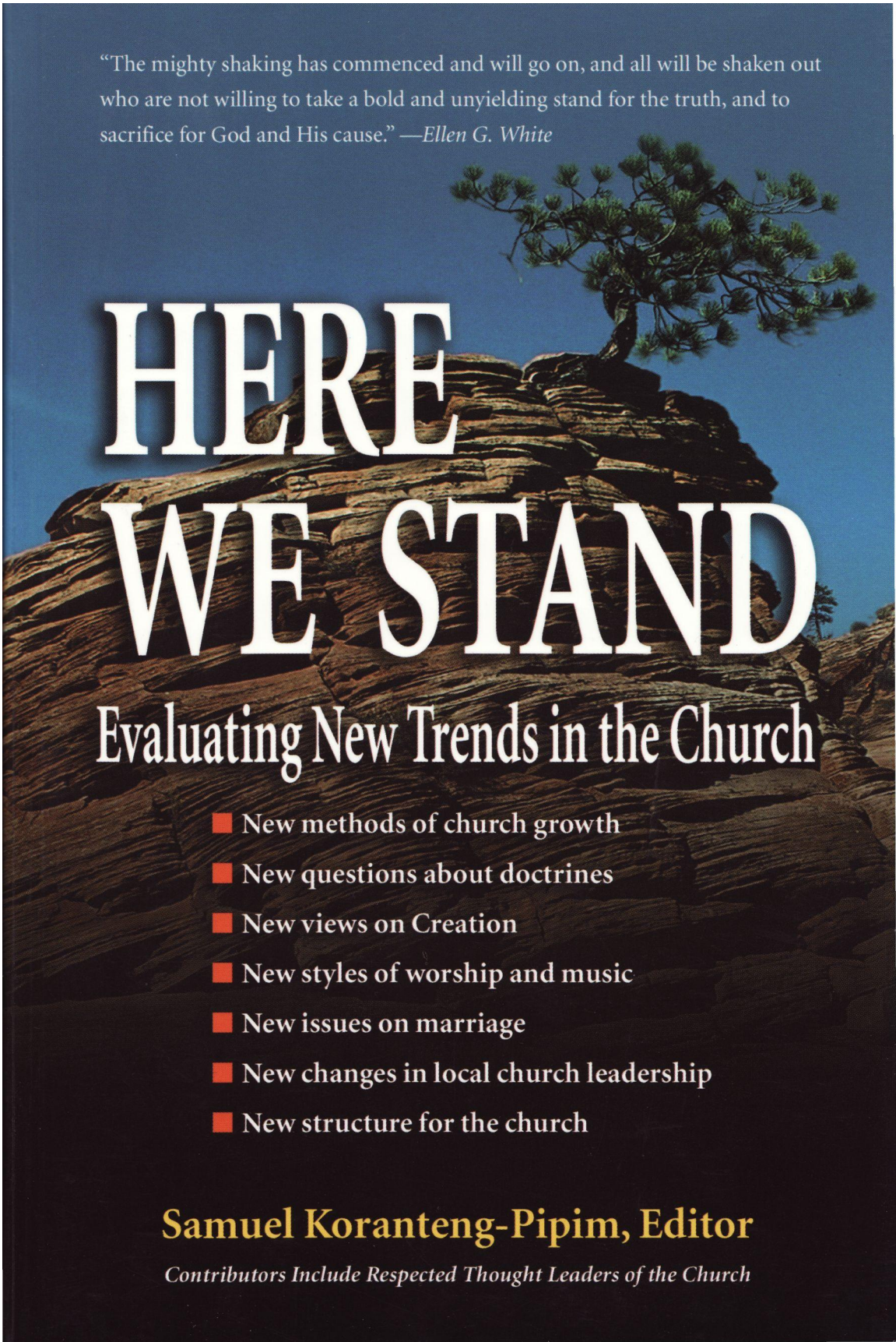


“The mighty shaking has commenced and will go on, and all will be shaken out who are not willing to take a bold and unyielding stand for the truth, and to sacrifice for God and His cause.” —*Ellen G. White*



HERE WE STAND

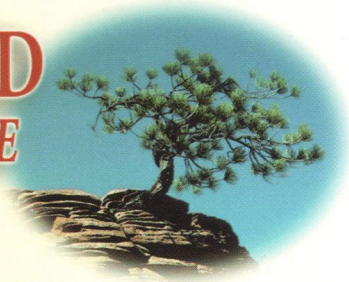
Evaluating New Trends in the Church

- New methods of church growth
- New questions about doctrines
- New views on Creation
- New styles of worship and music
- New issues on marriage
- New changes in local church leadership
- New structure for the church

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Editor

Contributors Include Respected Thought Leaders of the Church

HERE WE STAND THE NEW AND THE TRUE



Christians used to say, “If something is new, it probably isn’t true; and if something is true, it probably isn’t new.” They believed that the “old” truth in the Bible was the chief test of spiritual wisdom and Christian maturity.

But times have changed. Novelty is now the measure of the Spirit’s leading. Hence we uncritically adopt new methods for church planting and church growth, new views on Creation and other established doctrines, new styles of worship, and new views on music. We also practice new forms of praying and spiritual warfare, embrace new views on marriage, legislate new grounds for divorce and remarriage, push new leadership models on local churches, and agitate for new forms of church organization.

Are the arguments Biblically sound? Should we take a Biblical stand on these contemporary issues?

In *Here We Stand*, some of the church’s most respected thought leaders have addressed these questions in a compelling way.

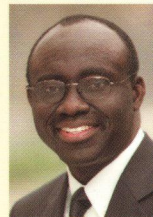
Questions Include:

- Do new church planting techniques really grow churches?
- How do we attract and keep young people in the church?
- Does the church need a 28th fundamental belief?
- What makes a doctrine “new light”?
- Should we embrace the new teachings on spiritual warfare, prayer warriors, and deliverance ministries?
- Why are some questioning a literal 6-day Creation and the historicity of Genesis 1-11?
- What are the roots of contemporary worship styles?
- Is music morally neutral? What does the Bible say about music?
- Is “abandonment” legitimate grounds for divorce?
- Does the Bible support polygamy and homosexuality?
- Why are major changes occurring so quickly in local congregations?
- Do we need another church organization?
- How did money and politics shape the issue of ordaining women as elders and pastors?
- Does it matter whether you are a “liberal” or a “conservative”?

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Contemporary Issues/Doctrines/Apologetics

HERE WE STAND

Evaluating New Trends in the Church

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Editor

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Koranteng-Pipim, Samuel

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Mrs. Hedwig Jemison

November 25, 1912-April 5, 2005

Director (retired) of the Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University; "Founding Mother" of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM, a publication affirming Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.

"A woman of many talents and strengths. Her energy, her enthusiasm, her regal poise, her infectious laugh, her deep commitment to the Lord and His work, her willingness to stand firmly and openly for what she believed to be right—these are things we will treasure. She had a deep and selfless interest in people that is worthy of emulation. Only eternity will reckon the full extent of the good she did."

—William Fagal

Associate Director, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, Maryland;
First Editor, ADVENTISTS AFFIRM

"Her life demonstrated faith and belief in God's Word and His prophets. One of God's true saints. She was a humble, dedicated Christian lady, with courage to stand for the right under all circumstances. She lived as in the presence of God and inspired those who knew her to be loyal to revealed truth. She would not allow compromise of truth to sway her. She was as firm to truth as the needle to the pole. Would that the church were full of her kind."

—Mercedes H. Dyer, PhD

Professor Emerita of Educational Psychology and Counseling, Andrews University;
Member, ADVENTISTS AFFIRM Board of Directors

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Acknowledgments

A project of this size and scope doesn't come about by happenstance! We are indebted in many ways and to numerous individuals for their part in bringing to reality the volume you hold in your hands. Some of these have passed to their rest. Most are actively spreading the three angels' messages around the circle of the earth.

Major inspiration for this work grew out of the example of that courageous Reformer of old, Martin Luther. In more recent times, Mrs. Ellen G. White faithfully wielded the pen of inspiration during some seventy years of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The combined legacy of these two messengers of the Lord is incalculable.

Excluding myself, some 33 individual contributors (and a few committees) provided the material that comprises this volume. Several of these, such as two of my mentors and dear friends C. Mervyn Maxwell and Gerhard Hasel, have done their work and silently await the first resurrection. I gratefully acknowledge all of the selfless contributions, moreover, of both the living and the dead.

The physically draining mechanics of large-book production can only come about only through close team effort. In this case, the team is composed largely of my colleagues on the editorial board of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM: Laurel Damsteegt, Ron du Preez, Mercedes Dyer, Debbie Gray, Barbara Hill, and Ken Scribner; with technical advice from Dane Griffin. Past AFFIRM editors have included Bill Fagal and the Maxwell twins, Mervyn and Lawrence. "Eagle-eyed" copyeditor of this volume (and current AFFIRM editor) is Jerry Stevens. Special thanks go to his wife Penny, who patiently endured significant drafts upon her husband's quality time at home.

In the key area of book design and layout, the studio, Orchard Design, proved a valuable resource. Al and Marion Newhart of American Cassette Ministries deserve special mention for suggesting a fitting title for this volume. Review and Herald Graphics rendered timely and expert assistance in the final

stages of book preparation. In a very real sense, also, the thousands of loyal readers of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM round out our team. In a material way, we feed off their enthusiastic encouragement and support.

Finally, and most importantly, this collaborative project is greatly indebted to our Lord and Saviour, the Giver of all good gifts. It is with deepest gratitude and praise that we offer Him the present volume as a sweet-smelling savor. It is our earnest prayer that this offering be not only acceptable, but will exalt His name in becoming a savor of life unto life.

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Editor
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Introduction

Here We Stand

Perhaps the most notable words spoken during the Reformation are found in Martin Luther's statement to the Council of Worms on April 18, 1521. On that day, when the young Reformer was urged by an unsympathetic council to retract his teachings, he concluded his defense with these immortal words:

"Since your most serene majesty and your high mightinesses require from me a clear, simple, and precise answer, I will give you one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by the clearest reasoning, unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the Word of God, *I cannot and I will not retract*, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me. Amen."

Luther's bold words, "Here I stand, I can do no other," not only conveyed the bravery of the young Reformer, but also marked a decisive point in the history of the Protestant Reformation. When he left Worms, the Reformation was irrevocable. From that day onward, there would be *protesting* Christians, men and women who would always dare to stand up against un-Biblical teachings and practices in the church.

Seventh-day Adventists view themselves as heirs of the Protestant Reformation.² But do we have the courage of conviction to stand up against un-Biblical doctrines that are today intruding upon the church?

Throughout the centuries of time, God has needed individuals who dared to say, "Here I stand." Elijah took such a stand in the days of Ahab and

Here We Stand

Jezebel. John the Baptist also stood firm, even laying down his life for the Word of God. And in this twenty-first century there is need of men and women whose consciences will be captive to the Word of God. Writes Ellen G. White:

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support. (*The Great Controversy*, p. 595)

Luther was at his noblest at Worms when he stood up against the un-Biblical traditions of the past—the powerful opinions of popes and church councils. Today, the Lord calls upon us also to do the noble thing by standing up against different kinds of un-Biblical traditions—namely the ideologies and fads of our contemporary culture. The church today must contend with the tradition of the living—its ambient culture.

This book in your hands, *Here We Stand*, affirms that, indeed, today there are Seventh-day Adventist men and women who are willing to take a stand for sound Biblical teaching and practices. At a time when it has become fashionable for church leaders, scholars, and members to be vague as to where they stand, each author has taken a stand on an issue that is of concern to him or her.

We believe that *Here We Stand* has offered a Biblically compelling response to some of the new trends in the church—namely,

- New methods of church planting and church growth
- New questions about our doctrines
- New views on Creation
- New styles of worship and music
- New issues on marriage
- New changes in local church leadership
- New structure for the church

In addition to new articles on a wide variety of issues, *Here We Stand* also brings together and updates relevant works that were previously published in ADVENTISTS AFFIRM magazine, but which may not otherwise have been readily accessible to readers.

Introduction

We offer *Here We Stand* to the church, with a prayer that even in these days of "a falling away" (2 Thessalonians 2:3) there will be faithful leaders, ministers, and believers who will make a commitment to stand upon the teachings of Scripture and live under its authority.

The mighty shaking has commenced and will go on, and all will be shaken out who are not willing to take a bold and unyielding stand for the truth, and to sacrifice for God and His cause (*Early Writings*, p. 50).

In the face of popular pressure to adopt the un-Biblical fads of our time, may each of us reecho the Reformer's determined words, "*Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me. Amen.*"

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Editor
Ann Arbor, Michigan
April 18, 2005

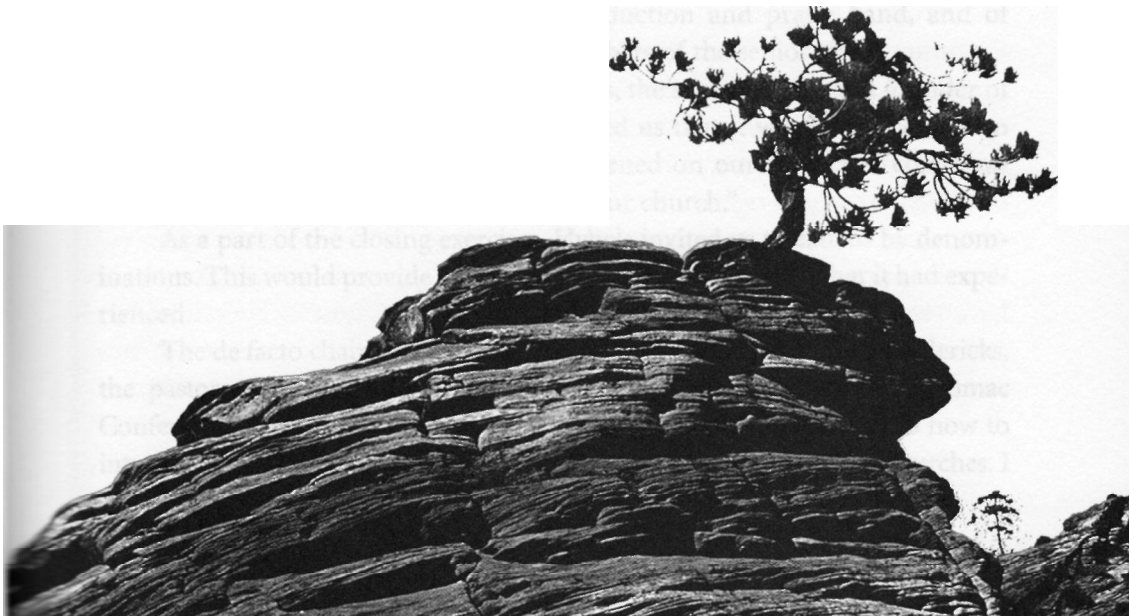
Endnotes

¹ Young Martin Luther uttered those words when he was called before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms ("diet" meaning a formal meeting, not a weight-loss plan, and Worms being a city south of Frankfurt in Germany). There are different versions and/or translations of the above-quoted statement by Luther. The statement here cited is from J.H. Merle d'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, book 7, chapter 8, as quoted in *The Great Controversy*, p. 160 (bold emphasis mine). Scholars debate whether or not Luther actually said, "Here I stand, I can do no other." The earliest printed versions contain these lines, while the official transcripts do not.

² As Seventh-day Adventists, we are "conscious of our indebtedness to the rich Biblical truths we have received from the Christian church of history. We acknowledge the noble line of witnesses—such as Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Tyndale, Calvin, Knox, and Wesley—whose advance into new light led the church forward to a fuller understanding of God's character. And that understanding is ever progressive. 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day' (Proverbs 4:18, KJV). Yet as we find new facets of God's revelation, they will harmonize perfectly with the united testimony of the Scriptures." *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, Md.: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. 7.

Section 1
**New Methods
of Church Growth**

1. We've Been Fooled *Richard W. O'Fill*
2. Are the Churches Really Growing? *E. Bruce Price*
3. Gospel Gimmicks *Samuel Koranteng-Pipim*
4. Movies in Our Worship Services? *Andrea D. Oliver*
5. What Adventist Young People *Really* Want *Israel Ramos*
6. Have We Believed a Lie? *Philip Mills*
- 7.1 Want My Church Back! **CD.** *Brooks*



Chapter 1

We've Been Fooled

By Richard W.O'Ffill

Pastor, Revivalist, and Adult Ministries Director (retired), Florida Conference
Author, *Lord, Keep Your Mansions—Just Save My Children* and
Lord, Save My Family Before It's Too Late

I was sitting at my desk at the Florida Conference where I served as a departmental director for nearly 20 years. That day the my mail included an inter-office memo from the Secretariat advising me that, along with several others from the office, I was being asked to attend a four-day training session at the Willow Creek Community Church, which is located in South Barrington, a suburb of Chicago. As my concern for the impact that Willow Creek was having on our churches had been growing. I welcomed the opportunity to see the program firsthand.

Adopting New Methods of Church Growth

Our little group from the office arrived at the church, along with approximately a thousand others from many denominations and independent congregations. In the days that followed we were systematically briefed on what the ministry of the church was all about. We were able to witness firsthand a typical seeker service with its drama production and praise band, and of course listen to sermons presented by members of the senior staff.

Toward the end of our stay, Bill Hybels, the senior pastor and founder of the church, in his closing remarks cautioned us that it would not be wise to return home and impose what we had learned on our respective congregations. To do so, he suggested could "split your church."

As a part of the closing exercises, Hybels invited us to caucus by denominations. This would provide a time for each group to debrief what it had experienced.

The de facto chairman of the Adventist delegation was Richard Fredericks, the pastor of the Damascus Church, a constituent church of the Potomac Conference. I will never forget listening as strategy was discussed as to how to introduce and implement the Willow Creek model in our respective churches. I

New Methods of Church Growth

remember our chairman saying that to do this we must work slowly.

A young pastor from Asheville, North Carolina, had already done to his congregation what Hybels had cautioned us not to do, and as a result the church had split. Sometime later I talked with a young dentist's wife who, with tears in her eyes, told me how she and her husband, along with 40 other young professionals, were convinced that the Willow Creek model was incompatible with what our church was all about, felt constrained to form a new congregation. This didn't seem to have fazed the pastor, whose articles in favor the Willow Creek model would later appear in the *Adventist Review* and the *Ministry* magazine.¹ He told me rather succinctly, "We're in charge now."

Throughout the decade of the nineties and into the 21st century, pastors and lay leaders from our churches continued to visit and learn at Willow Creek. Those particularly from the North American Division, Western Europe, and Australia returned home to implement in their churches and even at the Division level what they had learned. Many churches and even a number of church organizations became members of the Willow Creek Association.

Leading the way in the early years of the Willow Creek influence in our church were Oregon's Sunnyside Church, Maryland's Damascus Church,² and Colorado's Christ Advent Fellowship. It is a sad commentary that those churches and a number of others like them later went on to leave the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and become Sundaykeeping churches.

While hundreds of Adventist churches that are implementing elements of the Willow Creek model have not left the denomination, it is not unusual to find that significant numbers of them have chosen to play down those doctrines that make our church unique. It is sobering to see how many churches, and particularly church plants, are even choosing to play down our distinctive name and have taken on a nondescript "Such and Such Community Church."

Inasmuch as community churches are usually nondenominational, one might question the ethic of representing oneself as nondenominational, when in fact that is not the case. This name change, however, may accurately reflect the true state of affairs when later in this chapter we consider the trend toward Congregationalism.

It is perplexing, in observing all that has happened, that up to now we have been strangely silent to sound the alarm. How can we as church leaders and members continue to recommend a program that for so many of our churches, along with their pastors and members, has been fatal when taken as directed?

Perhaps the answer to that question is the great desire shared by so many

We've Been Fooled

to discover ways and means to retain our young people,³ and also to revive what seems to be a stagnated church, particularly among the Caucasian membership.

Based on the perception that nothing succeeds like success, it became apparent to pastors and church leaders in the divisions that have been most affected, that we had something to learn from churches whose pastors preach to from fifteen to twenty thousand people each week.

Churched and Unchurched.

Somehow along the way we must have forgotten that a little group of Adventist believers in the mid-19th century were used by God to launch a movement that during the following 150 years has carried the third angel's message to most of the countries on the planet.

As we have sat at the feet of the megachurch pastors and invited their worship leaders and other church growth experts to our workers' meetings, a word has begun to be heard among us that until recent years did not figure into our evangelistic vocabulary— and that word is "unchurched." This word can be problematic for two reasons. The first is that the Bible doesn't see people as being churched or unchurched, but rather as saved or lost.

The other reason is that focusing on the word unchurched can impact our mission as a church, brings to mind an experience that my father had as secretary of the Protestant ministerial association in the town where he was serving as pastor.

Later he told me, "Dick, during the year that I served as secretary of the organization I didn't conduct any public meetings because of the perception among the other ministers that in doing so I would have been engaged in sheep stealing."

You see, the word "unchurched" as used by pastors of other faiths is a code word that means that we will not steal members from each other's churches. While we can understand their professional concern, the message that God has given our church to proclaim to "My people" does not have this ethic. The third angel's message is not a sheep-stealing message but a sheep-saving message!

In truth, the message that God delivered to the founding fathers and mothers of our church was not a message designed only to save the lost, but one that would actually keep His people in whatever denomination from losing their salvation at that time just before the close of probation when Jesus warned that there would be deceptions so well crafted that they would deceive, if possible, the very elect. (See Matthew 24:24.)

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Church Planting and Church Growth.

Another term that has been given a major emphasis in recent years is "church planting," with the accompanying emphasis on "church growth." While both of these terms are on the surface benign, they carry with them an inherent danger, and that is they are doctrinally neutral.

Pastors of Sundaykeeping churches, as did Bill Hybels in establishing the Willow Creek Church, will often go door to door in a community canvassing the neighborhood and inviting the people to join them in what they hope will be a church plant.

The creed and doctrines of the new church will be wholly left up to those who will comprise its membership. For this reason a survey of the nondenominational community churches that often are the result of a church plant, will reveal that they are by and large doctrinally neutral or generic. It goes without saying that in establishing an Adventist church, the choice of what will be its doctrines is not left up to the members. Being a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church means that the person will have accepted the doctrines that have already been established by our denomination.

Commonly accepted church growth principles are largely based on principles that can be applied to *any* successful organization, be it a bank or a national fast-food chain. Church growth principles are little more than specific applications to churches of the principles which are consistently employed by Madison Avenue and which are driven by the needs perceptions of the target market.

Congregationalism.

The evangelical churches and their leaders who have in recent years become our templates for church planting and church growth, now practically control how we feel we must worship, sing, pray, and now what we must do if we are to win the "unchurched." But more than this, our churches are beginning to adopt two of the characteristics of the community-styled churches which, when implemented, will challenge the purpose of our very existence as a church. One is, as suggested earlier, their method of governance, which is congregational; and the other is their doctrinal emphasis, which is generic, not to mention loaded with error. These two characteristics are foreign—even fatal—to the divine mandate that was given by God to this church.

Continuing to use the community-type congregational churches as our models cannot help but narrow our world perspective, and as our local churches begin to craft doctrine to their own liking, will finally result in emasculating the unique message that God has commissioned us to carry to the

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world in the end-time.

One day I was at Atlanta's Hartfield-Jackson Airport waiting to take a flight to Chattanooga. While in the waiting lounge I happened to recognize John Ankerberg, a popular evangelical apologist. It was he, with Dr. Walter Martin, who, some years before, had debated Adventist doctrine on Christian television with one of our denominational representatives.

I approached Dr. Ankerberg, introducing myself as a Seventh-day Adventist minister. After I referenced the debate of some years before, he said, "I have two questions I would like to ask you. The first is What is the current position of the church on the ministry of Ellen G. White, and the other is What is the current position of the church concerning the investigative Judgment?"

I smiled and asked him if he didn't believe in the gift of prophecy in the New Testament church, and as to the investigative Judgment, I asked him if he didn't believe that before Jesus comes He will have decided beforehand who will be saved and who will be lost.

I relate this experience because to me it underscores that fact that though our colleagues in the evangelical churches appear to be willing to help us succeed in our mission, as a group they have a vested interest in making disappear the unique doctrines that set us apart from them. There can be no doubt that a church whose message is "Come out of her, My people" is easily seen in Christendom as being seditious.

While God alone will be the final Judge of motives, there is evidence that our continual interaction with the evangelical community's church-orientated professors and their pastors, is resulting in our dumbing down of our unique doctrines; and as we increasingly imbibe the spirit of Congregationalism, we are narrowing rather than expanding our vision of world outreach.

Downgrading Doctrines.

There is increasing criticism of what is considered to be our top-heavy organization, which, at a time when high technology is available, is seen by some as being neither necessary nor cost-effective. While a case may be made on both counts, our organization has until now enabled us as a church to do what all the Willow Creek and Saddleback churches in the world could not have done—and that is to carry God's end-time message to practically every nation on Earth while, most important of all, maintaining the integrity of our doctrines. The present trend toward congregational church government will put these accomplishments at risk.

One afternoon I received a phone call from a member of a nearby church. His first words to me were, "Pastor O'Fall, I believe our church has too many

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doctrines."

My reply to him was, "What do you know about the will of God for your life that you wish you didn't?"

Still he insisted we had too many doctrines. At last I suggested that he might consider finding a denomination that more nearly reflected his views. His reply, "No, I will stay and try to change ours."

It is not unusual to hear members, including some pastors, remark that we ought not be preaching our doctrines, but rather we ought to preach the Gospel. This concern is difficult to understand. Inasmuch as the word doctrine means "teaching" and the word Gospel means "good news," it at once becomes apparent that the concepts expressed by the words are not adversarial. The fact is that the cross is, in and of itself, a doctrine.

I hope I am wrong when I say that the point of view that we ought not preach the doctrines but rather the Gospel is really saying that we should not preach Adventist doctrines but the generic doctrines of the first-day churches. We are not surprised to hear Baptist sermons preached in Baptist churches. Neither should we be ashamed to hear Adventist sermons preached in Adventist churches.

There can be no doubt that in our fundamental beliefs there are certain doctrines that may be considered to be core doctrines. Those doctrines that are not considered by some to be important are actually the ones that God has given to His church in the end-time to protect the core doctrines from being overrun by the enemy of our souls.

For example, our doctrines of the millennium, the manner of Christ's return, etc., have kept us from becoming victims of the doctrine of the secret rapture, which will be the platform from which, just before the close of probation, the Devil will deceive, if possible, the very elect. Those who hold fast to this error believe they have two opportunities to be saved, and because they believe they will be in Heaven during the tribulation, many will enforce the mark of the beast, thinking they are doing the will of God.

Our mandate for Earth's last hour is clear, and we make a mistake if we feel that visitors to our churches should not be exposed to sermons that reflect our doctrines, which in truth are a life-and-death issue for this generation.

"Trojan-Horsed"

In wartime, using military parlance, having the correct "intelligence" is everything to the success of a campaign against the enemy. We are in a war whose results will be eternal. This is not the time to withhold a life-and-death mes-

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sage from a dying world, which includes our brothers and sisters in Christ in other denominations who otherwise may perish for lack of knowledge.

We are not wrong in trying to be more effective in retaining our children and grandchildren in the church. We cannot be faulted for wanting to revive the church in places where it has seemingly stagnated, but in going to the Willow Creek and Saddleback churches of the world we have been fooled. Those whom we invited to tell us how to win souls and expand our vision have introduced ideologies that if not arrested and corrected will make it impossible for us to do what we have been called to do, and that is to preach a message that will prepare a last generation who will be alive when Jesus comes, and of whom it has been written, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God and [have] the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

Our brethren in the churches who have in recent years have become aficionados of Willow Creek and others like it may have been well-intentioned, but experience has proved that the experiment has been divisive to our church; and the casualties to churches, their pastors, and members has been significant.

Recently my nineteen-year-old grandson, who had been a member of the Damascus Church where the majority of the membership under the leadership of their pastor broke away to become the Damascus Road Community Church, announced to my daughter, "Mom, I don't believe in the Sabbath anymore."

Friend, in spite of our best intentions, we have been, as it were, "Trojan-horsed"! The evidence is in, and we have been fooled. What we had hoped for is not what we have gotten. Let's ask the Lord to forgive us for unbelief. He Who began this church long ago with the little group in New England will finish it in all the world. For lack of faith we have allowed ourselves to believe cunningly devised fables. Our brothers and sisters in other denominations need the message of our church more than we need their methods. God's last message for His people just before He returns to take them home will not be finished by the might and power of marketing methods, nor by the megachurches that are the Willow Creeks or Saddlebacks, "but by My Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zechariah 4:6).

Endnotes

¹ This pastor would some years later denounce the Sabbath and renounce his position as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor.

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² Richard Fredericks, along with the majority of the members of the Damascus Church, left and organized a new Sundaykeeping community church.

³ A nationally known youth worker announced at the Promise Keepers convention held in Phoenix in the winter of 2003 that 80% of evangelical young people cease attending church after graduating from high school. This would seem to indicate that the challenge to keep our children in the church is not denomination-specific.

Chapter 2

Are the Churches Really Growing?

Church Growth Experiments in Secular Australia

By Pastor E. Bruce Price

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Australia, with its secular, postmodern culture, poses a real challenge to Seventh-day Adventists in their commission to preach the everlasting Gospel of Revelation 14:6.

The golden years of public evangelism after World War II, when hundreds were being baptized, are now only a memory. Church administrators, pastors, and evangelists find it a real challenge to win souls, grow churches, and increase memberships.

Over the past two decades in Australia, two philosophies of Church Growth have emerged as the answer to postmodernism. Some refer to these philosophies as "contemporary" and "traditional" approaches. But because these terms mean different things to different people,¹ I prefer to call the two approaches the *pragmatist* and the *commissionist* methods of church growth.

A. *Pragmatists* are those who are willing to try any methodology or approach if they believe it will make the Adventist church grow. It means being willing to learn from other denominations that are still experiencing church growth. It can mean new forms of worship, music, standards, and even the presentation of new doctrines or the neglect of old doctrines, in favor of entertainment. Pragmatists tend to adopt the celebration-type contemporary approach to worship.

B. *Commissionists* are those who will only apply new methods and techniques that are in harmony with the counsels and soulwinning principles found in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. They will not compromise in any way the unique Biblical doctrines or standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They accept the entire Gospel commission of Matthew 28:18-20,

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which includes "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." They follow the prophetic commission in Revelation 10:10, 11 to "prophesy again before many peoples" and in the time of the end powerfully preach the everlasting Gospel with the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12. Commissionists may be described as those who still uphold the distinctive Adventist messages, the mainstream style of worship, and the methods of evangelism that are consistent with counsels in the Spirit of Prophecy.

This article briefly looks at these two approaches to church growth, showing how they have fared during the past 15 or so years in some notable churches of the South Pacific Division. With hundreds of thousands of dollars being pumped into the celebration-type contemporary methods of church growth, it is only fair to ask if their experiments have been successful. I will begin, however, with a brief summary of my encounter with the new approach to church growth.

My Pilgrimage to U.S.A. Celebration Churches

By the late 1980s, Australian Adventist administrators, evangelists, and pastors were looking for an answer to the challenge of this post-Christian era. They wanted to know how to successfully grow their churches.

It was at this time that the "celebration movement" was introduced to the world church of Seventh-day Adventists. The church's leading papers heralded the first celebration churches in Milwaukie and Portland, Oregon; and Colton, California, U.S.A. This new type of church was believed to be the answer to our church growth problems, as hundreds were flocking to these celebration churches. I was one of the pastors who embarked upon this pilgrimage.

My first opportunity to observe the celebration church movement in detail was in June 1990. I was part of a group of 30 Australian pastors who were taken on a Church Growth Tour through the U.S.A. to learn how to grow churches. Two of the "growing" Adventist churches we visited were Milwaukie and Colton. With glowing enthusiasm their pastors told of the crowds of worshippers who were attending. Their excitement was contagious. We took notes, filed materials, and then attended some of their services.

I was in my 38th year of ministry, having been a departmental director and pastor/evangelist. Observing these celebration churches caused me concern as I saw their sacred worship services accompanied with lights and loud disco-type music of secular, worldly entertainment. The distinctive truths of the three angels' messages and the Spirit of Prophecy had given way to a mes-

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sage of "love and acceptance." Church standards had suffered a similar fate, as members were encouraged to be "loving" and not "judgmental." However, many of those attracted to these services could not see the dangers. They expressed their joy that this new presentation of the Gospel had brought to them love, understanding, and a liberation from Adventist legalism.

With almost evangelistic zeal the members were urging other Adventists from surrounding churches to join them in this newfound experience. These churches were certainly growing, and rapidly. But it was largely "transfer growth" from other Adventist churches. While they were supposed to attract and convert "unchurched Harrys and Marys," few such "kingdom-growth" baptisms were taking place.

While some of us left those celebration churches with questions in our minds, none of us had any idea that both of these churches would later collapse, with the loss of hundreds of souls. The pastor of the Milwaukie church also would become so antagonistic to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its teachings that his soul-destroying influence would even extend to Australia. In fact, little did we realize then that one of our fellow ministers on this tour would on his return "plant" a celebration/contemporary church like those he was observing, and he too would suffer a similar fate, with the loss of the church and himself to the Adventist Church.

On that Church Growth Tour, however, there was one smaller Adventist church that impressed me: Norwalk, California. The pastor had taken this church from a membership of 250 to 750 in just a few years. He explained that he had done this as a result of following closely the methods of evangelism and outreach outlined by Ellen White. After the meeting some asked his opinion of the celebration movement and why he was not impressed by it. He confirmed that the church growth being experienced by the celebration churches was largely "transfer growth" from other Adventist churches. His church's growth was mainly kingdom growth, of souls being won to Christ as a result of evangelistic outreaches and Bible study.

Thus, when I returned to Australia I had a choice between the celebration-type church growth methods, and the time-honored Adventist approach. The choice was between the pragmatic approach and the commissionist approach. Faced with this choice, I chose the latter.

I determined to continue to pattern and grow my church in Sydney, on the counsels of Ellen White, in books such as *Gospel Workers* and *Evangelism*, and not make it a celebration church. The Lord blessed our humble efforts and in the 16 years I was the pastor of the Waitara church in Sydney, we witnessed the baptism of 235 souls. Many of them were "unchurched Harrys" who have

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become pastors, evangelists, and soulwinners for the Lord. In the past four years since I retired, this church has continued to win souls and to grow. It is difficult to find an empty seat at any of its services.

When I did not make my church a celebration-type contemporary church, some church administrators questioned why I was not being "progressive." I told them that when this celebration movement should be successful and prove that this was the way the Lord wanted His church to go, then I would follow. Until then I would wait. But as I waited and watched, I witnessed only disasters in both Australia and the U.S.A.

The Celebration Movement in the South Pacific Division

When the celebration movement was launched in the Seventh-day Adventist Church by the Milwaukie and Colton Adventist churches in America, some pragmatists in Australia and New Zealand were quick to follow them. Five church plants of this nature were attempted in the South Pacific Division, each of which adopted a celebration-type contemporary style of worship. They are: (1) Cherrybrook, Sydney, Greater Sydney Conference; (2) Cornerstone, North New Zealand Conference; (3) Fox Valley, Sydney, Greater Sydney Conference; (4) Riverside, Perth, West Australian Conference; and (5) Southside, Brisbane, South Queensland Conference.²

These five contemporary churches that were "planted" in the South Pacific Division initially experienced transfer growth from other Adventist churches, but had very little success in their style of evangelism in terms of kingdom growth. Tragically, four of these five churches are no longer in the sisterhood of Adventist churches. Like most of their American counterparts, they experienced a tragic loss of members as well as pastors.³

Besides the church "plants," some established Adventist churches also adopted aspects of the celebration church growth methods. The Church Growth leaders of the South Pacific Division specially promoted one such Sydney church (the Mt. Colah church), hoping to demonstrate the success of these pragmatic methods. However, official conference records reveal that this church only had 19 baptisms in its first nine years, and in the next five years only one baptism!⁴

This "model" pragmatic church now has such a small attendance that it is struggling to exist. In contrast to this celebration-type church, the neighboring "commissionist" (or traditional) church, Waitara, has so experienced real kingdom church growth that it has been asked to care for the "model" church.⁵ In fact, more of these celebration-type contemporary churches are in trouble,

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and conference leaders are becoming very embarrassed about them, having in the past enthusiastically promoted them.

The Ford Apostasy

A mistaken assumption of the contemporary church growth movement is that distinctive Seventh-day Adventist doctrines are a hindrance to church growth and must, therefore, be abandoned. And yet, the churches that have jumped on this bandwagon are not growing!

For example, one of the greatest hindrances to church growth in Australia has been the apostasy of one of its most talented "sons," Dr. Desmond Ford. The apostasy has been like a great tsunami that has wrought enormous devastation throughout the South Pacific Division. For decades Dr. Ford taught at Avondale College, influencing more than a generation of professors, students, and future ministers. At the same time he was a popular and brilliant speaker at camp meetings and ministerial gatherings.

Among the Adventist doctrines that Dr. Ford opposes are the sanctuary, 1844, the investigative Judgment, the remnant church, and the role of the Spirit of Prophecy. In 1979 he publicly announced that he had not believed some of these doctrines for the past 35 years because he could not reconcile the writings of Ellen White with the book of Hebrews.⁶ In 2002, Ford at last publicly admitted he did not believe in "the creation of the world in six literal days a few thousand years ago."⁷

However, for decades Dr. Ford taught differently and wrote articles for Adventist publications⁸ purporting to uphold some of these doctrines. His book *Daniel* is a further example of this duplicity.

Voices were raised through these years in Australia concerning Dr. Ford's teachings. In 1976 he was even taken before the Biblical Research Committee by those concerned about what he was teaching at Avondale College on "the Sanctuary, the Age of the Earth and Inspiration."⁹ Ford defended himself. The two leaders of these concerned brethren¹⁰ were two of Australia's most successful evangelists. To silence their voices of opposition to Ford's teachings, they were banned from church pulpits.¹¹

After Dr. Ford was dismissed from denominational employment in 1980, a staggering 180 ministers left the ministry within the next decade.¹² However most of his followers and sympathizers remained in the church. He urged them to do this, so they could use their influence more effectively to change the church. Many have since enjoyed positions of trust and responsibility.

Thus, with this overwhelming influence of Dr. Ford in Australia, there

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has been a greater challenge to soulwinning and church growth than all the forces of secularism and postmodernism combined.

What minister or layman is going to labor to bring souls into a church that he believes has defective doctrines? What right does the Adventist Church have to exist, and what mission does it have if it is not God's remnant church commissioned to call people out of Babylon to do His will and keep all the commandments of God?

This also explains why the celebration type of church growth in Australia was accepted so readily. The pragmatic-type celebration churches do not teach the unique doctrines of the Adventist Church, and Ellen White is rarely mentioned among them.

The association of Dr. Ford and those who promote his teachings with this type of church growth is well known in Australia. Some have even defied their conference administrations and invited him into their pulpits to address their congregations,¹³ where people have flocked to hear him.

Two influential men, who would later raise serious doubts about the trustworthiness of the Spirit of Prophecy, even led a delegation to have Dr. Ford reinstated to preach again in Adventist churches.¹⁴

With this army of ministers and laymen who have been influenced by Dr. Ford in Australia, church growth has been seriously impeded.

Ellen White Challenged

Besides jettisoning distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, another mistaken assumption behind some of the church growth attempts is the view that the messages contained in the Spirit of Prophecy are not always relevant to the contemporary situation. However, this diminution of Ellen White's counsels has not helped those churches to grow!

In the South Pacific Division, since the doctrines of Dr. Ford are incompatible with the teachings of Ellen White, the Australian church has witnessed a continual denigration of her role and authority in doctrinal matters.¹⁵ Dr. Ford's followers appear foremost in upholding her in a pastoral role, while subtly destroying confidence in her writings in most other areas such as theology, health, history, etc., by outlining her "errors."

The year 2004 will no doubt be remembered in Australia for some of the most serious attacks on Ellen White from within the church. It began with a Summit on Ellen White at Avondale College. Prominent Australian presenters were some of Dr. Ford's most outspoken supporters, including those who tried to have him reinstated in the church in recent years. By contrast, some who are

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known to faithfully support Ellen White were not even asked to present a paper.¹⁶

Then in 2004 a lecturer in theology at Avondale College, the premier Seventh-day Adventist institution in Australia, published his provocative¹⁷ book, *Prophets Are Human*—a work that has been widely promoted by some prominent thought leaders of the church. This controversial book was initially promoted by a most distasteful cartoon of an alarmed Ellen White at last caught out in her errors! This appeared in the Division paper, the *Record*, and in large posters sent to every church.

In February 2004 a series of four articles appeared in the *Record* of an interview between an influential church historian and theology lecturer and the journal's editor, casting further doubt on the work of Ellen White. Serious charges were made by this church scholar, such as stating her writings were in error, being "partly wrong and partly right."¹⁸

Many faithful Australian ministers and laymen have been working to rectify the situation. Some have challenged the allegations.¹⁹ Others have been searching to give our people answers. This explains why the 400-page book *Greatest of All the Prophets*²⁰ is receiving a wide circulation even among those who do not normally read its authors' publications. This book not only documents the above situation but also answers each charge made against Ellen White. It would have been better if these answers could have been forthcoming for our confused people through the official church paper, the *Record*.

Fortunately, early in 2005, the Division evangelist was able to organize scholars from Andrews University, U.S.A., to give a series of presentations answering the most serious problems raised by *Prophets Are Human* and the *Record* articles.²¹ Copies of these presentations will be made available throughout the Division.

The Australian Adventist church was blessed by the living presence and counsels of Ellen White for nearly a decade. As a result, the South Pacific Division experienced great church growth, and its institutions likewise. However, as it has lost confidence in its doctrines and the Spirit of Prophecy, it has lost dedication and sacrifice, and as a result many of its institutions,²² as well as having its church growth crippled.

Those who have lost confidence in this God-given instruction no longer follow its counsels on church growth. They pragmatically turn to the methods of other churches, charismatic and celebration alike. These methods entertain but they do not produce Seventh-day Adventist Christians, nor do they convert the secular-minded. Awareness in Australia is increasing that there has been a lot of time and millions of dollars wasted on such experiments that have failed.²³

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The Charismatic Movement in Australia

Australians have been flocking to high-energy charismatic churches, which between 1996 and 2001 have enjoyed attendance increases ranging from 20 to 42 per cent.²⁴ This is despite the fact that at the same time Australian overall weekly church attendance declined by seven percent and Catholic mass attendance declined by 13 percent.²⁵

The charismatic Hillsong Church in Sydney attracts 18,000 worshippers a week²⁶ to its theatrical type of worship, complete with a big band, stage lighting, and dry ice.²⁷ It has averaged a yearly church growth of 1,000 worshippers for the past 17 years.²⁸

Churches such as Hillsong continually fascinate some Australian Adventists who wonder which aspects of the Hillsong phenomenon could be adopted to enjoy such church growth. Avondale College theology students are taken to Hillsong to learn how to grow a church. It is believed to have greatly influenced the first Australian Adventist celebration church at the nearby suburb of Cherrybrook.

Regrettably, Cherrybrook collapsed when 80% of the congregation moved into an independent tongues-speaking Sundaykeeping church.²⁹ However, the success of charismatic churches such as Hillsong is still having an influence on the worship style of many Australian Adventist churches.

When a pastor has been crippled by the influence of the Ford apostasy and can no longer preach the Adventist message with power, then he and like-minded church members often turn to the methods of the charismatic churches and entertainment to try and grow their congregations. The results have often been disastrous, with resources squandered.

Church Growth in "Traditional" Adventist Churches

Most Adventist churches in Australia that are experiencing real church growth are the "traditional" churches—i.e., those mainstream churches which follow the counsels of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy in carrying out the Gospel commission.³⁰

Although claiming to be a "traditional" church does not necessarily guarantee church growth, what is incontrovertible is that upholding the traditional Adventist messages and time-honored methods of evangelism still work. I can testify to this because I, among many others, have put them to the test!

I had been a departmental director for 14 years. But in 1984, foreseeing the ongoing devastation of evangelism and church growth in Australia because

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of the Ford apostasy, I asked for the privilege of having a church to pastor. I wanted to test whether the counsels that God had specifically given to this people concerning church growth would still work successfully.

I was given a church in a difficult area for evangelism, on Sydney's affluent upper North Shore, in the suburb of Waitara. The church was struggling against the effects of the Ford apostasy. It was half empty and the congregation divided.

Undeterred, the congregation was given strong Adventist sermons. They were left in no doubt of the teachings and mission of the remnant church to which they belonged. Then, using the counsels of the Bible and Ellen White, the members were trained in soulwinning.³¹ They were soon bringing their interests to church, studying with them and preparing them for baptism. Public evangelists³² were brought in to help reap the work being done.

Soon the church, which seated 300, was full each Sabbath. A second service had to be started to accommodate all the worshippers. In the 16 years I was the pastor of that church, 235 souls were baptized,³³ and a further 18 were reclaimed and rebaptized. In the past four years since I retired, this strong church growth has continued. Today it is hard to find an empty seat at any of its services.

Many examples could be given where these methods of evangelism worked successfully in secular Australia. The Woollahra church is a prime example: This church is situated in Sydney's eastern suburbs, which are both the most affluent and secular in all of Australia.³⁴ The large Woollahra church building had so few attending it seemed it would soon have to close. Then the local pastors used public evangelism, prophecy seminars, and proven Adventist evangelistic outreaches, based on the Spirit of Prophecy.³⁵ Baptisms resulted, and within a few years the church was full each Sabbath.

My point is this: Regardless of how a church refers to itself—pragmatist or commissionist—it will not grow *unless it upholds and preaches the distinctive Adventist messages, and follows the counsels of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy in carrying out the Gospel commission.* Celebration-type contemporary churches, by their very nature, tend to preach a different message and adopt a different method of church growth. This is why, despite the hype, they are failing.

The Challenge of Secular Australians

From the results shared in this article, it does not take a space scientist to realize the futility of the attempts to grow the Adventist Church by adopting

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celebration-type contemporary styles of worship, downplaying our distinctive doctrines, undermining the trustworthiness of the Spirit of Prophecy, and embracing the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. Not only have these types of churches not grown, but also 80% of them (four out of the five churches) have ceased to be Seventh-day Adventist congregations! In contrast, the records indicate that churches that take the Seventh-day Adventist message seriously and that still uphold the proven Adventist approaches to evangelism, are the ones that are growing even in secular Australia.

The above conclusion has some far-reaching implications for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It compels us to ask: What Biblical examples do we have of winning the secular-minded?

"There is no God, not even one with the message 'God helps those who help themselves,'" wrote M. Langley in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Letters to the Editor, Tanuary 3, 2005, p. 12. What can be done to convert this typical secular-minded Australian? What new methods need to be introduced, and what pragmatic changes would need to be made to our present methods of evangelism to win this person?

The interesting discovery we make in the Bible is that we have very few attempts by Jesus or the apostles to specially work for the secular-minded—at least using pragmatic or contemporary methods of His day.*

Jesus told His disciples to "go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). He told the Syrophenician woman, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). However, Jesus ministered to her as He did to others, such as the Roman centurion and the woman of Samaria, when they exhibited faith sometimes greater than those of Israel. We could hardly class these people of faith as secular.

Let us also remember that Jesus in His soulwinning methods did not appear to the Samaritan woman chanting Roman tunes or disguised as a would-be Samaritan. He did not need to. He had a message to bring to her, and He did not mince words. In this way He won her, and she in turn won others. These were Jesus' methods of church growth.

As the apostles, including Paul, moved to take the Gospel into all the world, their evangelistic endeavors were still mainly with the "God-fearers." He sought them out in the synagogues or worshipping by riversides, if there were no synagogues. In this way he won his greatest number of souls.

However, on Mars' hill in Athens, Paul encountered the secular-minded. Ellen White tells³⁷ how he pragmatically "sought to adapt his style to the character of the audience; he met logic with logic, science with science, philosophy with philosophy." It produced "but little fruit." Then he decided to move on to

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Corinth and preach a powerful message, ignoring the secular Greek culture of "excellency of speech and wisdom" and to preach nothing "save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Here Paul experienced real church growth, and a church was planted! It did not happen in Athens!

Does secular Australia have sufficient "God-fearers" to work with and experience church growth? The answer is surprising.

A recent poll reveals that 46 percent of Australians believe they will go to Heaven when they die³⁸ and "28 percent of us believe th[at] Earth was created in six days."³⁹ While Australia is still much more secular than the United States, the approximately 10 million Australians who believe they will go to Heaven when they die, and the nearly six million who believe the earth was created in six days, offer an excellent field to continue our evangelistic endeavors.

These people are waiting to hear more about Heaven and the Creator, Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. The full message of Seventh-day Adventists has never been more relevant. It can still enjoy church growth even in secular Australia.

As the traumatic signs of Christ's soon coming take place, such as September 11 and the Asian Tsunami, the secular are becoming more open to the working of the Holy Spirit. As they respond, they too can be won to this message. But it will not be done by entertainment, but with the solemn preaching of all the Bible truths and the methodology consistent with the truths that we have been given as a people.

To bring souls to a full and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ takes much dedication, prayer, and work. Nothing has changed in this regard since the days of Jesus, His disciples, or Paul. There are no shortcuts. We are to solidly build on the Rock, not superficially on the sand!

Those who choose other "easier" means of church growth may witness crowds proclaiming, "Lord, Lord," and even see them doing many wonderful works in His name. But Jesus warns that if they do not do His will, to them He will say those fateful words, "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Endnotes

1 When the Adventist celebration churches in America and then in Australia began to collapse, efforts were made by those who were running churches along celebration lines to distance themselves from the word "celebration." "Contemporary" or "alternative" was used instead. However, a "contemporary" church may mean different things to different people. Definitions of "contemporary" range from a full-blown celebration church (one which plays down Adventist

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doctrinal distinctives and lifestyle practices, embraces the Pentecostal/charismatic worship style, and employs secular music, Hollywood-style dramas, and other questionable gospel gimmicks to reach the "unchurched"), to an otherwise mainstream SDA church, which differs from "conservative" or typical SDA churches only in the fact that during its church services it plays lively or upbeat music which are in the church's hymnbooks. The term "traditional" is not very helpful either, because it can have the overtones "old fashioned," "still living back in the Dark Ages," or "stuck in the mud,"—i.e., a mood that refuses to explore new ways to do things. Notice, however, that a Bible-believing Adventist Church can remain true to its message and the methods of church growth approved by the Spirit of Prophecy, and be innovative at the same time, as for example, has been successfully demonstrated by H.M.S. Richards, Mark Finley, C.D. Brooks, Doug Batchelor, etc., in their evangelistic outreach using cutting-edge technology of their times. Therefore, to avoid being misunderstood, it may be best to not use the terms "contemporary" and "traditional"—*unless they are carefully explained*. This is why I have come up with two new expressions—pragmatist and commissionist.

² A detailed analysis of the baptisms and membership transfer results can be found in E.B. Price, "Church Growth in Contemporary Churches in the South Pacific Division," 2002, p.1.

³ For an insightful perspective on the North American scene, see Richard O'FfilFs article (chapter 1 in this volume); see also Michigan Conference President Jay Gallimore's "Can the Church Be Relevant and Survive?" ADVENTISTS AFFIRM 16/3 (Fall 2002): 16-27 and the March 14, 2002 report Gallimore presented to ministers of his conference.

⁴ E.B. Price, "Church Growth in Contemporary Churches in the SPD," p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶ Elder J. Robert Spangler, Editor, *Ministry*, October 1980, p. 4.

⁷ Wesley Centre, Sydney, NSW, August 3, 2002.

⁸ Desmond Ford, "The Creator in Court—The Teaching of the Investigative Judgment Is Not a Face-saving Device but an Integral Part of the Everlasting Gospel," *Review & Herald*, October 18, 1962, and "The Judgment," *Ministry*, July 1979.

⁹ Pastor J.W. Kent led 16 concerned men protesting to the Biblical Research Committee, February 3, 4, 1976.

¹⁰ "Concerned Brethren" was abbreviated to "CB" as a term of derision for those opposing Dr. Ford's new theology.

¹¹ Pastors J.W. Kent and G. Burnside were banned from preaching in the churches on December 18, 1978 because of their opposition to Dr. Ford. When Pastor Burnside died in 1994, some of the bans had still not been lifted.

¹² Dr. Harry Ballis, PhD Thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, discusses the 180 ministers who left the church.

¹³ The former Cherrybrook pastor, now at Charlestown, did this. It also occurred at Castlehill and Kellyville churches.

¹⁴ One was Dr. Arthur Patrick. He is a church historian who had served in a variety of capacities within the church, including pastor-evangelist, chaplain, college lecturer, and Director of the Ellen G. White/Seventh-day Adventist Research Centre at Avondale College. He recently raised doubts about the writings of Ellen G. White in his four "conversations" with the editor of the church's South Pacific *Record* (February 7, 14, 21, 28, 2004).

¹⁵ "Ellen White's Role in Doctrinal Matters," *Ministry*, October 1980, pp. 53-60, answered Ford's rejection at Glacier View of the authority of Ellen White's God-given counsels in the matter of theology.

¹⁶ Dr. Allan Lindsay, presenter of the excellent *Keepers of the Flame* video series and the very respected retired Director of the Ellen G. White Research Centre, was not invited to present a formal paper like the other presenters.

¹⁷ Dr. Lester Devine, Director, Ellen G. White SDA Research Centre, used this term to pro-

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mote the book.

¹⁸ Brace Manners with Arthur Patrick, "Ellen White for Today: 4," *Record*, February 28, 2004, p.10, col. 1, para. 4.

¹⁹ Jan Knopper, former Division PD Director, challenged the *Record* writers who claimed that Ellen White made historical errors, to produce evidence for their assertion. They were unable to do this, but did not retract their statements.

²⁰ Russell R. Standish & Colin D. Standish, *The Greatest of All the Prophets* (Highwood Books: Narbethong, Victoria, Australia, 2004).

²¹ The Division evangelist is Geoff Youlden, and the scholars invited from the U.S.A. are Dr. Jiri Moskala, Dr. Larry Lichtenwalter, and Dr. Denis Fortin.

²² The SPD has lost seven of its nine hospitals, as well as its entire chain of health food shops and restaurants.

²³ Huge sums of money—from both the local conferences and local churches themselves—were invested in establishing celebration churches that failed. The \$1.25 million video series, *Chasing Utopia*, produced to win the secular-minded also had little success.

²⁴ "Hallelujahs in the Hills," *Sydney Sun Herald*, November 7, 2004, p. 27.

²⁵ "Faithful Flock to New Churches," *Sydney Sun Herald*, January 9, 2005. Source: National Church Life Survey.

²⁶ "Hallelujahs in the Hills," *Sydney Sun Herald*, November 7, 2004, p.27.

²⁷ "How Great Thou Aren't," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 21, 2004.

²⁸ "Hillsong Prays for the Miracle," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 13, 2004.

²⁹ E.B. Price, "Church Growth in Contemporary Churches in the SPD," p. 2.

³⁰ Notice that I define what I mean by "traditional." See, however, note 1 above for reasons why I hesitate to use the term "traditional."

³¹ Louis R. Torres, Mission College of Evangelism, U.S.A., began conducting evangelism training programs in 1993.

³² Geoff Youlden, Division evangelist, conducted a number of public programs. In 2001, he also became the senior pastor of the church in order to use it as a training center of evangelism for Australian lay members.

³³ E.B. Price, "Church Growth in Contemporary Churches in the SPD," p. 5.

³⁴ It has Sydney's most expensive harbourside mansions as well as the notorious "King's Cross" red-light district.

³⁵ The pastors are Milton Krause and Gary Kent.

³⁶ Louis R. Torres, "Contemporizing the Gospel," a four-page unpublished paper.

³⁷ Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 244.

³⁸ Mark Coultan, "Bible Belt Puts Squeeze on Evolution," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 28, 2004, p.4.

³⁹ John Savage, Letters to the Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 30, 2004, p. 42.

Chapter 3

Gospel Gimmicks

The Foolishness of Preaching or the Preaching of Foolishness?

By Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, PhD

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"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the Spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. . . . Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the River?" (Jeremiah 2:13, 18, NIV).

Throughout Bible times, and ever since, the clear and persuasive proclamation of God's Word has been the most effective medium to communicate God's truth. The apostle Paul refers to the method as *the foolishness of preaching* (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Today, however, we seem to be moving away from simple Bible-based preaching to some rather ridiculous and sometimes bizarre gimmicks from the secular world. We may convince ourselves that there is nothing wrong with these gimmicks. But perceptive unbelievers, observing the way we are blindly mimicking worldly methods, may justifiably dismiss our message as the *preaching of foolishness*. Let me explain.

Gospel Magician? Recently I received an urgent e-mail from a Seventh-day Adventist graduate student at a public university in the United States. He urged me to share my views with him on "a troubling issue" that had arisen in one of the local churches of his conference. The issue relates to the plan by that local church to invite a "gospel magician" to be guest speaker for a week of prayer. The student expressed his concerns this way:

"I fear that in engaging in practices of magical tricks (that are also done by many secular magicians) we are blurring the line between what is good and what is not. Even though I do not necessarily believe that those engaged in sleight of hand are using any supernatural powers, I fear that the use of illusion to pass across some Gospel truth is missing the point and only putting

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temptation before our children.

"The brethren in the church I referred to do not believe that this is a matter of black and white. They believe that those of us who are opposing this practice in the church (for the children's story) and in the church school (for both entertainment and now week of prayer) are 'ultraconservatives' and that we are looking for evil where there is none. I do not know if there is a very clear distinction between black and white in this case. For now (I am still hoping to do further study on this matter), I see it as 'black' because of the potential for evil and because it blurs the line between the good and the bad (these brethren even argue that the Bible is really not opposed to 'magic'). I feel that if the line we are dealing with is gray then we, as a church, need to keep away from it. We should shun all 'appearance' of evil.

"I do not know therefore whether the church has a position on this. I have been challenged to show from the Spirit of Prophecy or Bible where this practice is condemned. I have been reminded that the local conference has sponsored some of the church members to seminars and conferences for gospel magicians. I have also been reminded that there were Adventist gospel magicians (or gospel illusionists) performing during the Toronto GC session. I am groping in the large sea of information and arguments out there to even get some principles I can apply in this matter. I have asked that this particular local church appoint brethren to study the matter and to get a forum to discuss it. I tried the same in the school board, but the overwhelming number of members of this school board 'did not see' anything wrong with the practice. I am preparing to face the church board but cannot go with simple arguments without a Biblical reason. Any ideas?"

Few would have thought that a Seventh-day Adventist congregation would one day even consider employing a so-called "gospel magician" to communicate spiritual truth at a church meeting. Yet this is one more evidence of a growing trend to introduce into the church some Biblically questionable styles of worship and evangelism. The surprising thing about this development is that an overwhelming number of members don't see anything wrong with it.

We have had gospel rock and praise dancing in worship services, gospel puppets, gospel clowns, gospel cafes/discos and gospel theatrics/dramas for our outreach to youth, young adults, and the "unchurched." Now, it seems, we must have gospel magicians for our church services and weeks of prayer. By resorting to these "gospel gimmicks," are we in danger of turning away from the *foolishness of preaching* to the *preaching of foolishness*?

In this article I will argue that in so far as gospel gimmicks accommodate the Biblical religion to the tastes of unrenewed hearts, such contemporary

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methods evidence our welcoming of worldliness into the church. Even more, a reliance upon such worldly methods of communicating the Gospel is misguided and contrary to the Biblical teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Worldliness in the Church

The former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev reportedly told the following story to teach the need for vigilance.

At a time when there was a wave of petty theft in the USSR, the story goes, the Soviet authorities put guards at many of the state-owned factories. At one of the timber works in Leningrad the guard knew the workers well. The first evening, Pyotr Petrovich came out with a wheelbarrow and, on the wheelbarrow, a great bulky sack with a suspicious-looking object inside.

Guard: "Come on, Petrovich. What have you got there?"

Petrovich: "just sawdust and shavings."

Guard: "Come on, I wasn't born yesterday. Tip it out."

Petrovich did, and out came nothing but sawdust and shavings. So he was allowed to put it all back again and go home. The same thing happened every night all week, and the guard was getting extremely frustrated. Finally his curiosity overcame his frustration.

Guard: "Petrovich, I know you. Tell me what you're smuggling out of here, and I'll let you go."

Petrovich: "Wheelbarrows."

While we may laugh at this story, we may also need to remember that in the arena of contemporary worship and outreach methods the laugh is on us as Bible-believing Adventist Christians. We have set up patrols to check for worldliness around us by developing our own schools, seminaries, radio and TV stations, publishing houses, book centers, etc. But the Devil has wheeled worldliness and paganism right past our eyes into some of these institutions of our church. And many don't see it, let alone see anything wrong with it.

What is more, we are actually importing and actively promoting these questionable methods of worship and evangelism from both the secular world and from other religions and churches. In some instances Adventists have gone outside to study these methods at non-Adventist theological seminaries or have attended the training seminars on worship, soulwinning, and leadership at Willow Creek and other interdenominational, ecumenical, and charismatic organizations and churches. Yet we fail to recognize that when we fundamentally change our method of proclaiming spiritual truth, we change the message itself. And when we change the message of God, we change the God of the message.

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Because these gimmicks compromise the credibility of our message, Adventists have been counseled against copying methods found in other churches.

Our Temptation. Throughout our history, there has always been a temptation for our ministers to pattern our practices after other churches. Ellen G. White warned against this in her day: "A new order of things has come into the ministry. There is a desire to pattern after other churches" (*Signs of the Times*, Dec. 27, 1899). She expressed her concerns about the influence of other churches on our ministers: "Some ministers are adopting the customs of other churches, copying their habits and manner of labor" (*ibid.*, May 25, 1882).

Warning of the dangers inherent in responding to other churches' invitations to learn from them and employ their methods of labor, Mrs. White wrote: "They may desire us to unite with them and accept their plans, and may make propositions in regard to our course of action which may give the enemy an advantage over us" (*General Conference Bulletin*, April 13, 1891).

In embracing Mrs. White's counsel, Seventh-day Adventists are not suggesting that they alone have the truth. The Word of God is clear that every human being in God's world has at least a little light (John 1:9; James 4:17) and that God has revealed Himself in nature, history, human experience, and in many other ways (Psalm 19; Romans 1 & 2; Hebrews 1:1, 2). Consequently, Adventists hold that some divine truth can be found in the secular world (whether atheistic or materialistic), in pagan and non-Christian religions, as well as in all Christian denominations—Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Pentecostal. God is Truth and the ultimate source of all truth. Wherever truth is found, we must embrace it.

Present Truth. Adventists, however, insist that whatever light can be found in other churches, they have also and much more besides. Believing that God has raised up their church as His end-time repository of truth, Adventists hold that they have the *present truth*, the *everlasting Gospel* for these last days.

The issue, then, is not whether other faiths or churches have some truth. Instead, the question is whether our ministers ought to look to other churches for new light. Given our self-understanding as God's end-time depository of truth, is it necessary for us to go to churches that are still living in spiritual darkness to discover new light or additional truth from them? If those churches represent "Babylon," and if it is true that "Babylon is fallen," how can we call upon our brothers and sisters in "Babylon" to "come out of her, My people" (Revelation 18:4), when we ourselves are now returning to "Babylon" to receive instruction from her?

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Broken Cisterns. Centuries ago, the prophet Jeremiah spoke out against this tendency on the part of God's people to mimic the gimmicks found in other faiths: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the Spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.... Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the River?" (Jeremiah 2:13, 18, NIV).

Ellen White explained why we must not drink from the broken cisterns: "We are in danger of making blunders in our missionary effort, in danger of failing to realize how essential is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. A new order of things has come into the ministry. There is a desire to pattern after other churches, and simplicity and humility are almost unknown. Young ministers who desire to be original introduce new ideas and new plans for labor. They open revival meetings and call large numbers into the church. But when the excitement is over, where are the converted ones? Repentance for sin is not felt. The sinner is entreated to believe in Christ and accept Him, without any regard for his past life of sin and rebellion, and the heart is not broken. There is no contrition of soul. The professedly converted ones have not fallen upon the Rock Christ Jesus" (*Signs of the Times*, Dec. 27, 1889).

Earlier in our history, following the Disappointment, Mrs. White warned our members not to seek "new light" even from denominations that had their roots in the Advent movement but had not accepted advancing truth: "The different parties of professed Advent believers have each a little truth, but God has given all these truths to His children who are being prepared for the Day of God. He has also given them truths that none of these parties know, neither will they understand. Things which are sealed up to them, the Lord has opened to those who will see and are ready to understand. *If God has any new light to communicate, He will let His chosen and beloved understand it, without their going to have their minds enlightened by hearing those who are in darkness and error*" (*Early Writings*, p. 124, emphasis mine).

She continued: "I was shown the necessity of those who believe that we are having the last message of mercy, being separate from those who are daily imbibing new errors. I saw that neither young nor old should attend their meetings; for it is wrong to thus encourage them while they teach error that is a deadly poison to the soul and teach for doctrines the commandments of men. The influence of such gatherings is not good. If God has delivered us from such darkness and error, we should stand fast in the liberty wherewith He has set us free and rejoice in the truth. *God is displeased with us when we go to listen to error, without being obliged to go*" (ibid., pp. 124, 125, my emphasis).

In spite of these warnings, a growing number of our members and lead-

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ers "don't see anything wrong" with today's gospel gimmicks. We are adopting and actively promoting these worldly entertainment methods for our own worship and evangelistic services. Regrettably, those who raise concerns are mislabeled "ultraconservatives." Why is this so?

Why We "Don't See Anything Wrong"

Granted, many within our ranks who are resorting to the various types of gospel gimmicks—gospel rock, gospel clowns, gospel cafes, gospel magicians, etc.—sincerely desire to see spiritual renewal in the church and want to attract new souls to Christ. Many who advocate such things are persuaded that God will use these modified forms of entertainment from other churches to win and retain young people in our own church. Without judging their motives and sincerity, I'd like to suggest a few other reasons why some of us don't see anything wrong with these contemporary innovations.

1. Desperation. There are those of us whose witness and example as parents and teachers have been unconvincing to our young people. The youth have observed that while we rightly affirm "the Bible and the Bible only," many of us do not have a living experience with the Bible's divine Author. Baptism seems more a graduation ceremony than the start of a new life in Christ. Our identity as God's "remnant" church makes us complacent instead of inspiring us to fulfill our divine mission to the world. We assert repeatedly that "we have the truth," but very often the truth does not have us. Our preaching, teaching, and evangelism may cram the mind with information without bringing about the deep soul-searching and humility of heart that results in transforming the character. Our ethical positions on social issues reflect pragmatic concerns rather than fidelity to Scripture. And instead of our worship being reverently vibrant, it tends to be either dull and sterile or emotional and superficial.

Having observed the above inconsistencies and hypocrisies, many of our young people are restless to sever all links with what they perceive as hypocritical faith. Their parents and teachers, in sheer desperation to hold them in the fold, encourage every worldly fad, even if it means importing "gospel rock," "gospel clowns," or "gospel magicians" into the church.

Although some of us who fit this description may sense that these new forms of worship and outreach are incompatible with Biblical Christianity, we find ourselves unable to oppose the methods because, in fact, we share the same worldly values and do practically nothing for the Lord. On the other hand, our children and students want to be active in the church. But the only

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way they know how is through different forms of worldly idolatry.

2. Weak Church Leaders. Unfortunately, some of us pastors and church leaders are sometimes to blame for the introduction of gospel gimmicks into church. We appear to put popularity, job security, position, and the illusion of outward success above our duty to the Chief Shepherd. We seem to fear that if we were to take a stand against these forms of worldliness in our churches, we would create enemies and threaten our support among our constituencies.

In some instances, we have done less than we might have to lead our congregations in the direction of revival and meaningful evangelism. We seldom preach Bible-based messages. With hazy preaching and teachings paralyzed by uncertainty, our churches are dying. Consequently, when something *wrong* comes along in the name of evangelism and worship innovation, we have already forfeited our moral right to challenge it. We find it easier to jump on the bandwagon of what is *new* instead of courageously holding on to what is *true*.

3. Denial of Faith. Another reason why we may not see anything wrong with gospel gimmicks is that some of us have embraced liberal higher criticism. Consequently we do not really believe in the efficacy of God's Word to draw souls to Christ and keep them in the faith. We also do not believe that ours is the end-time church of Bible prophecy to which other faiths should come for truth. To those of us with this view, our church is not the remnant, but only "part of the remnant." Although we may accept some aspects of our faith, such as the Sabbath and our health principles, in the honesty of our hearts we do not see the uniqueness of our message, the distinctiveness of our identity, the end-time dimension of our hope, and the urgency of our mission.

Ethical integrity suggests that if we have lost the faith and certainties of our pioneers and cannot regain them, we should resign from our denominational employment. But not all of us have the courage to do so. (Some announce their views only after retirement.) So, in our desire to shed the "cult" and "sectarian" labels that have often been used to characterize Seventh-day Adventists, we actively import gospel gimmicks from both the secular world and other religions and churches.

4. Lack of Conversion. There is another reason why some of us who advocate gospel gimmicks don't see anything wrong with them. Perhaps, unknown even to ourselves, we have never been fully converted. Our tastes and affections are still in the world. We are honest when we say that we see nothing wrong with these Biblically questionable innovations. This is because spir-

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itual things are spiritually discerned.

Thus when the sanctuaries that were dedicated to the worship of a holy God are transformed into auditoriums to worship the god of entertainment, we do not see anything wrong. We may congratulate ourselves for finally coming up with "a contemporary church program that meets the needs of our generation." We don't realize that the god of this world has blinded us (see 2 Corinthians 4:4). Without a true conversion, there is no hope of changing our minds against the use of worldly methods in worship or evangelism.

Worldly Entertainment to Communicate Gospel?

It is often suggested that before we can reach the world with the Gospel, we have to employ the world's methods to proclaim Christ's truth. But this reasoning is indefensible for at least two important reasons: (1) Worldly methods trivialize the message; (2) Worldly methods are contrary to Biblical teaching.

1. Trivializing the Message. Even if we are actually proclaiming the everlasting Gospel, we trivialize and cheapen the importance of the message when we adopt the world's entertainment methods to communicate the truth. Entertainment is entertainment and is generally not taken seriously by the public as a vehicle to proclaim important messages. If we adopt entertainment elements such as rock music, drama, clowns, puppets, and magicians, our message will fail to make any real moral demand upon the hearers.

If it is true that rock music (disguised as praise music and praise dancing) is the most effective medium to reach young people today, why is it that math teachers and chemistry professors don't set their classes to heavy-beat and hip-swinging music? Why don't politicians employ clowns and illusionists to present their political messages?

Common sense tells us that these entertainment media are not the most credible methods to communicate serious messages. A doctor, meeting an apprehensive patient, does not dress like a clown in order to tell his patient that she has cancer. If a doctor who wants to be taken seriously does not resort to this kind of frivolity, isn't it folly to announce God's message of warning and Judgment to a dying world by resorting to entertainment?

Jesus did not use the gimmicks of entertainment to proclaim his Sermon on the Mount. On the day of Pentecost, Peter did not set up a drum set or ask Mary to lead out in praise dancing to announce the resurrection of Jesus and His enthronement in Heaven. And Paul did not persuade people on Mars' hill

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using gospel magicians.

We are self-deceived if we believe that drums, disco lights, costumes, illusions, and loud noises are capable of representing the infinite holiness and mercy of God to a lost generation. Those of us who resort to these worldly gimmicks can only do so because we serve a different god from the One the apostles worshipped.

The apostle Paul makes it clear that the preeminent method of proclaiming spiritual truth is by the spoken word. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe___Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:21, 25).

2. Contrary to Scripture. It is a mistake for us to think that the world will embrace our message when we use worldly methods. The New Testament tells us that when Christ came to the world, "the world knew Him not" (John 1:10), for He was "not of this world" (John 8:23). What makes us believe that we can succeed where Christ failed?

Jesus Himself mentioned that Christians "are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:16; cf. vv. 9, 14). He stated emphatically that the works of this world are evil (John 7:7). He said that true believers are not of the world, and prayed that they should be kept from its evil ways (John 17:14, 15). Because the Spirit of God stands against the spirit of the world (1 Corinthians 2:12), the Gospel should not be presented in such a way as to be coupled with the standards of the world. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed . . . that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2).

The apostles also taught that "friendship with the world is hatred toward God" (James 4:4) and that the world "pollutes" the believer (cf. 1:27). Therefore, Christians are urged: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15, 16).

We depart from Biblical teaching when we think that today's so-called gospel rock, gospel clowns, gospel magicians, and other forms of gospel entertainment can legitimately be employed to communicate spiritual truth. The Scriptures teach that the world is on its own, "without hope and without God" (Ephesians 2:12). Therefore, instead of borrowing worldly methods to reach the world, Christians are sent forth like the apostle Paul, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18).

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Bait-and-Hook Evangelism? It is often suggested that because most people—especially young people—don't want to listen to the Gospel, we have to "bait" them with gospel entertainment and gimmicks. Once we attract them by these contemporary methods, then we can "hook" them with the true message. The proof text to justify the use of worldly methods to reach people is Paul's statement:

"And unto the Jews I became as a few, that I might gain the Jews. . . . To them that are without law, as without law . . . that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:20-22). Thus, some argue, we must employ whatever people like to hear in order to get a hearing for the Gospel.

But the context of the passage reveals that Paul was talking about *preaching* (see v. 16 ff.), not the use of worldly methods of evangelism. The apostle stated that in his preaching and witnessing he always tailored his message to suit the level of understanding of his hearers. In other words, he always spoke *appropriately*. Therefore 1 Corinthians 9 does not teach that Paul employed or encouraged the "bait-and-hook" method for evangelism. On the contrary, he persuaded the people from the Word of God using preaching as his method.

Moreover, God's end-time church has been divinely entrusted with the everlasting Gospel. This stewardship is a great privilege. But it is also a solemn responsibility. For "it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). The faithfulness to which the church has been called compels us to preserve the integrity of the message by preserving the method we employ to communicate it.

The apostle Paul therefore urges us not to try to "catch" people with the entertainment "bait" so we can "hook" them with the Gospel. He writes: "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile. But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, Which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness" (1 Thessalonians 2:3-5).

Note the following two facts from this passage. First, the Greek word translated "deceit" (*plane*) means error. The ultimate issue on any subject should always be truth. "The Gospel is either true or it is not. Paul stakes his entire life on the truth of the Gospel. There's a tendency in our day to judge values by the wrong standard. 'Does it work?' is often asked more than 'Is it true?' The test of the validity of the Gospel is truth. The danger in preaching to attract an audience is obvious. It is too readily disguised to provide solutions

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that work rather than truth that is to be confronted. The acid test for every sermon or Bible class must be: *Is it true?* If Christ is presented [merely] as a means by which we can be successful, happy, or whatever, we are betraying the Gospel of God. We are guilty of deceit and error even though we may be successful in drawing followers."¹¹

Second, the Greek word *dolos*, translated "guile" in 1 Thessalonians 2:3, means "trick" or "bait" (or "craft," "subtlety," or "decoy"). There is no place for trickery or manipulation in evangelism. Thus the NIV translates the passage as: "For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, *nor are we trying to trick you*" (my emphasis).

We must not employ "deceit" in the proclamation of the Gospel. Our message must determine the method. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1 that when the Jews wanted to see miracles and the Greeks wanted to hear worldly wisdom, he refused to bow to their tastes and desires because God had commanded him to preach the Gospel. Effective preaching is always the preferred Biblical method to proclaim the Gospel.

Encouraging Youth Involvement. We sometimes hear that the use of these contemporary methods of entertainment is the only way to involve young people in church life. Advocates argue that because young people have many wonderful talents and abilities, the church must give them "a piece of the pie"—just as was done for our youthful Adventist pioneers. They further claim that failing to allow them to employ their unique gifts in the worship and outreach activities of the church makes young people lose interest in the church.

This argument is not entirely accurate, nor is it Biblical. It is true that many of our Adventist pioneers were young people. For example, James White began preaching at 23 and Ellen White was telling her visions publicly at 17. J.N. Andrews held evangelistic meetings at age 21, and by age 24 he had published 35 articles. Uriah Smith became editor of the *Review* at age 23, having already written a 35,000-word poem called "The Warning Voice of Time and Prophecy" that the *Review* published in installments the year before. What set these youthful pioneers apart from many of today's youth is that they were *converted* and *studious Bible students*. As such, they would not bring themselves to using worldly entertainment methods in the Lord's service.

Many of today's young people have special gifts and abilities. But giftedness in performing certain functions does not necessarily mean those abilities should be employed in spiritual worship or outreach. The fact that a person can play a set of drums, or dance, or even perform magical illusions and acrobatics does not mean we need gospel rock, gospel dancing, gospel

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magicians, or gospel acrobats in church. If this were the case, we would have to insist that gospel footballers and gospel baseball pitchers should use their special gifts during worship services. Rather, we must seek to encourage young people who are truly converted to use their gifts in ways appropriate to the worship service of the holy God, while not putting them in positions that expose them too early to the dangers of spiritual pride and arrogance (see 1 Timothy 3:6).

The Foolishness of Preaching, Not the Preaching of Foolishness

The clear proclamation of God's Word has always been the most effective method of communicating God's truth. Because this method went contrary to the gospel gimmicks of his day, the apostle Paul referred to it as "the foolishness of preaching." Adventist evangelist Carlyle B. Haynes has aptly illustrated the difference between preaching centered on the Word of God and preaching using the worldly method.

Gospel Gimmicks. Speaking to young ministers several decades ago, Haynes wrote:

"I once attended a meeting conducted by a well-known Adventist evangelist who had achieved an outstanding reputation, and whom many younger ministers were consulting for suggestions to improve their work. Some were diligently copying this man's manner of presentation. I had been out of the country for five years in mission work. Reports came to me regarding this man, who was looked upon as a successful winner of souls. His methods, which were certainly innovations among us, were the subject of much discussion.

"I was eager to get a firsthand look at this man and his techniques. My appointments brought me to the city where he was conducting an evangelistic campaign, and I made plans to hear and observe him in action. Mingling with the large number of people streaming in to the meetings, I sat in the middle of the audience, where I could see and hear without difficulty.

"The tabernacle was well lighted and decorated.... On the rafters above the platform were hung many lights, and on each side of the platform two spotlights centered on the preacher.

"There was music, much music—instrumental, vocal, choral, solos, duets, quartets, and two little tots who sang an amusing ditty which brought a round of laughter and a handclap or two. Then came an impressive theme song, which many seemed to know and I had never heard. At its close the

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preacher entered in a sort of hush.

"He attracted everyone's attention, including mine. I was not quite prepared for this. He could not fail to catch attention. Everything had apparently been done with that in mind. He was dressed in spotless white, with white tie, white socks, white shoes. Even the Bible he carried was bound in white. A woman at my back exclaimed breathlessly to her companion, 'Isn't he a honey?' and I had to agree. He was indeed. From that first moment he was the focus of attraction. No one could hear, see, or think of anything else but that 'honey' of a preacher. His words were little noticed, yet no one moved his eyes from the speaker, and all heads swung around with him as he stood or moved about in the glare of the spotlights. . . .

"I didn't listen, but I certainly looked. I couldn't help looking. It was an impressive performance. What he said, I don't know; but I can remember yet what he did as he skillfully moved about the platform....

"Returning to my hotel room, I tried to recall what he may have read from the Bible. I could not remember his opening that beautiful white Bible at all. While I am sure he must have done so, I did not notice it. The last thing I remember passing through my mind before I sank into slumber was, 'He certainly is a 'honey'"

"Traveling about the country for some months after that, I ran into a considerable number of white suits and spotlights. They broke out like an epidemic everywhere. The imitation ran its course, as epidemics do, and then subsided—I hope.

"I mention the incident only because I desire to contrast it with another experience that occurred while I was a pastor in New York City. For a number of years I had heard reports about the ministry of a great British expositor, George Campbell Morgan, pastor of London's Westminster Chapel. He had been making annual trips to America for Bible conferences, but I had not heard him. I had, however, read all his books...."

Biblical Preaching. Haynes continued his advice to ministers:

"Learning that Morgan was coming to New York City to conduct a two-week series of studies in the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, I was delighted at the prospect of hearing this great preacher and arranged my schedule so that I could attend these nightly meetings without interruption. They were to start on a Monday night which I thought to be a poor night to begin.

"I arrived at the church a half hour before the meeting was to begin. Knowing the church accommodated 2,500 easily, I had no worry about finding a seat. But I was wrong; the seats were all taken. The ushers directed me

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into the gallery, and fortunately one seat was left there. With a sigh of relief I sat down, astonished beyond measure that 2,500 people would turn out like this on a Monday night.

"The pastor and Dr. Morgan came onto the rostrum quietly and sat down. The congregation sang an old hymn, and during the singing I looked closely at the famous preacher. Never had I seen a more unprepossessing man in the pulpit. He was tall, lanky, awkward, and I thought I might hear his bones rattle if there were not so much rustling by the audience. His clothing was plain, and there was nothing conspicuous about him.

"After the pastor's prayer and simple introduction, Dr. Morgan walked to the pulpit, opened the Bible—not a white one—and in a pleasing voice, but entirely without dramatic effect, read the Scripture passage and immediately began to explain it. I am glad that I examined him before he began speaking, for I never noticed him again during the whole hour. Instead, I was utterly absorbed and entranced at the meanings he was bringing out of the treasure-house of the Word of God. It was one of the most thrilling hours of my life. I had never experienced anything like it before. And it was repeated nightly for two weeks.

"Dr. Morgan had no graces of gesture, no spectacular delivery, and no eloquence in the usual sense. He used no charts, blackboard, pictures, screen, or gadgets of any kind. Nothing in his talk, movements, dress, or manner attracted attention to himself or diverted attention from the Bible. His tremendous power was in what he did with and by the Word of God.

"I was in another world in five minutes, not because of any elocution or oratorical ability. He talked quite casually and in a conversational tone, reading with deep reverence and impressive feeling the passage he was to explore. I forgot the people about me, forgot the church, forgot the speaker, forgot everything but the wonders of the world into which I had been led....

"I went home dazed with wonder at the effectiveness of the Bible alone as the source of great preaching....

"I want to impress upon you that such preaching is wholly within the reach of every one of you, the most powerful that any man can ever use. Throw away your accessories, discard your gadgets and pictures, discontinue your shows and playlets, stop relying on entertainment and theatrical displays, and get back again to the simple, plain, powerful exposition of the Word.

"When I returned home the night after Dr. Morgan's first study, the prayer that burst from my deeply moved heart was, 'O God, make me a preacher of Thy divine Word, and help me never to rely on anything else.'"²

May this be our prayer, too.

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Endnotes

¹ Gary W. Demarest, *The Communicator's Commentary Series*, vol. 9. *1, 2 Thessalonians, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1984), p. 54.

² Carlyle B. Haynes, *Carlyle B. Haynes Speaks to Young Ministers* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1968), pp. 31-36.

Chapter 4

Movies in Our Worship Services?

A Letter to Pastor A

By **Andrea D. Oliver**

Student, Washington and Lee University School of Law
Secretary, General Youth Conference

Dear Pastor A,
I pray that this message finds you doing well in the Lord and recovering from illness. I am glad that we could talk Wednesday evening. You gave me much food for thought, which happens to be the subject of this letter.

To tell you the truth, I was shocked by what you shared with me. You seemed very earnest about the significance you saw in *Movie Z*,¹ and I was deeply disappointed to learn that you intend to incorporate portions of this movie into the youth service this Sabbath. I believe so strongly regarding what I am about to share that I owe it to God and to you, as my pastor, to voice my concern and dissent. If you still intend to show excerpts from *Movie Z* this Sabbath or to preach on the themes you shared with me, I plead that for God's sake and the youth's sake you will by no means do so.

The Dangers of Movie Watching—In *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, Sister White wrote strong counsel against reading "fictitious and infidel books." Her words provide forceful applications for the movies of our world today. She said:

Suffer not yourselves to open the lids of a book that is questionable. There is a hellish fascination in the literature of Satan. It is the powerful battery by which he tears down a simple religious faith. Never feel that you are strong enough to read infidel books; for they contain a poison like that of asps. They can do you no good, and will assuredly do you harm. In reading them, you are inhaling the mias-

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mas of hell. They will be to your soul like a corrupt stream of water, defiling the mind, keeping it in the mazes of skepticism, and making it earthly and sensual. These books are written by men whom Satan employs as his agents; and by this means he designs to confuse the mind, withdraw the affections from God, and rob your Creator of the reverence and gratitude which His works demand.²

If worldly books present such grave danger, how much more so do movies with their provocative, indelible images? There are obvious dangers to watching the entertainment of the world. Though some believe that *Movie Z* has spiritual parallels, you and I should understand that any perceived parallel is embedded in error and corruption. As Christians, we must guard jealously what we behold. By beholding we become changed. We cannot go safely to the theater or Blockbuster to watch the bewitching movies of the world without imperiling our souls and unfitting ourselves for God's work. I dare say that even the presence of a Bible-believing Christian at a movie is misleading to those who are closely watching and scrutinizing our actions, "noting the effect of our faith upon our characters."³

To show scenes from *Movie Z* in the sanctuary is at best inappropriate. At worst, it is irreverent, reprehensible, and entirely unacceptable. Would it have been appropriate for the Levites to display the amusements of the heathen in the earthly sanctuary, even if to illustrate spiritual truth? Neither is it appropriate to show the corrupt movies of the world in the house of our God.

Drawing Illustrations from Inferior Means, and Its Effects—I also am deeply concerned that you would draw sermon illustrations from *Movie Z* to convey the most noble and beautiful truths of the Bible. Much can be said on this subject, but I will abbreviate my comments for lack of time. You may not intend to recommend this movie to your hearers, yet some might construe your actions as an endorsement. You acknowledged that *Movie Z* contains violence and many other ungodly themes. The danger is that those who are not discriminating will watch the movie as the result of your example. The evil in the movie, however brief the clip, will impress upon their minds and hearts. If they are intrigued by your teaching and seek to find additional "religious insights," they can draw erroneous conclusions that will harm their spiritual understanding. A message employing illustrations from such a perverse medium surely has dangerous implications for its effects on others, and it does not do justice to the holy truths of God's Word. Do you want to be responsible for

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the potential damage?

What is the limit to using such sources for illustrating Bible truth? How far can one go? Can someone safely go to nightclubs or rap or heavy metal concerts to extract spiritual truth to relate to a lost world? When I was in the world, I listened to rap, R&B,⁴ and hip-hop. Although I no longer listen to this music because of its ungodly influence, I acknowledge that some lyrics have profound glimpses of truth about life, though embedded in sensuality, the love of money, violence, and frivolity. Knowing that rap, R&B, and hip-hop have large audiences in the world, should I listen to this music that I may better "relate" to others? I respond with an emphatic, No! Not only are the sexual overtones, foul language, and overpowering rhythms perilous to my own soul, I also must consider the example I am setting for others. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). What would others think if they heard that I was listening to this music for "spiritual purposes"? They would be misled by my irresponsible example. They would have less faith in my Christianity. They would question the seriousness of Christ's expectation that we be in the world but not of the world. God has purer, nobler, and more compelling ways of reaching even the least spiritually minded.

Embracing the World—In light of our discussion on *Movie Z*, I remembered the question a church member asked you after a sermon on bigotry. He inquired, "How much of the world are we to embrace?" You responded, "We are to embrace as much of the world as we can without compromising." I understand what you are saying and trust your sincerity. However, what are the implications? For the sake of argument, let us assume that there are many acceptable things in the world. Still, to focus on what we safely can embrace of the world will be—in practice—to the neglect of our God-given mission in these last days. We are Seventh-day Adventists. We have a calling. I fear that we are focusing so much on the things we can agree with the world on, that we forget our God-given duty to be the watchmen of the world. The Lord has appointed us to take the three angels' messages to a perishing generation. The danger is that we will become so preoccupied in looking for acceptable things in the world that we commit a sin of omission by neglecting the final message of mercy that God has entrusted to us in this eleventh hour.

Like you, I believe that Jesus is coming soon. When I consider the condition of the world, I can feel it in my bones. God has called us out to be different, "a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). "God's commandment-keeping people are described by the prophet as 'men wondered at.' We are to be a people distinct

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from the world. The eyes of the world are upon us, and we are observed by many of whom we have no knowledge."⁵ I earnestly believe that it will be our marked contrast to the world that will draw true seekers, not our similarities.

The Young People—Lastly, please carefully consider your responsibility to the young people. They are at a tender, impressionable age. You may not intend to promote the movie or its evils by presenting it at the youth worship service, yet they might not understand this. Even your actions in having watched *Movie Z* will send a message to them. It will give them opportunity to justify movie watching "because Pastor did it." People see actions, not intentions.

Despite their appearance at times, young people are painfully attentive and discerning. Knowing that they will watch you closely, it is crucial that you abstain from all appearance of evil. As you stand before the youth this Sabbath, remember that you are standing before the living and the dead. With this precious opportunity the Lord has provided, what message will you bear to establish their hearts more firmly in Christ and prepare them to stand through the impending conflict? They are dear to Jesus, His beloved lambs. Their salvation is at stake. I plead with you to be especially careful. Please do not bear a message that will confuse their impressionable minds or wound their consciences. Should any be led astray as a result of our words or example, we must give an account. I pray that we will have stars in our crowns and not blood on our hands.

I say these things not to condemn but because I care. Much is at stake. Consider this letter prayerfully.

Most truly,

Andrea Oliver

P.S. A Note to Readers: You will note that the above letter is a forward-looking letter, addressing what I feared would transpire at the youth meeting based on my conversation with Pastor A. In the end, he still used the movie. This was some time ago. Recently, after I informed Pastor A that the letter would be published in this volume, he expressed his desire to present what he believes to be the proper context and justification for using *Movie Z*. Out of respect for his wishes, I have reproduced much of his response below. The careful reader will be able to evaluate the merit of his comments.

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Pastor A writes:

I have no doubt that many people who read that letter will assume things that they otherwise would not if they could have more specific information about the pastor in question or the whole setting. This will be especially true if the letter is surrounded with the literary context I assume it will be, namely warnings of "worldly ways" in our church.

1. Why do I say this? For several reasons. Some may seem very small, but even small things add up to become large things. Here are—what I see from your letter—11 "open doors" to increasing the odds for avoidable and inaccurate conclusions in a reader's mind: The letter speaks of "excerpts" of the movie without mentioning which *[Movie Z]* (there are three and they differ quite a bit), the number of excerpts, their time allotment, or their specific content.

2. The letter mentions the showing of the movie excerpts in a "sanctuary," rather than the classroom, which is actually where the youth meeting in discussion was held.

3. The letter quotes me as saying, "We are to embrace as much of the world as we can without compromising." This is not far from my statement, but not a true quote/sentiment.

4. The letter is void of mentioning how infrequently the pastor spoken of has shown any movie excerpts in his messages spanning twenty-plus years of preaching/teaching.

5. The letter fails to tell how many of the youth already saw the movie in its entirety and how many of them regularly see other movies saturated with unwholesomeness.

6. The letter says nothing of the pastor's introductory speech to the youth warning/telling them about movies/electronic games in general, the specific movie used that day, the principle of "by beholding, we become changed," and the many other pertinent things said in preface to the viewing.

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7. The letter suggests that the excerpts shown possessed Biblically condemned elements, which is untrue. (From the letter: "*The evil in the movie*, however brief the clip, will impress upon their minds and hearts.")

8. The letter never divulges the actual lesson derived from the Bible and how it was vividly seen in the movie.

9. The letter implies—but never actually says—that you have never seen the movie mentioned.

10. The letter lacks any follow-up to the incident; nothing is said of the Biblically positive responses various youth made as a result of the pastor's message.

11. The letter never deals with views of others about the issues/Bible texts you raise as related to the topic of "relating to the world." For example:

A. 1 Thessalonians 5:22 is quoted ("Abstain from all appearance of evil"), but no mention is made of how a "black and white," surface application of this principle is not seen in Jesus' life. (He went to parties where people became intoxicated, conversed with a woman in public alone, enlisted a tax collector as one of His disciples, showed compassion for a prostitute, etc.) In other words, *if* that text is to be taken on the surface level (which Jesus warned against; see John 7:24), *then* our Saviour violated it on a multitude of occasions.

B. Ellen White quotes are used without their historical/cultural context, thus making some *local and time-sensitive applications* of eternal, universal principles appear to be the *principles* themselves....

C. Ellen White quotes are used without their paradoxical counterparts. For example, absent are her oft-repeated thoughts that circumstances alter methods (of evangelism) and how the people we attempt to reach need to be related to (for balancing statements, see *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 400; *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 42; *Gospel Workers*, p. 381).

As I stated earlier, I leave it up to the discerning reader to evaluate the

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merits of Pastor A's comments. I believe, however, that I represent a growing number of young people who have serious reservations against the showing of movies to youth in our worship services. The potential damage resulting from the example of leaders pursuing such an action may far outweigh any conceivable good we may claim to derive from them. I personally find valuable principles for movies in our day in the following counsel by Ellen G. White against the reading of fictional and sensational works:

Works of romance, frivolous, exciting tales, are . . . a curse to the reader. The author may profess to teach a moral lesson, throughout his work he may interweave religious sentiments, but often these serve only to veil the folly and worthlessness beneath....

There are works of fiction that were written for the purpose of teaching truth or exposing some great evil. Some of these works have accomplished good. Yet they have also wrought untold harm. They contain statements and highly wrought pen pictures that excite the imagination and give rise to a train of thought which is full of danger, especially to the youth. The scenes described are lived over and over again in their thoughts. Such reading unfits the mind for usefulness and disqualifies it for spiritual exercise. It destroys interest in the Bible. Heavenly things find little place in the thoughts. As the mind dwells upon the scenes of impurity portrayed, passion is aroused, and the end is sin.

Even fiction which contains no suggestion of impurity, and which may be intended to teach excellent principles, is harmful. It encourages the habit of hasty and superficial reading merely for the story. Thus it tends to destroy the power of connected and vigorous thought; it unfits the soul to contemplate the great problems of duty and destiny....

It is often urged that in order to win the youth from sensational or worthless literature, we should supply them with a better class of fiction. This is like trying to cure the drunkard by giving him, in the place of whisky or brandy, the milder intoxicants, such as wine, beer, or cider. The use of these would continually foster the appetite for stronger stimulants. The only safety for the inebriate, and the only safeguard for the temperate man, is total abstinence. For the

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lover of fiction the same rule holds true. Total abstinence is his only safety.⁶

Endnotes

¹ "Movie Z" is used in place of the real title to avoid drawing attention to the movie at issue and because the concerns here addressed go beyond a particular movie.

² *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 93.

³ *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 386.

⁴ "R&B" is short for "rhythm and blues."

⁵ *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 386.

⁶ *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 445, 446.

Chapter 5

What Adventist Young People *Really* Want

The General Youth Conference Experiment

By Israel Ramos

Program Director, CAMPUS
President, General Youth Conference

There exists, today, an army of dedicated young people within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church who yearn to demonstrate Nehemiah's leadership, Daniel's integrity, Mary's humility, Paul's passion for evangelism, and Christ's love for God and humanity."

The above words, affirming the existence of a dedicated group of Adventist young people, constitute the opening sentence of the Mission Statement of the General Youth Conference (GYC), a grassroots organization that was conceived by Adventist students on university campuses in North America. This movement seeks "to mobilize existing youth and young adult ministries that are fully committed to the distinctive message and mission of the SDA Church towards the proclamation of the three angels' messages."

What is the history behind this movement, and why are thousands of dedicated young people, their friends, and loved ones being drawn to the ideals of GYC? In seeking answers to the above questions, we will discover what Adventist young people *really* want.

Currently serving as the GYC president, I write from the perspective of a young person who has been intimately and actively involved in the conception, development, and leadership of the General Youth Conference (GYC).¹

The Conception of a Vision

In 1999, Seventh-day Adventist young people on public university campuses conceived the idea of an experiment. They wanted to find out whether, indeed, they could make a difference in the church and in the world by taking seriously the claims of Biblical Adventism. These young people came from different walks of life, a spectrum of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, and

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a variety of occupations.

The idea of this experiment was the result of a growing desire among students on North American university and college campuses—both secular and Adventist—for a different kind of Adventist youth movement.

Prior to this time there was a general impression, in certain quarters of the industrialized world, that the way to attract and retain Adventist young people in the church was through a more "up-to-date" message and "progressive" methodology. Those who adopted this way of reaching young people often desisted from preaching Biblical messages and resorted to the kind of "innovative" methods found in some of the megachurches—approaches that included celebration-style contemporary worship, entertainment, and other means that are supposedly "better in reaching the postmodern mind."

However, many young people were feeling frustrated and extremely uncomfortable when such programs were forced upon them at worship services and at certain youth functions. It was for this reason that I found it necessary to direct the following comment to church leaders who came to welcome us at our 2003 youth convention:

We have heard a rumor that we do not wish to believe. It has been brought to our attention that some of our church leaders, scholars, pastors, and members sincerely believe that young people have a desire to be "spiritually" entertained due to the [supposed] lack of relevance in the direct preaching of what is sometimes regarded as an outdated, traditional, or culturally conditioned message. But there are nearly 800 young people here before you, questioning the viability of the sample group where this inconclusive research has been done. We wish not to settle for mediocrity, for we are striving to be a part of the message—the distinctive message—and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: a message and a mission of nothing but divine excellence!²

The students who conceived the idea of the experiment wanted to take Biblical Adventism seriously. They understood from Christian history that God had often launched major revival and reformation movements with individuals on university and college campuses.³ Thus, they embarked upon serious Bible study, intense prayer, an uncompromising lifestyle, and boldness in sharing Christ with others.

Three notable institutions inspired the experiment that would later be known as the General Youth Conference. CAMPUS (the Center for Adventist

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Ministry to Public University Students), based near the University of Michigan, provided a vision, methodology, and philosophy that rejected mediocrity and challenged young people to aspire to spiritual and academic/professional excellence.⁴

In addition to the students at the University of Michigan, CAMPUS was influential in challenging and changing the lives of other students attending some of our nation's most prestigious universities: Boston University, Brandeis, Brown, Harvard, Princeton, Rutgers, and others. Some of these students formed SPARC—Students Preparing Adventists for the Return of Christ—and began impacting the lives their friends and classmates. Others graduated from Michigan and moved on to Loma Linda Medical School to found and organize Advent H.O.P.E., which is an acronym for Helping Others Prepare for Eternity.⁵ All these students, who had been impacted by CAMPUS, would later compose a large part of the first GYC Executive Committee.⁶

Besides CAMPUS—with its vision of "A Bible-based revival movement in which every student is a missionary" and its philosophy of excellence—there were two other institutions that greatly shaped the outlook of GYC—particularly its vision of youth evangelism. They were: Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI) and Ouachita Hills Academy (OHA). These two institutions awakened in young people a passion for soulwinning.

With institutions like Ouachita Hills and organizations like ASI, the idea that a young person could hold evangelistic campaigns and preach powerful sermons from God's Word was already inspiring many young people. The young people involved in the General Youth Conference Experiment wanted to be like OHA, ASI, and others who formed teams, raised funds, and caught the first flight available overseas to win some souls for Christ.⁷

The above is the background behind the experiment that came to be known as the General Youth Conference, a revival and missionary movement that "seeks to equip and inspire Seventh-day Adventist youth and young adults to be ambassadors for Christ in their respective places of work and study."⁸

Today, this vision of GYC that was conceived by students on secular university campuses has been embraced by thousands of dedicated Adventist students and young professionals in denominational and supporting institutions, as well as by parents, lay people, pastors, and church leaders.⁹

The Birth of a Modern Revival Movement Amongst the Youth

By 2002 the vision conceived by these Adventist young people had given birth to the organization of the first annual General Youth Conference (GYC)

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meeting. GYC conventions are designed to be five-day training and inspirational events. They are held every third week of December, beginning on Wednesday evening and ending on Sunday at noon.¹⁰

The First GYC (2002). The first GYC meeting was set up to test-run the experiment—to determine whether Adventist young people would embrace a conference that promoted an Adventism that defies mediocrity and takes deep Bible study seriously. The venue was Pine Springs Ranch in Southeastern California. Since this Adventist retreat center is located in the mountains of California more than an hour away from the nearest airport, and since there was little advertisement, attendance was expected to be less than 200; but the expectations of the organizers were wrong. They were forced to close registration weeks early, when more than 400 young people registered. Those who weren't able to register showed up anyway! The facilities were maxed out at more than 500 attendees.

The conference was held with a specific intention to challenge the youth to a radical commitment to Christ and the distinctive message of the Adventist Church. A businesslike dress code was enforced. The first meeting of the day started at 6:00 a.m. and the last one ended at 9:00 p.m. Participants attended eight hours of workshops on Thursday and Friday along with six hours of plenary sessions. Sabbath and Sunday were full of inspirational messages, deep Bible study, and a lot of good-quality singing (especially of hymns and youth revival songs from the *Church Hymnal*). Intense though this conference may have been, young people loved it.

GYC chose as its 2002 theme: *Pentecost: He Will Do It Again*. It was to remind young people that what God had done in the past, He would do again. He would pour out His Spirit in a manner heretofore not witnessed since apostolic times. The response was overwhelmingly positive. On Friday evening, many young people gave their lives to Christ. Some returned to their homes, enrolled in Bible Studies, and were baptized. Others put their education on hold and got involved in mission service.

This first General Youth Conference experiment evidenced that young people want to be taken seriously. Given a chance and appropriate direction, they are capable of making deep spiritual commitment to Christ and to the Adventist message. Thus, expecting little of them can be discouraging.

The Second GYC (2003). The second annual General Youth Conference was held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, near the University of Michigan campus. The theme, *Higher Than the Highest*, challenged the young people to aspire to

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God's ideal of excellence in all aspects of their lives. Initially, 700 young people were expected to attend. Instead, more than 1,000 showed up. Many traveled from around the country and around the world, paying a significant sum in travel and registration costs.

Once again, the Ann Arbor 2003 General Youth Conference experiment evidenced that young people want to be challenged. It also revealed that God's ideal for His children, which is "higher than the highest human thought can reach," is the ideal that many young people are striving for. A desire for excellence mobilized young people to seek and find the highest quality of speakers, musicians, and teachers. The General Youth Conference has become well known for providing a conference with our church's godly and most capable leaders.

The Third GYC (2004). Miracles took place at the third annual convention in Sacramento, California (December 15-19, 2004). Under the 2004 GYC theme, *Carry the Light*, the young people were inspired to believe that they have a critical role to play in finishing God's work.

With more than 1,600 in attendance, the city of Sacramento felt the impact of young people used by God when more than 700 young people knocked on 5,000 plus homes and enrolled over 700 people in Bible studies in preparation for ASI's approaching evangelistic effort. More than 200 youth also accepted a call to give seven to eight years of their lives to be frontier missionaries and carry the light of Christ to the "unreached." Some have already contacted Adventist Frontier Missions to start making plans.

When young people feel that the church needs them and that they are to play an important role in the Gospel commission, it gives them a real reason to stay. Young people want a cause to live for and die for. And there is no better cause than the cause of God.

Results of the Experiments. From the three experiments at GYC conventions (2002-2004), we conclude that young people want to be taken seriously, are capable of making spiritual sacrifices and commitments, and are disappointed when others expect little from them. Young people want (1) to uphold the distinctive message of the Adventist Church; (2) to aspire to excellence in all aspects of their lives—academic, professional, and spiritual; (3) to embrace the call to radical discipleship, including a life of missionary service.

No Longer an Experiment

GYC is no longer an experiment. It is now a movement that has grown

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beyond the boundaries of North America.

Besides students, young adults, and youths of all ages in North America, this five-day intensive conference has attracted young people from more than 13 different countries. It has forced the organizers to book hotels and convention centers instead of Christian campsites. And it has arrested the attention of many chaplains, pastors, and youth directors. It has received support and encouragement from church leaders, including the General Conference President, Ian Paulsen, who attended its most recent (2004) meeting. Also, its major programs have been aired on 3ABN television, and the General Youth Conference Web site is getting numerous hits with people downloading available presentations.

Today, the General Youth Conference is officially sponsored by the Center for Adventist Ministry to Public University Students (CAMPUS) of the Michigan Conference and by Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI). It is governed by a board of directors comprising church leaders, pastors, lay people and students, and receives timely counsel from its Advisory Board.¹¹

The question is: *What is it about GYC that is so attractive to young people? Is it entertainment? Is it the downgrading of the church's distinctive doctrines and practices? Is it the adoption of contemporary worship styles? Is it an outlook of ease and fun?*

No! Young people are attracted to GYC because it seeks to offer them what they really want, yet never knew existed—a Bible-based revival, demonstrated by true Adventist teaching, godly living, missionary commitment, and excellence in all aspects of life.

What the youth of today want is captured in *The Spirit of GYC* which 2004 GYC attendees enthusiastically embraced at the convention in Sacramento, California.¹² It reads:

In seeking to uphold the distinctive message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, GYC will promote among its participants:

1. *A respect for Scripture*—as the foundation and test of all teachings and practices;

2. *An appreciation for the Spirit of Prophecy*—as an authoritative source of instruction, comfort, and warning;

3. *A quest for Biblical holiness*—through a daily prayer and devotional experience with Jesus and a commitment to following His Word;

4. *A vibrant worship experience*—one that is characterized by

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principle, reverence, and decorum;

5. *A passion for lost souls*—animated by personal experience in the saving love of Jesus and a desire for His imminent return;

6. *A cultivation of godly relationships*—preserving purity and encouraging accountability;

7. *An exemplary and abundant lifestyle*—in recreation, entertainment, dress, and healthful living;

8. *An enthusiasm for service*—through care for the needy, service to the community, promotion of human rights, and stewardship of the environment;

9. *A commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God's remnant church*—by supporting and upholding its principles, organization, and leadership;

10. *An attitude of humility and cordiality*—as we seek to clarify, articulate, and defend the Biblical teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The fact that many young people are attracted to GYC suggests that our young people want something substantial. They want something better than is offered them all too often. They want to take seriously the claims of Biblical Adventism. There is an army of dedicated young people who "yearn to demonstrate Nehemiah's leadership, Daniel's integrity, Mary's humility, Paul's passion for evangelism, and Christ's love for God and humanity."¹³

What, Then, Do the Young People *Really* Want?

The General Youth Conference clearly demonstrates that Seventh-day Adventist young people really want the opportunity to give up everything for God's sake. They want the challenge to excellence in all things. And they want to be useful in God's service.

An easy, ritualistic religiosity repels young people. Intelligent and idealistic as they are, they cannot accept a religion that leaves them "just as you are" and that gives a false sense of assurance. To many young people, becoming true disciples of Christ means that God's working must be manifested in their lives through a difference in behavior, thought process, and belief.

The General Youth Conference identified what Adventist young people really want by how they responded to radical youth programs that challenge a selfish outlook on life, that reject popularity at the expense of principle, and that embrace Biblical teachings and ideas that make us different—even "peculiar." The results speak for themselves.

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Conclusion

Due to some approaches in youth ministry through the course of recent years, the impression has been made that following the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy for ministry guidelines has become unconventional. Parents, pastors, and youth leaders seem to fear young people. The fear of offending them has caused many to try to make Adventism "easy to swallow."

Most of the current approaches of ministering to our younger generation lead many to believe that we expect little from them. Often the youth of our church have been deprived of the necessary discipline and example from some of its leaders. Thus, the motivation to make them committed Adventists is lacking. And in some instances, an unfortunate notion has been created that young people are not interested in spiritual things.

In an effort to allow young people to speak for themselves, the General Youth Conference has provided an approach that appeared to be overlooked—namely, a return to the old tried ways of the Bible. Young people are asking: *"If it worked for God's people then, should it not work for us now?"*

The GYC movement is a call for excellence in all things. Beginning on public university campuses—where no real Adventist culture existed to bias young people's minds—students were called out to live and share the uniqueness of Biblical Adventism. The results have surprised those who doubted the experiment's success. But to the rest of us, it confirmed what we believed all along: Young people *really* want only that which will assist them in their quest to rise "higher than the highest" for their Master and Saviour.

It would be funny, if it weren't so sad, that some of us have neglected or completely misunderstood that young people *really* want to be saved! It's just that some don't know it. Others don't know how. But parents, pastors, teachers, and church leaders should know how. Our responsibility demands that we help—not hinder—them from realizing their hearts' longing.

Endnotes

¹ For a summary report of GYC, see the February 19, 2005 special issue of *Adventist Review*. See also Staci Osterman's "A Modern Revival Movement Amongst Adventist Youth," *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM* (Fall 2004), pp. 62, 48.

² Israel Ramos, "Higher Than the Highest: The Second GYC Opening Address," December 17, 2003, Ann Arbor, Michigan. For the complete manuscript of this and all other opening addresses given at GYC, visit www.generalyouthconference.org.

³ For example, John Wycliffe at Oxford University, John Huss at the University of Prague,

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Martin Luther at the University of Wittenberg, and John and Charles Wesley at Oxford University. For more on this, see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1911), pp. 79-264.

⁴ CAMPUS, a division of Michigan Conference Public Campus Ministries Department, is based in Ann Arbor, near The University of Michigan. CAMPUS describes its approach to ministry in the following way: (1) *Vision*: A Bible-based revival movement in which every student is a missionary; (2) *Methodology*: Biblical simplicity; (3) *Philosophy*: Academic excellence and spiritual excellence; (4) *Goal*: Double our membership every year; (5) *Watchword*: Each one reach one; (6) *Mission*: To prepare secular university campuses for the imminent return of Christ. For more information, see www.campushope.com.

⁵ The Students at The University of Michigan started two organizations: Adventist Students for Christ and Advent H.O.P.E. (its outreach wing). The name later changed to CAMPUS HOPE when a Seventh-day Adventist Fellowship on the Michigan campus began to meet every Sabbath. Stephen Waterbrook, a Michigan graduate who migrated to Loma Linda University Medical School retained the name when he founded Advent H.O.P.E. in Loma Linda. Restoration and Advent H.O.P.E. are two ministries at Loma Linda University that are dedicated to Biblical evangelism and revival. Timothy Arakawa, an MD/PhD student at Loma Linda, founded Restoration (www.restorationministry.net), and currently serves as president of Advent H.O.P.E. He's also served as GYC's Vice-President for Ministry since 2003.

⁶ Though the *idea* of a GYC was conceived at The University of Michigan in 1999, the actual formulation of the plans took place in 2000 after Justin Kim, the current GYC Vice-President of Programming, and Israel Ramos, current GYC President, met during a SPARC-led retreat at The University of Michigan and laid plans for the organization. Thus, the following individuals who constituted the first GYC Executive Committee, were impacted by CAMPUS: Andrea Oliver, President (Princeton University); Stephen Waterbrook, Vice-President of External Affairs (Loma Linda University); Janine Kowell, Secretary of External Affairs (La Sierra University); Justin Kim, Vice-President of Internal Affairs (Brandeis University); Jeannie Kim, Secretary of Internal Affairs (Brown University); James Kim, Treasurer (Loma Linda University); Israel Ramos, Standing Committee Chair (Andrews University); Judy Namm, Standing Committee Chair (The University of Michigan). Besides GYC's first Executive Committee, there were others who later became active shapers of GYC. From CAMPUS are the following: Mike Orlich graduated from The University of Michigan Medical School and is currently a physician at Weimar Institute and GYC's General Vice-President. Jukes Namm, graduated from The University of Michigan. He served in 2003 as one of GYC's Standing Committee Chairmen and is now finishing his last year in Medical School at Loma Linda University. From SPARC: Tracie Kim, then 25—was a law student at Boston University School of Law. Today she is working in the Intellectual Property Law Department at Caterpillar Inc. She is the legal advisor for GYC.

⁷ In 1998, the OHA graduating class decided to go on a mission trip to the Philippines as part of their senior trip. Since then, every other one of its graduating classes has held an evangelistic campaign overseas instead of the typical class trips. Chester Clark, a teacher and evangelist from Ouachita Hills (www.ouachitahillsacademy.org, www.ohc.org), was a key leader in equipping young people for overseas missions. He currently serves as the ASI Vice-President for Youth Evangelism where he has been given responsibility over the ASI Youth for Jesus summer evangelism programs. For more information on evangelism opportunities and training: www.youthforjesus.info.

⁸ For more information regarding the mission, purpose, and goals of the General Youth Conference: www.generalyouthconference.org. Click on the "About" page.

⁹ Besides the current GYC leaders identified earlier (see note 6), the current GYC executive committee includes: Tom Owiti (Treasurer), a Senior Financial Analyst at Kellogg's

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Corporation and a Western Michigan University graduate; Staci Osterman (Public Relations Vice-President), Michigan Conference Bible Work Field Supervisor; Tim Arakawa (Ministry Vice-President) Loma Linda MD/PhD student; and Johnny Suarez (Logistics Vice-President), Pastor of Crossroads Fellowship in New Jersey. These young people were trained at public universities and our denominational or supporting institutions.

¹⁰ GYC 2005, whose theme is *Now Is the Time*, is the only conference that will not be held on the third week of December, due to scheduling conflicts. Instead, it will be take place on December 28-January 1.

¹¹ The General Youth Conference Advisory Board serves the Board of Directors by providing counsel from time to time on legal, business, church, or other issues. It is composed of business professionals, lawyers, conference presidents, young professionals, theologians and seminary professors, pastors, and youth leaders.

¹² "The Spirit of GYC" is found on page 7 of the 2004 GYC program brochure. In addition to governing participants at GYC meetings, the brochure also states that "Speakers and booths at the General Youth Conference should be in harmony with *The Spirit of GYC*" (ibid.).

¹³ See the GYC Web site: www.generalyouthconference.org.

Chapter 6

Have We Believed a Lie?

How Not to Grow a Church

By Philip Mills

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In mid-June 1941 the Desert Fox, German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, was poised to successively take Alexandria, Cairo, and the Suez Canal from his Egyptian base near Libya. With his battle-hardened Afrika Korps, he was determined to drive the British, under the command of General Archibald Wavell, out of North Africa. The harbor of Alexandria was crowded with British supply ships, and Rommel knew that to be successful he must destroy this harbor to remove an essential seaport for the Allies to replenish British troops and materiel.

To preserve this harbor, the British perpetrated one of the cleverest deceptions of the war. Lieutenant Jasper Maskelyne, a professional magician, developed an elaborate and brazen plan. A decoy Alexandria Harbor was quickly built about a mile down the coast at Maryut Bay.

From the air, Maryut Bay appeared to be a typical Egyptian shantytown during the day, but at night an ingenious network of ground light and shadows replicated Alexandria Harbor. Dummy canvas superstructures were constructed to appear like large boats in the harbor. A mock lighthouse was fabricated on the shoreline to "guide" the Luftwaffe bomber pilots. Explosives were planted to simulate exploding munitions.

The sham harbor was completely ready for operation by the evening of Monday, June 23, but the Luftwaffe failed to show up. The next night, however, the bombers did arrive. At first they flew in low and fast toward Alexandria Harbor. Eight thousand feet below them the lights at Maryut Bay twinkled with life while the genuine Alexandria Harbor was wrapped in enforced darkness. As the unsuspecting German pilots came closer they became confused. Instead of relying on their instruments and maps, the lead pilots relied on their sight, and, to the relief of the commander at Alexandria Harbor, the Luftwaffe bombers turned toward Maryut Bay. As the enemy planes flew nearer the false harbor, the lights deceptively dimmed as if being blacked out for the raid!

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Antiaircraft flak furiously pounded the planes as they dropped their bombs harmlessly on the sand beach.

To complete the deception, Allied commanders pretended to be concerned about the harbor damage in communications designed to be intercepted by the Germans, and even while the bombs were falling at Maryut Bay, military crews in Alexandria Harbor rapidly spread papier-mache "wreckage" and "rubble" over the real city and its harbor to make it appear to aerial reconnaissance that the targeted sites had been seriously damaged.

The ruse was highly effective. The German pilots and intelligence officers believed the bombing had been successful and destructive. For eight nights ferocious attacks continued without the slightest damage to the real harbor. Believing the harbor to be destroyed, the attacks stopped. Hitler turned his attention toward Russia. The next week, Allied reinforcements began to arrive. Rommel lost the battle the week he thought it was won.¹

Now let's try connecting a few dots. Could there be a spiritual tie-in between this legendary story from World War II days and the sensational church growth movement that seems to be taking Christianity by storm these days? More to the point, could it be that Satan is successfully using a similar strategy to deceive Christians?

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Today, "church growth" is almost a mantra among evangelical Christians. "Church growth" is to extend the Kingdom of God and defeat Satan. Hundreds of articles have been written and numerous dissertations defended on this topic. Books, videos, and tapes, promising to give the secrets of "church growth" are being produced almost without limit. A whole new vocabulary has been created with phrases such as "seeker-sensitive services." "Church growth" institutes, centers, and "experts" offer seminars that promise to double or triple the size of your congregation. A Google search on the topic elicits 260,000 sites!²

Everything church-related has been studied for its impact on "church growth." The church's architecture, location, and name; the pastor's wardrobe, the bulletin format, the greeters' welcome, the worship order and style—all have been analyzed. Public relations and marketing techniques are extensively employed in an effort to attack the kingdom of darkness. The religious air itself seems smoky from these raids. But could it be that God's soldiers are being diverted from the real enemy and the real targets? Could the "church growth" craze be based on an illusion?

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A careful review of the results of the "church growth" movement provides little evidence to suggest it has caused any measurable harm to Satan's kingdom. Surprisingly, while the "church growth" movement has had a profound effect on churches across North America in every denomination, the percentage of the population regularly attending church has been steadily declining.³

Are "church growth" bombs failing to hit any real satanic targets? Are they reducing the assets of the kingdom of God while leaving the kingdom of darkness unscathed? Could it be that instead of the church making inroads into the world, the world is actually making inroads into the church?

Willowbrook Community Church, one of the three leading megachurches in the "church growth" movement, has a large average attendance of 15,000 with peaks of 20,000; yet it is now stable and no longer experiencing significant growth. Its style has expectantly been exported to European churches with disappointment and failure.⁴ Although the church ostensibly is targeting the "unchurched," it has been conspicuously ineffective in reaching its target audience. The vast majority of its membership has simply transferred from surrounding Protestant and Catholic churches, preferring its entertaining style to the worship venues provided by their own denominations. Fewer than 700 members tithe.⁵ The number taking and completing the discipleship classes is low. The average attendee is sporadic in attendance. One researcher concluded, "Willow Creek may not be as effective at manufacturing fully functioning Christians as it appears."⁶ The growth of this church has reduced the attendance of nearby churches, and there is scant evidence that the community has noted any change in overall actual weekly church attendance. Sadly, while some members give warm testimonies to the change Willow Creek has made in their lives, actual research studies of the membership reveal that Willow Creek members mirror the community in such things as percentage of divorce, marital infidelity, etc. Apparently, the church has made no statistically significant or measurable difference in the morals of its members or its community. Are the church bombs harmlessly exploding on the beach? Is this type of "evangelistic" outreach more form than substance?

How do these converts compare with converts from Paul's ministry? "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."⁷

Is true conversion occurring?

"With every truly converted soul the relation to God and to eternal things will be the great topic of life. But where, in the popular churches of today, is

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the spirit of consecration to God? The converts do not renounce their pride and love of the world. They are no more willing to deny self, to take up the cross, and follow the meek and lowly Jesus, than before their conversion."⁸

We have been warned that Satan will attempt to prevent a true revival "by introducing a counterfeit. In those churches which he can bring under his deceptive power he will make it appear that God's special blessing is poured out; there will be manifest what is thought to be great religious interest. Multitudes will exult that God is working marvelously for them, when the work is that of another spirit. Under a religious guise, Satan will seek to extend his influence over the Christian world."⁹ Could the "church growth" movement be one of the fulfillments of this prophetic warning?

Madison Avenue is not a safe source for determining proper church evangelism methods. The Bible alone is. The multitudes will ever prefer listening to fables rather than truth.¹⁰ A politician's message may be based on opinion polls, but our message must be based on the Scripture.

The early church is a model of true "church growth." This was not because the apostles preached what the listeners wanted to hear. Paul did not begin his work in Corinth or Ephesus in taking surveys and studying demographics. The pen of inspiration reveals why the disciples were so effective:

They had not modeled their faith and teaching to suit the desires of their hearers, nor kept back truths essential to salvation in order to make their teaching more attractive. They had presented the truth with simplicity and clearness, praying for the conviction and conversion of souls. And they had endeavored to bring their conduct into harmony with their teaching, that the truth presented might commend itself to every man's conscience.¹¹

The question How big is my congregation? is not a Biblical question. It is not the focus of the Bible. Twice the Lord had to tell Gideon, "There are too many people."¹² King David was rebuked for counting the people.¹³

The one who chases the fickle multitudes will be disappointed. The early crowds of John the Baptist drifted away. This disappointed John's disciples.¹⁴ But the multitudes that left John to follow Jesus soon left Jesus, as well.¹⁵ The prophet Isaiah had foreseen that Jesus would go alone to the cross.¹⁶ The offense of the cross will not cease.¹⁷

Jesus couldn't be clearer. The purpose of evangelism is not "church growth" but church fruitfulness. "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." And He

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has promised to provide us with anything needed to reach this goal, "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you" (John 15:16).

Christ cursed the fig tree as a demonstration of how He views pretentious growth without fruit.¹⁸ The measure of a garden is not how many plants are growing in it. It takes no great skill to fill it with flourishing healthy looking weeds, but it takes much care and labor and skill to have a garden produce fruit.

How we make our church grow makes a difference. Methods matter. The people we fill our church with make a difference. Satan's "church growth" methods threaten to destroy the church. God's methods will strengthen it. The well-known English Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "When I have heard of large congregations gathered together by the music of a fine choir, I have remembered that the same thing is done at the opera house and the music hall, and I have felt no joy."¹⁹

Unfortunately, history reveals that some of the most dangerous practices have crept into the church disguised as "church growth." Today, as in the past, "Satan has his specious devices through which he purposes to crowd false brethren into the church, through whom he can work more successfully to weaken the cause of God."²⁰ Virtually any activity, even idol worship, has been defended in the laudable name of "soulwinning."²¹ But well would it be for our churches if it were the Lord adding "to the church daily such as should be saved."²²

Inspired advice given to managers of our schools is even more applicable to our churches: "To lower the standard in order to secure popularity and an increase of numbers, and then to make this increase a cause of rejoicing, shows great blindness. If numbers were an evidence of success, Satan might claim the preeminence; for in this world his followers are largely in the majority. It is the degree of moral power pervading a school that is a test of its prosperity. It is the virtue, intelligence, and piety of the people composing our schools, not their numbers, that should be a source of joy and thankfulness. Then shall our schools become converted to the world and follow its customs and fashions? '... be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...'"²³

Through the millennia pagan worship has always been concerned with "church growth." In the centuries just before Christ, as pagan worship ceremonies began to lose their attractiveness, the resourceful pagan priests attached gymnasia to their temples and built stages for theater in an attempt to increase attendance. We should not forget that sports and drama were originally religious in nature. The original Olympic games were rooted in pagan religious practices. Though sports and drama were associated with the world's

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popular religions in the days of Christ and the apostles, they did not choose to utilize these methods.

The human body is a useful model for the church,²⁴ and reveals insights into healthy growth. Early in medical school I was taught that *not all growth is good growth!* Our class was taught to differentiate normal growth and development from diseased growth, and I have found this helpful in understanding normal and pathological "church growth."

There are five ways humans can grow:

1. Girth growth

When individuals stop growing up, they may start growing out. If excessive, this growth is not fitness but fatness. It adds nothing to the strength of the body. It isn't useful growth; it is get-in-the-way growth. It causes many diseases. It decreases endurance. It shortens the useful life. It occurs when the intake of food exceeds the output of work. Empty calories and fast foods contribute to the problem.

As in the physical, so in the spiritual component. Spiritual obesity is seen in churches where the members attend church and receive nutrition, but engage in little useful labor for Christ. Fast food sermons may entertain the hearers. Novel theories, drama, sensational, or humorous stories may appear to arouse religious interest, but the numeric growth is not accompanied by a corresponding increase in spiritual strength. Members fail to produce fruit; they do nothing to advance God's kingdom around them. They do not recognize their great need for continual repentance and a growing sanctified life. No church with a membership that is increasing numerically with pew warmers and worship entertainment lovers can have healthy growth. In time these indolent members will contribute, not to strength, but to serious spiritual disorders within the church.

Physicians urge overweight patients to lose weight. The Great Physician does the same for the church. He says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."²⁵

Only in the Bible can we find reliable instruction on how to have proper "church growth." "We have great need to search the Scriptures that we may be representatives of Christ and act our part as laborers together with God to build up the church in the most holy faith. There is not enough careful, prayerful, painstaking investigation in accepting members into the church.... There is one thing that we have no right to do, and that is to judge another man's heart or impugn his motives. But when a person presents himself as a candi-

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date for church membership, we are to examine the fruit of his life, and leave the responsibility of his motive with himself. But *great care should be exercised in accepting members into the church*; for Satan has his specious devices through which he purposes to crowd false brethren into the church, through whom he can work more successfully to weaken the cause of God."²⁶

It is a serious work to be a minister. The true minister of the Gospel must study the Bible diligently to be approved unto God.²⁷ Paul said, "As we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God. . . . For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness. . . . Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others.... But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.... We preached to you the Gospel of God. You are witnesses . . . how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God Who calls you into His Own kingdom and glory.... When you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."²⁸

Salvation involves full surrender in every area of life, and in most cases those who come out of the world will need to change their wardrobe, their diet, their music, their recreation. Their speech will change. Habits—cultivated for a lifetime, encouraged by society, and approved by the nominal churches of our time—must be abandoned. The truly converted become strangers and pilgrims. These necessary changes will not please worldlings, who will regard them as strange, narrow, extreme, and fanatical.²⁹

Jesus warned, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."³⁰

While we don't need churches that are lean and mean, we do need churches that are lean. This will happen when the pastor preaches the plain Word of God and the parishioners live by the Word of God.

2. Forced growth

To keep growth balanced and healthy, the body carefully regulates growth with a variety of controls. These protective mechanisms can be artificially over-

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ridden and defeated even in normal people by giving them certain hormones such as a growth hormone. In some cases these hormones may actually appear to promote growth, but the growth is unbalanced. There are athletes who are so concerned about muscle growth that they are willing to sacrifice long-term health for anabolic steroids and even worse substances. Ultimately there is disfigurement; there is weakness.

Spiritual forced growth may sometimes be seen in modern evangelical revivals and charismatic renewals. Great and needed growth truths can be emphasized without the regulating and balancing "testing truths." Faith (without works), love (without law), justification (without sanctification) are three common religious "growth hormones." Revivals may appeal to the emotions and feelings, bypassing the mind, and never truly reach the heart. All such growth is unbalanced and cannot be sustained.³¹ It results in misshapen spiritual dwarfs and deformed Christianity. It results in deluding people into thinking they are Christians, thinking they are saved because they have experienced an emotional high, maybe even a high with tears. These spiritual amphetamines with their artificial high may prove addictive, resulting in worshippers dissatisfied with a simple Bible message, considering it "boring," since it doesn't stimulate the senses in a sensational (and harmful) way.

Paul declares, "I have not shunned to declare unto you *all* the counsel of God."³² He did not simply preach the popular and accepted portions of God's Word; He preached it all. This is necessary for symmetrical growth.

3. Neoplastic growth

At best, tumors are benign. At worst they are metastatic. No one can deny that there is growth with cancer—rapid growth. Although its early stages may be insidious and may even appear harmless, it quickly spreads throughout the body. This is growth that does not bring life but death. Cancer is growth that utilizes the rich resources provided by the entire body, for some limited, uncontrolled, local cause. There is no cure for this type of growth; it must be detected early and eradicated fully.

Spiritual neoplasms exhibit the same key characteristics. They *consume without producing* and are *unresponsive to external control*. They are selfishly independent and congregational in their thinking. Giving is not sacrificial. World mission giving is no more than tokenism. Funds are kept locally (with suitably "pious" reasons).³³

Selfishness is incompatible with Christianity. True Christians will not study their convenience. A truly converted ministry will not be pressing for higher salaries in larger churches. Any so-called minister or worker who would

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give arguments in favor of a tier wage scale is giving dangerous evidence of a cancer, and should immediately be terminated wherever employed.³⁴

True Christians will never use funds for extravagance and show in one region, while other parts of the Lord's vineyard perish for want of means. "Those who are truly converted will have an equal interest in the work in all parts of the vineyard."³⁵

4. Stature growth

Just as all growth is not good, *not all growth is bad*. Stature growth is normal growth and development. It is determined *in part* by our genetic inheritance. There are some people who are tall. There are other people who are short.

Likewise, some churches have the potential to be large; some do not. Larger churches and their leaders need not despise smaller churches, nor do smaller churches and their leaders need to envy the larger.

But growth is not only genetic; diet also plays an important role in growth. Some persons are short because they are stunted, and they are stunted because they have been unable or unwilling to eat the proper foods. The children of the earliest European settlers of America were short because they could not get proper nutrition during their developmental years.

Paul calls Christians to stature growth in its spiritual sense.³⁶ This is *not* numeric growth. This is character growth, growth in grace. This type of growth does not come by anxiety and worry;³⁷ neither does it come from self-righteous effort. This is the *natural* by-product of full and daily surrender to the Lord.³⁸ It is vital to teach this to our children and new members, lest they be stunted and surrounded by stunted people, and come to think this stunted condition is normal.

5. Fertility growth

Fertility growth is numeric growth. God intends for families to grow numerically.³⁹ This requires the complete union of a husband and wife.

For Abraham, and years later his son Isaac, fertility growth became a test of faith! For 25 long years Abraham and Sarah tried to have a son. They did their part. Nevertheless, no child came! In their natural and understandable desire for numeric growth, they abandoned God's plan after 15 years of apparent failure.⁴⁰ They didn't wait on the Lord. However, Abraham and Sarah rationalized it. Abraham committed adultery, and while numeric growth was the result, it was bastard growth.

We have to look at the situation in North America honestly today. It is not growing rapidly, as it once was. Can anyone who loves the church say that it is

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growing numerically as much as they would like? Can anyone say evangelism is progressing as rapidly as they would like? What should we do when God holds the evangelistic womb? We need not be discouraged. We need not blame and criticize others. We should make certain that the church, the bride of Christ, is intimately united with Jesus. That is the only way for true growth. If the church is intimately connected with Jesus, in faith we can await His timing to open the womb. We need not look for other methods for church numeric growth; they will only produce bastard results.

God has promised growth to us as surely as He promised growth to Abraham, we can trust His promise. If we wait 10, 20, 30, or 100 years, the promise remains sure. Jesus remained faithful when His work appeared fruitless.⁴¹ He trusted His Father's guidance.

There have been earnest Christians, especially pastors and evangelists, who feel that numeric growth is the proof of their faithfulness to God. There are a few conference leaders who measure success in this way. This has several dangers:

a. Despising the day of small things⁴²

The most effective ministry is not the ministry to the masses but the ministry to the individual. "The Saviour did not wait for congregations to assemble. Often He began His lessons with only a few gathered about Him, but one by one the passersby paused to listen, until a multitude heard with wonder and awe the words of God through the Heaven-sent Teacher. The worker for Christ should not feel that he cannot speak with the same earnestness to a few hearers as to a larger company. There may be only one to hear the message; but who can tell how far-reaching will be its influence? It seemed a small matter, even to His disciples, for the Saviour to spend His time upon a woman of Samaria. But He reasoned more earnestly and eloquently with her than with kings, councilors, or high priests. The lessons He gave to that woman have been repeated to the earth's remotest bounds."⁴³

b. Discouragement and desperate actions

Elijah tried to count up his evangelistic converts. He felt that he had none!⁴⁴ He concluded that the territory to which he was assigned was too difficult, and he left for another area.⁴⁵ He concluded that his work was a failure, and he became very discouraged. We can't count our children. God warned Abraham that his children would be numberless.⁴⁶

c. A spirit of pride and competition

David looked in self-satisfaction upon the growth of Israel during his administration. He took a census for pride reasons, and was punished for it.⁴⁷ However large our church grows, our strength and trust is in God alone, not

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the strength of numbers.⁴⁸

d. Madison Avenue approaches and "marketing"

Our commission is to preach the Gospel to *all* the world, not just to those segments that appear most open. We must not only go to the highways, we must go to hedges.⁴⁹ We need to reclaim past members, not because statistically this is successful, but because it is part of the church's commission. Our success must not be judged on the basis of numeric growth but on our faithfulness to the Lord's instruction. "It is the virtue, intelligence, and piety of the people composing our churches, not their numbers, that should be a source of joy and thankfulness."⁵⁰

We must not tailor our message to please and attract the crowds, but to honor and please the Saviour.

e. Premature or hasty baptisms, and early apostasy

Today it is considered normal for a high percentage (approximately 50%) of newly baptized converts to apostatize. It is considered normal for 50% or less of the church membership to attend church regularly! But based on the norms of the early church, this should be considered *unacceptably high infant mortality*. Of the converts brought in under the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Bible says, "They *continued steadfastly* in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."¹ This is true normal growth and development. For this growth we must pray, then work in faith.

Endnotes

¹ David Fisher, *The War Magician* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1983), pp. 86-96. This tells the full story.

² Undoubtedly, some of these are duplicates.

³ Thom Reiner, "Shattering Myths about the Unchurched," *The Southern Baptist journal of Theology*, vol. 5, no. 1, Spring 2001, p. 46.

⁴ Erik Sengers, postdoctoral research.

⁵ This is Willow Creek's own final (seventh) step in full commitment.

⁶ Laura Kaczorowski, "Willow Creek," May 11, 1997, Distinguished Majors Honors Thesis Paper, University of Virginia.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 7:11.

⁸ *The Great Controversy*, p. 463.

⁹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 464, italics mine.

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 4:4.

¹¹ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 330.

¹² Judges 7:2, 4.

¹³ 2 Samuel 24.

¹⁴ John 3:26.

¹⁵ John 6:66.

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¹⁶ Isaiah 63:3—"I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me."

¹⁷ Galatians 5:11.

¹⁸ Matthew 21:18-20.

¹⁹ From his sermon, *A Root Out of Dry Ground*, preached Sunday morning, October 13, 1872.

²⁰ *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1893.

²¹ *The Great Controversy*, pp. 42-45.

²² Acts 2:47.

²³ *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 143, 144.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18.

²⁵ John 15:2, NKJV.

²⁶ *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1893, italics mine.

²⁷ 2 Timothy 2:15.

²⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:4-13, NKJV.

²⁹ "There are many in the church who at heart belong to the world, but God calls upon those who claim to believe the advanced truth, to rise above the present attitude of the popular churches of today. Where is the self-denial, where is the cross-bearing that Christ has said should characterize His followers? The reason we have had so little influence upon unbelieving relatives and associates is that we have manifested little decided difference in our practices from those of the world. Parents need to awake, and purify their souls by practicing the truth in their home life. When we reach the standard that the Lord would have us reach, worldlings will regard Seventh-day Adventists as odd, singular, strait-laced extremists. 'We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.'" *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 289.

³⁰ Matthew 7:13, 14, NKJV.

³¹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 463.

³² Acts 20:27.

³³ Like Judas (John 12:5); like King Saul (1 Samuel 15:15).

³⁴ 1 Timothy 6:5—"... supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." See 2 Timothy 4:10; Acts 8:20.

³⁵ *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 138.

³⁶ Ephesians 4:13.

³⁷ Matthew 6:27; Luke 12:25.

³⁸ Matthew 6:28; Luke 12:27.

³⁹ Genesis 9:1, Psalm 127:3-5.

⁴⁰ No pun intended.

⁴¹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330—"In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace. He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment. Amid the greatest opposition and the most cruel treatment, He was still of good courage."

⁴² Zechariah 4:10.

⁴³ *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 194, 195.

⁴⁴ 1 Kings 19:14.

⁴⁵ 2 Kings 19:3, 4.

⁴⁶ Genesis 15:5.

⁴⁷ 2 Samuel 24:2-17.

⁴⁸ *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Luke 14:23.

⁵⁰ *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, p. 94.

⁵¹ Acts 2:42, NKJV.

Chapter 7

I Want My Church Back!

By C.D. Brooks

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[Editor's Note: The following is transcribed and edited from a talk given to Seventh-day Adventist ministers.]

In the writings of Ellen G. White, that inside information that God sent just to us, the Lord's servant draws a line over here against this extreme, and then she draws a line over there against that extreme. I've been doing this for years. But notice, she leaves a broad swath down the middle. I can walk here and you can walk there, and we're still within the safety zone. We don't have to think alike. We don't have to wear a uniform. You can be you and I can be me, but let's stay in the safety zone: we're better off near the middle of the road, avoiding the perilous ditches on both sides of the Christian pathway.

We are now facing an unusual rime in which those on the inside of our church are questioning our distinctive teachings and doctrines more than those who despise us. Many of us are walking away from the mandate that God gave to us.

A brilliant professional friend of mine called me long distance. In an almost desperate tone, he said, "Charles, *I want my church back!*" Then with anguish in his voice, he said, "I don't know if I can ever get it back!"

Preach Our Message!

My dear fellow workers, I want to tell you today, that one of the powerful keys to success and power in our churches and our pulpits and in our evangelism is resolute faithfulness to the Word of God, and to the message God has given to us to preach!

We must preach our message. All of it! There are forces that seem to be dismantling what was so laboriously put together under the indispensable aid of the Holy Ghost. There is a picture of erudition that we carelessly call schol-

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arship, but which is more scholasticism. Ellen White says it's as certain that we have the truth as that God lives. She spoke of a platform of truth. She knew that we'd always be gathering sources and resources, but she said, "Don't get off the platform." The Holy Spirit is not one to foster confusion, and He does not divide the saints. He may bring separation from the mixed multitude, but not from the saints.

Awesome Prophecy. Amongst us there are those who appear to be tired of our message, bored with it. There is a swelling cry for something different, unique. Some are saying, "We want a modern message designed for young people." That doesn't go along with the awesome prophecy of Malachi 4, for when the Elijah message comes, just before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the Bible says the hearts of the fathers and the children will be turned together. We are not to be divided by age and generation.

The media use the term *simulcast*, meaning that they are broadcasting in English and Spanish and other languages at the same time. But to us the Gospel is coming down from glory simulcast. I've preached to little children and they've come up and said, "I enjoyed your sermon." And I thought it was too heavy for them.

My beloved fellow workers, loose liberalism does not accomplish what we think it will accomplish. George Whital, writing in *Washingtonian Magazine*, says, "The churches that make the greatest doctrinal and moral demands on their members" (he mentions the evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants) "are growing. Their churches are booming. In contrast," he says, "the churches that have a hard time telling you why you ought to be a Christian, the churches of the old main line, like the Episcopalians, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the United Church of Christ, have been hemorrhaging congregants since the mid-'60s. It is vanilla Protestantism that is dying." And then he says, "Theological friendliness, avant-garde worship, and political correctness are a prescription for ecclesiastical catastrophe. Millions are leaving because they have no good reason to stay."

No Discipline, No Care

A blond girl came into my office at one of our colleges where I was preaching and burst into tears, sobbing uncontrollably. When I asked her problem, she said, "Pastor, my parents don't love me."

I said, "How can you say that? They are sacrificing to keep you here and you are dressed very well. They've taken good care of you. Why do you say that?"

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She said, "Because they don't care what I do."

Young and old need the discipline of the Word of God. When people feel like they can do what they please, then the church loses its premium value. They figure we don't care. But "feel-goodism" is pervading our congregations, creeping in, and our churches and our schools are floundering. Our church income is being depleted. We had our biggest budget crisis this year.

The Devil is playing every device he can. I'm going to do a little tongue in cheek; don't get angry with me. The Devil is pleading, "Culture! And pluralism! And scholarship!" He impresses many of us to try to modernize God by humanizing Him. God already answered that one. He said, "I am the Lord, I change not! I am the same yesterday, and today, and forever!" (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

Relevant. I hear a lot about, "Oh, we need someone now to make Scripture relevant!" Fellow workers, I wouldn't talk like this to just anybody. I am glad I can speak to my fellow workers. If God said it, it's relevant! It's our extraneous ideas about what He says that are irrelevant!

Paul said, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Colossians 2:8). The preaching of the Word, even with love and tact and diplomacy, will inevitably cause confrontation with our sinful, carnal natures. We are not called to make the Word popular, but to preach it with power! I'm one of those transition preachers, a connecting link between the old and the new. Those old warhorses, they preached it straight.

George Peters, Frank Peterson, W.W. Fordham, J.H. Wagner. J.H. Lawrence, P.M. Rowe—they stood up for the right. They placed the burden on the Holy Ghost. The message poured out of them. These men made and built Black Seventh-day Adventism.

In 1946 a skinny preacher came to my hometown. I had never heard anyone like him. There was one thing I knew when I looked at that preacher—he believed *everything he* preached! And he made me believe it.

These are the men to emulate.

You know that our laymen today are too caught up and preoccupied to study, and they get little substance from the pulpit. Wait, wait, wait, and let me say something else. I've got two libraries, one at my home and one at the General Conference. They are rather extensive, and I like to read the hardbacks and the softbacks. But when I sit at my desk in my study, the bookshelves immediately behind my chair have the Spirit of Prophecy, several versions of the Bible, and the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. When I get ready to read the other books, I've got to get up out of my chair and walk

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over to get them. But after I get through the books from Review and Herald and all the good stuff from our publishing house out in Idaho, then all this other becomes simply a skeleton on which I can hang the meat of Seventh-day Adventism. Verily my people can be fed. We've got to confront our people for their sake. If you pamper them, you're not helping them. We've got to dare to guide them.

Guide. Some of what they're doing is because they don't know any better. We've got to guide them concerning where they ought to go, what they ought to do, what they ought to wear, what they ought to think. And we ought to do it with the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy.

When we talk to our people it's not a purely human-to-human encounter. There is a Person called the Holy Ghost. It's our privilege to have Him standing by us and moving out there in the congregation. He will take a difficult truth and apply it to the heart. You think I didn't have to give up things I liked? I'd rather save one person with the truth and with the Holy Ghost than comfort ten thousand in their self-deception. We fail our people when we water down and compromise and undermine and repudiate the message that God has given us to bear—and to live!

Emboldened to Defy

Not only that, we embolden them to defy our standards. We embolden them to follow their own whims and offend fellow church members and even their parents. Many of them have chips on their shoulders. They are so self-confident they dare you to say anything.

A young woman who had always been friendly came to church loaded down with jewelry. When I approached her, ready to speak, she wouldn't even look at me. She avoided me. She couldn't be friendly as usual. No wonder our churches are turning cold! It's because our members remain guilt-ridden and insecure and not sure of what they really stand for. They hear about easy divorce, about moral falls even in the ministry. Sabbaths on the golf course, or on the bicycle trail, or at the beach, theatergoing, attacks on Ellen G. White. What's happening amongst us?

Responsibility. Ellen White says, "Of all the sins that God will punish, none are more grievous in His sight than those that encourage others to do evil" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 323). And of all the groups of people on the top-side of the earth, none has such an awesome responsibility resting upon it, as

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well as privilege, as the Seventh-day Adventist ministry.

When I was a boy we saw our pastor once every five weeks. Today nearly every Sabbath there is a preacher and still our members wonder, "What's happening to us? Is the Holy Ghost still with us?" Many who feel a lack of the Spirit are trying to compensate with a shaking, rocking, rollicking religion. They want to feel good. But that good feeling will replace their faith and it will be wiped out in a crisis.

Temporary Fix. The Bible says, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21). Many of our people who love the truth but don't know what to love are getting caught up in the subjective, ecstatic experience, and the 11 o'clock service is like cocaine, a temporary fix. Before the sun sets they are right back to where they were, unhappy, critical, not doing so well. "And what do I want now?" says the Devil. "A loud, thumping, bumping religion," I hear him say. "It will cause me great delight to make the old saints uncomfortable." And so we are being divided.

We're not supposed to set our churches on fire—that's the work of the Holy Ghost. What are we supposed to do? We are to be repairers of the breach, restorers of paths to dwell in (Isaiah 58:12). Culture? That deals with the natural man and it's not wrong. I'm not trying to make everything wrong. But if that is the natural part of us, the Bible says the natural man cannot receive the things of God, "for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Delusions. Some among us are questioning things that have been worked out by the Holy Ghost in human history and in my life's history and yours. There will always be some excess baggage. But don't throw everything away. The apostle said, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Instead, many are trying to satisfy themselves rather than pray and study. They want to reason things out with unsanctified minds. They're starting from the wrong position and will never arrive at spiritual fulfillment, but rather at compounded delusions. For spiritual things are spiritually discerned. The Bible says, "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Corinthians 4:3).

I said to a congregation one Sabbath, "The Gospel is good news, but it's not just the cross. Thank God for the cross! But the Gospel is more than that. The Gospel is health reform, that's good news! The Gospel is social reform, that's good news!"

I was invited to preach for the 65th anniversary of the high school I graduated from some 40 years ago. I walked in there and what a crowd! The head

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table was longer than this auditorium. I had given word that I couldn't arrive there until after sunset. They had said, "We understand that. We'll take care of the preliminaries, and you just come right in." And I did. I sat right in the middle. Those tables were surrounded, many of them, with former classmates. I looked out and they kept waving and winking and carrying on. Finally it would dawn on me . . . Oh, I recognize them— and they looked awful!

Good News. You think I look old! You should have seen them! Our message is good news! I tried to figure it out; I looked back, and I said to myself, I've been keeping the Sabbath for 54 years. That's seven years of Sabbathkeeping, which means I got seven years of rest they never got!

It hurts me today—Some of you heard a rumor that I'm getting ready to retire. It hurts me today to see that amongst us many, rather than kneeling in humility, are standing up like the Pharisee in the narrative of Christ with jaw set and shoulders squared to debate with God. and the pulpit is losing. It's enough!

Idols. I'm not suggesting that you browbeat anybody. I don't do that! Ellen White says rationalism is an idol (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 193), for it exalts human reason above the Word of God. Many of our beloved people are making dangerous decisions based on how they feel rather than on explicit revelations from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Error is always impinged to this. How sad I feel. They love to talk about theater now and evolution; and even the mark of the beast is getting a dressing-down in our own journals. What are we doing?

There is such a thing as "possessionism." I was the first that I know of to start using that word, but I read two psychiatrists who wrote a book about it. In this present, mixed company I cannot tell you what they said concerning the manipulation and the stroking of the physical by the spirits of demons who possess them. You want a thrill? It will come. If that's where your faith is, it will come. But the Bible says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Harold Lee was addressing this condition not long ago when he said, "Neopentecostalism will be the death of Black Adventism." I wrote that down. We Black people are especially vulnerable, because we are such an emotional people. We've been here too long. Divided and separated by racism, by advantage, education, money, and privilege, we've been forced into being reactive, but we've come too close to Heaven. Don't let us be cheated now and miss Heaven after all we've gone through.

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Culture Not All Bad

Culture? When I moved to Washington more than 30 years ago I was courted assiduously to join the White church. Now, these are good churches, good people, good pastors. But I was culturally more satisfied in the warmer atmosphere of the Black church. I see nothing wrong with that. But there is something that transcends culture. That something melds us into the family of God, distinguishable, distinctive, even peculiar.

My problem is that culture is becoming our religious experience. This is the reaction of the insecure that are not sure about anything. I want you to know, beloved, today, that I am not and never have been defined by cornrows and kente cloth.

I was having a discussion with a well known Black Adventist minister about African-Americans escaping from the plantation syndrome. He said to me, "These people say they are Americans, but they ain't. They say they are Africans, but they ain't. They are kind of lost people."

Adopted. Well, let me tell you. A long time ago I was adopted. There is a Seventh-day Adventist culture, and I was born into this Adventist culture by adoption, which is a legal compact. By contrast, my daddy and mother adopted a boy before I was born; I never saw him. As he grew older he got into trouble with the law and spent time in jail. Finally he said, "I want to leave this family." Remember, he was adopted. No person born of Brooks blood in my large family has ever spent a night in jail. What's the difference? He was adopted. He came in from another nature. The rest of us were born with Brooks blood. So I have been adopted but I have been born again! Adoption makes me His, new blood makes me like Him. There is a commonality of the blood.

Our Culture. I'm proud of our culture. I'm proud to be a Black man. I want you all to know that I mean that. I am *glad* I am a Black man. I always have been. The African said that kente cloth was made in Ghanaian villages. It was worn by the Ashanti royalty, the kings and princes of that country. It was very expensive, too expensive to be available to ordinary people. There are plenty of cultural things to be proud of from that part of the world. The first president of that country was named Kwame Nkrumah. Kwame means born on the Sabbath, Saturday. And if you get C.E. Bradford's book [*Sabbath Roots: The African Connection, a Biblical Perspective* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference Ministerial Association, 1999)], you'll understand that Sabbathkeeping is intrinsic in our culture. But remember that the Bible tells us

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what's important in dress. It tells us in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. I want to make this clear, because we have a bunch of smart alecks now saying, "You don't have a Bible base!"

Oh yes, I do! Where have you been?

Ornaments. And even if I didn't find it explicitly I got it indirectly from the Spirit of Prophecy, which is Biblical. If it's not, we ought to throw it away! In time of danger and crisis and judgment God required His people to take their jewelry off. When Jacob was trying to get home, they had to stop and bury something (see Genesis 35:2-4). When they worshipped the golden calf, God was about to move with vengeance and wrath. Moses stood between Him and the people. God didn't say, "What they're doing is all right." No, indeed. He told the people to take off their jewelry. "Take it off," He said, "that I may know what to do unto you." Then, the Bible says, they "stripped themselves of their ornaments by the Mount Horeb" (see Exodus 33:5, 6). Since 1844 we're in the Judgment, and the Bible says those that don't afflict themselves will be cut off.

I loved it when you could look at a young lady and know she was an Adventist. I got invited to a camp meeting. I went into a town and didn't know where to go. My wife said, "Honey, stop and phone." Then it dawned on me that no one answers the phone at a campground on the Sabbath, at least they used to not answer it. I was desperate. I looked at a car easing by and I saw some women, their faces clean. They looked like something. I pulled my car into that lane and followed them. My wife said, "Honey, what are you doing?"

I said, "I'm following those people!"

"You know who they are?"

"No! I just know how they look!"

And I ended up at my destination.

I'm saying with my friend, *"I want my church hack!"*

Praising the Devil?

Every year at Hampton Institute there is a convention of great preachers from all over this country, and many of our ministers go. I am told that this year, when one of those men got up to preach, he said to that congregation (not Adventist), "In our music, we've got to be careful that we are not praising the Devil instead of God."

Ellen White says that Satan dialogues with his imps. They discuss their plans together. His craftiness, he knows, will not fly unless he can first discount the Spirit of Prophecy. So he raised up a West Coast preacher, who called the

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Lord's servant a plagiarist and a liar. Then he raised up a teacher and his kind to buy it. Black preachers threw away their red books in green trash cans at a time when they needed them most. But I believe in the Spirit of Prophecy. Now I'm going to read to you what Ellen White says:

Selected Messages, book 2, and p. 36: "The Lord—"

Who?

[Audience:] "The Lord."

"The Lord has shown me." Now the criticism has been that everything is not inspired when she says, "The Lord showed me." All right, I'm reading it again:

"The Lord has shown me what would take place just before the close of probation. Every uncouth thing will be demonstrated. There will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit."

In the very next line she says, "The Holy Spirit never reveals [Himself] in such methods, in such a bedlam of noise."

Gospel Music. Wait a minute! I like Gospel music! I probably like it more than many sitting out here. And I can prove it. For 35 of the last 37 years I have gone every November to Germantown, Ohio, a mecca of Gospel music. Twenty-eight of those trips were over the Thanksgiving weekend, giving up my family holiday to be inspired by those people. Our precious Eleanor Wright, the late Eleanor Wright, wrote much of it. They were message songs. They rebuked sin! They encouraged the discouraged. That's one reason she did not die a millionaire, because she stayed faithful to this message!

A little more from *Selected Messages*: "A bedlam of noise shocks the senses and perverts that which if conducted aright might be a blessing" (ibid.). Gospel music should be a blessing.

But you all know it is out of hand.

I don't believe the drum is a bigger sinner than the trumpet or the psaltery or the harp. It's what we do with it! So Satan had a huddle, and he said to his imps, "Let's develop 'crossover.'"

Why would a saint want to cross over?

"Let's develop crossover!" said the Devil. "Let's blend some of ours with some of theirs. Let's start off with a balance, and then let's gradually move off center. Then let's talk about Christian jazz and religious Gospel rock. They are contradictions of terms, you see. Let's get them moving and grooving like our crowd in our places when they are getting down. Then, let's pull out all the

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stops." That's what the Devil says.

You all believe I tell the truth? I love Gospel music. You know what? "Power in the Blood" is a Gospel song. So are "Standing on the Promises," "Love Lifted Me," and "I'm on the Battlefield for My Lord." Eleanor Wright wrote "Naaman" the weekend after I preached it in Cincinnati, Ohio. And when my father-in-law died she wrote one for our family called "I Don't Plan to Stay Here." There's a stanza in there that says:

*If you miss me, don't dismay,
I might have to rest in a mound of clay,
But when I hear that trumpet sound
I'm coming up out of that cold, cold ground!
'Cause I don't plan to stay here, children.*

Pray. Today the intonations are pulsing with sensuality and sexuality. When they talk about loving Jesus they say it in a most sensual and sexual way.

But ladies and gentlemen, do we expect Satan to be candid, or subtle? Do we expect him to be honest, or a master deceiver? The other day I was listening to the Morgan State Choir when a young lady took a solo on a spiritual: "Old Satan wears a clubfoot shoe. / If you don't mind, he'll slip it on you."

Bypassing Our Judgment

One scholar from Australia said that music is one force that does not have to pass through the judgment hall of the brain before it affects us. There's an organ at the base of the brain to which music appeals directly. He said that you don't even have to think to start moving. That's how Muzak became so successful. It was background music. Folk didn't even know they were listening to it. It just soothed them. Now they're doing it with light rock. And music is gone. We ought to know Satan would take advantage of a thing like this to captivate and enchant us.

Great Music. We were once known as masters and purveyors of good music of various kinds. I grew up in a small church where we didn't hear the great anthems. When I came to Oakwood I had never heard the *Messiah*. One day, going to the dairy where I worked at 3 a.m., I heard music over in the chapel. The lights were on. Then when I came back I heard thump, thump, thump. Dr. Dyes was beating out the time with a staff. I said to somebody, "What's going on over there?"

They said, "They're getting ready for the *Messiah*."

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I admit I didn't know what it was, but I said, "Oh, yes!"

On the night it was presented, I felt like the top of my head would blow off. When they got to the Hallelujah Chorus I didn't need a royal example to get me to my feet as the choir sang, "He shall reign forever and ever and ever and ever and ever! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

We were known for that music, classical and dignified, warm and moving and simple. But Ellen White said, "The line of demarcation is [becoming] indistinct" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 316). Satan starts out small. No one comes to sudden ruin. It takes time to corrupt the soul. Gradually the Devil perverts. One departure from principle begins the journey.

I want my church back!

Movies and Smokes

Who do we think we're dealing with? He's called the wily foe. He's no friend of ours. These coffin nails called cigarettes he names "Salem" ("Peace!"), "-Cool" [or "Kool"], "True," "Joy."

Who do we think we're dealing with when he names the poison of alcohol "Southern Comfort"? God says a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. (I've got to hasten and please forgive me!)

Movies—if you say anything about them, you're old-fashioned! I don't mind that opprobrium. Call me old if you want. God is older than I am. And when God tells us something. He gets it right the first time! He doesn't have to edit or adjust.

"Oh, preacher, you can't stop it." I know that. I'm not saying you can, but we shouldn't promote it!

My Experience. I used to sneak off to the movies. Finally one of my buddies and I didn't know what else to do, and he took me to hear that skinny preacher, Earl Cleveland. Within two weeks something happened, thank the Lord God.

One Sabbath I walked out of that man's meeting. The sun was going down, and my buddy and I headed to the Carolina Theater. But nobody made me feel comfortable about it. My own conscience wouldn't let me feel comfortable about it. We walked about seven blocks discussing what we heard in that man's tent. The theater was across the street. The red light stopped us and I started thinking. All of a sudden the light turned green and he started off and I stayed. He turned around and said, "What's wrong with you?"

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I said, "I'm not going."

He said, "What do you mean, you're not going?"

I said, "You know. The things you're learning. I can't go, for I know them already."

He said, "If you don't go, I don't go."

That was 47 years ago. Today that man is a deacon in the Adventist Church. His wife and daughters are officers in the church. Suppose I hadn't stopped?

Our Truth Is Still the Truth

We serve a timeless God, and time, as we know it, is about to experience a cataclysmic collision with eternity. We are about to enter His realm of time and space. When we do, the truth will still be the truth. Sabbath will still be Sabbath, because truth never dies.

*Though ages come and go,
Though mountains wear away and seas retire,
Destruction lays earth's mighty golden cities low,
And empire states and dynasties expire.
But caught and handed onward to the wise,
Truth never dies.*

No Change. Fifty-four years ago I joined this church. I've been somewhat educated, illuminated, experienced. I'm getting ready to retire. But I want to tell you, nothing's changed. We've matured, and we've been enlightened. People are meaner, more immoral. But nothing's changed. God's law is still a transcript of His character. It's too high for us, so He gave us a ladder called grace that we might climb up.

The sanctuary is still in Heaven. It isn't going anywhere just because some say it doesn't really exist. Judgment is still going on. God still hates pride. Men are still born in sin. Men must be born again. Dead folk are still dead. Christ is still our only Saviour. None but the righteous shall see God. We've got to be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. We've got to be covered with His righteousness alone. He still sends the Holy Ghost. And He is still seeking the lost. He is still saving sinners. And it is possible to delight ourselves in the Lord and the truth. Our message is still valid. And if we stand around waiting for our truth to change, we're exactly like the Protestants who want the Sabbath to change. Jack Sequeira said, "If you believe in the Redeemer, you've got to start looking more redeemed."

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Morehouse Man. Through the agency of my friend, Walt Pearson, I was privileged to join others to be honored at Morehouse College. I arrived there, and I saw what I don't see on the average worldly campus. We walked outside and up to the president's dining room, and I saw it again, a certain dignity. I said to some of those who belonged there, "What is this thing I notice, and why? This—this thing that is almost imperceptible and yet is here?" We were told that when a man applies to Morehouse and is being accepted, he starts getting their propaganda.

"You are now a Morehouse man. You can't just dress any kind of way."

"You're a Morehouse man. You can't carry on and get loud and ugly."

"You're a Morehouse man. You've got to stay under control."

"You're a Morehouse man."

And I thought, *Oh my, Oh my! I'm an Oakwood man.*

Let me conclude with the Spirit of Prophecy: *The Great Controversy*, page 461, if you want to read it. I have these little dots in there because I can't read all of it. The "terror of appearing, in their guilt and uncleanness, before the Searcher of hearts... 'Who shall deliver me?'... [T]hey saw that nothing but the merits of Christ could suffice to atone." They "brought forth fruit," "not to fashion themselves after their former lusts, but by the faith of the Son of God to follow in His steps, to reflect His character, and to purify themselves even as He is pure. The things they once hated they now loved, and the things they once loved they hated—The vain and supercilious became serious and unobtrusive. The profane became reverent... The vain fashions of the world were laid aside."

Revival Coming

Today there are many accessions to the truth. Oh, please, get what I'm saying. I do evangelism. Brethren and sisters, we are not in competition with one another. When you run a church meeting and baptize sixty, you've done what some eight-week campaigns under a tent do when they baptize two hundred. We're not in competition. Let us glory when the Lord does it. But listen—today "there are large accessions to the churches; nevertheless" the new members show no "corresponding increase of real spiritual life" (*ibid.*, p. 463). Many who join are not more willing to deny self and take up their cross than before their baptism. Our religion becomes a sport of infidels and skeptics. Oh, I'm gonna say it! If I ever hear a man bragging about how many he baptizes, I worry about him.

But I tell you something, and I mean it with all my heart. If you don't like

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what I say, at least give me credit for being honest and sincere. When I work as hard as I do to run an effort, I want somebody to stay at least until after the snow falls. Don't let me hear that you baptized 250 and nobody can find them. When Earl Cleveland and Bill Scales and George Rainey and Eric Ward, and all those, along with many pastors who have not made it their specialty—when they do it, the church is enlarged and the folk know what they believe.

Primitive Godliness. *The Great Controversy*, pages 463, 464: "Picnics, church theatricals, . . . personal display, have banished thoughts of God. . . . Notwithstanding—"You see, there is a second statement here. (I'm glad there's a second one; the first one took us negative, and this one takes us positive.) "Notwithstanding... there will be ... a revival of primitive godliness"! Did you get it? Not neopentecostalism, but such "primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times"!

Now page 464 again: "Under a religious guise, Satan will seek to extend his influence over the Christian world . . . [with] an emotional excitement, a mingling of the true with the false.... Yet none need be deceived" if they rely on God's Word.

Let's go to page 474: "Every sinful gratification tends to benumb the faculties and deaden the mental and spiritual perceptions, and the Word or the Spirit of God can make but a feeble impression upon the heart."

Suppose you had a baby boy, and as he began to grow up he only wanted to eat cake every day three times a day for the rest of his life. Would you comply:

You and I, my fellow workers, are God's called facilitators to a purer, more powerful Christian life and to a finished work. The only reason why God needs us in the church at all is that we might become witnesses to those on the outside. The truth makes a difference, and we will not arrest their attention until we are peculiar. The power that we walk and talk about is in the Word.

In the Word! Whose side are you on?

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In the Safety Zone. You don't have to be just like me. But let's walk in here, in the safety zone.

Over in Chicago there was an old man, an elegant old man. He wore sports coats like a young guy, drove a yellow Cadillac, brought his beautiful wife (they were both old but she was beautiful) to my meetings every night. He never said a word, just listened and went home. Finally we got down to the decision time and he walked up by himself and said, "I need to talk to you."

I said, "Well, let's go aside."

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We did.

He said to me, "Now I want to know from you what I should do about a problem I have."

I said, "Well, what is your problem, sir?"

He said, "In my bar in my basement I have a lot of good liquor. I want to know what to do with it. Shall I sell it? Shall I give it away? What shall I do?" He turned and stared at me.

I said, "My dear brother, you have a misapprehension. There is no such thing as good liquor. What you probably mean is it's expensive. Now, suppose you gave it away or sold it, and the person that received it went out driving drunk and killed a bunch of people or shot his wife. Do you know you'd bear the responsibility? The book of Habakkuk says, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink" (Habakkuk 2:15).

He said, "Then what shall I do?"

I said, "I have a suggestion. Make your bathroom a temple and the toilet stool an altar. Bring that expensive liquor up from your basement and set it on the back of the toilet. Then kneel down and in an act of commitment give yourself anew to the Lord and pour that liquor out of the bottle with prayer."

He looked at me sternly and said, "If you had told me anything else, I was going to walk out of here." Today, 21 years later, his wife sleeps in Jesus and he is still in the truth.

Truth Wins. Brethren, this truth will win souls. You don't need to play games and fool people. This truth, with its dignity and power, this truth attended by the Holy Ghost will win souls of the best kind.

I want my church back!

Section 2
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Chapter 8

Do We Need a 28th Fundamental Belief?

The Development of Our Statements of Doctrines

By **Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, PhD**

Director, Public Campus Ministries, Michigan Conference

Author, *Must We Be Silent?* and *Receiving the Word*

Throughout its history there are those who have questioned the necessity of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church adopting a set of doctrinal beliefs to which all members are to subscribe. Recent events in the SDA Church—namely, the introduction of new methods of church growth and worship styles, the heated debate over Creation and evolution, and the proposal for a 28th Fundamental Belief statement—have reopened the discussion of the necessity of statements of doctrine. Different sets of arguments are often advanced against the need or propriety of doctrinal statements of beliefs.

For example, since the 1980s architects of questionable church growth methods and worship styles have been urging the church to play down its distinctive doctrines so as to attract and retain the "unchurched" as well as the "bored, burned, and bypassed" members of the church. These architects tend to believe that the only doctrine the church needs is "love" or the "Gospel." In their opinion, our current fundamental beliefs are too many, hence the adoption of new statements of beliefs will only add to the already unbearable load of restrictive doctrines.

Also, since 2004 when church leaders started discussing the idea of adopting a new statement of belief at the 2005 General Conference session in St. Louis, Missouri, there have been fears that adding another belief statement to the current "27 Fundamental Beliefs" will set up a dangerous precedent for those within the church who are aggressively seeking to introduce un-Biblical doctrines and practices into the church. Those who argue in this manner tend not to see a need for any new belief statements or even a revision of the estab-

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lished body of beliefs. To do so, in their opinion, could result in a shift or move away from the "landmarks" established by the Adventist pioneers.

Another opposition to statements of beliefs comes from self-styled "free-thinkers" or "progressives" who seek to "adventure into new truths" such as evolution, homosexuality, un-Biblical divorce and remarriage, and the ordination of women as elders and pastors. In their view, General Conference session decisions on doctrinal issues constitute the creation of a "creed," a restrictive body of dogma that could be used to persecute freethinking or even spirit-filled dissenters who are committed to "present truth" (an expression they hijack to refer to their un-Biblical ideologies). To such, the adoption of statements of beliefs (believed to be "creeds") is contrary to the views of the Adventist pioneers.

None of the above reasons for opposing doctrines is entirely new.¹ But because different expressions of the concerns keep resurfacing from time to time, Seventh-day Adventists today must clearly understand and be able to explain why they need doctrines.

So we ask: Given the fact that we already have 27 fundamental beliefs, do we need another doctrinal statement—such as the one being proposed for the next General Conference session? Are not the ones we currently have already too many? Instead of adding new doctrines, shouldn't we rather be emphasizing the "Gospel"? Isn't the adoption of another statement of belief contrary to the spirit of the pioneers? Isn't it creating a creed?

In seeking to address the above questions, we shall review what the attitudes of Seventh-day Adventists have been throughout their history towards creeds and statements of beliefs. We shall then draw some relevant conclusions for the questions being raised today.

History of Creeds or Confessional Statements

The word "creed" is derived from the Latin *credo*, which means "I believe" or "I confess." On the basis of its root meaning (or etymology) a creed may be defined as a brief statement of the faith. Thus, throughout Christian history, the terms "creeds" and "confessions of faith" have often been used interchangeably as the church's attempt to give articulate and intelligible expression to the Christian faith.

Such creeds or confessions of faith were employed in the instruction of baptismal candidates, in the hymns, prayers, and sermons of regular worship, in healing and exorcism, in resistance to persecutors, and in differentiating between false teachings (heresy) and sound teachings (orthodoxy).²

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The authority ascribed to the various confessional statements has varied with time among various Christian groups. For example, Roman Catholicism has historically regarded creeds as oracles from God and thus authoritative for all time. Creeds for them are part of the received traditions that can be traced to the apostles themselves.³

The 16th and 17th century Protestant Reformers, however, accepted only the Apostles' Creed and the creeds of the first four centuries, because these creeds agreed with the Scriptures—the only rule of faith for Protestants. In other words, the Reformers rejected other creeds because they were of the opinion that, for hundreds of years, the medieval church did not consistently teach Biblical truth in its creeds.⁴ They also felt that the ancient confessions did not always speak directly to the theological issues of their time. To explain where they stood with regard to the practices of the medieval Catholic Church, the several Protestant groups constructed their own confessional statements.

Thus, Protestants rejected ancient creeds not because creeds were evil in themselves, but because they considered them to be out of harmony with Scripture and also inadequate in addressing issues current in their day.⁵

Seventh-day Adventists and Creeds

Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged in the 19th century as a Protestant denomination, it should come as no surprise that Christian creeds retained very little value among its members.⁶ While they maintained a strong commitment to the Bible alone as their only creed, our Adventist pioneers took a firm stand against creeds. There were several reasons for their opposition to creeds.

Experience of Early Advent Believers. Early Adventists (i.e., pre-Disappointment Millerites) consisted of adherents from many Protestant denominations, all of which accepted the Bible as their only creed. Despite their theological differences, that which bound this movement together was the blessed hope of the soon coming Saviour.

The question of forming a new church organization and, hence, a creed to define who they were, was not an issue for them. The early Advent believers believed that since Jesus was coming very soon, there was no time and need to start a new church. They declared: "We neither expect nor desire any other organizations until we reach the New Jerusalem and organize under King of Kings."⁷

The issue of creeds did not attract their attention during that initial peri-

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od. In the words of Joshua V. Himes, "All peculiarities of creed or policy have been lost sight of in the absorbing inquiry concerning the coming of the Heavenly Bridegroom."⁸

However, as the 1844 date set for Christ's coming drew near, many Adventists (pre-Disappointment Millerites) were ostracized and excommunicated from their churches without being allowed a chance to give a Bible answer for their newfound faith. Their persecution was not because they were proven wrong from Scripture, but because their beliefs were not in harmony with the creeds of their respective churches. The dictatorial treatment they received from the organized churches created among the Advent believers strong feelings of revulsion against creeds.⁹

The pioneers came to identify creeds with oppressive or tyrannical church organizations that restricted the religious freedom and liberty of other sincere Christians. This fact was stated very clearly by William Miller himself: "We must then, either let our brethren have the freedom of thought, opinion and speech or we must resort to creeds and formulas, bishops and popes . . . I see no other alternatives."¹⁰

Thus, the Advent pioneers' own firsthand experience at the hands of creedal churches confirmed their distrust of creeds.

The Experience of Sabbathkeeping Adventists. The Sabbathkeeping Adventists (post-Disappointment Millerites) had another cause for being against creeds. This was their exclusion from their fellow group of *Advent believers* on account that they held "unauthorized doctrines"—namely, the Sabbath, sanctuary, state of the dead, and, later, the visions of Ellen G. White.¹¹ With these experiences fresh in their minds, they wrote forcefully against creed-making.

In 1845, Joseph Bates denounced the inconsistency between William Miller's stated opposition to creeds and the treatment of Sabbatarian Adventists at the Albany meetings at which Miller presided. Bates wrote:

Look at your publications, and your Albany and subsequent conferences. . . . All such as did not subscribe to this creed and countenance this organization, and of course yield their former views have been treated as disorganizers and fanatics.¹²

From Bates's statement above, we gather that in 1845 creeds were seen as a set of rigid authoritative beliefs to which all must subscribe. Such creeds allowed no room for new light, and those whose views differed from such

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creeds were ill-treated.

James White also spoke against creed-making and blamed on the "strange confusion of creeds the "Babel confusion" among Christian bodies and "infidelity" to the Bible."¹³ He gave his reasons in these words: "Men have 'forsaken the fountain of living water,' [the Bible] and with their broken cisterns that can hold no water [their Babylonian creeds] they have blocked up the very gate of Heaven against a world of sinners."¹⁴

Recognizing that "man-made creeds spring from this world, and have their origin in the brains of poor erring mortals," James White pointed to a different Creed that has its origin in the "councils of Heaven." He continues: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so is our Creed, which is the Word of God, higher in perfection and real worth than all human creeds."¹⁵ "We want no human creed; the Bible is sufficient."¹⁶

Thus, the Adventist pioneers rejected creeds not only because they could be misused, but also because as fallible human documents, they could lead to "infidelity" or apostasy. This understanding is summed up in the words of J.N. Loughborough at the 1861 organization of the Michigan Conference:

The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. Their third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And the fifth, to commence persecution against such.¹⁷

Here again, we see a close connection between creed-making and church organization. In the minds of the pioneers, an ecclesiastical hierarchy was necessary to make creeds binding upon individual members of the church.

Creeds as Barriers to New Truths. The Adventist pioneers also rejected the adoption of creeds because they were of the opinion that creeds and the spiritual gifts (notably the gift of prophecy) stood in opposition to each other. James White argued that taking the Bible as the only rule of faith does not mean that "God may not show the past, the present and future fulfillment of His Word in these last days, by dreams and visions."¹⁸

In the above quoted statement, the Adventist pioneers were trying to address an important question: How was the church to respond to new light from God through the gift of prophecy, if the new light was at variance with an accepted creed? They feared that creeds would either be rejected in favor of the new light or vice versa. Hence, James White maintained that "making a

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creed is setting the stake and barring the ways to all future advancement."¹⁹

Thus, the pioneers of the Adventist Church rejected a formal creed, accepted the Bible as the sole rule of faith, and recognized the place of spiritual gifts through which God could speak as He might choose.²⁰

In 1874 Uriah Smith wrote an article in which he listed some "Romish errors" that had been followed by Protestants. He argued that not only would creeds bar all further progress into truth, but also that the Bible itself would be brought to support the wrongly predetermined system of belief.²¹ He was thus opposed to creeds because he saw them as embodying a rigid or unalterable system of doctrine.

Ellen White was also opposed to creeds, not only because they shut our new truths but also because creedal resolutions serve to perpetuate error. Her position was made clear when a group of influential ministers unsuccessfully attempted to force a creed on the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in their attempt to quell a controversy at the 1888 General Conference session.²² If these administrators had their own way, nothing would have been taught at the school in Battle Creek "contrary to what has been taught in the past."²³

In her opposition to creedal resolution, E.G. White stated that the truths God gives to His servants today "would not perhaps have been present truth . . . years ago, but it is God's message for this time."²⁴ She warned against the attempt "to make all Scripture meet our established opinions" and again in 1901 she repeated: "Do not carry your creed to the Bible and read the Word in the light of your former opinions. Do not try to make everything agree with your creed."²⁵ She saw the danger of exalting a creed to the status of the Bible, thereby making the former the norm of authority. Such a move would have fomented controversy and fostered intolerance and disunity.

A Hindrance to Spirituality. Another notable reason for the early Adventist pioneers' opposition to creeds can be found in the arguments used to defeat an 1883 proposal for the preparation of a church manual. It was stated that creeds would cause members to "lose their simplicity and become formal and spiritually lifeless."²⁶ As to its impact on preachers, they said:

If we had one, we fear many, especially those commencing to preach, would study it to obtain guidance in spiritual matters, rather than to seek it from the Bible and from the leadings of the Spirit of God.²⁷

Summary. Without doubt, the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist

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Church were strongly opposed to creeds. This opposition was to a great degree shaped by their experience of harsh treatments at the hands of their former churches on account of their new beliefs—immediately before and after the 1844 Disappointment.

For them, a "creed" was not understood merely in its etymological sense as a statement of belief. Rather, they saw it as a system of beliefs drawn up by men and made binding upon the unwilling conscience of the believer. Even if such a confessional statement were in harmony with the Scriptures, the pioneers feared that it might be elevated to a place equal or superior to divine revelation, and thus become the reference point for belief as well as for further research and reflection. They also rejected creeds because adopting them could pose a danger of reducing faith to mere intellectual assent to a body of dogma, thereby stifling spiritual growth and even fostering divisiveness.

But at the same time that the Adventist pioneers were strongly distrustful of creeds, they also proceeded to establish statements of beliefs. How could the pioneers embrace statements of beliefs and yet claim that their denomination was not creedalistic?

Seventh-day Adventists and Statements of Beliefs

The opening sentence of the preamble to the current Fundamental Beliefs states: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures."

While the above statement accurately reflects the attitude of Adventists since the days of their pioneers,²⁸ it is often asked: How can the church be opposed to "creeds" and at the same time hold to certain "fundamental beliefs"?

The failure to clarify the meanings of these two terms—creeds and statements of beliefs—can give the unfortunate impression that either Adventists are confused or intellectually dishonest in their usage of the terms.²⁹

Distinction Between Creeds and Statements of Beliefs. A solution to the apparent confusion can be found when we understand that Adventists employ the term "creed" in its *historical* context as a rigid, inadequate, or even fallible document of faith—sometimes even used as an instrument of persecution. They do *not* use the word "creed" in its etymological sense as "something believed"—hence as a statement of belief. The two expressions—creeds and statements of beliefs—mean the same thing etymologically. They differ in meaning only in terms of how Adventists have perceived their usage in history.

The Adventists' preference of "statement of belief" or "fundamental

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belief" over "creed" is intended to emphasize that their belief statements should not carry a quality of finality or infallibility, nor be accorded a binding authority on the consciences of believers in the manner in which the Bible does. Also, their preference of "fundamental beliefs" over "creeds" is intended to suggest that their statements of beliefs should not be spectacles through which the Word of God is to be read.

As the preamble to the current Fundamental Beliefs states, Adventists throughout their history have seen their confessional statements not as rigid, fossilized, or infallible expressions of truth, but as a reflection of their best understanding and expression of Biblical truth up until the present time. "Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word."

The Justification for Statements of Belief. In 1887, in response to those who argued that the pioneers should not have drawn up any confessional statements since they already had the Bible, their only Creed—L.A. Smith, son of Uriah Smith, wrote to defend the necessity of statements of beliefs:

If there is anything which Scripture plainly teaches, it is the importance of possessing a clear and definite faith, or summary of religious beliefs; in short a "creed" in harmony with the truths God's Word has revealed.³⁰

In the above argument, in which he uses the word "creed" in its etymological sense, Smith states that adopting a statement of faith amounts to taking a doctrinal position, and taking such a position is Scriptural. He was quick to point out that only beliefs in harmony with Scripture should be confessed.³¹

Another justification for statements of beliefs was given by J.H. Waggoner in his 1886 book on church organization:

Repentance and faith are almost universally recognized as requisites to Christian character. But beyond this brief statement—too brief to indicate the position of the church or of the candidate—each denomination of professed Christians has some definite declaration of its faith;... were not this the case they could not possibly satisfy even their own minds that there is any reason for their denominational existence.³²

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The point emphasized above is that, unless clearly articulated, certain Christian catchphrases such as "repentance and faith," and, we may add, "the Bible and the Bible only," "commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," and even "the Gospel"—are vague and practically meaningless, since other Christian bodies might claim the same. Affirming the Bible as our only creed is not enough; that Bible must be opened, and what it teaches must be confessed.

With these reasons, the pioneers had no problems adopting statements of beliefs. However, the development of comprehensive confessional beliefs was occasioned by a number of factors.

The Development of Statements of Beliefs. We shall now highlight some of the key statements of beliefs that have been developed in the course of Adventist history and the factors that necessitated them. As will become evident, each statement of belief differed from the others not only in terms of the purpose for which it was written, but also in terms of its content, emphases, and number of listed beliefs.

1. *The 1850 "Original Faith" Statement.* In an article whose aim was to "expose the absurdities in the position of those who reject the present truth and still profess to stand on the original faith," James White stated that the "2300 days" [i.e., the sanctuary doctrine] "has been and still is the main pillar of the Advent faith." He refers to this as the "original faith." The reason for this brief statement was to differentiate the Sabbath/sanctuary Adventists from other Advent believers who rejected those truths.³³

2. *Seventh Day Baptist Request (1853).* To a request by Seventh Day Baptists who desired to learn about the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist faith, James White presented a list of the movement's basic beliefs. This statement, noted for its brevity and beauty, reads:

As a people we are brought together from the divisions of the Advent body, and from the various denominations, holding different views on some subjects; yet, thank Heaven, the Sabbath is a mighty platform on which we can all stand united. And while standing here, with the aid of no other creed than the Word of God, and bound together by the bonds of love—love for the truth, love for each other, and love for a perishing world—"which is stronger than death," all party feelings are lost. We are united in these great subjects: Christ's immediate, personal Second Advent, and the observance of all the Commandments of God, and the faith of His Son Jesus Christ, as necessary to a readiness for His advent.³⁴

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3. *"Leading Doctrines Taught by the Review"* (1854). In August of 1854 the masthead of the first issue of volume 6 of *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* included a list of five "Leading Doctrines Taught by the *Review*." Although the editor, James White, is presumed to be the author of the list of doctrines, and although it is described as doctrines "taught by the *Review*," this summary of doctrinal beliefs may well have described the views of the early Adventists. The beliefs listed are:

The Bible, and the Bible alone, the rule of faith and duty.

The Law of God, as taught in the Old and New Testaments, unchangeable.

The personal advent of Christ and the resurrection of the just, before the millennium.

The earth restored to its Eden perfection and glory, the final inheritance of the saints.

Immortality alone through Christ, to be given to the saints of the resurrection.³⁵

4. *Covenant Resolution* (1861). At a meeting in Battle Creek to organize the Michigan Conference, a covenant resolution was presented in which the new loosely organized Sabbatarian Adventists described who they were. It read:

Resolved, that this Conference recommend the following church covenant; We the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together as a church, taking the name Seventh-day Adventists, *covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ* (emphasis mine).³⁶

This church "covenant" consisted of the proposed denominational name and the words of a favorite SDA verse of Scripture (Revelation 14:12).

5. *The Monterey, Michigan, Statement* (1869). Another brief statement of our beliefs appeared in a pamphlet datable to 1869. It was written by the church board at Monterey, Michigan, to explain that the insanity of two ladies could not be blamed on efforts to convert them to the Seventh-day Adventists

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faith, nor by what E.G. White had written. Apparently such an allegation had been published in some local papers.³⁷

This document, which seems to have the approval of the highest leadership of the church,³⁸ lists the Second Advent, Sabbath, Judgment, state of the dead, and gifts of the Spirit as essential "particulars" that distinguish Seventh-day Adventists from "the Christian world at large." Ellen G. White is specifically mentioned and described as "a worthy Christian woman of blameless life" who was also the recipient of the gift of God.

6. *The Creed of the Evangelical Adventists (1869)*. In a *Review and Herald* article in which the "declaration of faith" of a group calling itself "Evangelical Adventists" is discussed, we find an analysis of the 15 articles of faith of this other Adventist body.³⁹ This "creed of the Evangelical Adventists" is important not only because a number of phrases from this creed found their way into the Seventh-day Adventists' 1872 statement of belief, but also because the SDA comments and responses to it clearly distinguish the two Advent groups.

7. *The 1872 "Declarations."* The first most comprehensive Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal statement was *The Declarations of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists*, believed to have been written by Uriah Smith in 1872.⁴⁰ These "Declarations" consisted of a set of 25 doctrinal beliefs, amounting to "a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them." The stated purpose of the "Declarations" is found in the preamble:

In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no article of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible. We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them. We often find it necessary to meet inquiries on this subject, and sometimes to correct false statements circulated against us, and to remove erroneous impressions which have obtained with those who have not had an opportunity to become acquainted with our faith and practice. Our only object is to meet this necessity.

As Seventh-day Adventists we desire simply that our position shall be understood; and we are the more solicitous for this because there are many who call themselves Adventists who hold views with which we can have no sympathy, some of which, we think, are sub-

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versive of the plainest and most important principles set forth in the Word of God.

The preamble to the "Declarations" identified at least two other groups of "Adventists" and succinctly distinguished Seventh-day Adventists from both of them:

As compared with other Adventists, Seventh-day Adventists differ from one class in believing in the unconscious state of the dead, and the final destruction of the unrepentant wicked; from another, in believing in the perpetuity of the Law of God as summarily contained in the Ten Commandments, in the operation of the Holy Spirit in the church, and in setting no times for the advent to occur; from all, in the observance of the seventh-day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord, and in many applications of the prophetic Scriptures.

Observe that the key doctrines that set apart Seventh-day Adventists from all other groups of Adventists were the seventh-day Sabbath and the church's unique understanding of Bible prophecy. The early Adventist; believed that we should lose our identity as a church whenever we divorce from our system of beliefs the church's long-standing views about Creation and origins (protology), of which the seventh-day Sabbath is a memorial, and the church's prophetic understanding of end-time events (eschatology).

In a real sense, the "Declarations" were designed to give a more authentic representation of who Seventh-day Adventists were. Until 1931, when another comprehensive "fundamental belief" statement came into existence, the 1872 "Declarations" became the de facto document by which Adventists identified themselves.⁴¹

8. *Explanatory Remark (1874)*. Another kind of "statement of belief" appeared in 1874 in an "Explanatory Remark" at the end of a reprint allegory entitled the "Celestial Railroad."⁴² The aim of publishing this allegory was to "show the deplorable condition of the nominal churches." The preamble reads: "We will now specify what we believe, from Scripture, to be a few of the prominent errors of the churches which are weekly promulgated from the pulpit and press as truth of the living God."⁴³ The eight "errors" listed deal with the "corruption" of the Sabbath, millennium, Hell, state of the dead, baptism, saints' inheritance, Trinity,⁴⁴ and the nature of the Second Advent.

9. *1889 Fundamental Principles in the Yearbook*. In 1889 the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for the first time published a list of "Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists." The 28 articles contained in the *Yearbook* were a revision and an expansion of the 1872 "Declarations." These new articles of belief were reproduced in each *Yearbook* for 1905 and 1907-1914. According to a knowledgeable Seventh-day Adventist historian, the 28

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articles were not included in the *Yearbook* in 1890-1904, 1906, and 1915-1930 because of debates over the Trinity and the atonement.⁴⁵

10. *The 1894 Battle Creek Statement.* Apparently because no statements of beliefs were published in the SDA *Yearbook* after 1890, in 1894 the 1,521-member Seventh-day Adventist church in Battle Creek issued its own statement of beliefs in its church directory. It was titled "Some Things Seventh-day Adventists Believe."⁴⁶ Although it did not differ substantively from the 1889 "Declarations," the Battle Creek statement was expanded into 31 articles.

11. *The 1931 Fundamental Beliefs.* This is the only other major comprehensive statement of beliefs since the 1872 "Declarations." It was published in the 1931 *Yearbook*.⁴⁷ Unlike the 1872 "Declarations" which are contained in 25 articles, the 1931 Fundamental Beliefs are grouped under 22 articles, although the latter seems to be more explicit or detailed in content.

Three major reasons occasioned this 1931 Fundamental Belief statement.⁴⁸ First, failure to publish the SDA statement of faith after the 1914 *Yearbook* gave an unfortunate impression to other denominations that Seventh-day Adventists had no defined or specified doctrines. The 1931 Fundamental Beliefs was designed to reveal to the world "both what we believe and why." Second, a formal request of statement of beliefs came from the African Division (J.F. Wright, then president) so that such a statement would help "government officials and others to a better understanding of our work."⁴⁹ Third, to correct misrepresentations and distortions of the Adventist faith by apostates like A.F. Ballenger.

Generally speaking, the 1931 Fundamental Beliefs seem to be a rearrangement and rewording of 1872 "Declarations." But there are some differences. In comparison with the 1872 "Declarations," the 1931 Fundamental Beliefs have articles on man's mortality (#9); Christian lifestyle—modesty in dressing, abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and worldly pleasure (#17); and tithing (#18)—all of which are absent in the 1872 statement. Also, unlike the 1872 "Declarations" that sound more polemical or even confrontational in tone, the 1931 Belief statements seem more irenic.⁵⁰

Although the 1931 "Fundamental Beliefs" were never officially voted by the General Conference Executive Committee or any other church body, since its publication in the 1931 *Yearbook*, it assumed an official status in the church.⁵¹ It was reprinted each year in the *Yearbook*, and beginning in 1932, was published in the *Church Manual* by vote of the General Conference Executive Committee.

The importance of the 1931 "Fundamental Beliefs" lies in the fact that the declaration became the foundation of all SDA confessional statements

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between 1931 and 1980. Thus, the 1941 *Baptismal Vow and Baptismal Covenant* statements that were voted by denominational leaders at the 1941 Annual Council were based on the 1931 Fundamental Beliefs.

It should be pointed out, parenthetically, that delegates at the 1946 General I Conference session voted that no revision of the Fundamental Beliefs should be made at any time except by approval of a General Conference session.

12. *The 1980 Fundamental Beliefs.* The current Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were voted at the Dallas General Conference session in April 1980. It was the first time in SDA history that its doctrinal statements have been voted at a General Conference session. The 2,000 delegates of the world church who gathered in Dallas voted some major revisions and rearrangements of the 1931 "Fundamental Beliefs," expanding the earlier list from 22 to the current 27 statements.

The occasion for this major reformulation of the church's beliefs was the felt need on the part of the *Church Manual* committee for a coordination of three different statements it contained—namely, Fundamental Beliefs, the Doctrinal Instruction for Baptismal Candidates, and the Baptismal Vow and Covenant—and also "the preparation of an additional 'Fundamental Belief statement to deal with the Doctrine of Creation.'"⁵²

Another pertinent reason for the 27 Fundamental Beliefs statement was given by President Neal C. Wilson during his introductory comments at the 1980 General Conference session:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a creed as such. Nothing set in concrete in terms of human words. The time never comes when any human document cannot be improved upon. We feel that every 20, 30, or 50 years it is a very good thing for us to be sure we are using the right terminology and approach. . . . Certain terms mean today what they did not mean 50 years ago. . . . It is extremely important that we should understand what we believe and that we should express it simply, clearly, and in the most concise way possible.⁵³

As indicated earlier, the 27 Fundamental Beliefs statement that was voted at the 1980 General Conference session was a major revision and expansion of the previous doctrinal beliefs—a fact that raised concerns in the minds of many delegates, and to which the GC President felt compelled to respond.⁵⁴ Besides altering the sequence of topics and providing paragraph headings, the 27 Fundamental Beliefs included new articles of faith: Creation (#6); The

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Great Controversy (#8); The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ (#9); The Church (#11); Unity in the Body of Christ (#13); The Lord's Supper (#15); The Gift of Prophecy (#17); and Marriage and the Family (#22).

It is to these "27 Fundamental Beliefs" that another statement of beliefs titled "Growing in Christ") is to be added during the 2005 General Conference session in St. Louis, Missouri. If adopted, the Seventh-day Adventist Church will now have "28 Fundamental Beliefs."

Summary. While rejecting the adoption of creeds (as historically understood and used), Seventh-day Adventists throughout their history did not hesitate to formulate various confessional statements. They did not see any contradiction in their position. For them, adopting statements of beliefs amounted to taking a doctrinal position—something they believed to be Scriptural.

There were several reasons for the adoption of statements of beliefs. The notable ones include the need to (1) describe themselves to outsiders, (2) refute or correct some teachings of "false brethren," (3) clear themselves of false charges, (4) expose errors in nominal churches, (5) address relevant issues upon which unanimity had been attained, and (6) use the correct terminology to articulate their understanding of Biblical teaching so that they can be understood by their contemporaries.

The various confessional statements between 1850 and 1980 varied in form, scope, emphases, and tone. Certain statements were reworded, rearranged, amplified, and new doctrines were added, suggesting that Adventists have never considered their belief statements unalterable.

The number of belief statements has also varied—from one (James White's "original faith") to 31 (the Battle Creek statement of faith). Also, none of the different doctrinal statements pretended to be comprehensive of all Scriptural teaching. They were merely consensus statements regarding the common understanding of Biblical truth up till the time.

Because Seventh-day Adventists have never regarded their confessional statements as rigid documents that couldn't be changed, the number of fundamental beliefs (e.g., 1, 2, 5, 22, 25, 27, or 31) has been immaterial. This fact indicates their willingness to advance with new light, in harmony with the Bible.

Do We Need a New Fundamental Belief Today?

Our brief investigation has revealed that since the days of our pioneers, Seventh-day Adventists have seen no contradiction in their rejection of creeds" and endorsement of "statements of beliefs." Statements of beliefs

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describe the unanimous consensus of Adventists regarding their understanding of Biblical teaching, and for them the adoption of fundamental beliefs amounted to taking a doctrinal position.

The Bible is very clear indeed that the church should hold certain doctrinal truths, "a common faith" (Titus 1:4; 2 Peter 1:1), "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3, KJV). In order to preserve the "unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13), the apostles urged believers to uphold sound teaching (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:13) and counteract false teaching and false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3; 4:1, 6; Titus 1:9-11). They occasionally exposed the false teachings of certain individuals (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:19; cf. Philippians 4:2, 3). Even John, the apostle of love, and Jude, possibly the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, also found it necessary to call attention to those who were departing from the teachings of the apostles (3 John 9, 10; Jude). The Christians in Berea were commended for constantly subjecting the teachings of the apostle Paul to the scrutiny of Scripture (Acts 17:11).

At the same time that we are holding onto established truths, the church should be open to new insights from the Bible—new light that does not contradict the established truth:

Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His Word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's Word, and discourage any further investigation of Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion (*Gospel Workers*, pp. 297, 298).

New light will ever be revealed on the Word of God to him who is in living connection with the Sun of Righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will find precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the Word of God. Many gems are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the remnant people of God (*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 34).

How then should we respond to the concerns within certain quarters of the church that our doctrines are too many, and that instead of adding to them

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we should rather emphasize the "Gospel"?

Such a question betrays a major weakness in the thinking of those who are raising it. It seems to suggest a quarrel between "doctrine" and "Gospel." But this is not the case. The word "Gospel" means *Good News*, and the word "doctrine" means *teaching*. The Gospel is the whole and the doctrines are an explanation of what the Gospel is about. In other words, the more we understand about the doctrines, the more meaningful the Gospel becomes to us!

Therefore, those who truly understand the Gospel will not downplay doctrines. To do so is to minimize how much they will know about the Gospel. This is why Seventh-day Adventists should have no hesitation in clarifying, articulating, defending, and living all their doctrines. Instead of thinking that the current 27 fundamental doctrines are too many, they must wish for more. The doctrines help us to understand the Gospel more clearly.

Could it be that those who are arguing for the "Gospel" at the expense of "doctrines" are simply trying to find a way to justify their opposition to some of our distinctive beliefs?

In the light of our study, delegates to future General Conference sessions should not hesitate to adopt new fundamental beliefs that are consistent with Biblical teaching. They must, however, ensure that the wording is not so ambiguous as to allow error to slip in. Even an innocuous comma can make a difference.

Endnotes

¹ For example, during the 1980 General Conference session at which the current 27 Fundamental Beliefs were adopted, the then GC President, Eld. Neal C. Wilson, responded to some of the concerns by those who are opposed to the statements of beliefs. In his extensive introductory comments, he said: "We have heard a variety of interesting rumors. Some, it is said, understand that the church leaders want to destroy completely the foundations of the church and set the church on a course that would be un-Biblical, contrary to the tradition of the past and to historical Adventism. . . . We have also heard that any time we touch the Statement on Fundamental Beliefs we would be introducing the Omega, the final confusion of theological and doctrinal positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.... There are others who . . . believe it is being prepared as a club to batter someone over the head, to try to get people into a narrow concept of theology, not leaving any opportunity for individual interpretation of prophecy, or any individual views with respect to theology or certain areas of doctrine. . . . Some academicians, theologians, and other have expressed the fear that this statement was being developed so that the church could confront them with a checklist to determine whether they should be disqualified from teaching in one of our institutions of higher education. It is very, very tragic when these kinds of rumors begin to develop." See "Seventh Business Meeting, Fifty-third General Conference session, April 21, 1980, 3:15 p.m.: Session Proceedings," *Adventist Review* 157/20 (23 Apr. 1980) :8, 9.

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² The principal doctrinal formulae in the Western Church are: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicean Creed (A.D. 325), the Chalcedonian Definition (A.D. 451), and the Athanasian Creed (A.D. 490). Even though fixed, official creeds did not appear in the Christian community until the third and fourth centuries. See Glen Hinson, "Confession or Creeds in Early Christian Tradition," *Review and Expositor* 76 (Winter 1979) :5-17; John Leith, *Creeds of the Churches* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982).

³ States one authoritative Catholic source: "The creed is also the rule to which the magisterium must refer as the expression of the apostolic tradition." Pierre-Thomas Camelot, "Creeds" in *Sacramentum Mundi* vol. 2 (New York: Herder Sc Herder, 1968), p. 40.

⁴ This view is reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith (A.D. 1648) in which the Word of God is described as the Supreme Judge of "all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men," seeing that "symbols or councils since the apostles' times . . . may err, many have erred," and as such they should not be made the rule of faith and practice (I. [10], XXXI. [46]). See also Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, pp. 196, 228.

⁵ The authority of Protestant confessional statements that replaced the ancient creeds differed from one group to another. Lutheran confessional statements (e.g., the Augsburg Confession [1580], the Formula of Concord [1577], and the Book of Concord [1580]) were generally authoritative because of their worldwide church government. Reformed churches, however, did not adopt one central confession nor ever close their confessional canons. Even though national formularies appeared in various regions of the church, from time to time one or another of these would gain prominence as representative of Reformed faith. Thus, the Heidelberg Confession served churches in Switzerland, Germany, Hungary, and Poland, while the Westminster Confession became the standard of faith for churches in England, Scotland, and the U.S.A. Anabaptist confessions had very localized authority.

⁶ The 19th century was a time in history when the pervading scientific and philosophical atmosphere tended to undermine confidence in the Bible and other authoritative religious documents. In this era, objective truth was also rejected in favor of a subjective one, and due to the influence of rationalistic religions, people sought emancipation from every ecclesiastical and Biblical authority. Thus, during this period, Christian creeds retained very little value. See the excellent article by Bruce A. Demarest, "The Contemporary Relevance of Christendom's Creeds," *Themelios* 7:2 (1982) :9, 16.

⁷ Joshua V. Himes, "The Rise and Progress of Adventism," *The Advent Shield and Review* (May 1844), p. 91.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁹ The experience of Ellen White's family (the Harmon family) was reflective of how hundreds of Advent believers were disciplined on the basis of creedal rules and arbitrary ecclesiastical authority. See E.G. White, *Life Sketches* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1900), pp. 50-53.

¹⁰ William Miller, quoted in F.D. Nichol's *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944), pp. 294-295.

¹¹ This occurred six months after the Disappointment, or April 29, 1845, at a conference held in Albany, New York, at which the leading Millerites and 61 delegates met in an attempt to bind together the Advent people. See A.W Spalding, *Captain of the Host* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1949), pp. 141-143.

¹² Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps* (New Bedford, Mass.: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), pp. 53, 54.

¹³ James White, "Gospel Order," *Review and Herald*, 13 December 1853, p. 180.

¹⁴ *Idem*, "Gospel Union," *Review and Herald*, December 6, 1853, p. 172.

¹⁵ *Idem*, "Gospel Order," *Review and Herald*, December 13, 1853, p. 180.

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¹⁶ Idem, "Gospel Order," *Review and Herald*, December 6, 1853, p. 180.

¹⁷ J.N. Loughborough's statement quoted in "Organization of Michigan Conference," *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1861, p. 148.

¹⁸ James White, *A Word to the Little Flock* (May 1847), p. 3.

¹⁹ Idem, James White, "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference," October 5 & 6, 1861", *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1861, pp. 148, 149.

²⁰ Arthur L. White, "Why SDAs Have No Creed," *Adventist Review*, July 12, 1984, pp. 6-8.

²¹ Uriah Smith, "The Reformation Not Yet Complete," *Review and Herald*, February 3, 1874, pp. 60,61.

²² Tim Crosby, "A Law Without Profit," *Adventist Review* (May 29, 1986), pp. 9, 10.

²³ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald), p. 253.

²⁴ E.G. White, Manuscript 8a, 1888, quoted in Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 225.

²⁵ E.G. White, Manuscript 12, 1901, release #209.

²⁶ "General Conference Proceedings," *Review and Herald*, November 20, 1883, p. 733.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ As would be shown in succeeding paragraphs, while the early Adventists were opposed to "creeds" they did not fail to publish statements of their faith in church publications. For example, James White lived nine years after the 1872 "Declaration," the most comprehensive doctrinal statements in the days of the pioneers (Ellen G. White lived even longer, 43 years). During this time, our SDA publications and each *Yearbook* carried our statements of beliefs. This fact alone suggests that they knew the difference between a creed and a statement of beliefs.

²⁹ The article "Creed" in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* highlights this failure on the part of SDA writers to clarify the meanings of these two terms. That article defines a creed as "a formal, official statement of doctrinal beliefs, as for instance the Apostles' Creed or the Westminster Confession." It continues immediately by stating that "Seventh-day Adventists have no formal creed, although a statement of beliefs may be found in the denominational *Yearbook* and *Church Manual*." Does this mean that the difference between a creed and a statement of belief lies in the latter being "unofficial"?

³⁰ L.A. Smith, "The Value of a Creed," *Review and Herald*, May 10, 1887, p. 298.

³¹ L.A. Smith drove this point home when he wrote again in 1888. Using "creed" in the etymological sense, he stated that "every person has his creed and might have it in spite of himself. His creed is simply his belief." Since this was the case, he insisted that individuals must adopt creeds that have the support of Scriptures. See L.A. Smith, "Creeds," *Review and Herald*, November 6, 1888, p. 699.

³² Joseph H. Waggoner, *The Church: Its Organization, Ordinances, and Discipline* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1886), p. 105.

³³ James White, "Our Present Position," *Review and Herald*, December 1850, pp. 13-15.

³⁴ James White, "Resolution of the Seventh Day Baptist Central Association," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald A* (August 11, 1853) :52, 53.

³⁵ *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 6 (August 15, 1854) :1. This list of doctrinal beliefs was published as part of the Review masthead in 17 subsequent issues, and then discontinued. See *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 6 (August 19&26, 1854) :137, 145.

³⁶ "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 18 (October 8, 1861) :148.

³⁷ See the pamphlet, "The Cases of Insanity at Monterey" (1869).

³⁸ There is cause to believe that the document was written with the approval of the highest leadership of the SDA church. The Monterey church was built in the 1850s, and was the place where the first annual session of the Michigan Conference was held (October 4-6, 1862). It was

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the home of Joseph Bates from 1858 onwards, and the place where he was buried. E.G. White and James White visited the church for revival meetings, and communicated to them in writing (see file DF 287-a, at E.G. White Research Center, Andrews University).

³⁹ "The Creed of the Evangelical Adventists," *Review and Herald* [editor J.N. Andrews], July 6, 1869, pp. 12, 13.

⁴⁰ Uriah Smith [anonymous], *The Declarations of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek: Steam Press, 1872). The "Declarations" also appeared in the 1872 *Yearbook*, were reprinted several times—in the *Signs of the Times* in 1874 and 1875, in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* in 1874, and republished as a pamphlet in 1875, 1877-78, 1884, and 1888. The belief that Uriah Smith penned the "Declarations" comes from the 1912 issue of the *Review and Herald*, where it was designated "Fundamental Principles" and described as "by the late Uriah Smith."

⁴¹ The "Declarations" were also printed in pamphlet form, with an additional 29th section on religious liberty. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed., 2 vols. (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald), 1:465-466.

⁴² The Publishing Committee, "Explanatory Remarks on the Celestial Railroad" (Oakland, Calif.: Signs of the Times Office, n.d.), pp. 20-32. The allegory was first published in 1843 by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864). Even though no date is given on this reprinted pamphlet, the fact that the pamphlet was advertised in *Signs of the Times*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1874, p. 8, places it around 1874. In any case, it could not have been after 1904, the year the press moved from Oakland.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁴ It seems that in 1874 the opposition to the Trinitarian doctrine was quite widespread among the SDA believers. The note on the "Trinitarian doctrine" reads: "In consequence of this mysterious theological subtlety, the world has a very confused idea of God, and the plan of salvation; and multitudes as a result openly impugn Christianity as a whole." For a history of the SDA view on the Trinity, see Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2002).

⁴⁵ Le Roy Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, pp. 412, 413.

⁴⁶ *Membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Battle Creek, Michigan, As It Stood April 16, 1894.*

⁴⁷ The 1931 statement is found under "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists" in *Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1931), pp. 377-380. Although the 1931 "Fundamental Beliefs" was not officially voted by the General Conference Executive Committee, it assumed an official status in the church.

⁴⁸ See Le Roy Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, pp. 410-419.

⁴⁹ Action taken on December 29, 1930. See General Conference Minutes, December 29, 1930, p. 135.

⁵⁰ For instance, the 1872 article on Millennium (VIII) criticizes churches that teach one thousand years for the world's conversion as "a fable," which is "calculated to lull men into a state of carnal security." It refers to the designations "Jewish Sabbath" and "Christian Sabbath" as "names of human invention, unScriptural in fact, and false in meaning" (XII). The Papacy "has misled all Christendom in regard to the fourth commandment" (XIII). We may explain the differences in the "tone" of the 1872 and 1931 statements by the fact that in the 1872 work, the early Adventists were fighting for a legitimate claim to historic Christianity. However, by 1931, the church had come to stay, and it sought to extend a hand of "good neighborliness" to other Christian churches that held different viewpoints in the theological spectrum. For a comparative analysis of the 1872 Declarations and the 1931 Statement of Beliefs, see Samuel Koranteng-

Do We Need a 28th Fundamental Belief?

Pipim, "Creeds and Statements of Belief: Harmony or Contradiction (A Historical Analysis of Adventist Understanding from 1840s-1931)," an Andrews University research paper, 1988, pp. 27-35. This document is available at the Adventist Research Center of the James White Library.

⁵¹ According to Lawrence Geraty, "A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs," *Spectrum* 11/1 (July 1980) :2, the 1931 Fundamental Belief statement was submitted by a four-member group, consisting of C.H. Watson, President of the General Conference, F.M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*, M.E. Kern, associate secretary of the General Conference, and E.R. Palmer, manager of the Review and Herald Publishing Association.

⁵² Minutes of the President's Administrative Committee (PREXAD), Mar. 18, 1976, and the President's Advisory Council (PRADCO), Mar. 24, 1976. See also, the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1:465.

⁵³ "Seventh Business Meeting, Fifty-third General Conference session, April 21, 1980,3:15 p.m.: Session Proceedings," *Adventist Review* 157/20 (Apr. 23, 1980) :8, 9.

⁵⁴ See endnote 1, above.

Chapter 9

When Is a Doctrine New Light?

By **P. Gerard Damsteegt, Dr. Theol.**

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Progressive revelation has played an important role in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. By "progressive revelation" I mean God's continuous unfolding of previously revealed truth that we often refer to as "new light." Without God's shedding new light on His revealed Word—the Bible—the Seventh-day Adventist Church would not exist.

Throughout their history Seventh-day Adventists have looked forward to discovering additional truth. Ellen G. White, one of the church's principal founders, kept this hope alive, stating, "Truth is an advancing truth."² She encouraged believers to search for additional light, for "there are mines of truth yet to be discovered by the earnest seeker."³ In speaking of "truth" she always meant truth as given by God through His divine Word.

Some Current Claims. During the discussions that culminated at the 1995 General Conference session in Utrecht, some voices heralded the ordination of women as elders and pastors as new light for God's church in the last days. For example, a widely distributed document from a major North American conference, in support of women's ordination, presented new interpretations of "new light," "present truth," and "progressive revelation."

The document said that "God is active throughout history, bringing new truths to light. Historically, Adventists have understood that God is active in our own time, using the term 'present truth' to denote *truths which were not present in earlier times, but which God has led his people to discover*. Further, there is the parallel idea of 'progressive revelation,' which suggests that *God has not revealed all truth at some previous time, that revelation is not confined to the thought and behavior patterns of the prophets and disciples of old, but that God*

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lives and is active today and tomorrow. Most importantly, this dynamic character of truth is the undergirding theological rationale for the very existence of Seventh-day Adventism. Thus the notion of Scriptural literalism [accepting the Bible as it reads] is essentially un-Adventist" (italics mine).⁴

Note that "present truth" in this statement represents "truths that were not present in earlier times"—i.e., "the prophets and disciples of old" were not privileged to have the "new light" that our twentieth-century progressive culture needs. Thus, it would seem, God bypassed Moses, Jeremiah, Peter, James, John, and Paul in order to reveal to us "present truths." Further, "progressive revelation" is *redefined* to mean that "God has not revealed all truth at some previous time." And does the reference to the "dynamic character of truth" imply that truth is ever changing?

Crucial Questions. In practical terms, if the "new light" was "not present in earlier times" and if God did not reveal our "present truths" to the "prophets and disciples of old," by what criteria can today's believers determine whether this "new light" is really light or darkness? Is the ordination of women as elders or pastors (which some are now calling a "moral imperative") new light or no light? To name some other current examples the church faces, how can a Christian today know whether approval of homosexual practice is new light or no light? Is the assertion that our earth is millions of years old new light or no light? Is speaking in unintelligible ecstatic utterances new light or no light? Are suggestions that we eat unclean meats, drink alcohol, and wear adornment new light or no light?

Thus the reinterpretations raise fundamental questions about how we may know what is new light and about the very character of truth itself.

When any group or individual claims to have "new light," we must evaluate it. It is essential to study what divine inspiration has revealed about the nature of new light. What new light can we expect just before the Second Advent? Will it change the way we look at Scripture and how we interpret it? In what areas can we expect to see a development of new light? These questions will help us focus on some key aspects of this important topic.

Operating Principles of New Light

Ellen G. White's comments on new light have exerted a strong influence in the church. Many have quoted her views, especially those who have advocated changing the church's beliefs or practice. So it is important for us to review what the Lord has revealed to her on new or advanced light.

When Is a Doctrine New Light?

Its Nature and Relevance. The light of truth advances constantly (Proverbs 4:18). Ellen White wrote that "we shall never reach a period when there is no increased light for us." "In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation."⁶ This development of truth, also designated as present truth, "is a test to the people of this generation," who are accountable for truth that past generations were not accountable for.⁷

To say, then, that something is "present truth" should not imply that what is truth today was not truth in previous generations. Rather, truth that Scripture taught but which had been overlooked or forgotten now shines with new luster. When this happens, God does not condemn the previous generations. "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but *now commandeth all men everywhere to repent*" (Acts 17:30).

Given to the Remnant. Ellen White taught that the believers should not consult non-Adventists regarding new light for the time of the end, for God would reveal new light directly to His remnant church. She said: "If God has any new light to communicate, He will let His chosen and beloved understand it, without their going to have their minds enlightened by hearing those who are in darkness and error."⁸

What does this statement mean for us today? It means, for one thing, that we don't have to go to a charismatic church to discover new light about tongues or to seek for an experience of "laughing in the Spirit" or other exercises that take place at such meetings. When God wishes to communicate new light, He will reveal it to His people without the intermediation of those who lack the advanced light of truth we already have.

When we are seeking light on subjects of spiritual significance to God's people, where shall we turn? Shall we search for new light on soulwinning in the seminaries of other denominations? Shall we seek God's new light on such issues as homosexuality and the age of the earth from the scientists of this world? When we want to know how the Lord would have us manage our hospitals, shall we inquire of the healthcare conglomerates? Will the universities of the world provide the models we need for our educational system in these last days?

Though we believe God will give new light to the remnant, we are not to glory in ignorance of what others may have learned or arrogantly claim to know all there is to know. But we are to recognize that on matters of spiritual import to God's people, we must diligently search first the channels of light that He has already given us, for it is in this way that He has promised to reveal

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new light to meet our needs for this time. It may well be that truths overlooked or long forgotten will begin to glow with fresh meaning. We will know that God has given light to His remnant.

Areas of Advancement. The areas of new light are associated in a special way with the practical dimensions of Christian life. They touch upon matters necessary for the perfection of the faith and of the faithful.⁹ New light is especially intended to lead God's people "onward and upward to purity and holiness."¹⁰

One particular topic in which we may advance is the knowledge of God's character. Ellen G. White wrote, "It is our privilege to reach higher and still higher for clearer revealings of the character of God."¹¹

Another area is the way we are to share the teachings of Scripture. Because Christ is the key to our understanding of God, it is important for us to present the truth "as it is in Jesus." We must bring "Jesus before the churches and before the world."¹² Here the advancement of truth seems to have no limits: "Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless. The student of Scripture looks, as it were, into a fountain that deepens and broadens as he gazes into its depths. Not in this life shall we comprehend the mystery of God's love in giving His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The work of our Redeemer on this earth is and ever will be a subject that will put to the stretch our highest imagination.... The most diligent searcher will see before him a boundless, shoreless sea."¹³

Christ's righteousness is another special subject for advancing light.¹⁴ It is God's desire, Mrs. White wrote, that finally "one interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other—Christ our righteousness."¹⁵ When this one interest does prevail, the brilliance of God's final message of mercy will illuminate the entire world (see Revelation 18:1).

We may expect additional light also on final events,¹⁶ the book of Revelation,¹⁷ and the antitypical significance of the Jewish ceremonial system.¹⁸

Conditions for Reception. New light is not given indiscriminately to everyone. Its bestowal relates closely to the level of individual spirituality. Recipients of advanced light, Ellen White said, have the following characteristics: They

- are persons involved in diligent and prayerful study of the Bible¹⁹
- live a righteous life²⁰
- grow in grace²¹
- have a vital connection with Christ²²
- walk obediently in the present light²³
- purge sin from the life²⁴

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- have an attitude of humility²⁵
- follow the light of health reform²⁶
- accept and apply the old truths²⁷
- accept the Spirit of Prophecy²⁸
- are chosen and illuminated by the Holy Spirit²⁹ and
- advance in proportion to the light.³⁰

Relationship to Established Truth. New truth develops from the truth already revealed in the Word of God. Ellen G. White frequently stressed the close relationship between old truth and new truth. This is clear from the following characteristics of new truth.

1. New Perspectives of Old Truth. The long-established truths of redemption continue to offer new perspectives. "Though old, they are ever new, constantly revealing to the seeker for truth a greater glory and a mightier power."³¹

2. An Unfolding of the Old. "The old truths are all essential," Mrs. White said, and "new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it.... It is the light which shines in the fresh unfolding of truth that glorifies the old. He who rejects or neglects the new does not really possess the old. For him it loses its vital power and becomes but a lifeless form."³²

3. Harmony With the Foundations of Adventism. New light in no way diminishes the relevancy of the truths upon which the Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded. Ellen G. White cautioned: "Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundations of the truth that have made us what we are."³³ "Not one pillar of our faith is to be removed. Not one line of truth is to be replaced by new and fanciful theories."³⁴

"The truth for this time, God has given us as a foundation for our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth. One will arise and still another, with new light which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit....

"We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture, and pile it as proof around their asserted theories.... And while the Scriptures are God's Word, and are to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake."³⁵

The pillars of our faith, the special points of our faith, are based upon a foundation of confidence in the totality of Scripture as "given by inspiration of God" and "profitable for doctrine" (2 Timothy 3:16). New light, then, will not weaken this foundation by suggesting that the Bible writers were mistaken in

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their views or that their messages were culturally conditioned for a prescientific era. Such viewpoints are out of harmony with the historic Seventh-day Adventist teaching about the Bible itself, and they open the door to attacks on the distinctive teachings of our church.

4. *Harmony With Miller's Approach to Scripture.* Ellen White had a high regard for the way William Miller, God's chosen instrument in the great Second Advent movement, interpreted the Bible. She called Miller's rules of interpretation "simple but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation." She pointed out that all involved in the mission of Adventism use the same approach to the Bible: "Those who are engaged in proclaiming the third angel's message are searching the Scriptures upon the same plan that Father Miller adopted."³⁶

Ellen White especially highlighted these rules:

"1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible;

"2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent application and study;

"3. Nothing revealed in Scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering;

"4. To understand doctrine, bring all the Scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error;

"5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his guessing, desire, creed, or wisdom is my rule, and not the Bible."

Commenting on these principles from William Miller, Mrs. White said that "in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth."³⁷ In evaluating today's claims of "new light" on Bible interpretation—whether called "principle approach," "contextual method," "casebook approach," "dynamic approach," "developmental approach," or some other name—we must test them against the historic Adventist methods of interpretation upheld by Miller, Ellen G. White, and our pioneers.

The Church's Responsibility

Great care must be taken in introducing purportedly "new light." In her concern for the church, Ellen G. White went to great lengths to establish sound practices to follow before accepting new light into the church.

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Openness. Ellen White called for the church to be open to new light. She strongly opposed the attitude that we have all the truth for our time.³⁸ New light is not a private affair, however, for no one should claim that he or she has all the light.³⁹ "God has not passed His people by, and chosen one solitary man here and another there as the only ones worthy to be entrusted with His truth. He does not give one man new light contrary to the established faith of the body. . . . Let none be self-confident, as though God had given them special light above their brethren."⁴⁰

The investigation of new ideas is important. Mrs. White stated: "Our brethren should be willing to investigate in a candid way every point of controversy. If a brother is teaching error, those who are in responsible positions ought to know it; and if he is teaching truth, they ought to take their stand at his side. We should all know what is being taught among us; for if it is truth, we need it. We are all under obligation to God to know what He sends us."⁴¹

Ellen White illustrated the correct attitude toward new light with a personal experience from 1844. "In 1844, when anything came to our attention that we did not understand, we kneeled down and asked God to help us take the right position; and then we were able to come to a right understanding and see eye to eye. There was no dissension, no enmity, no evil-surmising, no misjudging of our brethren."⁴²

Since new light is not a private matter, the church can be open to it, seeking God and searching the Scriptures for the unity that can only be found in truth. In such a setting, the proponents of "new light" must not feel free to ignore the consensus of the worldwide church when they have presented their case to the body.

Procedure for Discussion. The manner in which new light should be discussed is crucial. A matter frequently overlooked but absolutely necessary is that the Bible must be studied "with fasting and earnest prayer before God."⁴³

The Bible is the "standard for every doctrine and practice____It is the Word of the living God that is to decide all controversies."⁴⁴ "God's Word is our foundation of all doctrine."⁴⁵ The instrument, therefore, to determine whether any proposed "new light" is part of God's plan for His people is Scripture—not feelings, opinions, surveys, petitions, referenda, or other means, as appropriate as these may be in other spheres. Our question must be, "What does the Bible say?"

Everyone involved in the investigation of new light should be free from the spirit of prejudice. Such freedom can be achieved only through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. "When the Spirit of God rests upon you, there will be no reeling of envy or jealousy in examining another's position; there will be no

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spirit of accusation and criticism, such as Satan inspired in the hearts of the Jewish leaders against Christ."⁴⁶

Tests of New Light. Ellen White recommended the following specific ways to determine the genuineness of new light:

1. Is It Christ-centered? "Does this light and knowledge that I have found, and which places me at variance with my brethren, draw me more closely to Christ? Does it make my Saviour more precious to me and make my character more closely resemble His?"⁴⁷

2. Does It Harmonize with All of Scripture? God "has given directions by which we may test every doctrine, — 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them' [Isaiah 8:20]. If the light presented meets this test, we are not to refuse to accept it because it does not agree with our ideas."⁴⁸

3. Does It Produce Fruits of Righteousness? "The most convincing testimony that we can bear to others that we have the truth is the spirit which attends our advocacy of that truth. If it sanctifies the heart of the receiver, if it makes him gentle, kind, forbearing, true, and Christlike, then he will give some evidence of the fact that he has the genuine truth. But if he acts as did the Jews when their opinions and ideas were crossed, then we certainly cannot receive such testimony, for it does not produce the fruits of righteousness."⁴⁹

Advancement in light should be accompanied by advancement in character. Does the "new light" lead its proponents to exhibit the loving character of Christ? Does it make them gentle and humble? Or does it result in self-confidence, arrogance, and defiance?

If Seventh-day Adventists had always used the above procedures and tests in dealing with new light and proposed changes in doctrine and practice, the atmosphere in the church might have been much different, and we could have avoided much of the strife and controversy that continues to affect the church in some quarters. To redeem the situation we must make a commitment to follow the instructions the Lord has so graciously revealed to His people through the Spirit of Prophecy.

Conclusion

We can be most thankful to the Lord that He has graciously revealed clear instructions on how we should respond to "new light." Ellen White gives us reasons why her counsels are vital in our era, when claims of "new light" seem to abound:

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"I am instructed that the Lord, by His infinite power, has preserved the right hand of His messenger for more than half a century, in order that the truth may be written out as He bids me write it for publication, in periodicals and books. Why?—*Because if it were not thus written out, when the pioneers in the faith shall die, there would be many, new in the faith, who would sometimes accept as messages of truth teachings that contain erroneous sentiments and dangerous fallacies. Sometimes that which men teach as 'special light' is in reality specious error, which, as tares sown among the wheat, will spring up and produce a baleful harvest. And errors of this sort will be entertained by some until the close of this earth's history.*"¹⁵⁰

In the coming days, as the church continues to be bombarded with all kinds of "new light"—new methods of interpretation, new theologies, new lifestyle practices, new forms of worship, new suggestions for ecumenical alliances, etc.—let us "test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It is high time that we study these issues together with prayer and fasting, calling for a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit. Then we will be able to discard those teachings that do not measure up to Bible truth. May the Lord guide us in our struggle to preserve the truth as it is in Jesus so that we may experience a "revival of true godliness," which is "the greatest and most urgent need of all our needs."¹⁵¹

Endnotes

¹ For a critical discussion of contemporary usages of the concept of "progressive revelation," see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Totality of Scripture Versus Modernistic Limitations," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2/1 (Spring 1991) :30-52.

² *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 33.

³ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 704.

⁴ In a letter dated June 1, 1995, given out to delegates at the 1995 General Conference session in Utrecht, the president of this influential conference states: "With this letter we have attached several position papers that we have prepared. We trust that they will help clarify our perspective on ordination and the ministry of women." The statement cited on "progressive revelation" and "present truth" comes from one of the position papers entitled, "An Attempt to Justify Gender Discrimination in Ministry," p. 2. The above paper was subtitled "A Brief Response to *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity*" Readers may wish to evaluate the response against the content of the book it purports to review. For additional data to help in evaluating whether the restatement of the Adventist understanding of "present truth" and "progressive revelation" represents the historic Adventist position, see P. Gerard Damsteegt, "Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines and Progressive Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2/1 (Spring 1991) :77-92.

⁵ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 404.

⁶ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 127.

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- ⁷ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 693. Cf. *Early Writings*, pp. 42, 43.
- ⁸ *Early Writings*, p. 124.
- ⁹ See *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 48.
- ¹⁰ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 534.
- ¹¹ *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 464.
- ¹² *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 259.
- ¹³ *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 128, 129.
- ¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *1888 Materials*, vol. 2, p. 537; also in *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 121.
- ¹⁵ *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 259.
- ¹⁶ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 692, 693.
- ¹⁷ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 133.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 27; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 259; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 35.
- ²⁰ *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 34, 35.
- ²¹ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 706.
- ²² *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 35; *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 130, 131.
- ²³ *My Life Today*, p. 310; cf. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 67.
- ²⁴ *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 464, 465.
- ²⁵ "Be Zealous and Repent," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 23, 1890.
- ²⁶ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 67, 70.
- ²⁷ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 127; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 369.
- ²⁸ *Life Sketches*, pp. 198-200.
- ²⁹ *Gospel Workers*, p. 297; "Be Zealous and Repent," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 23, 1890.
- ³⁰ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 534.
- ³¹ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 127, cf. pp. 130, 131.
- ³² *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128.
- ³³ Ellen G. White Manuscript 62, 1905, p. 5. This statement appears in Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 5, p. 411. The entire manuscript is published as Manuscript Release #760 in "The Integrity of the Sanctuary Truth," a document available from the Ellen G. White Estate; the quoted statement appears on p. 9.
- ³⁴ *Medical Ministry*, p. 96.
- ³⁵ *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 32; cf. *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 115.
- ³⁶ "Notes of Travel," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 33.
- ³⁹ *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 107; *The Great Controversy*, p. 343. For Biblical support she referred to Job 11:7; Isaiah 55:8, 9; 46:9, 10.
- ⁴⁰ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 291.
- ⁴¹ *Gospel Workers*, pp. 300, 301.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 302.
- ⁴³ *1888 Materials*, vol. 2, p. 517.
- ⁴⁴ *1888 Materials*, vol. 1, p. 201.
- ⁴⁵ *1888 Materials*, vol. 1, p. 46.
- ⁴⁶ *Review and Herald*, Feb. 18, 1890.
- ⁴⁷ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 444.
- ⁴⁸ *Gospel Workers*, p. 301.
- ⁴⁹ *1888 Materials*, vol. 2, p. 632.
- ⁵⁰ *This Day With God*, p. 126, emphasis supplied.
- ⁵¹ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 121.

Chapter 10

Agency of Evil Spirits

By **Ellen G. White**

Pioneer and Messenger to the SDA Church*

Author, *The Desire of Ages*

The connection of the visible with the invisible world, the ministration of angels of God, and the agency of evil spirits, are plainly revealed in the Scriptures, and inseparably interwoven with human history. There is a growing tendency to disbelief in the existence of evil spirits, while the holy angels that "minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14) are regarded by many as spirits of the dead. But the Scriptures not only teach the existence of angels, both good and evil, but present unquestionable proof that these are not disembodied spirits of dead men.

Before the creation of man, angels were in existence; for when the foundations of the earth were laid, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). After the Fall of man, angels were sent to guard the tree of life, and this before a human being had died. Angels are in nature superior to men, for the psalmist says that man was made "a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:5).

Nature and Mission of Angels

We are informed in Scripture as to the number, and the power and glory, of the heavenly beings, of their connection with the government of God, and also of their relation to the work of redemption. "The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all." And, says the prophet, "I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne." In the presence chamber of the King of kings they wait—"angels, that excel in strength," "ministers of His, that do His pleasure," "hearkening unto the voice of His word" (Psalm 103:19-21; Revelation 5:11). Ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, were the heavenly messengers beheld by the prophet Daniel. The apostle Paul declared them "an innumerable company" (Daniel 7:10; Hebrews 12:22). As God's messengers they go forth, like "the appearance of a flash of lightning," (Ezekiel 1:14), so dazzling their glory, and so swift their flight.

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The angel that appeared at the Saviour's tomb, his countenance "like lightning, and his raiment white as snow," caused the keepers for fear of him to quake, and they "became as dead men" (Matthew 28:3, 4). When Sennacherib, the haughty Assyrian, reproached and blasphemed God, and threatened Israel with destruction, "it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand." There were "cut off all the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains," from the army of Sennacherib. "So he returned with shame of face to his own land" (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chronicles 32:21).

Angels are sent on missions of mercy to the children of God. To Abraham, with promises of blessing; to the gates of Sodom, to rescue righteous Lot from its fiery doom; to Elijah, as he was about to perish from weariness and hunger in the desert; to Elisha, with chariots and horses of fire surrounding the little town where he was shut in by his foes; to Daniel, while seeking divine wisdom in the court of a heathen king, or abandoned to become the lions' prey; to Peter, doomed to death in Herod's dungeon; to the prisoners at Philippi; to Paul and his companions in the night of tempest on the sea; to open the mind of Cornelius to receive the Gospel; to dispatch Peter with the message of salvation to the Gentile stranger—thus holy angels have, in all ages, ministered to God's people.

Guardian Angels

A guardian angel is appointed to every follower of Christ. These heavenly watchers shield the righteous from the power of the wicked one. This Satan himself recognized when he said: "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" (Job 1:9, 10). The agency by which God protects His people is presented in the words of the psalmist: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Psalm 34:7). Said the Saviour, speaking of those that believe in Him: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father" (Matthew 18:10). The angels appointed to minister to the children of God have at all times access to His presence.

Thus God's people, exposed to the deceptive power and unsleeping malice of the prince of darkness, and in conflict with all the forces of evil, are assured of the unceasing guardianship of heavenly angels. Nor is such assurance given without need. If God has granted to His children promise of grace and protection, it is because there are mighty agencies of evil to be met—agencies numerous, determined, and untiring, of whose malignity and power none can safely be

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ignorant or unheeding.

Agency of Evil Angels

Evil spirits, in the beginning created sinless, were equal in nature, power, and glory with the holy beings that are now God's messengers. But fallen through sin, they are leagued together for the dishonor of God and the destruction of men. United with Satan in his rebellion, and with him cast out from Heaven, they have, through all succeeding ages, cooperated with him in his warfare against the divine authority. We are told in Scripture of their confederacy and government, of their various orders, of their intelligence and subtlety, and of their malicious designs against the peace and happiness of men.

Old Testament history presents occasional mention of their existence and agency; but it was during the time when Christ was upon the earth that evil spirits manifested their power in the most striking manner. Christ had come to enter upon the plan devised for man's redemption, and Satan determined to assert his right to control the world. He had succeeded in establishing idolatry in every part of the earth except the land of Palestine. To the only land that had not fully yielded to the tempter's sway, Christ came to shed upon the people the light of Heaven. Here two rival powers claimed supremacy. Jesus was stretching out His arms of love, inviting all who would to find pardon and peace in Him. The hosts of darkness saw that they did not possess unlimited control, and they understood that if Christ's mission should be successful, their rule was soon to end. Satan raged like a chained lion and defiantly exhibited his power over the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The fact that men have been possessed with demons, is clearly stated in the New Testament. The persons thus afflicted were not merely suffering with disease from natural causes. Christ had perfect understanding of that with which He was dealing, and He recognized the direct presence and agency of evil spirits.

A striking example of their number, power, and malignity, and also of the power and mercy of Christ, is given in the Scripture account of the healing of the demoniacs at Gadara. Those wretched maniacs, spurning all restraint, writhing, foaming, raging, were filling the air with their cries, doing violence to themselves, and endangering all who should approach them. Their bleeding and disfigured bodies and distracted minds presented a spectacle well pleasing to the prince of darkness. One of the demons controlling the sufferers declared: "My name is Legion: for we are many" (Mark 5:9). In the Roman army a legion consisted of from three to five thousand men. Satan's hosts also are marshaled in companies, and the single company to which these demons belonged numbered

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no less than a legion.

At the command of Jesus the evil spirits departed from their victims, leaving them calmly sitting at the Saviour's feet, subdued, intelligent, and gentle. But the demons were permitted to sweep a herd of swine into the sea; and to the dwellers of Gadara the loss of these outweighed the blessings which Christ had bestowed, and the divine Healer was entreated to depart. This was the result which Satan designed to secure. By casting the blame of their loss upon Jesus, he aroused the selfish fears of the people and prevented them from listening to His words. Satan is constantly accusing Christians as the cause of loss, misfortune, and suffering, instead of allowing the reproach to fall where it belongs—upon himself and his agents.

But the purposes of Christ were not thwarted. He allowed the evil spirits to destroy the herd of swine as a rebuke to those Jews who were raising these unclean beasts for the sake of gain. Had not Christ restrained the demons, they would have plunged into the sea, not only the swine, but also their keepers and owners. The preservation of both the keepers and the owners was due alone to His power, mercifully exercised for their deliverance. Furthermore, this event was permitted to take place that the disciples might witness the cruel power of Satan upon both man and beast. The Saviour desired His followers to have a knowledge of the foe whom they were to meet, that they might not be deceived and overcome by his devices. It was also His will that the people of that region should behold His power to break the bondage of Satan and release his captives. And though Jesus Himself departed, the men so marvelously delivered, remained to declare the mercy of their Benefactor.

Other instances of a similar nature are recorded in the Scriptures. The daughter of the Syrophenician woman was grievously vexed with a devil, whom Jesus cast out by His word. Mark 7:26-30. "One possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb" (Matthew 12:22); a youth who had a dumb spirit, that oftentimes "cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him" (Mark 9:17-27); the maniac who, tormented by "a spirit of an unclean devil" (Luke 4:33-36), disturbed the Sabbath quiet of the synagogue at Capernaum—all were healed by the compassionate Saviour. In nearly every instance, Christ addressed the demon as an intelligent entity, commanding him to come out of his victim and to torment him no more. The worshippers at Capernaum, beholding His mighty power, "were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! For with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out" (Luke 4:36).

Those possessed with devils are usually represented as being in a condition of great suffering; yet there were exceptions to this rule. For the sake of obtaining

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supernatural power, some welcomed the satanic influence. These of course had no conflict with the demons. Of this class were those who possessed the spirit of divination,—Simon Magus, Elymas the sorcerer, and the damsel who followed Paul and Silas at Philippi.

Our Greatest Danger

None are in greater danger from the influence of evil spirits than those who, notwithstanding the direct and ample testimony of the Scriptures, deny the existence and agency of the Devil and his angels. So long as we are ignorant of their wiles, they have almost inconceivable advantage; many give heed to their suggestions while they suppose themselves to be following the dictates of their own wisdom. This is why, as we approach the close of time, when Satan is to work with greatest power to deceive and destroy, he spreads everywhere the belief that he does not exist. It is his policy to conceal himself and his manner of working.

There is nothing that the great deceiver fears so much as that we shall become acquainted with his devices. The better to disguise his real character and purposes, he has caused himself to be so represented as to excite no stronger emotion than ridicule or contempt. He is well pleased to be painted as a ludicrous or loathsome object, misshapen, half animal and half human. He is pleased to hear his name used in sport and mockery by those who think themselves intelligent and well informed. It is because he has masked himself with consummate skill that the question is so widely asked: "Does such a being really exist?" It is an evidence of his success that theories giving the lie to the plainest testimony of the Scriptures are so generally received in the religious world. And it is because Satan can most readily control the minds of those who are unconscious of his influence, that the Word of God gives us so many examples of his malignant work, unveiling before us his secret forces, and thus placing us on our guard against his assaults.

The power and malice of Satan and his host might justly alarm us were it not that we may find shelter and deliverance in the superior power of our Redeemer. We carefully secure our houses with bolts and locks to protect our property and our lives from evil men; but we seldom think of the evil angels who are constantly seeking access to us, and against whose attacks we have, in our own strength, no method of defense. If permitted, they can distract our minds, disorder and torment our bodies, destroy our possessions and our lives. Their only delight is in misery and destruction. Fearful is the condition of those who resist the divine claims and yield to Satan's temptations, until God gives them up to the control of evil spirits. But those who follow Christ are ever safe under His

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watchcare. Angels that excel in strength are sent from Heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about His people.

Endnote

* Ellen G. White (1827-1915) was a woman of remarkable spiritual gifts who lived most of her life during the nineteenth century, yet through her writings and public ministry she has made a revolutionary impact on millions of people around the world. With the exception of Biblical writers and the former Russian Communist leader Vladimir I. Lenin, Ellen G. White is possibly the most translated author of all time. The number of different languages that her works have been put into exceeds those of Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, German socialist philosopher Karl Marx, English playwright William Shakespeare, English mystery writer Agatha Christie, German fairy-tale collaborators Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, British author Ian Fleming (creator of the James Bond thrillers), and American novelist Ernest Hemmingway. During her lifetime she wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 49 books. Today, including compilations from her manuscripts, more than 100 titles are available in English. She is the most translated woman writer in the entire history of literature and the most translated American author of either gender. But she was more than a prolific author. While the world is only now coming to appreciate her deep spiritual and practical insights on health, education, family, Biblical spirituality, etc., millions have always recognized her as a recipient of the true gift of prophecy. Seventh-day Adventists believe that she was a recipient of the true gift of prophecy. One of her life-changing masterpieces, *The Great Controversy*, deals with current events in the light of Bible prophecy. Many consider it to be the most important book they have ever read. This article excerpted from pages 511-517 of *The Great Controversy*. Headings other than the chapter title have been supplied by the editor.

Chapter 11

Prayer Warriors and Prayer Offensives

A New Approach to Spiritual Warfare

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Introduction

Since the late 1960s a new approach to spiritual warfare has been sweeping through Christian churches and missions today. I say a "new approach" because, historically, Christians have always believed that there is a conflict between Christ and Satan, good and evil, and truth and error. They have taught that the weapons of our warfare are: total surrender to the living Christ and an abiding faith in Him, a devotional life of persevering prayer, meditation on God's Word, a wholehearted response of worship and witnessing, a loving obedience to all of God's commandments, and a faithful adherence to the teachings of Scripture.

However, in the new approach to spiritual warfare, we are being told that the traditional Christian teaching on the subject is inadequate, and that we need some extraordinary techniques to combat the enemy who is controlling our lives, homes, neighborhoods, cities, and countries. The battle plan focuses on powerful weapons of prayer, and provides training sessions to prepare mighty warriors for combat against the powers of darkness. The new approach is called *Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare*, or simply "spiritual warfare."

This new way of fighting evil forces, and the flurry of interest in the demonic in general have been fueled by four different movements:¹ (1) the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement,² (2) the Non-Charismatic Dispensationalist movement,³ (3) the "Third Wave" or "Signs and Wonders" movement,⁴ and (4) certain evangelical groups.⁵ During the past three or four decades, the teachings of these movements have spread to many denominations through church growth and missions classes in theological seminaries, through seminars or conferences on worship, soulwinning, and church plant -

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ing, and through a variety of tapes, cassettes, books, magazines, song books, CDs, worship aids, religious TV and radio broadcasts, the Promise Keepers, and others.

Not surprisingly, as some of our own Seventh-day Adventist scholars, pastors, and members uncritically embrace the theology, worship styles, church growth methods, and missions strategies of these movements, they find themselves adopting this new method of defeating demons.

It is important that we understand what this new approach to spiritual warfare is all about, especially at this time when the church is discussing the proposal for a new statement of belief. Among other things, the proposed 28th Fundamental Belief attempts to show how "Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us."⁶ Without a correct understanding of the subject, this much-needed statement of belief (which is likely to be adopted, after necessary modifications at the 2005 General Conference session) could be hijacked and misused as justification to promote the questionable method of fighting Satan and his evil spirits.

Although there are different components to this new approach to spiritual warfare, in this article I will only highlight its teaching on prayer, contrasting it with what the Bible says about how we are to fight Satan and his evil forces.⁷

A New Fascination With Prayer

Satan has a counterfeit for every truth in the Bible (miracles, angels, love, faith, unity, doctrines, worship, Sabbath, etc.). He even counterfeits our Saviour Himself (Mathew 24:24). So it should not surprise us that in his plan to deceive, the enemy offers a counterfeit prayer, as well. Such is the case with the new approach to spiritual warfare and its fascination with prayer.

Chuck Lowe, a scholar who has studied the subject in great detail, describes this new approach to fighting Satan and evil spirits in this way:

This new methodology has captured the popular imagination and is making considerable inroads into missionary thinking and strategy. The results are extraordinary. A newfound enthusiasm for prayer has swept many churches. Large numbers of mission teams travel on brief but costly mission trips into remote countries in order to challenge the spiritual forces of darkness in combative prayer. Books are written by the dozen, seminars held around the world, study groups formed, marches scheduled, all with one pur-

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pose: to disarm the spiritual powers of wickedness that impede the spread of the Gospel."⁸

Notice that in this new approach to spiritual warfare, "a newfound enthusiasm for prayer has swept many churches." Given this new fascination with prayer, anyone who raises serious questions about prayer can be easily misunderstood. Who can possibly be opposed to prayer—except those on the side of Satan? But we must be careful here, for the enemy of our souls is very cunning.

To understand how prayer is gaining a new popularity in the churches, and how it plays a major role in this deceptive new approach to spiritual warfare, I will call attention to a few developments.

1. Prayer as a Spiritual Gift

Today, prayer is a top agenda item on the list of many churches. Prayer ministries, prayer departments, and prayer coordinators are popping up everywhere to coordinate prayer offensives against Satan and his forces. These may seem like very positive developments, in that they may evidence spiritual growth in the lives of members and a sign of revival in the churches. But are they?

Lest I should be misunderstood, I want to make it clear that there is nothing wrong with praying. We are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Jesus Himself taught that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). And yet, it appears to me that something insidious is happening in this new approach to prayer. It is this: What is supposed to be the responsibility of all believers is now slowly becoming the specialty of a few.

Observe that prayer is never listed in the Bible as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and yet today, we seem to be looking up to a few individuals believed to have "the gift of prayer" and whose prayers are deemed more effective than all others. Intercessory prayer is slowly becoming the exclusive domain of a few "spiritual gurus" or "prayer warriors." These prayer coordinators constitute the new priesthood to whom we must look if we are to know how to offer effective prayers. The sad irony is that the new fascination with prayer is actually discouraging or inhibiting more people from praying!

Even more, to give the illusion that we are really praying, some of our prayer ministries and prayer coordinators are chasing after and promoting the latest prayer fads and formulas that are believed to really work. These fads include "prayer warriors," "prayer offensives," "prayer walks," "Jericho marches," "prayer anointing services," and the famous "prayer of Jabez" formula. In many cases we blindly import these into the church, having little clue as to

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what they are all about, and thereby setting up our church members for deception.

2. Prayer as a Set Formula

Not only do we see prayer as the spiritual gift for a few, but in certain quarters of the church prayer has become a Christian mantra or talismanic formula that people recite or repeat to get some results. Prayer has to be said in a certain way, repeated so many times, and be expected to be answered at a particular time. And if that prayer formula happens to come from the Bible, it becomes all the more appealing to many—even if the theology behind it is dangerously deceptive. Let me illustrate with one well-known example.

It was not too long ago when individuals and churches were captivated by Bruce Wilkinson's book *The Prayer of Jabez*. This mega-bestseller took Christendom by storm, from a small, single, 92-page volume to a deluge of editions marketed for various age groups from preschoolers to adults. At its peak, "Prayer of Jabez" became a successful Christian enterprise, with Jabez Bible covers, Jabez desk calendars (with the famous Jabez prayer of 1 Chronicles 4:10 on every page), Jabez music CDs, Jabez ballpoint pens, and other Jabez paraphernalia.

But the "Jabez prayer" also became the new way to do church. Judging from the many "Prayer of Jabez" conferences, prayer meetings, leadership seminars, sermon series, and anything else one can think of, one could almost think of it as a cult. The prayer of Jabez became the newly discovered formula to every need, as we memorized it: "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!" (1 Chronicles 4:10).

Thus, the above prayer replaced the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) as today's model prayer.

Perhaps one reason why so many Christians were carried away by the *Prayer of Jabez* book is the fact that it contains a lot of good things. But like a meal that is 99% wholesome and nutritional, but which has been sprinkled with a little rat poison, the problem with the book is that upon closer examination its approach to prayer is no different from the pagan formulas in other religions (e.g., Muslims' rote repetition of prayers when they count their beads, the Hindus' method of repeating their prayer wheel, and the Roman Catholic Christians' endless recitation of "Hail Mary" as they use their rosaries).

A few excerpts from Bruce Wilkinson's book *The Prayer of Jabez* will show that for the author, prayer is the rote repetition of a particular formula. In the preface, the author writes:

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I want to teach you *how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers*. It is brief—only one sentence with four parts—and tucked away in the Bible, but I believe *it contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God*. This petition has radically changed what I expect from God and what I experience every day by His power. In fact, thousands of believers who are applying its truths are seeing *miracles happen on a regular basis* (emphasis mine).

The "key" that will make God "always answer" our daring prayers is the repetition of the famous "prayer of Jabez." In subsequent pages, Wilkinson describes how he himself learned to pray this prayer "word for word" every day. He then "guarantees" that our lives will also be "marked by miracles" if we pray the prayer of Jabez for thirty days (pp. 11, 24). In other words, as long as we know the right formula of prayer and recite it every day for the stipulated period of time (30 days), God is bound to always answer our prayers. As he concludes his book, he makes this appeal to readers:

I challenge you to make the *Jabez prayer for blessing* part of the daily fabric of your life. To do that, I encourage you to *follow unwaveringly* the plan outlined here *for the next thirty days*. By the end of that time, you'll be noticing significant changes in your life, and the prayer will be on its way to becoming a treasured, lifelong habit" (p. 86; emphasis mine).

Thus, according to Wilkinson, if we will just pray the prayer of Jabez, word-for-word, unwaveringly every day for a month, then we will see God's power released in our lives. The key isn't God's choice to answer Jabez's prayer. In fact, God cannot say "No" to our prayers as long as we use the *right formula* for asking things of God. He has to say "Yes."

As mentioned earlier, this mindless recitation of the Jabez formula seems suspiciously close to the Hindu's method of rote repeating their prayer wheel and the Catholic's use of "set" or "fixed" prayers. In fact, in its insightful commentary on the prayer of Jabez, a Roman Catholic magazine, *Our Sunday Visitor*, has this to say:

A little book with huge sales is introducing evangelical Protestants to a uniquely Catholic concept—the comfort and power of "set" or "fixed" prayer—but also reinvigorating the troubling "name it and claim it" aspects of prosperity gospel preaching.⁹

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This Roman Catholic magazine correctly recognizes that rote praying the prayer of Jabez is, indeed, just like praying the rosary. In addition, the practice is also another version of the name-it-and-claim-it prosperity gospel. It is, however, worthy of note that even though this Catholic magazine likes the idea that Protestants are getting conditioned to accept rosary praying, it is troubled by the fact that the prayer of Jabez is preaching another gospel. In short, the author is distancing himself from the prayer of Jabez, even though it is just like rosary praying!

My point is that despite the new fascination with prayer, upon a closer examination prayer has become a mantra, a ritual, or a talismanic formula people are reciting or repeating. Contrary to the teaching of Christ against "vain repetitions" in our prayers (Matthew 6:5-13; Luke 11:2-4), today prayer has to be said in a certain way, repeated so many times, and be expected to be answered at a particular time. In the words of Wilkinson himself, "Jabez's . . . request is a brilliant but little-understood strategy for . . . a blessed life" (p. 63). Fortunately, after two thousand years, when our Lord taught us how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13), this author has finally revealed to us this "strategy" or formula of effective prayer.

3. Warfare Prayers

The new view of prayer as a spiritual gift and as a formula finds its ultimate expression in warfare prayers. These are special techniques of prayer to combat territorial demons that are believed to inhabit not only people but also homes, cars, mechanical devices, etc. Popularized by the new worship styles and new methods of church planting and church growth, this new approach to prayer is finding increasing acceptance in certain quarters of our own church.

Warfare prayer has a definite objective. According to one leading advocate of "warfare prayer," "through warfare prayer, we can free unsaved souls and take them 'from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.'"¹⁰ Warfare prayer "helps bring about effective evangelism,"¹¹ and can increase receptivity to the Gospel "virtually overnight."¹²

Warfare prayer also involves certain key components—who can effectively pray, the place to pray, and how they should pray. For example, *prayer warrior* is the name given to those engaged in this warfare prayer. These "prayer warriors" or "generals of intercession" are a cast of "specialists" who have the special knowledge needed to deal with demons. Although these spiritual warfare "generals" liberally share their knowledge, the average Christian must be extremely careful in any attempt to deal personally with demons. There are dire conse-

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quences for incompetent dealings with demons (such as demonization, death, and illness).

Praying on-site is vital in the new approach to spiritual warfare. For in order to be successful in combating the evil forces, the prayer warriors must embark upon *prayer offensives*, aggressive kinds of prayers designed to "bind" or "break the strongholds of" demons. If the demons are believed to control our neighborhoods, the prayer warriors embark upon what is known as *prayer walks*.

The new "prayer walks" should not be confused with "walking and praying" (the kind Christians throughout the ages experience when they are walking, jogging, working, etc.). In the new approach, "prayer walk" simply means going to a particular neighborhood and binding the demons that are believed to hold that neighborhood captive and hence impervious to the preaching of the Gospel. Also, praying for the deliverance of cities requires *praise marches* or "Jericho marches" (after the example of Israel marching around the city of Jericho). Finally, praying for entire regions is called *prayer expeditions*, and for nations it is known as *prayer journeys*.

Additionally, the new approach to spiritual warfare teaches special techniques or formulas of prayers. A typical prayer on-site goes like this:

On the basis of our submission to God, we in faith resist the Devil and his work. We resist all forces and powers of evil that have taken hold of [name of neighborhood or city]. We resist the spirit of wickedness that has established strongholds in [neighborhood or city region, the dark places, the hidden works of darkness, the mystery places where the enemy has set up encampments]. We call on the name of the Lord to destroy all spiritual strongholds. We proclaim this day that [neighborhood or city] is now under the power and ownership of the Holy Spirit. All other spirits are hereby given notice and are evicted from this property by the power of the name of Jesus. Today we stand in the gap and rebuild a hedge of protection around [neighborhood or city].

If a particular prayer site or individual is noted for certain vices, the prayer warrior's prayer must "trample down the demon of pride, the demon of anger, the demon of lust, the demon of stupidity, or the demon of immorality." Thus, one pastor who writes often about spiritual warfare suggests the following prayer:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I resist all of Satan's activity to

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hold [John Doe] in blindness and darkness. Exercising my authority which is given to me in my union with the Lord Jesus Christ, I pull down the strongholds which the kingdom of darkness has formed against [John]. I smash and break and destroy all those plans formed against [John's] mind, his will, his emotions, and his body. I destroy in prayer the spiritual blindness and deafness that Satan keeps upon

Later in his book, this minister suggests warfare prayers for an adopted child, whom he believes has been indwelt by demons transferred to him through generational bloodlines:

I cancel out all demonic working that has been passed on to me from my ancestors. As one who has been crucified with Jesus Christ and raised to walk in newness of life, I cancel every curse that may have been put upon me.¹⁴

Notice the phrases: "I resist, I pull down, I smash, I break and I destroy." It is I-I-I-I-I! It almost sounds like a kind of spiritual egoism, in which Christ's name is being used to advance oneself. Is that how we are supposed to pray? Where is humility in this kind of prayer?

Here is another suggested prayer for "the taking back of ground we may give through our own fleshly or worldly sins":

I address myself against Satan and all of his kingdom. I take away from you and all your powers of darkness any ground you are claiming against me when I sinned in [naming the offense]. I claim that ground back in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I cover it with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵

Notice that this prayer addresses Satan and demons, not God. One wonders if we can really say we are praying, when we are not directing our petitions to God but to Satan. Who are we to order around the powers of darkness? Can we really bind Satan?

As a result of practices such as described above, "a great deal of fiction, superstition, fantasy, nonsense, nuttiness, and downright heresy flourishes in the church under the guise of 'spiritual warfare' in our time."¹⁶ The result is that spiritual warfare "is not only a hot issue, but a hotly contested one."¹⁷

What really is this strategic-level spiritual warfare? What are some of its

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key components? Is it Biblical? And should we be involved in it?

What Is Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare?¹⁸

Strategic-level spiritual warfare (popularly known as spiritual warfare) consists of two major components: (a) the *theory or doctrine* of 'strategic-level spirits'—this is a complete belief system about demons; (b) the *practice* of "spiritual warfare"—this is implementation or the new strategy designed specifically to defeat demons. The practice grows out of the theory.

Therefore, when people talk about "spiritual warfare" or "warfare prayer," they are referring to the implementation or the practice of combating the territorial demons. It must, however, be emphasized that behind warfare prayer, prayer warriors, and the different techniques of prayer, is a doctrine or theory of territorial demons.

Doctrine of Territorial Demons. Warfare praying is based on the fundamental assumption that specific demons control certain assigned territories, and that these demons not merely exercise authority over, but reside within, and are restricted to, that specified location. The territories included:

- geographical regions (e.g., there are specific demons in charge of the Middle East [Islam], Native American reservations, etc.);
- ethnic regions;
- geopolitical institutions (e.g., nations or governments);
- topographical features (e.g., valleys, mountains, or rivers);
- ecological features (e.g., trees, streams, and rocks) or smaller physical objects (e.g., houses, temples, or idols);
- occupational enterprises;
- domestic situations, etc.

The belief that demons control certain assigned territories has some radical implications. For example: If the spirits are ethnic, then spiritual warfare is particularly mandated when penetrating a new tribe or people group, but may not be necessary when beginning a new outreach in a new area to other members of an already evangelized people group.

Also belief in territorial demons suggest that in evangelism, instead of the proclamation of the one Word, we need to devise specialized techniques over each religion, each vocation, each voluntary association, etc.

Given the complexity of this new approach to spiritual warfare, you can understand why today an increasing number of church leaders and pastors are attending special training seminars to learn how to confront and assault the

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powers of darkness.

The Practice of Warfare Prayer. Warfare prayer is an *aggressive* challenge, initiated by the Christian and directed against the demons. Christians are to go on the "offensive," they must declare and wage war on the ruling evil powers. The specific purposes of warfare prayers include:

1. Rebuking or binding the demons that have invaded or indwelt *Christian believers*, rendering them ineffective as Christians or depriving them of God's blessings of health, wealth, prosperity, or success. [This is the justification for "deliverance ministry."]

2. Setting free unbelievers or unsaved souls and taking them "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." [Hence the need for "prayer warriors," "prayer offensives," "prayer walks," etc.]

3. Effecting the *receptivity of the Gospel* by rebuking, binding, or cursing the territorial demons that are believed to control or rule a particular home, region, territory, objects, music, etc. [Hence the need for "anointing" people, microphones, pews, music CDs, etc.]

Techniques of Warfare Prayer. Spiritual warfare specialists believe that we must learn formulas to speak to, confront, command, cast out, and verbally assault evil spirits. If you're not practicing this kind of warfare, they imply, you are not really in the battle. Believing that warfare prayer is very dangerous for those who are not skilled in the area, today they are offering specialized training to thousands on how to engage in warfare prayer.

There are three major steps in warfare prayer:

1. *Seek the name of the ruling spirit.* The proper name is preferable; but if it proves too difficult to obtain, a functional name is (e.g., "demon of lying," "demon of anger," "spirit of poverty," etc.) is better than nothing.

2. *Identify the demons territory.* Identifying the territory ensures that the proper demon is selected, and establishes the boundaries for ministry once the demon is bound. Proponents do "spiritual mapping" by collating and plotting the information concerning territorial spirits and their "strongholds" for distribution and wider prayer. This process is similar to mapping a city according to ZIP codes. Once the spiritual mapping is done, the prayer warriors will conduct their *on-site prayers* (such as "prayer walks," "prayer marches," "prayer expeditions," and "prayer journeys").

3. *Use the demons name in direct rebuke.* Their strategy includes speaking to, confronting, or rebuking demons, commanding them to leave the person or location, and claiming an individual or region for God.

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It must be pointed out that the above formula in confronting demons cannot be found in the Bible. Nowhere in Scripture are Christians instructed to seek out, speak to, defy, deride, or rebuke, bind, and cast out demons as advocated by the spiritual warfare experts. We may therefore ask: If Christians must learn these spiritual warfare techniques for casting out demons, why did the Holy Spirit omit the instruction from Scripture?

In this connection, it is significant that the specific techniques employed by spiritual warfare specialists are the same found in pagan and animistic religions. Writes Paul Hiebert:

[In animism] most things that happen are brought about . . . by spirits, ancestors, ghosts, magic, witchcraft and the stars. It is a world in which God is distant and in which humans are at the mercy of good and evil powers and must defend themselves by means of prayers and chants, charms, medicines and incantations. Power, not truth, is the central human concern in this worldview.¹⁹

In such animistic faiths, practitioners seek and employ the names of the demons in their incantations and prayers to cast out the evil spirits. This was the kind of thing that the exorcists in Ephesus did. If there is any lesson for us, it is that the key to power does not rest in using names—even the name of Jesus. How much less can it depend on using the names of demons (cf. Acts 19:13-16)?

Some Key Questions

The theory and practice of strategic-level spiritual warfare raises a number of questions for Bible-believing Christians. The following are a few of them:

1. Are there territorial demons?

The Bible teaches that as a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve, Satan is now the god and ruler of this world. Proponents of spiritual warfare go beyond this teaching when they teach that specific demons control certain assigned territories, and that these demons not merely exercise authority over, but reside within, and are restricted to, those specified locations. Among the texts often cited are:

Mark 5:9. *"What is thy name? And he answered, saying My name is Legion: for we are many."* This encounter between Jesus and the demoniacs of Gadara (Mark 5:6-13 and Luke 8:28-33) is the proof text that advocates of the new

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approach to spiritual warfare employ for identifying demons by name. On this basis, practitioners find demons named Self-Destruction, Anger, Hate, Self-pity, Pride, Fear, Fear of Others, Rebellion, Unbelief, Lust, Suicide, Homosexuality, Despair, Resentment, Nonacceptance, Liar, Self-hate, and so forth. They also find demons matching the varied names the Bible attaches to the evil one: Lucifer, Beelzebub, Satan, Apollyon.

However, the one recorded incident of Jesus directly addressing the evil spirits is not sufficient ground for naming demons, dialoging with them, or assigning territories to them. Notice that Jesus did not initiate the conversation; instead He responded to the demons after they had taken the initiative. Even then, Jesus did not ask them to identify themselves until *after* He had authoritatively demanded that they depart. Also Christ didn't seek to enter into dialogue with the demons, nor did He connect demons to patterns of sin in the demoniac. Moreover, Jesus never received a name for an answer; He got a *number*. And although He never got a name, the demons obeyed Christ. Finally, after ascertaining that there was more than one demon inhabiting these afflicted men ("Our name is Legion"), Jesus did not (a) ask them their individual names; or (b) cast them out sequentially, one by one, as is the practice of spiritual warfare advocates today; or (c) take hours to get rid of them.

Mark 5:10. *"Don't send us out of the area."* Spiritual warfare advocates argue that the reason the demons said this was because they were afraid that their superiors would punish them if they lost control over their assigned territories. In reply, it must be pointed out that the demons were not afraid of deportation, but of torment in the "abyss" (see Luke 8:31, Mark 5:7). They feared that Jesus (not Satan) had come to punish or judge them.

Acts 19:28,35. The Ephesians shouted, *"Great is Artemis of the Ephesians."* On the basis of this text, spiritual warfare proponents conclude that Artemis was a territorial spirit in charge of the city of Ephesus. Contrary to such assertions, we must point out that Artemis was not just associated with Ephesus, but was the amalgamation of several distinct deities: the "mother-goddess" of Asia Minor, the Greek goddess Artemis, and the Roman goddess Diana.

The Bible itself explains the meaning of the slogan "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:34). In the words of the city official, "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven [the sky]?" (Acts 19:35). Artemis was of the Ephesians only in the sense that her central temple was located in their city. *The goddess was not the guardian of the city; rather the city was the guardian of the goddess.*

Revelation 2:13. *"The place [Pergamum] where Satan dwells."* Spiritual

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warfare advocates claim that this statement concerning Pergamum is an example of a spirit reigning over an "assigned territory." Note, however, that if Pergamum were the assigned territory of Satan, then the all the rest of the whole world would be free from his attack. But the Bible teaches otherwise. Until Jesus comes, Satan will prowl over the face of the entire globe to destroy (Revelation 12:12; 1 Peter 5:7).

Moreover, the book of Revelation makes similar comments about Smyrna, Thyatira, and Philadelphia. Smyrna and Philadelphia each contain a "synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9; 3:9), while Thyatira is "where Satan's secrets" are taught within the church (Revelation 2:24). "By the logic of SLSW [Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare], if Satan resides in Pergamum but works in Smyrna, Thyatira and Philadelphia, he does a fair bit of commuting! Besides, if he is ruler of Pergamum, what is he doing interfering in the other cities? Of course this is all rather silly, but it demonstrates the absurdity of the woodenly literalistic interpretative method employed to substantiate SLSW."²⁰

The statement "The place [Pergamum] where Satan dwells" simply points to the location where Satan was raising opposition against the church. In Smyrna and Philadelphia, Satan used the Jewish synagogues to instigate persecution against Christians. In Thyatira, he instigated his attack from within, through a prophetess who encouraged participation in temple feasts, where sexual immorality and idolatry were rife. In Pergamum, Satan used persecution. The Devil does not dwell physically or exclusively in any one city, temple, or synagogue. Rather, he is at work anywhere that the church faces persecution without or corruption within.

2. Should Christians engage in warfare prayer?

Proponents of warfare prayer confront Satan's demons by (a) naming the spirits, and (b) using the names in direct confrontation and imprecation in an attempt to "bind" the spirits. They often point to the following Biblical examples:

Daniel 10:13. "*Daniel's warfare prayer.*" "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia."

Notice that Daniel never seeks the names of the demons or the angels, nor does he ever use them in prayer. The only names he receives are those of Gabriel and Michael, the heavenly beings *helping* Israel (cf. Dan 8:16; 9:21; 10:13, 21; 12:1). The evil powers are known only by the generic titles, "prince of Persia" and "prince of Greece" (10:20). Daniel does not have to embark upon prolonged periods of prayer and fasting to obtain the particular names of the alleged territorial demons. He never rebukes any demons. He offers a

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simple prayer requesting the explanation of a dream. In fact, Daniel does not even know that a battle is raging until he is later told!

Zechariah 3:1, 2. *Warfare prayer in Zechariah.* "Joshua the high priest [was] standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan [was] standing at his right side to accuse him. The [Angel of the] Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord . . . rebuke you!'"

Although advocates find here a justification for "rebuking" demons, observe that the only human participant, Zechariah, is merely a bystander and an observer. It is the "Angel of the Lord" (identified as Christ Himself by Ellen G. White in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 469) Who confronts Satan.

Jude 9. *Warfare prayer at the burial ground of Moses.* "Yet Michael the Archangel, when contending with the Devil He disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."

Again, as noted before, no human being "rebuked" Satan. It was Michael the Archangel (Who is Jesus Himself [Jude 9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; John 5:25-29; Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1-3]), Who did it. Even here, He handed the Devil over to God Himself. Christians may beseech God to rebuke ruling demons, but they must be careful not to give the impression that on their own authority they can do that.

3. Should we bind demons?

The new approach to spiritual warfare, which seeks to get rid of territorial demons by "binding" the spirits through various commands and prayers, allegedly finds justification for this practice in Matthew 12:29: "How can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house." It is often supplemented by Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, where Jesus says, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven."

However this Matthew 12:29 passage is taken out of context. The passage "is a parable describing Jesus' cosmic work as the Messiah. He entered a 'house' that belonged to a 'strongman' whom He 'tied up' in order to 'rob' him of his 'possessions.' The house is planet Earth. The strongman is Satan. The possessions are people, you and I, whom Jesus has saved, robbing the Devil. The tying up is the entire work of Christ—from ekbullistic [casting out] foretastes of mercy, to His death on the cross, to His resurrection. Satan's kingdom of sin and death has been dealt a definitive blow, and his former followers are fleeing the darkness and streaming into the kingdom of mercy, righteousness, and life.

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The passage does not teach—and nowhere else does Jesus illustrate—a pastoral method of 'binding' spirits."²¹

Also, Christ's example is sometimes cited as precedent ("Jesus . . . rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him" [Mark 9:25]), and the further example of Paul is used to buttress the case ("Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her" [Acts 16:18]).

While these examples cannot be ignored, it must be noted that in both of the above instances the demon himself initiated the confrontation. And as we have shown in the earlier contexts (Daniel 10, Zechariah 3, Jude 9), the general pattern in Scripture seems to be that of the Christian believer's appealing to Christ to cast out the demon, instead of addressing the demon directly.

4. Should Christians initiate preemptive war to attack the "strongholds" of Satan?

On the basis of Ephesians 6:10 ff., spiritual warfare advocates maintain that Christians are urged to arm themselves in the armor of God and declare war on the principalities and powers. But this is not what the Bible teaches.

Before looking at Ephesians 6, we must mention why Christians are not to launch their own a preemptive strike against Satan. First, it was Satan who declared this war in the beginning, and it is he who is still making war with the saints (Revelation 12). We don't have any business declaring war on him. The war was on before we came on the scene, and the enemy initiated it. Second, God has already won the battle. And this is good news. For though defeated, Satan is still a dangerous foe, and we cannot fight him in our own power.

It is important to highlight the victory Christians have in this warfare with the enemy. While the book of Ephesians teaches that there is a war going on, in which "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12), Paul makes certain facts clear in the book of Ephesians:

1.Christ has already defeated Satan. Through His death, resurrection, and exaltation at the right hand of the Father, Satan has been conquered.²² In Ephesians 1:19-23, we are told of the "the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set Him at His Own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this

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world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him That filleth all in all."

All power (*dunamis, energiea, kratos, isxus*) belongs not to the spirits or to their mediums, but to Christ, Who uses it for the benefit and protection of His followers. Also in Romans 8:37-39, we read:

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him That loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Greek word for "principalities" refers to both good and fallen angels in the New Testament, but in verse 37 it refers to the latter. *In Christ we are secure against the demons.* "The Greek words for 'height' and 'depth' are astronomical terms. The former refers to the location of a star at its zenith, and the latter at its nadir. We are secure against *everything* in the celestial realm, including demons. Now that's territorial security!"²³

2. *Every conversion story demonstrates Christ's power.* Each person who turns to Christ marks an unmistakable break in the control of the demons over the world (Ephesians 2:1-6). Prior to conversion, the individual was under the control of the evil forces of the world and the flesh. But at conversion Christ raises the individual up and exalts him to "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6; cf. Colossians 2:15; 1:13). We are on the throne with Christ, and conquerors through Him. The Christ Who sits on the throne is winning victories in the lives of people today.

3. *The existence of Christ's church shows that Satan's power has been broken.* The existence of the church, reconstituted from every nation, proclaims the wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities of the universe that Satan's power has been broken (Ephesians 3:8-11). "Until the resurrection of Christ, Satan had ample reason to boast. The only people who professed allegiance to the true God was a small unimportant ethnic group, restricted to a provincial outpost on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, and insignificant on the political stage. The rest of the world appeared to be firmly within the kingdom of darkness. Now the church has exploded across all boundaries, and incorporates all people. Entire ethnic groups and nations which were previously consigned to the darkness have now entered the light."²⁴

Therefore, even though the Christian is engaged in a warfare with spiritual forces, Christ's decisive victory over Satan through His death on the cross, resurrection, and exaltation, as well as through the conversion of each believer

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and the universally constituted church, suggests that Satan and his forces have no power or control over us—if we remain in Christ.

4. *Though a defeated foe, Satan is still dangerous.* But having lost his power and his captives taken, Satan is waging a counterattack. He is like a wounded Ion, seeking whom he will devour (1 Peter 5:8). Our responsibility is not to launch a preemptive strike, but to resist and withstand Satan. Thus, James urges us "to resist the Devil," not to attack him, with the promise that he will flee from us (James 4:7). Herein lies the nature of our warfare: Resistance (defense), not Attack (offense). We are to preserve and maintain what has already been won. This is how to fight the enemy.

Standing Firm: How to Fight the Enemy

Our Role in the Warfare. Contrary to the assertions of advocates of the new approach to spiritual warfare, the Ephesians 6 passage that they often cite teaches that *the Christians role in the ongoing battle is to stand firm in the face of Satan's counterattack.* Our role is not offensive, but defensive. We are to "stand fast" or "stand firm":

"Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to *stand* against the wiles of the Devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to *withstand* in the evil day, and having done all, to *stand*" (v. 13).

"*Stand* therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness" (v. 14).

The military metaphor of "standing firm" or "standing fast" portrays soldiers threatened by the enemy and engaged in close combat. Under fierce assault, the commander does not order them to launch an offensive, but to *hold their ground*. It is a defensive, not an offensive, posture:

It involves standing firm, holding one's position, resisting, not surrendering to the opposition but prevailing against it. . . . The decisive victory has already been won by God in Christ, and the task of believers is not to win but to stand, that is, to preserve and maintain what has been won. It is because this victory has been won that believers are involved in the battle at all.²⁵

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Standing firm means to hold the ground already taken in the face of an enemy counteroffensive. This is the appropriate stance for Christians. Christ has won the battle; we are to stand firm in the face of satanic counterattack.

Stand is a common exhortation in Paul's writings, and always carries a defensive connotation.

- The Thessalonians are to "stand firm" in the midst of persecution (1 Thessalonians 3:8) and in the face of false teaching (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

- The Philippians are to "stand firm" in the midst of persecution, and not be cowed by fear of their opponents (Philippians 1:27, 28; 4:1).

- The Colossians are to "stand firm" in all the will of God, lest they be swayed by heresy or seduced by sin (Colossians 4:12).

- The Corinthians are to "stand firm" in the faith and do all things in the spirit of charity (1 Corinthians 16:13, 14).

These exhortations to "stand" suggest that Christians are under attack; it does not call them to initiate an attack against Satan. This is why James says that we must "resist the Devil" (James 4:7). Because the enemy prowls like a hungry lion, Peter says we must be vigilant, resisting and withstanding him (1 Peter 5:8, 9). This is what the Bible teaches about the nature of the spiritual warfare—how to fight Satan and his evil forces.

We shall now summarize the other components of spiritual warfare.

The Weapons of the Warfare. Ephesians 6:10-17 mentions the weapons of our warfare: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

Indeed, the "weapons of warfare are not carnal" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5), for the combat equipment consists of:

1. The belt of truthfulness
2. The breastplate of righteousness
3. The shoes of the Gospel of peace
4. The shield of faith
5. The helmet of salvation
6. The sword of the Spirit

These essential items emphasize the basic Christian disciplines that encourage true character development.

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The Prayer of the Warfare. It is worthy of note that even though the Ephesians 6 passage mentions both warfare and prayer, it never uses "warfare prayer." But even if the apostle Paul had mentioned "warfare prayer," it is important to understand what such a prayer entails. He writes:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:18-20).

Prayer is not an addition to the spiritual armor identified in Ephesians 6:14-17. Rather, it is the atmosphere in which all the fighting should take place. As we put on the full armor and as we undergo the demands of the warfare, we must at the same time (and at all times) be engaged in prayer. Since all of us are engaged in the spiritual battle, the prayer in the warfare is for all—not some elite "prayer warriors" or some "generals of intercession."

We can only highlight certain aspects from the above passage:²⁶

1. Variety of prayer—"all prayer and supplication"—general and specific requests; prayer is not limited to some set formula.

2. Frequency of prayer—"praying always"—is not some 30-day "prayer of Jabez" formulas or techniques, but simply living a life in the presence of God and with an attitude of God-consciousness. Our whole life should be one of communion with God.

3. Power of prayer—"in the Spirit." Prayer must be consistent with the mind and will of God.

4. Manner of prayer—"and watching thereunto"—vigilance. We are to watch and pray" (cf. Matthew 26:40, 41).

5. Persistence in prayer—"with all perseverance"—steadfast, unshakable, etc.

6. Specificity in prayer—"and supplication"—specific needs of concern should be mentioned in our prayers.

7. Objects of prayer—"for all saints and for me"—not to Satan and his demons, but on behalf of members of the body of Christ.

The Site of the Warfare. The new approach to prayer territorializes not only the demons, but also the power of God. In this connection, it is particularly insightful that the apostle Paul didn't prescribe a particular *site* for prayer

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at which Christians must engage in some "prayer walks" (in neighborhoods), "praise marches" (in cities), "prayer journeys" (for certain regions), and "prayer expeditions" (to nations). On the contrary, Paul asked the Ephesians to "pray for all the saints and for me."

The fact that Paul regularly prays for people several months' journey away and requests their prayers for him (cf. Ephesians 1:17-19; 3:14-19; 6:18-20), raises questions about any supposed advantages to praying on location. "Not once does Paul pray against Artemis, the alleged territorial spirit of Ephesus. Never does he ask them to pray against the ruling spirit over Rome, from where he is likely to have written this letter. He asks merely that they pray for other Christians as he was praying for them, and that they pray for him to be bold in evangelism."²⁷

Conclusion

If ever there was time for God's people to pray, it is now. But the new approach to prayer, as taught by the spiritual warfare movement, is a deceptive ploy by the enemy to confuse and lead God's people to destruction. The way to revive our churches is not to import such questionable forms of prayer from other churches.

When the risen Christ gave specific instructions to the lethargic and inactive church of Laodicea (a symbol of God's end-time church), Christ did not ask its pastors, scholars, and members to attend some spiritual warfare seminar to learn how to overcome their lukewarm condition. When He wanted to see a revival in the church, He didn't ask a few "prayer warriors" or "prayer coordinators" to be the "generals of intercession." And when He wanted His church to be successful in its missions to unentered territories, He didn't encourage some "prayer offensives" that require "prayer walks" around some neighborhoods to "command" or "rebuke" the demons believed to be in control of those neighborhood or houses. No one was encouraged to rebuke the "demon of hypocrisy" or the "demon of materialism" that had possessed the church members. And there was no need for anyone to conduct some "anointing services" for church members, pews, microphones, and other objects to ensure the receptivity of the Gospel message.

Instead, Christ simply pleaded with the Laodicean church to "repent," urging them to buy from Him spiritual resources that are free (Revelation 3:18,19).

This is also our need today. For the real spiritual warfare is a battle over *self*—whether we shall totally surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ and allow Him to transform our lives. Shall we surrender to Christ's teaching,

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instead of inventing our own? This warfare has to do with character development, and the site at which it is being waged is our hearts.

The Christian life is a battle and a march. But the victory to be gained is not won by human power. The field of conflict is the domain of the heart. The battle which we have to fight—the greatest battle that was ever fought by man—is the surrender of self to the will of God, the yielding of the heart to the sovereignty of love. The old nature, born of blood and of the will of the flesh, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. The hereditary tendencies, the former habits, must be given up. (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 141.)

Endnotes

¹ David Powlison refers to them as "four varieties, one movement" (see his *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], pp. 32-34). For an excellent bibliography on the new approach to spiritual warfare, see Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation?* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications; and Sevenoaks, Kent: OMF, 1998), pp. 175-186.

² Charismatics were the first to popularize this new approach to spiritual warfare. This is represented in the works of Don Basham (see his best-selling book *Deliver Us From Evil* [1972]) and the ministries of individuals like Derek Prince and Benny Hinn.

³ The Non-Charismatic variety of spiritual warfare's deliverance ministry arose in the circles around Dallas Theological Seminary and Moody Bible College with authors like Mark Bubeck (*The Adversary*, 1975), Merrill Unger (*What Demons Can Do to Saints*, 1977), and Fred Dickason (*Demon Possession and the Christian*, 1987). The emphasis here is through private pastoral counseling and prayer.

⁴ The "Third Wave of the Holy Spirit" centers around Fuller Theological Seminary in its emphases on "signs and wonders," church growth, and third-world missions. Its most influential leaders and spokespersons include John Wimber (of the Association of Vineyard Fellowships), C. Peter Wagner, Charles Kraft, John White, and Wayne Grudem. Two others who also have greatly popularized the Third Wave approach to spiritual warfare are Paul Yonggi Cho pastor of the world's largest church in Seoul, South Korea) and Frank Peretti, author of popular novels such as *This Present Darkness* (1986) and *Piercing the Darkness* (1989). For more on the "Third Wave," see Gerhard F. Hasel's article "The Roots of Contemporary Worship Styles" in the present volume.

⁵ Those in this group include Neil T. Anderson (Freedom in Christ; his book *The Bondage Breaker*, 1990); Timothy M. Warner (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; his book *Spiritual Warfare: Victory over the Powers of This Dark World*, 1991); Tom White, founder of Mantle of Praise Ministries (now Frontline Ministries; his book *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, 1990, and *Breaking Strongholds: How Spiritual Warfare Sets Captives Free*); Ed Murphy (OC international; his work *The Handbook of Spiritual Warfare*, 1992); and John Dawson (Southwest U.S. Director of Youth with a Mission, *Taking Our Cities for God*, 1989, and "Seventh Time Around: Breaking Through a City's Invisible Barriers to the Gospel" in the book *Engaging the*

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Enemy: How to Fight and Defeat Territorial Spirits, ed. C. Peter Wagner, 1991).

⁶ At the 2005 General Conference session in St. Louis, Missouri, delegates will be invited to revise and adopt a 28th Fundamental Belief. The proposal to be presented at the GC session is titled "Growing in Christ." It reads as follows: "*Growing in Christ*—By His cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He Who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Instead of evil forces, the Holy Spirit now dwells within us and empowers us. Committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of past deeds and our former life with its darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, as we commune with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us sanctifies every moment and every task. (Psalms 1:1, 2; 23:4; Colossians 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18, 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Philippians 3:7-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Matthew 20:25-28; John 20:21; Galatians 5:22-25; 1 John 4:4.)"

⁷ This article is adapted from one of my 8-part digitally recorded audiocassette series. "Signs and Wonders: Satan's Deceptive Miracles and Counterfeit Revivals," available through American Cassette Ministries (1-800-233-4450; www.americancassette.org). For a thorough discussion of the Seventh-day Adventist view of spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry, see the next two chapters of this volume.

⁸ Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation?* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications; and Sevenoaks, Kent: OMF, 1998), p. 11.

⁹ "The Return of the Prosperity Gospel?" *Our Sunday Visitor* (June 24, 2001), p. 9.

¹⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Churches that Pray: How Prayer Can Revitalize Your Congregation and Break Down the Walls Between Your Church and Your Community* (Ventura, Calif: Regal, 1993). p. 137.

¹¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God's Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1992), pp. 28, 33, 101.

¹² C. Peter Wagner, "Territorial Spirits," in *Wrestling with Dark Angels: Toward a Deeper Understanding of the Supernatural Force in Spiritual Warfare*, eds. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1990), p. 77; cf. p. 81.

¹³ Mark Bubeck, *The Adversary* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), p. 106.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 150, 151.

¹⁶ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), p. 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁸ For the summary below, I am indebted to Chuck Lowe's *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, pp. 10-28. His work provides extensive documentation of the main proponents of this new approach to strategic-level spiritual warfare.

¹⁹ Paul Hiebert, "Healing and the Kingdom," in *Wonders and the World*, eds. James Coggins and Paul Hiebert (Hillsboro, Kan.: Kindred Press, 1989), p.117.

²⁰ Lowe, *Territorial Spirits*, p. 40.

²¹ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, p. 130.

²² See Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "The Unknown Truth About Pentecost," *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM*, Fall 2004, pp. 30-41.

²³ John MacArthur, Jr., *How to Meet the Enemy: Arming Yourself for Spiritual Warfare*

Prayer Warriors and Prayer Offensives

(Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1992), p. 44.

²⁴ Lowe, p. 56.

²⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, *Word Bible Commentary*, vol. 42, (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. 442, 443.

²⁶ For more on this see John MacArthur, Jr., *How to Meet the Enemy*, pp. 156-169.

²⁷ Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, p. 65.

Chapter 12

Spiritual Warfare: Past, Present, and Future

"Spiritual Warfare" and "Deliverance Ministry" and Seventh-day Adventists—Part 1

A Report of the Biblical Research Institute

[A proposed new statement of belief will be on the agenda at the church's worldwide General Conference session in July 2005 in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. This new doctrinal statement highlights the power of Christ in confronting and vanquishing demonic powers, and affirms the freedom of believers from past deeds and influences. Among other things, the proposed Fundamental Belief seeks to offer hope to those living in cultures where the fight against "evil spirits" is a daily occurrence. As the church discusses the proposed 28th Fundamental Belief and its implications, members and leaders will be benefitted by an insightful report—" 'Spiritual Warfare' and 'Deliverance Ministry' and Seventh-day Adventists"—that was approved by the General Conference's Biblical Research Institute Committee in 1983. The article that follows in this chapter is the first part of that BRICOM report. Chapter 13 of this book will present Part 2 of the report, identifying some problems in the "Deliverance Ministry."—Editor]

Introduction¹

Seventh-day Adventists believe that behind the scenes of earthly affairs, invisible, supernatural forces of good and evil are engaged in cosmic warfare for the control of every human being (Ephesians 6:12). We believe in the existence of a literal, personal Devil, now named Satan, who once was a perfect (and Heaven's highest) angel (Ezekiel 28:15). Scripture further declares that Satan experienced a moral fall, took one-third of all the holy angels with him (Revelation 12:4), and at the conclusion of that first war in Heaven he was literally, physically, ejected, eventually coming down to planet Earth (verses 7-9). Here he continues yet today, diligently waging warfare against the Kingdom of God and all that is good and worthwhile in the universe. We

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believe that today under Satan's immediate, direct control there are multitudes of evil spirits, fallen angels, demons, allied with him in this "great controversy between Christ and Satan."

We believe, further, that we are today living in the closing days of this earth's history, and that this warfare will intensify to an unprecedented degree as this ages-long conflict draws to its close (verse 12). Because these supernatural forces of good and evil operate largely outside the range of human knowledge and control, their nature and modes of operation are not always clear and understandable; yet we believe that these forces are real and personal.

We also believe that it is the inalienable right of every child of God to be free from the control of Satan (though not, of course, from his temptations) through the superior power of Jesus Christ, Who won a supreme victory over Satan at Calvary. There, by His personal and once-for-all sacrifice, He earned the right to confer upon His followers not only eternal life in the hereafter, but also freedom from the control of Satan in this present temporal existence.

A number of other Christians also believe all of the above doctrinal tenets surrounding the problem of evil in the universe, and they invitingly beckon Seventh-day Adventists to join with them actively in doing something constructive to combat the reign of Satan in this world. They claim that they have the power to cast out evil spirits, to drive back the supernatural forces of Satan's kingdom of darkness, and to dispossess him of his human prey. They say that we Adventists, too, may have this power—indeed, if we are truly genuine Christians, we will have this power, and that we may wield it as they do. Anything less, they affirm, is a virtual denial of the Christian faith once delivered to the saints.

The "deliverance" sessions they conduct are impressive, dramatic, and sensational. They appear to confront Satan and his evil angels in direct combat. They seem to have power to force demons audibly to identify themselves by name, and then they boldly order them to depart the body of their victim by the superior power in the name of Jesus Christ. And the demons seem to obey!

Now these exponents of "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry" invite us to join them in this challenging work that, say they, carries not only the authority but also the command of Scripture.

Should we go along?

There are some in the church who think we should.

There are others who are raising questions.

To raise questions at this point is not to prove oneself a skeptic, or to impugn either the sincerity or dedication of the practitioners of "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry." Nor is it a "cop-out" to escape the high risks that

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necessarily devolve upon anyone who dares to challenge Satan on his home ground.

In the same sermon in which Jesus commanded, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," He also declared that "by their fruits ye shall know them" (see Matthew 7:1,16,20). While no Christian may ever judge the character or motivation of a fellow human being, yet Christ clearly intended to convey the idea that His followers should carefully reason from cause to effect, and from effect to cause, and order their lives accordingly in a prudent fashion.

Christianity is not predicated upon the abdication of a human being's reasoning powers. On the contrary, it places a premium upon their correct functioning—but always within the framework of faith and based upon inspired writings. Christianity, indeed, sanctifies reason and intellect, placing them upon vantage ground, all the while subordinating them to the objective control of the Word of God.

In "deliverance ministry," as it is variously practiced at the present time by many of its enthusiastic advocates, there are a number of features that give cause for serious concern, that raise a danger signal, that sound a warning for caution. In (a) the philosophy that undergirds the movement, and in (b) the manner in which it is often practiced (interestingly, the methodology is often in a state of flux), the committee finds that which causes it to take a second look—especially in view of certain pertinent Scriptures and rather straightforward, clear-cut statements from the writings of Ellen G. White which our church holds, respectfully, to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. (For example, our church has been warned that in the very last days just such challenges to the miraculous "will bring Seventh-day Adventists to the test.")³

It is, therefore, neither unkind nor unfair to draw back a moment to raise some probing, penetrating questions and to seek frank answers for such, to "test the spirits" by yardsticks provided by inspired writings. It is an area too important to trifle with, for mistakes here may affect the destiny not only of the afflicted but also the one who seeks to bring him relief.

I. Historical Backgrounds: Past, Present, Future

It is impossible today to understand adequately phenomena in "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry" without first taking into account the data available to us from the times of the Bible and the subsequent development of the post-New Testament Christian Church. Since prophecy has been defined by one writer as "history written in advance," it will not be inappropriate to include here a survey of instruction and counsel from Scripture and the pen of

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Ellen White concerning what the present and future may hold for God's people just before Jesus returns.

A. The Old and Intertestamentary Periods

The Mesopotamian-Canaanite world out of which the Old Testament emerged was extremely conscious of the existence of malignant spirits, and the Hebrew prophets attested in their writings to this fundamental reality even in their own culture.

By way of contrast, however, demonology, while certainly present among the Hebrews, still existed in inchoate form in Old Testament times, at least as far as the Inspired Record attests. While there are in its pages undeniable evidences of what today we might speak of as demonic possession, there is not one single clear-cut instance of "exorcism" (the expulsion of evil spirits from persons and/or places—an especially well-known phenomenon in Sumero-Akkadian civilizations) being practiced among the Jews of Old Testament times.

Why is this so? If demons were present, why were no steps taken for their expulsion? One answer suggested by scholars is that (Jehovah) is, from beginning to end, seen as so fully in control of all situations and circumstances that the evil spirits are always seen as completely under the regulation and control of Jehovah, thus their preemptive activity is totally precluded. The problem of demonology, as far as the world of the Hebrews of antiquity is concerned, is therefore merely a peripheral one, completely overshadowed by the commanding presence and total authority of Jehovah.

A crucial distinction needs to be recognized at this point between the attitude toward the existence of demons by the Jews and that of their non-Hebrew neighbors. The Babylonians, for example, saw every illness as traceable to the work of demons (some Christians today would concur in this view). The Israelites, however, recognized that although demons indeed might cause illness, not every such manifestation is properly linked to their direct activity.

The typical non-Hebrew dweller in Mesopotamia lived his life constantly in fear and danger of evil spirits. Amulets were widely favored to ward off such encounters, but the chief recourse for protection was found in the form of ceremonies of incantation, administered by a professional priest/exorcist. In the ceremony (not unlike the practice of some in "deliverance ministry" today) the officiating priest sought to discover which demon or demons were troubling the afflicted, the better to conduct successfully the appropriate required ceremony. The ritual not only utilized certain incantation rites but also employed specific verbal formulae blurred magic, religion, and disease.

There is a remarkable—and distressing—similarity between these pagan

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Sumero-Akkadian rituals and those sometimes employed modern "Christian" practitioners of "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry"—a concern to which we will return again and again.

Although the incantation rituals achieved great popularity in ancient Mesopotamia, there is, by way of stark contrast, a total absence of such rites in the official practices recorded among the Hebrews. Indeed, their Old Testament Scriptures inveighed heavily against the practice of magic, incantation, and exorcistic liturgies.

As the demonology of the intertestamental period developed, these evil spirits were frequently identified or associated with dispositions such as fornication or greed, an identification now revived and increasingly witnessed among believers in "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry"—a cause of growing concern among many.

In this milieu it generally came to be accepted that every kind of illness, from insanity down to lesser afflictions, was due to the immediate presence and activity of malevolent spirits. Demons came to be seen as also being capable of possessing places and events as well as people. And thus it was that ritual exorcism, once the exclusive preserve of the pagan dwellers of Mesopotamia and totally unknown in the Judaism of Biblical times, now becomes commonplace along the Hebrews.

Partly perhaps because of their contact with Persian influences, the Jews in intertestamental times signaled a shift in their perception of reality. Until now, demons had largely been associated with physical evil; now they become attached to ethical evil as well. This ethical opposition to God and His kingdom transforms demons into devils, and places them under the severest censure.

Thus, by the time we reach the Christian era of the first century A.D. we find the marked presence of demonology in the New Testament where Jesus and His disciples are frequently portrayed as in conflict with demonic forces. And there is a growing interest with things demonic.

To recapitulate, the similarity between the ancient Near Eastern exorcistic rituals and that practiced today by many practitioners of "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry" tends to give pause to the objective Christian observer of the contemporary scene, especially in view of the absence of such rituals from the Old Testament (and, as we will note subsequently, below, basically from the New Testament as well).

The absence of exorcistic ritual from the Old Testament points to the power of Yahweh over all evil. This focus on the salvation of God points us away from excessive preoccupation with the demonic.

And the relationship between the use of demonic terminology to charac-

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terize disease, increasingly popular in certain "deliverance" circles today, may merely reflect an oversensitiveness and superstitious conscience. It, unfortunately, goes beyond the Biblical data to label uncritically all or most disease as directly caused by Satan.

B. The New Testament Period

The New Testament writings present the perplexing and distressing picture of demonic forces not only impinging upon but also ruling over creaturely existence. The influence of these forces is portrayed throughout the New Testament, but specific case examples of demon possession and deliverance of Satan's captives are confined to the Gospels and Acts. (Concern with demonic possession and deliverance is, of course, present elsewhere in the New Testament—see Colossians and 1 Peter, for example.) We will now attempt to summarize the data from these five books.

Although the distinction probably is not significant (since both Satan and his subordinate fallen angels have the same objectives and utilize much the same *modus operandi*), it may yet be interesting to note that although Satan is viewed as behind and superior to all demonic forces, except in the case of Judas, in the New Testament Satan himself is never spoken of as "possessing" an individual. Rather, he is pictured as the instigator of moral evil, the one who tempts weakened mortals to sin. Contrarily, demons or spirits are described as the agencies that possess the bodies (physical illness) or minds (mental illness) of people, but not as the powers that tempt persons to sin.

There seems to be some evidence that people became possessed because they were especially sinful (Judas is one example that quickly comes to mind). While possession and special sinfulness may go hand in hand (Mary Magdalene may be a good case in point), in terms of the data of the New Testament itself, possession appears to be related specifically to physical and mental illness, rather than to be linked with doing sinful deeds.

With regard to possession and illness, there appears to be no precise demarcation made in the New Testament between demon possession and illness caused by other factors. Sometimes people are pictured as ill with various diseases without any mention being made of possession; at other times the same diseases are ascribed to possession. In any case, from the New Testament point of view, while not all illness is due (or even is pictured as being due) to possession, the supernatural power of evil is seen as behind all illness.

The most notable feature of possession is the substitution of the human self, ego, or personality by an alien spiritual power. This is seen especially in cases where the demons speak through the vocal chords of the demonized.

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Concerning the characteristics of the demons, the following are especially notable:

1. The Gospels imply degrees of badness among the evil spirits.
2. They also correspondingly portray degrees of demon possession.
3. The demons exhibit supernatural knowledge of the identity of Jesus and the fact of their own judgment and destruction.
4. The methodology by which the demons are dispossessed of their human prey is spelled out clearly in Scripture: They are expelled by a simple, short, authoritative word of command. Interestingly, Jesus is nowhere in the Gospels called an "exorcist." And when He casts out demons there are never any long, drawn-out, time-consuming exercises. Prayer is mentioned in connection with deliverance from demons only in one instance where the nature of the possession appears to be exceptionally severe.

Though the power to cast out demons was indeed conferred on Christ's disciples by the Lord, the New Testament—in terms of the data it supplies—is very reserved about this power being given, as far as including all people at all times.

The act and task of demon deliverance must be understood in the Scriptures in the overall understanding of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, and the infilling of Christ's Spirit. Here it finds its ultimate significance.

There are two elements common to deliverance from demons in the Gospel and Acts accounts: (a) the mention of Jesus' name, and (b) the exercise of faith. Prayer and fasting (mentioned in only one account) are perhaps to be viewed under the broad heading of the exercise of faith. Also, certain strange (to us) acts (touching the hem of a garment, praying over handkerchiefs or aprons, standing in Peter's shadow, et cetera,) probably have more to do ultimately with the exercise of faith in Jesus than with any other factor.

The casting out of demons was not an end in itself; the vacuum left by the departing devils must be filled by positive good—God's presence—lest the demons return to an empty place and make it worse than it was before. And the casting out of demons can only be properly understood in the overall context of the motif of the Kingdom of God—and His kingdom in men's hearts.

It appears that the Scriptures are concerned lest potentially sensationalistic phenomena be overly magnified. In the case of "speaking in tongues" it is implicitly permitted, but tightly regulated, and placed last in all of the catalogues of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

C. The Post-New Testament Period

The earliest evidence of what might be called a Christian rite of exorcism is found in the middle of the third century (about the year A.D. 250). Here we

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discover the practice of a ritual conducted in conjunction with baptism. It appeared to signify the change that the baptismal candidate was making, withdrawing his prior allegiance to the realm of Satan and the demons and placing it now with the realm of Christ.

It is important that we do not confuse this kind of "exorcism" with the kind exhibited in cases where demons are believed to have taken possession of individuals and are summarily expelled. During medieval times farfetched tales of wonders of various sorts were widespread and prevalent, but it is not until the last Middle Ages that there is much reliable evidence demonstrating that much attention was given by Christians to what we today speak of as "exorcism." As a matter of fact, it appears that what little efforts at exorcism were made at this time seem more to be devoted to the matter of how to identify witches than anything else.

The formal ritual in conjunction with baptism, mentioned above, was evidently practiced generally throughout the Middle Ages in connection with a somewhat elaborate rite (which rite was condensed in the *Rituale Romanum* of A.D. 1614).

Interestingly, an abbreviated form of this rite was also published in the earliest Lutheran service books. But Calvinists shunned this sort of practice, and the Lutherans themselves generally came to abandon it as well.

Perhaps most striking (and significant) for us today is the evidence from history in the early modern period (about A.D. 1600). Exorcists in England, southwest Germany, and Italy were then gaining some degree of notoriety. The ecclesiastical authorities were usually found to be questioning the procedures and/or validity of the exorcisms that were purportedly being conducted, and ecclesiastical trials of the would-be exorcists were the usual consequence for such sensationalists.

One especially striking case of the period involved an Italian monk who produced a flurry of excitement by his activity ostensibly in casting out demons. His colleagues and ecclesiastical superiors were amazed and puzzled by his success in view of the very scandalous life he was then living!

A relatively successful exorcism, therefore, is not necessarily evidence that the power of God has truly been at work.

A fact noted at this point in history has also been observed by many in more recent times: Whereas in places where devils had not previously been known to be prevalent prior to the arrival of this monk-exorcist, all manner of them seemed to crop up when he came to town.

Until the fairly recent upsurge of interest in exorcism developed, neither Roman Catholic nor Protestant Christian bodies have given much attention to

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the phenomenon of exorcism, at least in Western Europe and in North America. As recently as 1961 one Catholic authority could declare that exorcism was "rarely necessary in civilized lands; but foreign missionaries are sometimes called on to use it." (Protestants, generally, have tended for the most part to hold the same view.)

D. Today and Tomorrow

Inspiration has told us that the period of Christ's personal ministry among men was the time of greatest activity for the forces of the kingdom of darkness. For ages Satan with his evil angels had been seeking to control the bodies and the souls of men, to bring upon them sin and suffering; then he had charged all this misery upon God. Jesus was revealing to men the character of God. He was breaking Satan's power, and setting his captives free. New life and love and power from Heaven were moving upon the hearts of men, and the prince of evil was aroused to contend for the supremacy of his kingdom. Satan summoned all his forces, and at every step contested the work of Christ.³

Then, without a break, the Lord looks down to the closing scenes of this earth's history, and prompts His special messenger to add these words full of significance to us who live today:

So it will be in the great final conflict of the controversy between righteousness and sin. While new life and light and power are descending from on high upon the disciples of Christ [possibly a reference to the outpouring of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit prior to the close of human probation], a new life is springing up from beneath, and energizing the agencies of Satan. Intensity is taking possession of every earthly element. With a subtlety gained through centuries of conflict, the prince of evil works under a disguise.⁴

This same writer tells us, further, that it is indeed "important" for us to understand Satan's snares, that we may escape them today. In his "last campaign," Satan will move upon "some deceived souls" to advocate the idea that he does not really exist as a personal entity.⁵

Indeed, one of his snares is the "subtle," "mischievous," and "fast-spreading" "error" that "Satan has no existence as a personal being; that the name is used in Scripture merely to represent men's evil thoughts and desires"⁶—merely a rhetorical device to personify evil. And this prediction, made more than a century ago, is more than amply fulfilled today by modern humanism.

Whatever the popular concept may be today, the testimony of the Bible is

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that Jesus believed in a personal Devil. Immediately upon entering into His earthly ministry, Christ was confronted by such a personage who brought nearly overwhelming temptations to Him. They conversed together (not, however, over the person of a possessed human being!), and this confrontation was real (see Matthew 4:1-11).

Then, as now, Satan worked "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness" in those who "received not the love of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). God permits the wicked, who deliberately choose evil, to "believe a lie" through the "strong delusions" which Satan increasingly will bring as the end of time approaches (verse 11).

And in the very last days, we are told, Satan will work with "all power and signs and lying wonders" (verse 9); even the "very elect" will be in grave danger of this deception. No less than four times in the end-time prophecy of Matthew 24 does Jesus warn of deception and urge alertness (verses 4, 5, 11, 24). And at the last Satan will work dramatically, especially in performing genuine miraculous manifestations to carry the day (Revelation 13:13, 14; 16:13, 14), ultimately producing that "crowning" deception—the impersonation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 11:14)⁷

One of the chief deceptions Satan instituted during medieval times was the palming off upon a gullible, unsuspecting public the notion that instead of his being a fallen angel of light, Satan was, instead, a horrible red-skinned creature with animal-like horns; cloven hoofs; wolf-like ears; scaly, fish-like skin; possessed of an animal-like tail with a spike at its tip; who carried a spear-like trident.

Today most people (at least in Western culture) merely laugh at such a characterization. And that suits Satan's purposes well—for men seldom fear that at which they can laugh. Furthermore, they will tend to ignore something that they don't really believe exists.⁸

They didn't laugh at Satan in medieval times; they feared him. And in many primitive societies today men still greatly fear a literal, personal devil. And this, too, suits Satan's purposes well; for where he can paralyze with fear, there he can win, too.

The story of Jesus' casting out a host of demons from the two men of Gadara (Mark 5:1-20) provides five facts about the existence and activity of Satan and his evil angels, evidence that we need today to counterattack his deception that he and his cohorts do not have a personal existence:

1. Their reality. They are real personalities. On this singular occasion, Jesus entered into a conversation with them (which, incidentally, they initiated).
2. Their number. They declared, in answer to Christ's demand that they

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identify themselves, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (verse 9). In Christ's day a Roman legion might number somewhere between three and five thousand soldiers.

3. Their organization. Like the Roman legions, "Satan's hosts . . . are marshaled in companies, and the single company to which these demons belonged numbered no less than a legion."

4. Their supernatural power. The madmen broke the chains restraining them; and the swine (into which the demons were subsequently cast) were swept down a cliff to their destruction in the sea below.

5. Their malignity. The bleeding, disfigured bodies and distracted minds of the two Gadarenes well illustrate what Satan will do when given an opportunity to "possess" the bodies and minds of men.

Satan, then, is a real, personal being.

Does that mean that everything that is strange and bizarre in our world today is evidence of the direct operation of Satan and his demons? Should we not battle against these personal attacks by the enemy of all souls?

Before we can address that question directly, it may prove helpful to make three crucial distinctions, the better to examine their program intelligently and to decide whether it meets the criteria of inspiration, or is weighed in the balances and found wanting.

II. Three Crucial Distinctions

Before any useful assessment of the validity and helpfulness of the program of "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry," as it is generally beginning to be practiced among us, can be made, some basic rules must be formulated. And the drawing of three basic distinctions will help us toward that goal.

A. Avoiding an "Either-Or" Mentality

One feature in "deliverance ministry," as it is popularly being practiced today, which disturbs an increasingly large number of observers, is the tendency to view this present life in the starkest of simplistic terms—to see either a demon or a good angel involved, immediately, in every human decision and activity.

The informed Christian, we believe, will avoid two equally serious but opposite extremes as he/she relates to baffling phenomena that appear to be of supernatural origin:

1. A "Satan-made-me-do-it" mentality, in which Satan is identified as the immediate cause of every misfortune and every sinful deed; or

2. A virtual denial of the existence of Satan's "supernatural" operation in

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our otherwise "natural" world.

Either position is unrealistic, and is fraught with peril. Let us note why.

While we believe that ultimately all evil is traceable to Satan, the originator of sin, we do not believe that Satan or his evil angels are always directly responsible for every deviation from what we have come to understand as "normal" in human experience. Many illnesses, for instance, whether physical or mental, are simply the result of genetic inheritance, or living in a world of sin, or simply the natural consequences of our disobedience to God-given laws of health and well-being.

Having said that, we do not believe that this fact rules out the possibility of direct involvement of evil spirits in influencing human affairs and behavior. Indeed, in some circumstances supernatural entities very clearly are involved. There is a Devil—as we have already declared—and he "must not be allowed to get the better of us: we know his devices all too well" (2 Corinthians 2:11, New English Bible).

It also appears that the father of lies in some cases operates supernaturally by simulating "natural" diseases so closely as to render them almost indistinguishable from ordinary diseases. Because of these considerations it behooves each of us to exercise extreme caution and prudence in dealing with cases of alleged demon possession.

And there are, certainly, genuine cases of demonic control or harassment. Evil angels, because of their superior intelligence, powers, and invisibility, obviously have a tremendous advantage over human beings. The only way in which they can be defeated is by the application of the Word of God and the supernatural forces of the Holy Spirit and holy angels.

It is still necessary, though, to recognize a cogent point made by a recent contemporary writer¹⁰ who (borrowing an expression from the Book of Common Prayer of the Protestant Episcopal Church)¹¹ provides us with a most helpful insight into the fact that the Christian is the target of three separate (but often coordinated) forces waging war against him: (a) the "flesh," (b) the "world," and (c) the "Devil."

Now only in the last of these three categories is Satan seen as directly operative (although it is readily conceded that every bad thing ultimately comes from Satan, even as "every good gift and perfect gift" ultimately comes "from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" [James 1:17]).

The apostle (in this same passage, three verses earlier) is here indicating that at least some of the temptations that mankind faces arise merely when a man is "drawn away of his own lust [desire] and [is] enticed" (verse 14).

What we are saying here is simply this: Every son or daughter of Adam

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has a fallen nature because of the moral "Fall" of our first parents in Eden (1 Corinthians 15:22). And that fallen nature makes it hard for us to do good, and easy for us to do evil (Jeremiah 13:12). This inherited sinful nature is opposed to God's program for mankind, and each human being has inherited a basic predisposition (or bias, or "bent") to sin (Romans 8:7). And one of the most common New Testament words to identify this fallen nature of man is the word "flesh" (Romans 7:5, 18; 8:3, 8, et cetera).

Used in this particular way (and it should be noted in passing that "flesh" is used perhaps a dozen ways in Scripture), "flesh" here signifies in the words of Alexander Cruden, "the whole corruption and depravity of our nature."¹²

This, then, is the struggle confronting the Christian quite apart from the direct immediate temptation from Satan or his evil angels that is a continuing fact of life with which we must deal. Furthermore, Galatians 5:16-21 identifies at least 17 specific manifestations of the "flesh" in which we humans sin quite apart from any immediate external temptation from satanic agencies, quite simply and only because we have a fallen, sinful nature that always predisposes us to commit these sins.

Next, one use of the term "world" refers to society and an environment totally pagan and unremittingly antagonistic and hostile to the living of the committed Christian life. It is geared to reinforce our internal tendencies toward evil through external stimuli.

In the New Testament the Greek word *cosmos* is often translated as "world," and in this sense it "often stands for the ungodly . . . or for worldly interests that lead one away from God."¹³ Thus the apostle John urges us to

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever (1 John 2:15-17).

In this restrictive sense, "world," then, represents a society at large, and individuals in particular, who are spiritually unrenewed and unregenerated. In John 15:18 the wicked are called the "world" because they relish and savor nothing but worldly things, and pursue nothing but worldly designs.¹⁴

Ultimately this enemy-"world" is a system of social, economic, and religious philosophies and practices expressed through organizations and human personalities. But while Satan is ultimately the father-creator of this "world"

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complex, it may yet nevertheless operate against a Christian quite apart from the direct intervention of Satan and/or his evil angels at the personal, individual level.

Finally, evil spirits—devils—most certainly do come in person to tempt (Ephesians 6:12; 1 Timothy 4:1) and to make attractive to each of us both sins of commission (1 John 3:4) and sins of omission (James 4:17). They also taunt and torment (Luke 8:29; Matthew 17:15; Mark 1:26). And they most certainly must be reckoned with. But the whole point being made here is this: Evil spirits are not always the immediate cause of every human sin.

Contrarily, while it is dangerous (because it is misleading) to blame Satan as the immediately predisposing cause of every sin that we commit, it is equally dangerous to deny (as do secular humanists and some Christians) that an actual being named Satan causes any sin. And today there are many who deny any supernatural causation of undesirable behavior or attitudes. Yet Seventh-day Adventists are assured, by an inspired writer, "It is Satan's special device to lead man into sin."¹⁵

B. Harassment Versus Possession

A second crucial distinction that the Christian will wish to make is in the area of situations where Satan and his evil angels are admittedly active. The Christian will wish to differentiate between the external harassment of demons (which is the universal experience of us all) and satanic possession or control (which is the experience of a comparatively much smaller group of human beings). (By the term "possession" we here wish to designate control of human neurology and physiology—the control of an individual's higher centers, central nervous system, individual organs of the body, et cetera.)

Ellen White has written extensively upon the "Agency of Evil Spirits"¹⁶ and "The Power of Satan."¹⁷ In the latter presentation she makes a very useful and significant distinction between (a) Satan going "to the extent of his power to harass, tempt, and mislead God's people," on the one hand, and (b) situations in which individuals had "lost control of themselves, and Satan made them do that which they detested."¹⁸

Referring to this latter species of spiritualistic phenomena, Mrs. White goes on to add: "It comes so direct from his satanic majesty, that he claims the right to control all who have to do with it, for they have ventured upon forbidden ground, and have forfeited the protection of their Maker."¹⁹

Thus, "Satan holds them by his power, and is not willing to let them go free. He knows that they are surely his while he has them under his special control."²⁰ Mrs. White concludes by describing in detail the only way out for such

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"possessed" souls.

Every one of us has, at one time or another, been "harassed, tempted, misled" by Satan. But certainly not every one of us has been "possessed"—that is, under the total control of Satan or his angels. For this reason, it is important that those who confront Satan and his angels in any kind of ministry of deliverance determine first (by earnest prayer and heart searching, subjectively, and a careful examination of the victim, objectively) whether the individual seemingly possessed is simply manifesting the symptoms of a natural illness (epilepsy, for example) which might be a form of mere harassment, or whether the individual is in fact subject to direct demonic control.

It would be unspeakably cruel (for at least three reasons) to suggest to an emotionally disturbed or sin-laden person, in the absence of clearly coercive evidence, that he/she were "possessed" when, in fact, such a person was not demon-controlled:

(1) It would only serve to make the suffering of a sensitive person more keen—and unnecessarily so. (2) It could, unintentionally, provide for an unstable person an excuse in evading personal responsibility and accountability for his/her actions and problems (not only thereby reinforcing deviant behavior but also retarding the chance for recovery). (3) It might serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy, actually operating in the form of hypnotic suggestion, weakening the resistance of the individual and making him/her subsequently more susceptible to actual possession!

We recognize that often it may be difficult (if not impossible) to determine whether an individual is possessed, or merely the victim of demonic harassment. But the important thing to remember under all circumstances is that importunate prayer is always appropriate in all situations and at all times. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Indeed, only two verses earlier James asks,

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him (verses 14, 15).

There is a distinct danger that Christians may make an invalid dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural. God and Satan are interacting in all that goes on in the world, and with all of the processes that are operating therein. We must be sensitive to the operation of these powers and recognize that

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supernatural forces—both good and evil—frequently operate in many subtle, unnoticed ways, not merely in the spectacular.

More important, we do well to remember that any given experience or phenomenon is not necessarily supernatural or satanic. God often produces supernatural phenomena (miracles, for instance). Further, evil often expresses itself in very naturalistic ways. Much can be done for disturbed persons through professional therapy (as will be noted further, below). True religion, true psychiatry, and true psychology are not in opposition to one another.

C. Natural Illness or Supernatural Possession?

It follows, then, that a third and very necessary distinction needs to be made between "natural" mental illness on the one hand, and supernatural demon possession on the other (although we do recognize that sometimes natural mental illness may provide both the climate and occasion for Satan to work more directly).

Many sincere Christians, unfamiliar with human physiology, are greatly surprised to discover that certain of the more gross, abnormal, bizarre forms of behavior often superficially associated with "possession" are often also present in certain kinds of mental illness in which demon possession does not appear to be a factor. We speak of such things as: foaming at the mouth; noisy, obscene, blasphemous utterances in unnatural, altered (and often guttural) vocal registers, or shrill, spine-chilling screams; falling into trancelike states; and violent bodily seizures in which the unfortunate victim may suddenly be thrown to the floor, or violently against walls or furniture. All of these symptoms, sometimes seen in genuine cases of demon possession, are also common responses of victims of various "natural" mental disorders. Thus, the ignorance an individual concerning the nature and operation of nature's laws could (and often does) result in that person's seeking to explain these phenomena by means of the spirit world, and thus finding demons where none exist.

(Perhaps at this point it is also worth noting the contrary truth: Some individuals who are genuinely "possessed" may exhibit perfectly normal, natural behavior—and thus are enabled to do Satan's bidding all the more effectively.)

We quickly grant that all mental (as well as physical) illness is a by-product of sin, and may be said, in the ultimate sense, to be caused by Satan. But a knowledge of certain forms of mental illness is extremely helpful, because apparently some mental illnesses are primarily caused by biochemical, environmental, genetic factors; abuses of alcohol and/or other drugs; and simply physical illness. (Again, in some instances, Satan may also become involved

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more directly.)

Unquestionably some mental illness is a genuine manifestation of direct demonic control of human neurology and physiology. But because there is no evidence that all mental illness involves demonic possession, it is crucially important that those who venture to grapple with the phenomenon of demon possession should, if possible, first have an intelligent awareness of the many and varied determinants of normal and abnormal perceptions, auditory and visual hallucinations, normal and anomalous physical sensations, speech mechanisms, emotional experiences, and thought processes before attempting to deliver a victim believed to be demon-possessed.

In actual practice, interestingly, there are comparatively few conclusive, telltale evidences of supernatural activity in cases where demon possession is suspected. Even the following four evidences may at times be suspect:

1. *Clairvoyance.* The revealing of hidden secrets of private individuals, whether present or not (and often revelations of the secret sins of the one attempting deliverance ministry)—information probably not known by any other human being.

2. *Levitation.* The suspension of persons or objects in midair without any natural, physical support.

3. *Apparition.* The materializing of ephemeral, spiritualistic, ghost-like beings.²¹

4. *"Tongues-speaking."* The utterance of foreign languages without the individual's prior study of such languages. In the book of Acts the three instances of "speaking in tongues" are all manifestations of their speaking established contemporaneous languages foreign to the apostles and never studied by them beforehand. However, Satan can counterfeit this legitimate gift of the Holy Spirit, and probably the context of any given manifestation must aid in determining whether it is from God or from Satan. If, for example, the speaking of recognizable foreign languages never previously studied is found in a situation involving gross bodily contortions and other highly repulsive behavioral characteristics, the phenomenon probably is not of God, but of Satan.

If any of these four factors is present in any given phenomena, there may be a strong presumption in favor of the presence of demon possession.

There is a place, we feel, for ministry to the mentally ill by the trained Christian psychiatrist or psychologist. Ellen White once wrote despairingly of parents who took their children to fraudulent faith healers "instead of trusting in the power of the living God and the skill of well-qualified physicians."²²

One wonders if Ellen White were alive today if she would not broaden the cat-

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egory of "well-qualified physicians" to include psychiatrists and psychologists.)

Mrs. White also wrote, in 1908, to a husband and wife who were actively involved allegedly in casting out demons, and her inspired counsel is germane to this consideration.

In vision Mrs. White observed Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Mackin "making some sad mistakes" in their labor for Christ. In their personal study of the Scriptures and of Mrs. White's writings these Seventh-day Adventists had come to "wrong conclusions." She therefore sounded a warning concerning their present activities, for "the Lord's work would be greatly misunderstood if you should continue to labor as you have begun." As a consequence of their "false interpretation" of inspired writings, the Mackins apparently had sought to carry on what Ellen White described as a "strange work" that included efforts at exorcism of alleged demons. And she wrote them earnestly:

You have even supposed that power is given you to cast out devils. Through your influence over the human mind men and women are led to believe that they are possessed of devils, and that the Lord has appointed you as His agents for casting out these evil spirits.²³

This activity, she went on to warn them, will "endanger not only your own souls but the souls of many others," because the Mackins were using Scripture coupled with Mrs. White's writings "to vouch for the genuineness" of their messages and activities. In claiming their authority from Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy writings, Mrs. White unequivocally declared to them. "You are deceived." She characterized their work as "incorrect,... inconsistent and fanatical," which as a consequence made "twentyfold harder" the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church "in acquainting the people with the truths of the third angel's message."

And in a message to the churches in California, warning them of the "strange work" of the Mackins, Mrs. White declared unequivocally:

I was shown that it was not the Spirit of the Lord that was inspiring Brother and Sister L [the Mackins], but the same spirit of fanaticism that is ever seeking entrance into the remnant church. Their application of Scripture to their peculiar exercises is Scripture misapplied. The work of declaring persons possessed of the Devil, and then praying with them and pretending to cast out the evil spirits, is fanaticism which will bring into disrepute any church which sanctions such work.²⁴

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Even more to the point are these next solemn and impressive words of Mrs. White that perhaps have a special application to misguided souls attempting "deliverance ministry" as it is commonly perceived and practiced today: "We are none of us to seek to cast out devils, lest we ourselves be cast out."²⁵

What conclusions may reasonably be inferred from these two directives from one given Heaven-inspired messages for the remnant church today?

1. Obviously not every person who appears to be demon-possessed is in fact demon-possessed.

2. Not every Christian who names the name of Christ is called upon by God to engage in the work of casting out evil spirits. (This point is interesting, if for no other reason than the fact that many who are engaged in contemporary "deliverance ministry" claim that this power to cast out demons is the God-given birthright of every Christian, whether minister or layman; and the failure to exercise it is a virtual denial of the Christian faith.)

3. While there are situations that may come to our attention in which it is appropriate, through importunate prayer, to call upon divine aid to expel evil spirits, none should presumptuously go out of his/her way in seeking to confront these evil agencies, lest unwittingly they go in their own armor and be defeated by the Devil. For even if one appears to succeed in casting out demons, it is entirely possible that the prince of evil will triumph at the last.

4. To attempt to cast out a demon when none, in fact, is present, is potentially harmful physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to both the "victim" and to the Christian leader, and renders a disservice to the cause of God that actually could retard its progress.

[The next chapter of this book will present Part 2 of the BRICOM report, highlighting some problems in "Deliverance Ministry" and how we can pray for those afflicted by evil spirits.—Editor]

Endnotes

²⁵ "Spiritual Warfare' and 'Deliverance Ministry' and Seventh-day Adventists," A Report of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Washington, D.C., 20012, May 1983. W. Richard Lesher (then Director of the Biblical Research Institute) wrote the foreword to the report. Lesher sums up the findings of the BRICOM: "The committee noted two extreme views prevalent within Christendom today: (1) the tendency to see the immediate presence and activity of evil spirits as the predisposing cause of every individual tragedy of human experience, and (2) the tendency to find purely naturalistic explanations and

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solutions for all instances of mental and emotional illness and abnormal behavior. While the committee felt that the Scriptures and the writings of Mrs. White clearly point to the reality of the demonic and to the legitimacy of counseling and importunate prayer to bring freedom and relief to victims of Satan's influence, it also recognized that these same inspired sources sound a warning against the dangers inherent in misapplication, misuse, and mishandling of this kind of ministry. Indeed, the committee felt that in certain instances brought to its attention misuse (if not malpractice) has occurred, a misuse which has proven dangerous to the spiritual, physical, and/or emotional well-being of the individual whose healing was sought. This cautious stance recognizes that the threefold message of Revelation 14—not the casting out of demons—is yet today the *raison d'être* of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The committee's report, which is intended to be educative rather than legislative, is presented here for the reader's serious study in this day when the counsel of the apostle Paul to the Christians at Ephesus was never more timely [quoting Ephesians 6:10-13].² The entire document can be found at the following Web sites: www.greatcontroversy.org/documents/papers/brispar.html and www.sdnet.org/atis-sue/warfare/bri.html.

² *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 53 (hereafter indicated as 2SM). See also pp. 48-55. Unless otherwise indicated, all sources are found in the writings of Ellen G. White.

³ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 257 (hereafter abbreviated as DA).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 341 (hereafter abbreviated as IT, 2T, etc.).

⁶ *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, p. 524 (hereafter abbreviated as GC).

⁷ See also *ibid.*, pp. 624, 625.

⁸ See IT 295 and GC 516.

⁹ GC 514.

¹⁰ Mark I. Bubeck, *The Adversary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975).

¹¹ "The Litany," p. 24.

¹² *Cruden's Dictionary of Bible Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 110.

¹³ Article "World," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., p. 1183 (1st ed., pp. 1152, 1153).

¹⁴ Cruden, p. 380.

¹⁵ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 156 (emphasis supplied).

¹⁶ GC 511-517.

¹⁷ IT 341-347.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 341, 343 (emphasis supplied).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 343 (emphasis supplied).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ If only one person sees the ghost-like form, it may well be merely an hallucination. However, if several individuals see it, there exists the stronger probability of its being a spiritualistic manifestation.

²² *Prophets and Kings*, p. 211.

²³ 2SM 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46. For background on this singular case, see "The Ralph Mackin Story" in *Review and Herald*, August 10, 17, and 24, 1972; republished in a White Estate shelf document, "Charismatic Experiences in Early Seventh-day Adventist History."

²⁵ Ellen G. White Letter 96, 1900, cited in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13, p. 324 (emphasis supplied).

Chapter 13

"Deliverance Ministries": Another Look

"Spiritual Warfare" and "Deliverance Ministry"
and Seventh-day Adventists—Part 2

A Report of the Biblical Research Institute

[This chapter highlights some of the problems in "deliverance ministry" and how we can pray for those afflicted by evil spirits. The chapter is Part II of the insightful report—"Spiritual Warfare" and 'Deliverance Ministry' and Seventh-day Adventists"—that was approved by the General Conference's Biblical Research Institute Committee (BRICOM) in 1983. See the previous chapter for Part I.—Editor }

III. Problems in "Deliverance Ministry"

While recognizing the existence of genuine cases of demon possession and the need of relief for the oppressed victims of Satan's control, the [BRICOM] committee nevertheless felt unable to endorse "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry" as it is presently being practiced in various circles (including some among Adventists).

There are problems with some of the philosophical underpinnings of the contemporary "deliverance ministry," and these have been examined to some extent in the previous section of this report. The committee also viewed with deep concern some of the practices characteristic of this specialized ministry that it deemed potentially harmful and even dangerous. To these we will now address ourselves.

A. Misuse of the Concept of "Priesthood of All Believers" and Importunate Prayer

Central to the philosophy undergirding "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry" as it is presently practiced in many places is the concept of the

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"priesthood of all believers" and the corollary of importunate prayer.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* defines the "priesthood of all believers" as "the concept that every person can approach God directly, without the services of an intermediary human priesthood," and identifies it, rightly, as "one of the fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation." As such, "it is a logical corollary of belief in salvation by faith alone."

The concluding paragraph in this brief sketch significantly points out how Seventh-day Adventists, in contradistinction to other Protestants (particularly certain evangelicals) see the implications of the doctrine. SDAs share with Protestants generally the concept of the priesthood of all believers. But whereas Luther, for instance, stressed the idea of the universal priesthood of man, SDAs emphasize the priesthood of Christ, to Whom man may come directly.³

Some Christians tend to amplify the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers somewhat as follows: the father is priest of his household. The believer is priest to the nonbeliever. As such, the believer may serve as a latter-day Levitical priest and take a man's "offering" (or the man himself) and present it to the Lord. Thus the "priest" thereby assumes the weight of responsibility for someone else's behavior and his/her relationship to the Lord.

Adventists have perhaps seen the doctrine in slightly different terms. While some hold (perhaps borrowing an idea from Roman Catholicism) that a Christian may come to God only through the intermediation of a human priest, who brings the supplicant grace and salvation through the sacraments of the church, Adventists believe that the practicing Christian does not need a human priest (or Mary) in order to come directly before the throne of grace to present his/her needs directly to God through Jesus, our heavenly High Priest. We believe we certainly may pray for others with problems, but by so doing we do not become their priest; and in so doing we do not assume responsibility on their behalf.

Tied closely to one's view of the priesthood of all believers is one's view of the nature and purpose of "intercessory prayer." The "deliverance ministry" adherents see one of the main purposes of intercessory prayer as being a vehicle by means of which the individual Christian may "stand in the place of" the person afflicted (and even possessed) by Satan. Thus, as "priest," he stands as an intermediary between the victim and Christ.

As such, this viewpoint continues, this "priest" may confess (and/or reveal) the sins of another individual in the small prayer group gathered for "deliverance;" he/she may claim promises or victories on behalf of the victim. And this "priest" may even take another's sin—or even demons—upon him-

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self/herself, the better to free the victim and enable him/her to deal with them.

It is possibly because of this popular connotation of "intercessory prayer" that Ellen White herself seldom appears to employ the term (she does speak a great deal about the need and place for importunate prayer); and because of Ellen White's apparent reticence to employ the term, we will seldom use it here.

A cursory examination of the *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White* will reveal that Mrs. White uttered numerous cautions concerning the confessing or revealing by one person of the mistakes and sins of another person, even in small prayer groups. She also had much to say about what were appropriate (and inappropriate) topics for public prayer, in contradistinction to private ("closet") prayer.

She had a great deal to say about the place, purpose, and function of the human will (everything, she declared, depended on the right exercise of it, by the individual himself/herself) and she appears to be silent about the possibility or desirability of one person relating and confessing another's sins. We do not find in Scripture or in Mrs. White's writings the provision for one Christian to "stand in the place of" someone else in the capacity of priest. Contrarily, we all have a crucified, risen, and soon-coming heavenly High Priest Who directly intercedes for us all, the Man Christ Jesus. There is no provision for "standing in the place of" someone else for the purpose of identifying and casting out the demons alleged to inhabit the unfortunate victim. Nor is there provision for carrying the responsibility of the burden of long, constant, detailed prayers for others—either for those who are also praying for themselves or those who will not (or cannot) pray. And there is no indication that the prayers of such a "priest" are more efficacious than an individual's prayers for himself.

One's basic view of the "priesthood of all believers" and of "intercessory prayer" will certainly have a bearing upon one's attitude toward some of the activities prominent in "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry."

B. Dialogue With the Devil

Probably the chief characteristic running as a common thread through almost all variations of contemporary "deliverance ministry" is the predilection of entering into dialogue with the spirits in which the demons are asked to identify themselves, indicate the days, months, or years of their "possession," and answer other questions of a similar nature, before being dispossessed of their prey in the name of Jesus Christ.

This practice, to which we are strongly opposed, is felt to be not only inimical to a strong and growing Christian experience, but entirely unneces-

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sary as well.

Proponents defend this approach on the precedent found in Scripture in the narrative of Christ's healing of the two demoniacs of Gadara (see Mark 5:6-13 and Luke 8:28-33), in which Christ demanded of the evil spirits that they identify themselves.

We feel that this is insufficient ground for basing a practice, for the following reasons:

1. There is only one such instance recorded in Scripture. This custom of directly addressing the demons was not the general practice of Christ, nor yet of the apostles.

2. In the one instance on record Jesus did not initiate the conversation (yet, in contemporary "deliverance ministry," the initiative is invariably taken by the human "deliverer"). Instead, Jesus waited for the demons to take the initiative.

3. Even so, Jesus did not ask them to identify themselves until after He had authoritatively demanded that they depart.

4. And, most damaging of all to the case of modern exorcists, after ascertaining that there was more than one demon inhabiting these afflicted men ("Our name is Legion"), Jesus did not (a) ask them their names individually; or (b) cast them out sequentially, one by one, as is the practice of those who would perform this task today in His name; or (c) take hours to get rid of them.

We would, furthermore, offer five additional reasons for avoiding the practice of addressing demons directly:

1. This kind of addressing of evil spirits seems to some perilously close to, if not actually within the realm of, two-way communication between the spirit world and humanity, which is strictly prohibited and condemned in Scripture. (In Bible times it brought forth upon the practitioners the sentence of death. This is how God—"Who changes not"—views communication with the spirit world.)

2. Dialogue with the spirits generally tends toward protracted efforts at casting out the demons, with consequent emotional and physical exhaustion for all concerned. These humanitarian concerns alone justify the abandonment of the practice of demanding of the demons that they identify themselves.

3. The devils are notorious liars (it was, after all, their master who invented the lie). And their word, therefore, is simply not trustworthy. It is entirely possible, for instance, that in a genuine case of demon possession one demon might well simulate a number of different "voices" and offer differing identities, thus pretending to be a whole galaxy of spirits, thus making a mockery of the whole situation by pretending to go and yet "returning."

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4. It is immoral to give the demon any more authority over the vocal chords of the afflicted. Hasn't the victim suffered long enough already?

5. Lastly, it tends to identify the Seventh-day Adventist Church with cultic practices.

Ellen White said it best: "Our only surety is in giving no place to the Devil.... It is unsafe to enter into controversy or to parley with him."³

An interesting variation on "dialoguing" is becoming increasingly popular in certain "deliverance" circles: instead of dialoguing with the Devil, those in prayer "dialogue with the Holy Spirit," and ask Him to reveal the nature of the sins of the afflicted that need to be confessed, and the identity of the individual demons that need to be summoned forth.

While we have had no doubt but that such prayers would find an "answer," we are perplexed to know how effectively to validate such responses, because the unholy spirit—Satan—the author and father of all deception, can inject himself insidiously and unobtrusively.

A subculture spawned by "deliverance" ministry is a school of "divine guidance," which is growing in popularity. Based largely on the work of Joy Dawson, one Adventist version offers twelve "Ways in Which God Speaks" to us. The first four are entirely subjective; number five in the list is the Word of God. Yet Ellen White, in discussing the same subject (in which she offers three •ays), lists the Word of God first, because all subjective methods must be validated by the objective Word.

This school of thought goes on to allege that in the last days everyone will receive the Holy Spirit in the identical manner that Ellen White did (1 Corinthians to the contrary notwithstanding), and being able to dialogue with the Holy Spirit, is just one of the benefits of this new, special relationship.

Possessors of this "gift" have an unshakable assurance that they are right and all others who disagree—or even doubt—are wrong. And those skeptics who do not wholeheartedly support are automatically dismissed out of hand as being possessed by a spirit of unbelief. Such an one might even be startled to have a conversation with the exorcist interrupted by the individual offering a short (and seemingly sanctimonious) prayer, right there: "Lord, in Your name I cast out the demon of unbelief in this person."

"Dialoguing with the Holy Spirit" is as potentially dangerous to those who practice this perverted form as dialoguing with evil spirits.

C. Commanding Demons or Supplicating Christ?

Another characteristic of deliverance sessions, as commonly carried out, is direct confrontation of the demon by demanding—always in Christ's name,

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of course—that the demons depart.

The example of Christ is sometimes cited as precedent ("Jesus . . . rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him" [Mark 9:25]), and the further example of Paul is used to buttress the case ("Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her" [Acts 16:18]). These examples are valid and must not be ignored.

It has been suggested, however, that in both of the above instances the demon took the initiative, himself initiating the confrontation. In other contexts the example offered in Scripture is, rather, that of the Christian believer's appealing to Christ to cast out the demon, instead of addressing the demon directly.

In the past God used "divers manners" to communicate with humanity (see Hebrews 1:1); and there is also evidence in Scripture that He used "divers manners" in communicating with demons.

In Jude 9 we find Christ (here called Michael, the Archangel) "contending with the Devil" who disputed His intention to resurrect Moses from his lonely grave atop Mount Nebo. Satan claimed Moses as his own, for he had come under the dominion of Satan and was therefore his lawful prey. Further, Jesus had not yet come to pay the penalty price for sin. Nevertheless, Jesus assumed responsibility for salvation and eternal life on Moses' behalf. Yet even here, Christ "durst not bring against him [Satan] a railing accusation," but instead said, "The Lord rebuke thee."

In Zechariah 3:1, 2, we find Joshua, the high priest, standing before the Angel of the Lord, while Satan was standing there "at his right hand to resist Him." Instead of rebuking the Devil directly, Joshua allowed the Lord to handle the matter, "and the Lord said unto Satan, *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord That hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?*" (emphasis supplied).

Direct confrontation, and direct address to the "possessing" demon, sometimes is not only undesirable but also pragmatically unproductive. Mark I. Bubeck, a leading exponent of "deliverance ministry," tells of his surprising discovery when, in the mid-1970s, he endeavored to bring freedom from demonic powers to a young man on the brink of destruction.

Through the young man's faculties, Bubeck says,

I was in direct confrontation with a snarling, cruel, crude, vulgar demon that had taken the same name as this young man's last name. This wicked power was very talkative. He constantly threatened and

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insulted me, the young man, and another person who was working with me in the confrontation. After taking back ground he was claiming against the young man, I kept commanding him to leave and go where the Lord Jesus Christ would send him. He was very obstinate in refusing to go. I kept quoting the truth of God against him, but even though he was weakening, he still refused to go. We were all near the point of physical exhaustion when finally I quoted the promise of our Lord, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

After quoting this verse, I said, "This is the very truth of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is here. Dear Saviour, this wicked spirit is insulting You, and he's insulting us, Your servants. I ask You now in Your presence here to put Your holy hand against him and send him where You want him to go." Almost immediately, a great cry came out of the young man's mouth, and he was immediately delivered from that destroying power.⁴

Apparently Mr. Bubeck misread the entire situation, for he had already been "quoting the truth of God" repeatedly, but the spirit "still refused to go." More important, however, is the approach that did work—instantly. For when Mr. Bubeck ceased directly commanding the demon to leave, and commenced to ask the Lord Jesus go take charge and Himself dismiss the demon, then and only then did the demon depart.⁵

In one instance of deliverance, Jesus told His disciples, "This kind goeth not out by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21, emphasis supplied). In other instances "this kind goeth not out" when commanded to depart—even in the name of Christ—by the servant of the Lord, but only when Christ is addressed directly and is asked to perform the task personally!

How much better, then, in the presence of demons—especially in instances where they have not initiated the confrontation—for the leader to address Christ rather than the demons, and allow Him to do the job He is eminently qualified to perform.

D. A Ritualized Liturgy

Another objectionable feature of the conventional "deliverance" service is the growing tendency to develop a highly ritualized approach in which the preparatory steps are outlined with the victim in advance. During this "briefing" session the "deliverer" speaks in language highly suggestible and in an

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authoritative manner that bears an extremely close similarity with instructions given by a hypnotist to a client while he is yet conscious.

One writer in the growing body of "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry" literature describes the preparatory service as follows. The leader first prays for guidance, discernment, and protection by the blood of Jesus. He then addresses "C," the "client":

Now, C, there are three things you do not have to do. You don't have to hurt yourself, you do not have to hurt either one of us, and you do not have to break or damage anything in the room. You may feel like coughing or screaming. Do that if you feel like it. Coughing or screaming doesn't cast out the demon—only the Holy Spirit can do that. But if you feel like coughing or screaming, and you don't, you may be holding the demon inside. The demons will put many strange things in your mind, like you're going insane, that this is all a fake, that this is all psychological, that you're going to wind up without a personality, or that other people are going to hear about it. Don't worry, all of these are only old tricks. None of them are true. Okay, now relax. Don't initiate any thoughts.⁶

No such "preparations" as these are described in Scripture! On the other hand, most victims of demonic control appear to be highly suggestible, and the form of address by the leader of a "deliverance" session could take the form of hypnotic suggestion, with him in effect making a self-fulfilling prophecy by the instructions he chooses to give.

E. Aiding and Abetting the Enemy

Acknowledging that at times it is difficult to tell whether a harassed individual is or is not demon-possessed, practitioners of "deliverance ministry" often nevertheless proceed with their ministrations on the ground that "if in doubt, try it, since there will be no harm done if the diagnosis of demon possession was found to be in error."

But this lingering suggestion in the mind of the victim that he or she might be demon-possessed (even though nothing by way of proof subsequently showed up) may work untold havoc in treating such a victim, and there is often an even greater danger from such unconscionable experimentation.

"Deliverance" sessions often last several hours (all-night sessions are not uncommon), and the experience is generally exhausting and emotionally grueling for all concerned. The net effect is to leave the patient in a state of extreme emotional fatigue. At such times the inhibitory neural pathways are often incapable of functioning normally, while the excitatory pathways are discharging their impulses readily.

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This means that the patient's power to resist, to control the thoughts, is wiped out. (The effects are identical to those produced by the brainwashing tactics of certain well-known religious cults.) This generally accepted psychological fact, coupled with the insights to be gained from inspired writings concerning the wiles of Satan, ought to warn us that Satan can—and does—take advantage of this fatigued condition to make his suggestions that will be acted upon without resistance by the fatigued victim. He may even make his hypnotic suggestion for a later performance, after the deliverance session is over, one possible explanation for the fact that a large number of individuals who have been the subject of a "deliverance" session later exhibited recurring problems. This is almost guaranteed by the nature of such exhausting efforts at exorcism.

Fatigue for the victim is not the only by-product of unduly prolonged "deliverance" sessions. Christians who participate in long prayer vigils may experience a delayed-exhaustion syndrome. For a month or two the individual may exhibit a "high," seeming to abound in physical vitality, seeming to be able to defy the normal needs of the body for rest and sleep by late-night or all-night prayer vigils. Their "freshness" the next day seems coercive clinical evidence to them that the Lord was really working on their behalf, as well as for me afflicted. They even cite, by way of justification, how Christ spent all night in prayer, and came forth inexplicably refreshed the next day, ready to resume ministering to men and fighting the Devil. So there would be great praising of the Lord after such experiences.

Nevertheless, the net effect seems to be that the body was depleting its reservoir of life force, its energies were being bankrupted (Ellen White's concern expressed at one point for Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's health because he was "living two years in one, and I utter my protest against this"⁷ seems somehow relevant here).

And after two, three, or four months, acute aging commences to set in. There is a "bottoming out," and cumulative exhaustion then takes its toll in a devastating manner. The physical deterioration is evident to all who behold it. And the law of physics ("to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction") and the law of Scripture ("Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" [Galatians 6:7]) is proven correct again.

F. Oppression Vs. Possession

A final area of concern that we have of "deliverance ministry" as it is presently practiced in many circles is the tendency of its proponents to equate "oppression" with "possession."

The word "oppression" (and related forms of the word) is almost entirely

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an Old Testament word. It is used only twice in the New Testament. In Acts 7:24 Stephen, in his defense, refers to the experience of Moses in slaying an Egyptian who had "oppressed" an Israelite. The other instance is of particular interest as we consider "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry": In Acts 10:38 Peter tells "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the Devil: for God was with Him."

That human beings are "oppressed" by the Devil is certainly Biblical. That such "oppression" is to be equated with "possession" by a demon is equally un-Biblical, for in Isaiah 53:7 we are told that Jesus was "oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his mouth." Jesus was oppressed, but Jesus certainly was never demon-possessed.

The Bible appears to use the word "oppressed" to describe an acute form of temptation, not possession by an evil spirit. And Christians who are thus "oppressed" by Satan or his evil angels do not need to call an exorcist to come and cast out a demon, for none is there.

As we have already noted, "control" is the unique characteristic of "possession"; how encouraging, then, is this assurance from Heaven, "Satan cannot control minds unless they are yielding to his control."⁸ If you are a genuine member of the Kingdom of God, Satan cannot control you, though he certainly may oppress (severely tempt) you, even as he did our Lord Jesus Christ.

How one gains power over oppression/harassment/temptation is the subject of the following section.

IV. Prayer for the Afflicted

With this kind of "deliverance services" in extreme doubt, is there no hope for victims of genuine demon possession today? The committee, while unanimously recommending against certain procedures described in the preceding section, yet feels that the Lord's commission, "Cast out devils" (Matthew 10:8), was given to meet the real situations that do confront God's people. The methods used, however, will be in contradistinction to the highly ritualized and sensationalized drama of the "deliverance session" that appears to borrow (however unconsciously) substantially from ancient pagan cults of Mesopotamia. There is, indeed and in fact, hope for genuine deliverance.

A. Hope in the Face of Hopelessness

"If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us," the father of a demon-possessed lad once appealed to Jesus (Mark 9:22). Jesus'

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immediate response was, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (verse 23). Matthew quotes the Master, in the same incident but now talking privately with the nine disciples who had been defeated in their attempts to cast out this demon earlier, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matthew 17:20).

In the face of increasing activity of a supernatural nature emanating from the prince of darkness, Christians in general and Seventh-day Adventists in particular may face this distressing phenomenon with optimistic courage and confidence.

While the Scriptures clearly teach that these malevolent spirits are banded together in an organized power structure for the express purpose of subverting and destroying God's created works, and especially mankind, those same Scriptures declare the unwillingness of our God "that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

In "every time of need" Christians are invited—indeed, commanded—by a loving Father in Heaven to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help" (Hebrews 4:16).

Standing by the right hand of that throne (Acts 7:56) is an Intercessor Who has never lied (Numbers 23:19); and His continual declaration is that "him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). He further adds:

And I will give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, Which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. (John 10:28, 29.)

Indeed, the "good news" of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that by one decisive blow at Calvary, God, by the death of His Son, effectively broke the power of Christ's mortal enemy, Satan.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He [Christ] also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14, 15.)

The essence of the Gospel that God now bids His servants declare is the proclamation of individual Christian liberty from the bondage of sin and Satan, here and now, through a bestowal of unmerited eternal life through

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Jesus Christ our Lord.

And this is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son of God hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. (1 John 5:11, 12.)

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free....
If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.
(John 8:32, 36.)

While Christ lived among men on this earth He utterly defeated every demon He every confronted; and, furthermore, He gave His disciples the power to confront and cast out demonic spirits from human beings who were thus oppressed: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

In New Testament times, as we have already noted, the phenomenon of demon possession was a stark fact of existence:

Satanic agencies were incorporated with men. The bodies of human beings, made for the dwelling place of God, had become the habitation of demons. The senses, the nerves, the passions, the organs of men, were worked by supernatural agencies in the indulgence of the vilest lust. The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men. Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which they were possessed.⁹

Christ did something about it; and the same author, elsewhere, adds that today "God's messengers are commissioned to take up the very work that Christ did while on this earth. They are to give themselves to every ministry that He carried on."¹⁰

We would add only at this point that our work today is not the conducting of rituals and ceremonies so common among those of the "deliverance ministry" persuasion that bear a striking resemblance to similar rites in the very heart of paganism in Old Testament times. Indeed, with Paul, "I show you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31).

It is neither God's intention nor His plan that the people created in His Own likeness should be the plaything of Satan. In love, and by a divine initiative, our Heavenly Father has in mercy provided "the weapons of our warfare." They are "not worldly"—human or naturalistic, and certainly not of pagan

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origin—but they are indeed "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4, RSV, KJV; see also Ephesians 6:10-18).

Therefore, the individual Christian need not falter, much less fail, if confronted by supernatural demonic forces (Ephesians 4:13). Rather, he/she may fight victoriously "the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12), in God's strength (Philippians 4:13), and then come off from that battle "in all these things . . . more than conquerors through Him That loved us" (Romans 8:37).

This is the birthright of every "born-again" Christian child of God.

B. The Christian's Preparation

There are times when the Christian layperson or minister is confronted by evil spirits harassing or possessing those for whom Christ died. He/she must sense the necessity of proper and complete spiritual preparation to meet the situation. The need of such preparation is highlighted by the experience of the nine disciples of Jesus who attempted—unsuccessfully—to cast out a demon possessing a young man brought to them one day.

Jesus, Peter, James, and John were on the mount of transfiguration when the distraught father came with his demon-possessed son looking for the Lord down in the valley. Upon learning of his quest, the remaining nine disciples may well have assured the man that he need not await the indefinite return of Jesus. They themselves were eminently capable of dealing with perplexing situations such as these (see Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29).

Now, prior to this the Twelve had been given power over unclean spirits (Matthew 10:8). And still later the Seventy would experience so great success in their ministry in freeing Satan's captives that in returning to Jesus they came with great rejoicing because "the devils are subject to us through Thy name" (Luke 10:17-20). Yet, strangely, upon this singular occasion, these nine men all tasted the bitter fruit of total defeat. And they privately besought Jesus to explain the cause of this humiliating failure.

Jesus' immediate response revealed a serious deficiency: They lacked "mustard-seed" faith. And to correct the situation they needed to engage in prayer and fasting—for themselves (Matthew 17:20, 21).

In her inspired commentary on this passage Ellen White identifies the various causes of this celebrated failure as (1) an "unbelief" that "shut them out from deeper sympathy with Christ," (2) the "carelessness with which they regarded the sacred work committed to them," and (3) dwelling in "a state of darkness" in which they mulled over their "discouragements" (Jesus had pointed to His impending death) and their "personal grievances" (jealousy toward the three favored disciples who alone were invited to join Jesus on the mount).

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Now, in order to succeed in their conquest of the kingdom of darkness, Mrs. White continues, these nine disciples needed: (1) to have their faith "strengthened by fervent prayer and fasting, and humiliation of heart;" (2) they must be "emptied of self"; and (3) they must "be filled with the Spirit and power of God." Then they must come to God with earnest and fervent supplication in faith.

Earnest, persevering supplication to God in faith—faith that leads to entire dependence upon God, and unreserved consecration to His work—can alone avail to bring men the Holy Spirit's aid in the battle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in high places.¹¹

Indeed, "if you have faith like this, you will lay hold upon God's Word, and upon all the helpful agencies He has appointed. Thus your faith will strengthen, and will bring to your aid the power of Heaven.... 'Nothing shall be impossible unto you.'"¹²

The human agent should ever remember that he/she has no power within himself/herself; we are simply channels through which the divine power may be poured out to the stricken victim. This being the case, Paul's admonition is appropriate: "Let a man examine himself" to see if there is anything in the life that could possibly obstruct the flow of divine power (1 Corinthians 11:28). If such be found, it ought speedily to be removed by the confessing and forsaking of sin, lest one's prayers be "hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). Fasting may be necessary (it is always appropriate) in the making of this self-examination.

And, in harmony with our Lord's admonition in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:16-18), this fasting should be done privately, individually. Again, long, drawn-out prayer seasons involving self-examination certainly seem contraindicated by the thrust of this passage.

Finally, this inspired counsel may prove helpful as the Christian prepares himself for this special ministry:

In such cases of affliction where Satan has control of the mind, before engaging in prayer there should be the closest self-examination to discover if there are not sins which need to be repented of, confessed, and forsaken. Deep humility of soul before God is necessary, and firm, humble reliance upon the blood of Christ alone. Fasting and prayer will accomplish nothing while the heart is estranged from God by a wrong course of action.¹³

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In such situations "the earnest prayers of His faithful followers" are necessary.¹⁴

C. The Afflicted One

The manner in which good and evil angels secure the compliant cooperation of the human agent is not always apparent. In some cases demonic possession may begin with the weakening of the bodily forces brought about through dissipation or circumstances causing continuing and unrelenting anxiety, to the point where the human being finally loses control of himself or herself and in some cases control passes over to the hands of unseen evil entities. The converse may also be true: Through the building up of the physical powers, self-control may be regained, even wrested from satanic forces, by the active cooperation of the human will with the power of the Holy Spirit and holy angels.

Also, control of an individual's will by demonic forces may be partial or total. Cases vary, and it is not always clear why they vary. But in cases where control is partial, it would seem appropriate—even essential—to secure the cooperation of the subject. In all instances the worker for Christ should seek to enlist the will of the afflicted on the side of Christ that he or she may be strengthened to resist the evil foe. In cases where control of the individual seems more total, it may be necessary for the Christian worker to secure the cooperation of those closest to the victim of demonic harassment and to pray on his or her behalf without this manifest consent.

There are today perhaps three groups of individuals who are particularly susceptible to the approach of demonic forces: (a) some who are emotionally disturbed; (b) some who are presently (or formerly have been) associated with spiritualistic phenomena—seances, Ouija boards, mediums, et cetera; and (c) some who make room for sin in the daily life, especially those who are professing to serve God, but who have not yet totally surrendered to His lordship over their lives. All need help, and all need a work of preparation if satanic power is to be broken.

Instruction in Bible Truth. Before prayer is undertaken, the victim of satanic oppression should first be helped to understand certain rudimentary Christian principles, including:

1. His/her inalienable right as a confessing Christian, to live a life free from control (though not, of course, from temptation and/or harassment) of evil spirits, in harmony with the expressed will of God.
2. The Biblical provision and teaching of personal victory over the evil one, through which even the thoughts may be brought into captivity to Christ

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(1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 2:5).

3. The fact that as long as a person is himself/herself able to confess, repent, and commit his/her life to Christ, such individual is able personally to invoke the Lord's power against the enemy on the basis of Christ's victory over Satan at the cross (John 16:33).

4. The fact that Christ has already won the "great controversy" against Satan by His decisive victory at Calvary, and that He has committed to His followers a redemptive ministry to free the captives of satanic control in and through His holy name.

5. The nature and practice of importunate, "effectual fervent prayer" by the Christian (James 5:16).

6. The need for faith to believe that prayer offered in Jesus' name and for His sake will bring deliverance from Satan's control.

Ellen White makes a cogent point about the fact that there is a work for persons who are still in control who need not (indeed cannot) have this work done by another:

Those who have tempted the Devil to tempt them will have to make desperate efforts to *free themselves* from his power. But when they begin to *work for themselves*, then angels of God whom they have grieved will come to their rescue. Satan and his angels are unwilling to lose their prey. They contend and battle with the holy angels, and the conflict is severe. But if those who have erred continue to plead, and in deep humility confess their wrongs, angels who excel in strength will prevail and wrench them from the power of the evil angels.¹⁵

And what is the nature of the work that the victim must do for himself/herself? First, he/she must seek the Lord earnestly. "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me *with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13, emphasis supplied).

Then he/she must accept God's Word that deliverance is possible. There are three important points in 1 Corinthians 10:13—temptation is the normal experience of every human being, God is faithful to those who serve Him, and a way of escape is available for all who wish to find one. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Then the counsel of James 4:7-10 is especially appropriate at this point. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from

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you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded___Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up."

And "wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word" (Psalm 119:9). The mind must be focused away from self and defeat and directed upon God and victory: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee" (Isaiah 26:3). Indeed, we must allow Jesus to bring into "captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Power of the Will. An individual's will plays an important—even decisive—role in the success or failure of prayer upon his behalf, and it is therefore imperative that the afflicted one being prayed for understand the place and the power of the will.

While it is true that supernatural beings seem to have an incalculable advantage over human beings in the warfare thus waged, yet these angels—whether evil or good—cannot compel the will of an individual when that will is committed to Christ. Evil angels can tempt and harass; good angels can woo and bless. But evil angels cannot force the will, and good angels will not. So the surrendered human will, exercised with faith in God's Word and power, is the crucial factor in this consideration.

(Unfortunately, in some "deliverance" circles today the concept of "surrendered" has come to mean a totally passive stance on the part of the individual vis-a-vis God's control. While such practitioners would deny that they [or God] manipulate the afflicted person, the net result often comes down to a mindless abdication of the victim's human reasoning powers, instead of the combination and cooperation of "divine power and human effort" which Ellen White continually holds before us. Surrender is not passive; it is very active.)

D. Concerns and Cautions

Basic Attitudes. Church leaders have been accused by some in "deliverance ministry" as wishing to create a monopoly in which only "professionals" or "specialists"—be they clergy, medical, psychiatric, or psychological—may officiate in prayer for the emotionally and physically ill. (Ironically, some of these who protest thus give evidence that they would prefer to have the monopoly in their hands.) Prayer is not the prerogative of any one group; and the church continues to hold that no practicing Christian needs an advanced academic degree in prayer before he/she can be used to minister successfully to those afflicted by Satan.

Avoid "Adventure" Approach. When after careful consideration and prayer

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for guidance it is decided to intercede with God for relief and victory of one afflicted by satanic power, the one who leads out and those who take part need to guard against a "morbid" curiosity, a craving for the sensational, the dramatic, a desire to witness supernatural forces in mortal combat, in short: to indulge a sort of "adventurism." Each Christian participating in this kind of personal ministry needs to examine carefully his/her motives. One thinks instinctively of the story of the seven sons of Sceva (see Acts 19:13-17). These men "played around" with exorcism, perhaps little realizing the power of the agencies with which they were dealing. They received a sound thrashing for their pains. Those same evil spirits are still around today; and those who flippantly, carelessly seek to confront demon forces could run substantial personal risks.

Avoid Inordinately Long Seasons of Prayer. Evil angels sometimes seek to prolong the season of prayer, hoping thereby to wear out the supplicants and eventually to win the day by default.

There is no evidence in Scripture that when demons were cast out by Christ or His disciples that the service was dragged on inordinately long. Jesus Himself decried the "heathen" philosophy that repetitious utterance of the same petition, in "much speaking," was the way to move effectively the hand of the Almighty (Matthew 6:7; see 1 Kings 18:26). And Jesus was also down on "long prayers" (see Matthew 23:14), as was also Ellen White, who had quite a little to say in warning against prolonging seasons of public or semipublic prayer.¹⁶

Not only are long, drawn-out prayer services unnecessary and without Scriptural foundation, they are also generally counterproductive in terms of exhausting the physical and emotional resources of all concerned.

Avoid Encouraging Overdependence. There is a twofold danger that the one who is doing the praying will experience difficulty in confidently leaving the one prayed for in the hands of God, and also that the one being prayed for will develop an overdependence upon one or more of those who intercede in prayer on his/her behalf.

While the Christian should and will carry a burden for those under Satan's control, he/she needs to know when to "let go" and trust God to take over and do whatever is needful in the case. Christians can become genuinely trapped by these burdens for others, and it interferes not only with their ability to help others but also may interfere with their own ability to function in daily living. One may be tempted to conclude that he/she cannot trust God to handle the case in His Own way and in His Own time, and also that he/she can really add something to the ministry of Christ. The idea grows that somehow if I can add my sacrifice to Christ's then it will count for more in the victim's life than Christ's sacrifice without my own.

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Sometimes the one for whom prayer is offered develops an unreasonable overdependence upon one or more of those who pray. While the mature Christian will certainly be called upon to supply large personal quantities of love, care, and interest in providing personal support in prayer, study, and emotional stabilization, he/she will certainly need to avoid permitting the victim to develop a mindless, irrational overdependence by encouraging telephone calls at all times of the day or night and childish and unreasonable demands for personal attention.

While no Seventh-day Adventist Christian would ever seek to hypnotize someone for whom he/she was working to bring relief from demonic forces, there is yet a potential danger of "practical hypnosis," whereby the effective control of the believing Christian over the mind of the victim of harassment is accepted by the latter because of an undesirable overdependence upon the former.

In this context, then, the cautions of Ellen White concerning one of the practical dangers of hypnosis seems particularly apt:

The theory of mind controlling mind was originated by Satan, to introduce himself as the chief worker, to put human philosophy where divine philosophy should be. Of all the errors that are finding acceptance among professedly Christian people, none is a more dangerous deception, none more certain to separate man from God, than this. Innocent though it may appear, if exercised upon patients it will tend to their destruction, not to their restoration. It opens a door through which Satan will enter to take possession both of the mind that is given up to be controlled by another, and the mind that controls.¹⁷

E. As We Look to the Future

Ellen White has written that satanic activity will greatly increase in these last days before Jesus returns, and we accept that declaration without equivocation. As the Biblical Research Institute Committee examined the work of many engaged in "deliverance ministry" at this time it also concluded that cases of genuine demon possession associated with physical phenomena are still not as common today as is confidently declared by some practitioners of "deliverance ministry." However, the near future may reveal more such cases, especially in some cultures.

We fully recognize that Satan is at work in the earth today, and in certain instances he actually does control individuals in the here and now. This is an undeniable fact.

But to make "deliverance ministry" a prominent, if not the chief, work of

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the Seventh-day Adventist Church at this time, is, we believe, to fall for yet another of Satan's specious devices: that of diverting the remnant church from its true, ultimate mission on Earth—spreading the three angels' messages of Revelation 14.

We have often been reminded that "we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teachings in our past history."¹⁸ Let us, therefore, at this point examine an incident in our past history that we feel teaches a lesson that is well considered yet today.

In 1900 the Devil succeeded in getting a large number of Seventh-day Adventist Church members, ministers, and even at least one conference president, into a fanaticism which called forth an unsparing, direct rebuke from the Lord through His servant, Ellen White. This "holy flesh" movement (as it came to be known) was, in turn, but a repetition of an earlier fanaticism by which Satan had succeeded in seducing certain of the people of God.¹⁹ It involved manifestation of supernatural powers that were most dramatic and sensationalistic. There was much excitement. But God was not in it; and the net effect of it all was to disgust and turn away serious-minded people who might otherwise have felt led to become members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Ellen White declared to the practitioners of this fanaticism in Indiana: "You are giving the wrong mold to the precious and important work of God."²⁰ Then she added that at the very end of time Satan will come in again among the remnant people, to destroy their effectiveness by getting them entangled with fanaticism involving excitement and confusion.²¹

An important distinction, perhaps, needs to be made at this point. It is clear from Ellen White's writings that after the latter rain experience has been received by the remnant people of God, there will be amazing phenomena exhibited by laity and ministers alike: "Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men.

However, she also seems to indicate that before the latter rain is poured out upon Adventists, such miracles will not be so abundant. Indeed, the miracles of Satan, his evil angels, and their human accomplices, will be held up to Seventh-day Adventists (whose activity then is not especially characterized by the working of miracles) as proof of the legitimacy of their own position and their standing with God!"²²

Even as late as the giving of the mark of the beast, and the concomitant forbidding of the sealed saints to buy and sell, those in Babylon will be "mocking" the remnant, "threatening to destroy" them. They ridicule their "feebleness," mock at the "smallness" of their numbers. And at this time the wicked

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declare that they (and not the remnant) have "the truth, that miracles were among them" (and, by contradistinction, not abundant among the remnant). They will boast "that angels from Heaven talked with them, and walked with them, that great power, and signs, and wonders were performed among them" (and, by distinction, not so much among the remnant), and that "the whole world was converted and in harmony with the Sunday law."²³

More to the point, Ellen White further points out very clearly that in the last days (especially before the outpouring of the latter rain), "God's people will not find their safety in working miracles, for Satan would counterfeit any miracle that might be worked.... They are to take their stand on the living Word."²⁴

Summary and Conclusion

We would summarize our findings briefly as follows:

1. Demonic forces of a supernatural character exist today, as they did in Bible times; and the goal now, as then, is the subversion and destruction of men and women, wherever possible, for time and for eternity.

2. We distinguish between the affliction/harassment/oppression of Satan and his evil angels on the one hand, and possession on the other. The former is the experience of acute temptation that comes to all mankind; the latter represents total control of human physiology and neurology, and is the experience of a more limited group of individuals.

3. Among various Christian bodies today there is a movement called "Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance Ministry" in which dramatic and highly ritualized ceremonies (that unwittingly bear some resemblance to pagan exorcism of Bible times) are used in attempts to cast out demons.

4. The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that there is a place for ministry to those who are tempted and controlled by satanic agencies; and, furthermore, it is not a ministry to be limited to professional clergy, psychologists, and psychiatrists.

5. The church is also highly conscious of the fact that our Lord foretold false (and apparently successful) efforts at casting out demons, by professing Christians, just prior to His Second Coming to this earth; and He emphatically disassociated Himself from such activity in the strongest of terms (see Matthew 7:22,23).

6. Satan does not instigate all forms of gross human behavior, nor are they, in and of themselves, necessarily conclusive evidence of demon possession. Ellen White strongly denounced the practice in her day of certain church members who went around declaring certain persons as possessed of the

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Devil, then prayed with them, and then pretended to cast out evil spirits. She called such work fanaticism, and said it would destroy any church that sanctioned it.

7. Because Jesus specifically warned of deceptions, especially in the days just before He returns to this earth (four times in Matthew 24 alone), the church cannot endorse many facets of "Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance Ministry" as it is currently practiced by many Christians and some Seventh-day Adventists. Particularly objectionable to the church are:

a. Dialogue with demons: entering into conversation with them, asking them to identify themselves by name, asking questions of them, et cetera. The Bible and Spirit of Prophecy writings uniformly forbid human communication with the evil supernatural world of Satan and his demons.

b. Long protracted prayer seasons in which release from demonic possession is sought: there is not one instance in the Bible of such interminable, wearying exercises. The demons always left as a result of a brief, authoritative command to depart.

8. Christians may be called upon to participate, or even to lead out, in prayer services for victims of satanic harassment or possession. An important work of personal preparation is spelled out in Scripture and in Ellen White's writings, which includes close self-examination to discover the possible presence of sin that needs to be repented of, confessed, and forsaken before confrontation with the supernatural forces of evil. Fasting and prayer may be an important part of this preparatory work.

There is a place for this kind of ministry, conducted properly; but, important as it is, deliverance ministry is not to be the main thrust of the work given to Seventh-day Adventists to perform in these closing days of this earth's history.

Whether a counterfeit "spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry" is one of the fanaticisms into which Satan will seek to lead the remnant people of God in these last days, we cannot now say with certainty. But that the possibility exists in a very real sense, we cannot deny. And every member of the church should follow a prudent, yet positive, course of action. We believe that Jesus is an all-powerful Saviour, and that demons will be cast out of suffering souls today as in apostolic times.

Let us, however, keep in mind the counsel of the servant of the Lord as we ponder this whole question of satanic activity in our world, especially in these, its closing days:

There are Christians who think and speak altogether too much about the power of Satan. They think of their adversary, they pray

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about him, they talk about him, and he looms up greater and greater in their imagination. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Saviour, Who cast out the evil one from Heaven. Satan is pleased when we magnify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power and His love?²⁵

Endnotes

¹ "'Spiritual Warfare' and 'Deliverance Ministry' and Seventh-day Adventists," A Report of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Washington, D.C., 20012, May 1983. W. Richard Leshar (then Director of the Biblical Research Institute) wrote the foreword to the report. The entire document can be found at the following Web sites: www.greatcontroversy.org/documents/papers/brispwar.html and www.sdanet.org/atissue/warfare/bri.html.

² "Priesthood of All Believers," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* series, vol. 10), rev. ed., pp. 1150, 1151.

³ 3T 482, 483.

⁴ Bubeck, pp. 95, 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶ Kent Philpott and D.R. Hyhmers, *The Deliverance Book: A Handbook for Ministers and Those About to Have Deliverance*, (Van Nuys, Calif.: Bible Voice, Inc., 1977), pp. 105 ff.

⁷ Ellen G. White Letter 10, 1887 (February 23), cited in Richard W. Schwarz, *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Assoc., 1970), p. 133.

⁸ 1T 301.

⁹ DA 36.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White Manuscript 27, 1907 (January 22), "The New England Sanitarium," cited in *This Day With God*, p. 30.

¹¹ DA 431.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ 2T 146.

¹⁴ 1T 299.

¹⁵ 1T 301 (emphasis supplied).

¹⁶ *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*, vol. 2, p. 2113.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁸ *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196.

¹⁹ 2SM 33, 34.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 38. For a more complete account of the "Holy Flesh" movement and fanaticism, see also Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1981), ch. 7.

²² 2SM 52, 53.

²³ Ellen G. White Letter 6, 1884; cited in *Maranatha*, p. 209.

²⁴ 2SM 55.

²⁵ DA 493.

Chapter 14

The Power of the Spirit for a New Life

By **Ron E.M. Clouzet, ThD; Candidate, DMin**
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A few years ago I had the opportunity to preach the Gospel in Kumasi, Ghana. Western Africa has for centuries been an animist region, and it is still today, even though nearly 80% of the population professes Christianity. I there met Eunice Samaah, an ex-fetish priestess who received six dreams, four in which Jesus Himself presumably appealed to and instructed her to join herself to Him and leave her world run by the power of darkness. Not long after her third dream, a member of the Sefwi Wiawso Seventh-day Adventist Church in Western Ghana had a dream. In his dream, J.K. Marfo saw a man who told him to take a Bible to a Eunice Samaah who lived in Bipoa, off Kumasi, Central Ghana. Though far from Bipoa, brother Marfo considered the command in the dream so firm that he dared not disobey.

As soon as Marfo arrived at the house, Eunice was possessed by a demon in the presence of several family members. Marfo quickly gave the Bible to one of Eunice's assistants. Eunice's father then asked Mr. Marfo, "Why, bring her a Bible!" Before the visitor could answer, the evil spirit controlling Eunice spoke, reminding her father of the promise Jesus had made to his daughter in a previous dream, and asserted the fact that darkness could no longer prevent her from joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church "for it cannot challenge the will of God."

Eunice Samaah went on to study the Bible, she joined the church, and today is a powerful soulwinner on behalf of her new Chief, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Challenge of the Spirits

The challenge of demonic spirits in the lives of those who wish to follow Jesus is a very real struggle. And it is as much so today as it was in Biblical times. This is why the Seventh-day Adventist Church has found it necessary to consider the inclusion of the issue in its official statement of fundamental beliefs.¹ As Mike Ryan, a General Conference vice-president and director of

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Global Mission has put it: "As a church, we've set a priority on reaching those who live in the 10/40 window—nearly 70 percent of the world's population. Most of these people go to bed each night fearing evil spirits. Their first question to us invariably is, 'What will your Jesus do about the evil spirits?'"²

What will Jesus do? That is the question.

Jesus and Demonic Activity

Jesus was no stranger to the direct activity of demons. It is so distinctive of His ministry that some theologians consider Christ's encounters with demons in the book of Mark, for example, as characteristic of that particular Gospel.³ The servant of God went even further in highlighting the impact of Jesus' presence on the world of darkness:

The period of Christ's personal ministry among men was the time of greatest activity for the forces of the kingdom of darkness. For ages Satan with his evil angels had been seeking to control the bodies and the souls of men, to bring upon them sin and suffering; then he had charged all this misery upon God. Jesus was revealing to men the character of God. He was breaking Satan's power, and setting his captives free. New life and love and power from Heaven were moving upon the hearts of men, and the prince of evil was aroused to contend for the supremacy of his kingdom. Satan summoned all his forces, and at every step contested the work of Christ.⁴

We are told that human beings had become the habitation of demons that led them in the indulgence of the vilest lusts. "Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which they were possessed."⁵ Jewish historians Josephus and Philo also believed in serious demonic activity leading up to the time of Christ.⁶ And historical evidence abounds regarding demonic activity long after the first century, leading up to the present.⁷

The ancients thought that demons were the spirits of the dead.⁸ Exorcists followed magical formulaic methods to cast the spirits out, which may have included the repetition of certain incantations and key names inserted at the right places.⁹ They also believed that calling the specific name of the demons gave them power over them.¹⁰ This practice to appeal to a power authority is even seen in Scripture (Acts 19:13; Mark 9:38). When a loud demoniac in Capernaum faces Christ, the evil spirit tries to do to Jesus what exorcists in those days would normally do to *him*. This is why the demon identifies Christ

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precisely as "the Holy One of God" (Luke 4:34). This recognition formula "is not a confession, but a defensive attempt to gain control of Jesus in accordance with the common concept of that day, that the use of the precise name of an individual or spirit would secure mastery over him."¹¹

However, Jesus does not ask for names,¹² bypassing formulas for a simple: "7 command you, come out of him" (Mark 9:25, emphasis added). Instead, Christ declares His source of power authority as "the Spirit of God" (Matthew 12:28)!

Jesus' Power: The Spirit of God

It is nothing short of amazing to realize that the powers of darkness, whose ultimate objective was to derail the plan of salvation by constant attacks upon Jesus the Messiah, were no match for the Redeemer, Who functioned in this world in total dependence upon the power of God's Spirit. "He rested not in the possession of almighty power. . . . That power He had laid down."¹³ He said, "I can do nothing on My Own initiative. As I hear, I judge " (John 5:30).

When Christ cast out the demon in the synagogue at Capernaum, the locals were astonished: "And amazement came upon them all," saying that "with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out" (Luke 4:36). Why? They recognized that Jesus cast out demons "with a word" (Matthew 8:16) instead of by elaborate formulas and incantations. And why was He able to do this? Because "the Spirit of the Lord" was upon Him "to set free those who are downtrodden" (Luke 4:18).

John the Baptist had already predicted that the Messiah would speak "the words of God" because He would receive "the Spirit without measure" (John 3:34). Here was the key to His life of victory over the powers of darkness: *the words of God as given to Him by the measureless Spirit*. Through His words, "Jesus is announcing that deliverance has come, and His acts of deliverance are aimed at the unseen forces that bring suffering to the creation."¹⁴

When He was accused of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebul, "the ruler of the demons" (Mark 3:22), Christ responded with an analogy to show how ludicrous it would be for Satan to fight against Satan. "No one can enter the strong man's house," He said, "and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house" (v. 27). The "strong man" is obviously Satan. But Christ was the *Stronger One*, something John the Baptist had also predicted while baptizing at the Jordan:¹⁵ "After me One is coming Who is mightier than I." And what does John link with Jesus' strength? The fact that Christ would baptize people "with the Holy Spirit" and not merely with water, as he had (Mark 1:7, 8).

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No wonder the Gospels reveal the source of His power over demons: "I cast out demons by the Spirit of God" (Luke 11:20). In the parallel Matthean account we find the same accusation by the rulers, and the same answer by Jesus, save one word: "I cast out demons by the *finger of God*" (Matthew 12:28). The "finger" of God is said to be the "Spirit" of God! This harks back to another acrimonious encounter between the forces of good and evil: Moses and Pharaoh's magicians.

When Moses turned water into blood, "the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts" (Exodus 7:22). When Moses smote Egypt, causing frogs to cover the country, Pharaoh's "magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt" (Exodus 8:7). But when Moses struck the dust so gnats covered the land, "the magicians tried . . . but they could not; . . . Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God'" (w. 18, 19).

From the third plague on, the power and magic of Satan were insufficient to keep up with the power of God through His Holy Spirit. Even the heathen recognized that their powers were no match to God's Spirit. The Spirit is *stronger* than the Devil.

The Christian's Power: The Spirit of God

But that is not all. It was with the "finger" or the Spirit of God that the Ten Commandments were written (Exodus 31:18). The apostle Paul quotes from Jeremiah as he looks forward to seeing the completed work of Christ in God's people: "After those days, says the Lord, I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts, and I will be their God" (Hebrews 8:10).

When does He say He will be our God? When His law, His character, is written in the tablets of our hearts,¹⁶ something He plans to accomplish by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is why we know that when Jesus warns about people in the last days casting out demons and performing miracles in His name, He will say to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:22, 23). The issue in the last days is deception, believing one source of power to be another. But Jesus is not here suggesting one is to focus on the law in order to avoid deception. "Lawlessness" here is related to whether or not one *knows* the Master! ("I never knew you . . . you who practice lawlessness").

Knowing God is akin to having an intimate relationship with Him that produces obedience, resulting in the transformation of one's character. In

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other words, it is through the *Spirit* of God that we become like God, prompting spontaneous, joyful obedience." That was Lucifer's problem in Heaven: he wanted God's power but not His character.¹⁸ It is upon this rock of Christ, His character, that the Spirit will build His church, "and the gates of Hell shall not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18).

The Reason Christians Fail

Over every soul that is rescued from the power of evil, and whose name is registered in the Lamb's book of life, the controversy is repeated. Never is one received into the family of God without exciting the determined resistance of the enemy. But He Who was the hope of Israel then, their defense, their justification and redemption, is the hope of the church today. . . . Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power.¹⁹

How is it, then, that so many sincere Christians are susceptible to the influence and the power of the evil one in their lives?

Luke gives us more details about that confrontation Christ had with the Pharisees, who accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebul. He quotes Jesus saying, "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Luke 11:23). Then He illustrates it with the case of a man, who, freed from demon possession, does not use this renewed opportunity to "fill" the house with God's Spirit—for that is the implication—but leaves it empty instead. When the demon who was previously cast out returns and finds the house empty, not only does he think of retaking the house, but he does it with the additional help of seven other demons (w. 24-26)!

"Implicit is a warning not to take God's powerful work through Jesus for granted. Respond. Neutrality is not an option. Either God or the forces of evil will fill the void."²⁰ If the "house" is not filled with the Holy Spirit, it will only make it more inviting for the spirits of darkness to take up residence there. After all, even in the case of Jesus, once the Devil was expelled from His presence by His choice ("Begone, Satan!"—Matthew 4:10), "he departed . . . until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). The enemy's tendency is to come back "for an opportune time."

The Ephesian Example

Perhaps the experience of the Ephesian believers may be instructive. Ephesus was the most important city in the most important province of the

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Roman Empire. With a population of well over a quarter million, it led politically, culturally, and economically, and was the most important intersection between East and West. But that was not all.

Of all Greco-Roman cities, it was "by far the most hospitable to magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts."²¹ Artemis—or Diana, as the Romans knew her—was the chief goddess. Her power was said to even be able to raise the dead! Paul spent several years there, which proved to yield a very fruitful ministry among the most heathen of the heathen.

Many converts were streaming into the churches—converts who were formerly affiliated with the Artemis cult, practiced magic, consulted astrologers, and participated in various mysteries. Underlying the former beliefs and manner of life of all these converts was a common and deepset fear of the demonic "powers." [The book of] Ephesians addresses that fear directly and instructs the new and older believers alike on how to resist the powerful influence of these evil forces.²²

The challenge was very significant for new Christians to remain in Christ and not hark back to their former practices. When Paul writes to the Ephesians, the underlying message is in the context of the great controversy between good and evil in its rawest form.²³ It climaxes with the counsel to be girded with the "whole" armor of God in order to stand "against the schemes of the Devil" (Ephesians 6:10, 11).

However, we can discern three key verbs associated with the work of the Spirit in the believer which, when heeded, may hold the key to victory over any demonic oppression whatsoever. The words are Sealed, Grieved, and Filled.

In Ephesians 1:13, we are told that "after listening to the message of truth, the Gospel... having also believed," we "were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." In chapter 4, verse 30, Paul warns us: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Finally, in chapter 5, verses 17 and 18, he admonishes to "understand what the will of the Lord is." "Do not get drunk with wine,... but be filled with the Spirit."

The process is helpful. When we first come to Christ in full surrender of self and believe in His saving power, we receive the Holy Spirit as a pledge of greater things to come (Ephesians 1:13). He is what we need as we grow more and more like Jesus. The story of so many new Christians burning their books of magic arts is exemplary of the type of surrender experienced by many of those early converts (Acts 19:18, 19).²⁴ Years later, Christ remembered the

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Ephesians' great surrender and first love for Him (Revelation 2:4, 5).

However, we are all capable of grieving such a Spirit of promise by our choices and actions, thus breaking the seal that was there "for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). A "foothold" (v. 27) is all the Devil needs to begin to inch his way back into the center of our heart. By permitting heinous sin, indulging in occultism or occult religion, or yielding to some other transgression, a believer limits the protection that is his in Christ.

Finally, Paul urges the Ephesians, and us today, to understand that the will of God is for us to "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). God's servant warns us that our need to be constantly filled with the Spirit is because we tend to become "leaky vessels."²⁵ In the case of the Ephesians, God allowed them at first to experience the "signs and wonders" associated with healing by means of a handkerchief (Acts 19:11, 12). "But they needed to grow in the understanding that the power of God is different. It is imparted through an intimate relationship with the exalted Lord Jesus, Who enables them to share in His authority over the unseen evil realm."²⁶

Conclusion

Many times, in our weakness, we allow the trio of "doubt, unbelief, and pride"²⁷ to be the weapons of choice that the enemy of our souls can use to begin eroding the presence of the Spirit away from the body temple (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17). Although we have armament designed to shield us from "all the flaming missiles of the evil one," our only way to defeat the enemy is by wielding "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:14, 17). This was Christ's secret of success (Matthew 4:1-11; Isaiah 50:4, 5).

To achieve this goal, a daily devotional life that seeks to know God's particular Word for the soul that day becomes absolutely essential to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). If we are to receive the Holy Spirit by faith (Galatians 3:14), we must develop an ear to hear the Word of God, for faith only comes "by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

I met Roger Morneau a few years before he passed away. His life experience became known through a variety of books published by Seventh-day Adventists. As a young man, though raised in a devout Catholic family, he renounced Christianity and turned to Satanism. By and by he got more and more involved, until his time for one last decision needed to be made. Would he commit his all to the prince of darkness, or would he search elsewhere?²⁸ Almost instantly, God placed him to work next to a new laborer hired just that

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morning. As they got acquainted, Roger noticed how much he knew about the Bible. Intrigued, he sought to study with him some. In one week he became a new man. Somehow, the Spirit of the living God brought conviction to him on everything he studied from the Word. He finished in a mere week a series of studies that typically lasts months to complete. He spent hours and hours with God's Word. Soon after, he was baptized.

Roger went on to become one of the most powerful men of prayer I have ever known. Part of the reason is the fact that he knew the power of darkness and the power of God as concrete realities. For Him, the God of Heaven was a God That was able, abundantly able, to supply every need. A few days before his baptism, a chief counselor, a demon of high rank visited him one last time. He was threatened with misery and even death if he would not immediately forfeit his newfound faith in the Creator God. The demon intimidated him, but Roger stood his ground. He had a new Friend now, Jesus, Whom he had come to know by the study of the Word. Though under constant threat the rest of his life, Roger Morneau served his new Master with distinction. The Saviour had become his all in all, and the Word, God's most precious possession.

The power of God is in the Spirit of God That inspired the Word of God for mankind.

Endnotes

¹ The statement is entitled "Growing in Christ" and is made up of two primary components. The first one asserts the fact that at the cross Christ triumphed over the forces of darkness, with the result that "instead of evil forces, the Holy Spirit now dwells within us and empowers us." Then, it urges believers to grow in this new freedom out of demon oppression by communing with Christ daily "in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it" while worshipping with believers and witnessing to others of His salvation.

² On the Web: <http://www.adventistreview.org/2004-1541/update3.html>.

³ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark. The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 75. See also H.C. Kee, "The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories," in *New Testament Studies* 14 (1968) :232-246.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898, 1940), p. 257. After this initial citation, abbreviations for the works of Ellen G. White will be according to standardized norms.

⁵ DA 36.

⁶ G.H. Twelftree, "Demon, Devil, Satan" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992), p. 165.

⁷ For instance, Paul Thigpen: "There are numerous accounts of demonization and exorcism in every century of the history of the church." "Spiritual Warfare in the Early Church," *Discipleship Journal* 81 (1994) :29. See also Clinton E. Arnold, 3 *Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), p. 75.

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⁸ Twelftree, p. 164.

⁹ The primary source for the practice of magic at the time of Christ comes from a document known as the *Magical Greek Papyri*, or *Papyri graecae magicae*. *Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, ed. Karl Preisendanz, 2nd rev. ed. by A. Heinrichs (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973-4). Hence abbreviated as PGM.

¹⁰ An exorcist may demand: "What is your divine name? Reveal it to me ungrudgingly, so that I may call upon it." See David E. Garland, "Mark" in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, Clinton E. Arnold, ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), p. 235.

¹¹ Lane, p. 74.

¹² The lone exception is the case of the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5.

¹³ DA 336.

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 103.

¹⁵ Fresh evidence for this was the fact that Christ had just endured 40 days in the wilderness of temptation and proven to be *stronger* in spite of His weakened state than Satan was in -is strongest state!

¹⁶ "The character of God is expressed in His Law; and in order for you to be in harmony with God, the principles of His Law must be the spring of your every action." Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1900, 1941), p. 391.

¹⁷ For instance, "And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:27, emphasis supplied); and COL 384.

¹⁸ "Had Lucifer really desired to be like the Most High, he would never have deserted his appointed place in Heaven; for the Spirit of the Most High is manifested in unselfish ministry. Lucifer desired God's power, but not His character" (DA 435).

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1917, 1943), ?? 585, 587.

²⁰ Bock, p. 260.

²¹ Bruce M. Metzger, "St. Paul and the Magicians," in *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 38 (1944) :27.

²² Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989, 1992), p. 122.

²³ Note, for example, the contrasts and inferences to power in the following texts: Ephesians 1:13; 2:2, 6-14; 3:16; 4:17-24; and 6:10-20.

²⁴ Arnold estimates the value of such a bonfire was akin to 50,000 days' wages! Arnold, *Power and Magic*, p. 15.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1350; also *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 10 (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990, 1994), p. 101.

²⁶ Arnold, 3 *Questions*, p. 92.

²⁷ See *Signs of the Times*, September 14, 1882.

²⁸ His conversion experience is recorded in Roger J. Morneau, *A Trip Into the Supernatural*, updated ed., (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1982, 1993).

Chapter 15

Living a Life of Victory

By Daniel E. Augsburg

Revivalist and Lecturer on Prayer

An authentic victorious life has always been a much desired, often frustrating, objective of the Christian life. Throughout history believers have acknowledged a tendency to struggle and stumble in their pursuit of the more abundant life, and in despair cried out with John Bunyan of old, "How?"

This challenging quest to overcome continues in our day and may be a significant factor in the lack of enthusiasm and frequent backslidings experienced. It could also be the reason behind recent discussions in the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding the proposed Fundamental Belief #28. This new statement of faith seeks to address concerns of people living in 10/40 countries, large blocks of unreached people living between latitudes 10 and 40.¹

But although 10/40 country inhabitants fearing evil spirits may find the suggested disciplines for growing in Christ—prayer, Bible study, following the opening of Providence, praising God, worshipping with other members, and serving—"revolutionary and emancipating,"² I suspect members worldwide will look expectantly to the proposed fundamental for direction and solutions in this regard.

Personally, I rejoice that church leaders at the 2004 Annual Council meeting proposed to the 2005 General Conference session a new statement of belief that sets forth key elements in a life of victory. In the next paragraphs I want to share what I have learned about the victorious life and make some suggestions relative to the new fundamental belief. In doing so, I want to highlight the pathway Jesus directed His hearers towards, show that Paul supported the same pathway, share a few thoughts from the writings of Ellen White on the subject, and speak a little to the "how"—the practical how—that I have learned while studying and teaching on the subject, as well as seeking to personally experience the more victorious way.

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The Victorious Life: How?

Richard Osborn perceptively observed, "A lot of young people are more interested in the spiritual side [of our beliefs] rather than the theological impact."³ Why? Perhaps one reason is that theology doesn't mean much when one is continually struggling.

I recall being asked to pray with an individual who was facing an illness. In the process of those prayers we read the *Ministry of Healing* chapter on healing prayer, and the need to be right before God. I was pleased to hear that nothing stood in the way of God responding to our entreaties, and we expectantly sought God's intervention. It wasn't too much later, however, that the same individual called to confess an ongoing decimating battle with temptation, and would I please come and help in that regard. To outside appearances everything was fine, but under the surface an incapacitating struggle was withering spirituality. And this was a respected spiritual leader. Had this person awakened one day and decided to succumb to forces that were infinitely stronger? Of course not. Was this an exception? Sadly, I don't think so.

Meade MacGuire, SDA pastor, General Conference youth leader, and revivalist of the early 1900s, posed the following haunting question: "Why is it that many who really love God and desire earnestly to walk with Him, manifest and confess an utter lack of power to do it?"⁴

Notice that he characterizes this deficit as an "utter lack of power to do it." An uncomfortable fact that we need to seriously consider is that we are all recipients of the wily Devil's attacks, who is well acquainted with our particular weaknesses, is more than willing to take advantage of them, assails us where we are most vulnerable, brings about defeat and failure, tarnishes reputations, and embarrasses and humiliates—as much as possible and in ways that can be quite beyond our imagining—bringing a bondage from which deliverance may seem nigh impossible.⁵

I hope I am not making my readers uncomfortable, but there is an undercurrent of despair at times that desperately needs addressing!

Sometimes outsiders have been more honest about what is going on than we have. Once a scoffer taunted Hannah Whitehall Smith, a popular devotional writer of the mid- 1800s, with: "You Christians seem to have a religion that makes you miserable. You are like a man with a headache. He does not want to get rid of his head, but it hurts him to keep it. You cannot expect outsiders to seek very earnestly for anything so uncomfortable."⁶ Hannah responded by writing her classic *The Christians Secret of a Happy Life* to give practical direction on how to be a happy, overcoming Christian.

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Not only are outsiders turned off, but I don't believe insiders always want to stay with the program either. And, sadly, struggling individuals have difficulty sharing their "Adventism" with enthusiasm. "Why," they ask "would anyone have an interest in my religion if I don't have sufficient answers for myself, let alone someone else?"

The problem isn't with our objective: practically manifesting the character of Jesus. The problem is *how* are we to attain that objective? We need real, implementable answers in this regard!

So we ask, Are the avenues often listed for victorious Christian living such as those suggested in the proposed 28th Fundamental Belief—prayer, Bible study, etc.—sufficient to bring about the longed-for vibrancy and victory? Have we not been pursuing these very disciplines from the earliest days of our church, to say nothing of the long years since Jesus returned to Heaven? Have we succeeded, or is that vibrancy still eluding us?

Allow me to put it another way: If adopted, will the proposed Fundamental Belief statement be a sufficient step forward or "more of the same, better"? I ask this question without malice, and with love and respect for a church that I have been a part of since birth, to say nothing of three generations before me. But are we giving "bread" in this area of victory, or "stones"? I believe the answer falls somewhere between, and sincerely pray that discussions relative to the proposed statement of belief will provide opportune forums to revisit the challenge of how to attain the more abundant life.

Perhaps you say, "This problem only confronts new believers." I wish it were true, but personal experience has told me otherwise, to say nothing of the fact that ample evidence exists in the pages of Christian history to suggest that the struggle has confronted individuals of all ages and all levels of spiritual maturity. Even the apostle Paul confessed this struggle when he stated, "For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find" (Romans 7:18).

A famous struggler was Hudson Taylor. Taylor, who founded the China Inland Missions, converted thousands to Christ and inspired many aspirants to dedicate their lives to missions, confessed in a letter to his sister that he "prayed, agonized, fasted, strove, made resolutions, read the Word more diligently, sought more time for meditation—but all without avail. Every day, almost every hour, the consciousness of sin oppressed me. . . . I would begin the day with prayer, determined not to take my eye off of Him for a moment, but pressure of duties . . . caused me to forget Him. . . . How could I preach with sincerity that, to those who receive Jesus, 'to them gave He power to become the sons of God' when it was not so in my own experience?"⁷

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This was written when he was 37 years old and had already spent considerable time in mission work.

Rosalind Goforth, wife of revivalist Jonathan Goforth and much-respected missionary who joined the China Inland Mission in 1888, also speaks of an ongoing struggle that came to a crisis point when she overheard two of her fellow workers say, "Yes, she is a hard worker, a zealous preacher, and—yes, she dearly loves us; but, oh, what a temper she has! If she would only live more as she preaches!"¹⁸ Mrs. Goforth goes on to share how she finally found the secret of victory at a conference in 1916—twenty-eight years after she first entered mission service.

In these examples we find the desire/performance conflict that has always existed.

Is the "struggling" confessed by these spiritual giants the "normal" experience God had in mind for His children? Was this the "more than conquerors" that was promised? (Romans 8:37.) Was "causing us always to triumph" (2 Corinthians 2:14) God's pledge, a guarantee of the new birth, or a cunningly devised fable? Had these individuals experienced the "sanctify you wholly" promise of 1 Thessalonians 5:24? What about all the promises of a holy and blameless experience? If God had made such promises, why wasn't the victorious experience something they could count on—a birthright of His followers and therefore a birthmark, instead of something so often absent—a noticeable birth defect instead of a birthmark? Might there be something wrong with the picture?

Thankfully, progress is being made in the church regarding the light God has given us in the Spirit of Prophecy through books like *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages*. And those books have a wealth of information on how to overcome. But do a majority of our members fully understand how to live a victorious life? And please don't take what I am saying as a categorical indictment of every member. But when the chips are down in the struggle arena, do we have adequate answers? May I respectfully suggest that there is room for improvement?

Does "room for improvement," however, emerge as a result of mixed loyalties, limited devotion, and compromise—or a combination of them? Could there be a systemic condition, arising from a correct but limited understanding of the subject, that is causing problems? If it is the latter, could we be suggesting "more of the same, better"?

Jesus and the Victorious Way

Jesus taught many things about following Him during his lifetime, but encapsulated it all when He said: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him

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deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9: 23). We find this same "take up the cross" sentiment repeated several other times. It's interesting that every time Jesus mentioned the cross, He always referred to it as the cross of His followers.¹⁰

One such occurrence came in his conversation with a rich young ruler who had approached Him desiring to know what he still lacked. We find in Mark 10:21 that Jesus doesn't scold him for keeping the commandments poorly; rather Jesus points out that he lacked "one thing"—only one thing! This "one thing" turned out to be his possessions, which Jesus instructed him to sell, give the proceeds to the poor, and then "take up the cross, and follow Me." What was only "one thing" and apparently not a very big "one thing" to Jesus, was a really big thing to this wealthy person. In fact, such a big thing that he turned away sorrowing, for "he had great possessions."

We can make some assumptions about the man's spiritual experience. He was sincere; he was trying to follow the light he had received up to then; he was keeping the commandments; he was probably reading the Scriptures, praying, and serving God to the best of his ability—he was practicing all the disciplines! He had sufficiently succeeded that Jesus did not criticize his commandment keeping. He had all the earmarks of a future follower of Jesus, and the Bible specifically says that Jesus loved him.

That Jesus loved him, and that the young man walked away sorrowing, suggests this was more than a superficial interchange. In fact, the interview outcome suggests that he didn't recognize that the ruling power in his life was his possessions, and that retaining control of his possessions in spite of Jesus' commands, negated his ability to follow Jesus regardless of otherwise sincere desires. He had already surrendered his way of relating to God, his neighbor, and his parents, but failed to realize that following Jesus meant surrendering control in an even greater way.

It is also interesting to note that Jesus didn't ask any other person to make a similar disposal. For several of the disciples, the call was to leave their fishing and follow Him. To Matthew the call meant leaving his tax collecting. Zacchaeus was only told that Jesus was going to his house that day. All of them were called to exit familiar lifestyles and strike out after Jesus.

Was Jesus unfairly asking the young man to make a sacrifice that would not be asked of others? Did Jesus have a double standard? Of course not. The issue wasn't the "things"—possessions, fishing, or revenue wrongly gained in collecting taxes. The issue was whatever commanded greater loyalty—be it possessions, professions, or relations—and which therefore came between the person and the Lord Jesus; it was those things that needed disposing. In the

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case of the young man, it was his possessions. His possessions were not intrinsically bad. The love of money is the issue, not money itself. The problem was the power his possessions exerted over him. Though Jesus loved him and saw great potential, He knew that following Him while retaining idolatrous possessions would be impossible. The man had failed to count the cost of following! (Luke 14:28.)

Is it possible that the man was not only struggling with surrendering but also with integrating Jesus' instruction to sell all, with prior contradictory rabbinical instruction that wealth was a sign of God's favor? Was the rich young ruler struggling with the same desire/performance conflict suggested earlier in our discussion? He obviously wanted something more, but was Jesus' answer the right answer, considering prior instruction? Furthermore, was Jesus' teaching coming at such a late time in his life that the surrender called for was much harder than what might have been asked of him had he been correctly instructed from his earliest days?

Are people facing the same practical challenges in our day that the young man was facing? Are they also having difficulty integrating personal experience with formal teaching? Is there dissonance between the messages sensed in the heart ("Lord, isn't there more?"), in Scripture ("Thou shalt..."), and through formal church teaching ("We believe ...")? I praise God that we want to more adequately define how to grow in Christ, but I again ask whether we are sufficiently addressing the "how" part of the question.

Taking Up The Cross: Dying to Self

What was Jesus asking when He appealed to His followers to "deny [themselves], take up the cross daily, and follow [Him]" (Luke 9: 23)?

We first note that a denying of oneself preceded taking up the cross. Forgetting oneself and one's interests—denying oneself—was a necessary first step in abandoning control to another person and enable taking up the cross. Taking up the cross would not be possible while a preeminent concern about "me and mine" remained.

Following Jesus also entailed "taking up the cross." What did it mean for a man to take up a cross in the days of Jesus? It meant that the person was going to die. It meant that he was going to lose control of his life, he was going to experience humiliation in the greatest way possible, and he would eventually die. It wasn't a matter of what was going to happen; it was only a matter of when it would happen.¹¹

Jesus said as much to Peter when He described the kind of death Peter

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would later succumb to: "Most assuredly, I say to you, When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish" (John 21: 18).

Commenting on this, Ellen White said: "To the disciples His words, though dimly comprehended, pointed to their submission to the most bitter humiliation—submission even unto death for the sake of Christ. No more complete self-surrender could the Saviour's words have pictured."¹²

We should also note that "taking up the cross" was a voluntary act. Whereas the cross was *forced* upon the condemned person who carried the death-rendering instrument to the place of their demise, Jesus called his followers to *voluntarily* take on the cross-bearing—self-abnegating, death-rendering—life depicted by the crucifying process, including obeying to the point of death as Jesus did, if necessary.

Reading of Jesus' experience, we find He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7, 8). Throughout His life, Jesus maintained a life of continued dependence, eschewing the use of His Own power—refusing to deliver Himself from difficulties without His Father's permission, even when sorely tempted otherwise.¹³

Jesus also made it clear that the decision to bear the cross was to be renewed daily. Apparently, it would be difficult to maintain the required self-abnegation, necessitating a daily retaking up of the cross. Every day of the year they were to live as dead men so far as their own interests and self-protective efforts were concerned.

Jesus made this perfectly clear when He said that they were to "deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow" (Luke 9:23), though they initially misunderstood. He even went on to say, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (Luke 9:24). It seems that we may be having a problem understanding His words in our day, as well.

The last step might have seemed like blind following. Jesus' followers were only given a sketchy framework of the days ahead, commissioned, and reassured that regardless of what happened He would be with them. They followed because they trusted His leading. For His part, He trusted His Father and followed His leading.

Two other points should be mentioned. First, note that Jesus was calling His followers to pursue a two-step process that included laying something

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aside—themselves—in order to follow.

Secondly, in speaking of the dying experience through the example of a grain of wheat, Jesus connected dying and bearing fruit. "Most assuredly, I say to you, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24). Accordingly, the "dying" to which Jesus called His followers, impacts even the service component suggested in the new fundamental.

In summary, we find Jesus disclosing to the rich young ruler that his commandment keeping was inadequate so long as he remained in charge. Only in selling and disposing of all (in his case possessions) for others, leaving a fishing trade, or perhaps collecting taxes—could he really follow. In our day Jesus' appeal to take up the cross is a call to stop worrying about our own interests and abandon ourselves to His care, keeping, and leading; it means dying to the need to protect our interests and direction and only being concerned about following Jesus.

Paul and Dying to Self

Is this matter of abandoning our self-protecting schemes and "taking up the cross" much ado about nothing? It wasn't for the rich young ruler, nor was it for the apostle Paul, who frequently refers to the cross as the place where the world lost its appeal and power over him.

A key point of Paul's understanding of the cross is found in Romans 6, where Paul starts the discussion by asking, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:1). Here Paul is acknowledging that sin is still possible to the believer who has been justified with God (Romans 5:1). He is saying that temptation is still possible and that God has provided a remedy!

But he mentions an important fact, "How shall we who *died* to sin live any longer in it?" (Romans 6:2). You can almost see his Roman listeners bending a little closer to catch all the words being read, since they are about to hear *how* to conquer temptation. We sense them inwardly imploring, "Tell us how, Paul, tell us *how!*"

Paul anticipates their question, asking, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4).

The Roman believers are trying to understand, and Paul mercifully gets more specific by verse six, where he asserts, "Knowing this, that our old man

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was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

That was the answer they had been seeking: Victory comes by way of the cross!

What does Paul say happened at the cross? His wording includes "died to sin," "baptized into [Christ's] death," and "the old man was crucified." Though we may never fully understand everything in this text, somehow, in being baptized into Christ's death, Paul had died to the power of sin and received a new freedom from the grasp of sin.

I don't intend to review extensively all that Paul said on the subject, but we find that he personally looked to the cross as his place of victory. Note Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me." "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

Here, as in the case of Jesus Who called for a voluntary dying, Paul also called for a voluntary embracing of the cross—a life-changing putting of self aside—which would enable following and rising to newness of life. This experience with the cross was sought through prayer, Bible study, and service, but could not be substituted by them.

Ellen White and Dying to Self

Ellen White calls for the same life-changing experience with the cross in her writings.

One of the more important quotations in her writings on this subject is the following:

The new birth is a rare experience in this age of the world. This is the reason why there are so many perplexities in the churches. Many, so many, who assume the name of Christ are unsanctified and unholy. They have been baptized, but they were buried alive. Self did not die, and therefore they did not rise to newness of life in Christ.¹⁴

Note that the reason for so many perplexities in the churches is due to the lack of sanctification and holiness resulting from people being "buried alive"—*self not dying*—and therefore preventing them from rising to newness of life.

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Notice the following statements as well:

We cannot retain our own self and be filled with the fullness of God. We must be emptied of self. If Heaven is gained by us at last, it will be only through the renunciation of self and in receiving the mind, the spirit, and the will of Christ Jesus.... Are we willing to pay the price for eternal life? Are we ready to sit down and count the cost, whether Heaven is worth such a sacrifice as to die to self and let our will be bent and fashioned into perfect conformity with the will of God? Until this shall be, the transforming grace of God will not be experienced by us. Just as soon as we present our emptied nature to the Lord Jesus and His cause, He will supply the vacuum by His Holy Spirit.¹⁵

On one occasion I spoke in reference to *genuine sanctification, which is nothing less than a daily dying to self and daily conformity to the will of God.¹⁶*

Speaking of John and Judas,

One, daily dying to self and overcoming sin, was sanctified through the truth; the other, resisting the transforming power of grace and indulging selfish desires, was brought into bondage to Satan.¹⁷

Here we find a strong call to die to self for the purpose of being filled with the fullness of God. Mrs. White goes so far to say that without this renunciation of self, the grace of God will *not* be experienced! If the grace of God will not be experienced without renouncing self—she uses the phrase "dying to self" as well—then it would seem that an adequate statement on growing in Christ would mention the need to die to self.

In summary, Ellen White makes it clear that dying to self is a necessary component of growing in Christ. To be fair, few would argue that dying to self isn't important, but many would have great difficulty explaining how such a dying is to take place. Needless to say, we find continued support for mentioning dying to self in the new Fundamental Belief.

Dying to Self on a Practical Basis

Meade MacGuire, who as a revivalist and leader of young people actively sought to help church members experience a more vibrant and victorious walk

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with Jesus, and wrote four excellent books on the subject in pursuing that objective,¹⁸ speaks authoritatively when he asserts:

There is a great deal of modern preaching which presents, as a remedy for sin, love, social regeneration, culture, self-development, etc. According to the Scriptures, the *only way to deal with sin is to begin with death*____Undoubtedly the great difficulty with the majority of believers is that *they are trying to live Christ's life without first having died Christ's death. . . .* It is much more popular these days to talk about life than death, but not more necessary, for death is the way into life. Many have not seen or understood the necessity of this death; and others, having seen it, are afraid or unwilling to die. . . . *It is the daily dying of self that makes room for the living of Christ.*¹⁹

Notice, it is the "daily dying of self that makes room for the living of Christ!" How many of our members—for that matter any of us—fully appreciate the need of dying to self, or what it means on a practical basis, or the process by which it is attained? If this is pivotal truth, shouldn't it be mentioned? I believe so.

Dying to Self and Growing in Christ

It isn't fair to bring up the subject of dying to self, and not to share a little about how dying to self becomes real on a practical basis.

George Muller, much-blessed founder of orphanages in Bristol, England, provides important insight in the following testimony concerning his life, which also renders the quintessential description of the person who has died to self on a practical basis:

"There was a day when I died"; and, as he spoke, he bent lower, until he almost touched the floor. Continuing, he added, "Died to George Muller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."²⁰

With this description in mind, in the next few paragraphs I would like to share the pathway by which God brings about growth, as I understand it.

God's purpose in sending Jesus to live a perfect life, die an all-sufficient

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death, and rise in abundant power, was to provide *ample* provision for the development of transformed, Christlike characters in His people.²¹

But, as a result of our wills being placed in Satan's control at the time of Adam's Fall and the resulting habit patterns of relating and reacting that have been etched into our psyches, we are *utterly unable* to achieve Christlike characters in and of ourselves. We have neither the wisdom nor the strength, but these belong to God, and He gives them in response to our prayers.²²

Either God or Satan controls our minds. Paul said that we were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), and therefore subject to failure if we sought to attain freedom in our own strength. Those who refuse to give themselves to God are described as being in the most abject slavery.²³ God can bring freedom, but only as we exercise our will—which is the power of choice that God does not violate—regarding which of the two powers will control us.²⁴ Note the following:

Many are inquiring, "How am I to make the surrender of myself to God?" You desire to give yourself to Him, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you; but you need not despair. What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him.²⁵

As a result of our fallen, enslaved condition, we are weak, helpless, and despairing,²⁶ and therefore need pardoning and covering with the righteousness of Christ. As a result, God treats us as if we had never sinned.²⁷

A bitter disappointment in the lives of many Christians is the presence and power of sin in their lives, in spite of knowing God's pardon, notwithstanding

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otherwise sincere intentions and efforts. Instead of knowing freedom and victory, temptations press ever harder, and we experience many defeats and failures. The only way to experience victory is through the daily dying to self.

Following Paul's admonition to reckon ourselves dead, we choose to make that death practical by continuing to surrender to God's leading. This death, which we initiate²⁸ through surrender, is brought about on a progressive basis as we accept the circumstances that *God* orchestrates (self *cannot* cast out self) and which brings us to the point of complete dependence in whatever area He is changing.

As a result we sometimes face severe but blessed trials as God unrelentingly brings about our death to self and His complete mastery. This annihilating process that is to be renewed daily is the painful first *emptying* phase of sanctification, which allows us to present our emptied selves to the Lord Jesus to fill with Himself in the second *filling* phase of sanctification. In connection with this, I want to call your attention to the following instructive quotation:

No outward observances can take the place of simple faith and entire renunciation of self. *But no man can empty himself of self.* We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work. Then the language of the soul will be, Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unChristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul.²⁹

This is the answer to the "How do I empty myself of self" question! We can't! We don't even have to worry about it because it does not lie within our domain, though we will have to keep persevering towards our objective by continuing to consent for Christ to accomplish this work. If we do our part in surrendering to God—daily dying to self and abandoning ourselves to God's control—God will take responsibility for bringing us to the point where self no longer exerts irresistible power over us.³⁰

Jesus lived such a surrendered life, trusting His father and not exerting self-protective measures. Often He was taunted by His detractors to save Himself or use to His power outside of His Father's will, but He resisted—even to the last moment, when He was heckled to come down from the cross if He was really God. We also have the same ability to exert ourselves—in effect to come down from our crosses—in responding to annoyances with which Satan tempts us. And, yes, we can trust God regardless of what is going on, for every-

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thing coming our way is either given or permitted for our good.³¹

When we present our emptied selves to God, He is willing to fill us with the Lord Jesus Christ by means of the Holy Spirit, which is the second *filling* phase of sanctification. Just as the branch is completely dependent on the vine for life, so we become completely dependent on our *Vine* for life. Upon dying to self, a new power—*Christ's power*—takes possession of the *new* heart, and we begin to experience victory as never before. Victory is the indwelling of a *Person*—Jesus, through the Holy Spirit—Who changes our *overall* behavior, not merely a behavior. Sadly, many Christians have sought to entirely surrender their lives to God in dying to self, but are still frustrated. Why? Though they were giving, they were not taking! Notice,

By *faith* you became Christ's and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking. You are to *give* all,—your heart, your will, your service,—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must *take* all,—Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting Helper,—to give you power to obey.³²

As a result, God is able to do beautiful things in our lives that will be His work from first to last. And, yes, persevering will continue right to the end, as we persist in continuing to daily surrender our wills to Him, and follow His opening providences with gratitude.³³

Here is how Hudson Taylor described his life after he discovered what he referred to as the exchanged life:

I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest position He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient.... And since Christ has thus dwelt in my heart by faith, how happy I have been! I wish I could tell you about it instead of writing. I am no better than before. In a sense, I do not wish to be, nor am I striving to be. But I am dead and buried with Christ—aye and risen too! And now Christ lives in me, and the "life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me."³⁴

Note the following two quotations by Ellen G. White:

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The Lord Jesus loves His people, and when they put their trust in Him, depending wholly upon Him, He strengthens them. *He will live through them, giving them the inspiration of His sanctifying Spirit, imparting to the soul a vital transfusion of Himself. He acts through their faculties and causes them to choose His will and to act out His character.* With the apostle Paul they then may say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20) (emphasis mine).³³

God does not ask us to carry forward the work of character-building in our own strength. We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves. The Holy Spirit is our efficiency in this work. When we think ourselves capable of molding our character aright, we deceive ourselves. Never can we in our own strength obtain the victory over temptation. But he who trusts in Christ, and submits to the guidance of His Spirit, will grow daily into the likeness of God. His growth will be proportionate to his dependence on the Spirit's help. Such a one in every time of difficulty will turn, and not in vain, to the One Who has said. "Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest." On the one side is the all-wise, all-powerful God, infinite in wisdom, goodness, and compassion; on the other His frail, erring creatures, weak, sinful, and absolutely helpless. God proposes to make them laborers together with Him in the building of character, and all His mighty power is at their disposal as they cooperate with Him.³⁶

Needless to say, the outcome will be a new life that is wholly sanctified—wholly set apart—and used of the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5: 23, 24.)

Ramifications of a Limited View of Dying to Self

A. Leads us to minimize our weakness. If we are "absolutely helpless" and "utterly unable" to overcome outside of the power of the cross, any understanding of the growing process that does not include dying to self would seem to be inadequate.

B. Minimizes extent of Satan's control. If it is true that the human will was placed in Satan's control at the time of Adam's Fall and is only broken at the

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cross, a lack of mention seems to grant Satan greater control over new believers, since they might not realize their need of seeking the power of the cross in their own lives, to say nothing of long-term believers forgetting that they must choose one of two masters (there isn't a third option), and that Satan has mastery by default unless Jesus is chosen, the latter result which comes in the process of dying to self.

C. Brings perplexity into the church. If failure to see the need to die to self is bringing perplexities into the churches, it would seem that one could hardly afford not to say something about the ameliorative effect of dying to self on the wider church family.

D. Brings perplexity into families. If self-assertiveness brings perplexities into churches, it surely brings perplexity into families, and therefore deserves mention.

E. Decreases the perceived necessity of only pursuing God's will. George Muller was greatly used of God because he was only concerned about one thing: studying to show himself approved unto God! Might we not enjoy greater spiritual health and vibrancy in our day if that were our great concern?

F. Causes us to fight the battle where the "battle isn't!" If the greatest battle is the surrender of the will to the sovereignty of love, then anything pointing in another direction is to be feared. There is nothing Satan enjoys more than seeing us struggle in our own strength, because he accordingly retains his control over us.

G. Causes underappreciation of the level to which Christ humbled Himself in dying to self. In failing to see that even Jesus had to die to self—learning obedience through the things that He suffered, humbling Himself to the point of death—we fail to see, let alone assimilate, the most important lessons of His life and ministry.

H. Causes us to be underinformed relative to baptism. If baptism is the forum where we publicly declare our intentions to pursue a life of continuing surrender and dependence on God, one would think that instruction relative to the need to die to self would be included.

I. Precludes the Holy Spirit from filling us with Himself. The purpose of emptying ourselves is to be filled by the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. If we are not emptied, we can't be filled. If we can't be emptied and therefore filled, then we cannot experience victory! Is there such a thing as Christian growth without dying to self?

J. Contributes to our misunderstanding and avoiding providentially ordained "dying to self" experiences—blessings that sometimes come in rough packing cases.³⁷ If the honing process includes painful emptying experiences,

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any teaching that fails to inform in that regard will work against the process of growing in Christ, since self is dealt with through these humbling events.

K. Sets us up for backsliding and limited decisions in evangelism and outreach activities. If a person heeds Jesus' call to deny self, take up the cross—giving Him control of all decisions—and follow, then obtaining decisions relative to the Sabbath and other last-day truths will be greatly simplified.

L. Contributes to our placing too much confidence in men. A limited view of the need to die to self also causes us to look to men for direction instead of to God. Too often, we approach decision-making somewhat like a smorgasbord restaurant, choosing to follow or not to follow on the basis of current desires that can be strongly oriented to self-preservation and self-pleasing, as well as to the opinion of those around us. But if our only desire is to show ourselves approved to God, ignoring the support or censure of those around us, to say nothing of ignoring our own preferences, we can be sure that God will have His way.

Conclusion and Suggested Wording

I have attempted to show that dying to self is a fundamental—perhaps cardinal—element in the growing-in-Christ process. Jesus called His followers to take up the cross; Paul affirmed it and rejoiced in the power that came his way thereby; Mrs. White strongly asserted the impossibility of being transformed without dying to self; and great Christians have pointed to dying to self as the vital element in their transformation.

If all this is true, than it behooves us to talk a little longer, and incorporate wording that will alert and inform our worldwide membership of the need to learn about and experience dying to self. This is the elusive "how" that is so eagerly sought. I believe God will honor our efforts and use the introduction of this new Fundamental to bring great blessings to our worldwide membership.

May I make a few suggestions?

1. Discuss and craft wording that appropriately acknowledges the central place of dying to self in the growing process.

2. Prepare a Sabbath School quarterly on the dying-to-self process.

3. Encourage the republishing of books such as Meade MacGuire's, which are so helpful on the subject.

Some suggested wording:

"Committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we accept His pardon and freedom from the burdens of past sins and shortcomings, and *heed His call to die to self and follow Him*, thereby gaining liberty from our former life with its darkness, fear of evil spirits, ignorance, meaninglessness, and defeat. In this

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new freedom, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character as we daily die to self, as we renew our surrender, accept the opening of Providence with gratitude, commune with Him in prayer, feed on His Word, sing His praises, gather with others for worship, participate in the mission of the church, give ourselves in loving service to those around us, and witness to His salvation. His constant indwelling, made possible by our constant dying to self, sanctifies every moment and every task."

A Final Thought

"There is a crucifixion that must go on in our lives, a constant dying to self and sin. We must walk circumspectly, that our lives may preach the Gospel of Christ to those with whom we associate. If we will speak and walk circumspectly, the light of Christ will be revealed in our lives."³⁸

Endnotes

¹ At the October 2004 Annual Council meeting of SDA, church leaders recommended referring to the 2005 General Conference Session the following draft for the proposed new Fundamental Belief—Growing in Christ, which reads as follows: "By His cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He Who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Instead of evil forces, the Holy Spirit now dwells within us and empowers us. Committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of past deeds and our former life with its darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, as we commune with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us sanctifies every moment and every task. (Psalms 1:1, 2; 23:4; Colossians 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18, 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Philippians 3:7-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Matthew 20:25-28; John 20:21; Galatians 5:22-25; 1 John 4:4.)"

² Mike Ryan, quoted in *Adventist News Network*, April 15, 2004.

³ Richard Osborn, quoted in *Adventist News Network*, April 15, 2004.

⁴ Meade MacGuire, *The Life of Victory* (Washington D.C.: Review & Herald, 1924), p. 5.

⁵ In John 10:10 whereas Jesus speaks of bringing the more abundant life, Satan is described as coming to steal, kill and destroy! Paul was speaking of this power when he cried out, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:23, 24)

⁶ Hannah W. Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1980), p. 13.

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⁷ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1932), pp. 158,159.

⁸ Rosalind Goforth, *How I Know God Answers Prayer* (Chicago: Moody, n.d.), p. 119.

⁹ We know that Jesus said that they would know we are Christians by our love. Wouldn't it make sense that people could identify Christians by their victorious vibrancy, as John Wesley was so impressed by the Moravians when crossing the ocean on the *Simmonds* ?

¹⁰ Matthew 10: 38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23.

¹¹ "A well-known instrument of most cruel and ignominious punishment, borrowed by the Greeks and Romans from the Phoenicians; to it were affixed among the Romans, down to the time of Constantine the Great, the guiltiest criminals, particularly the basest slaves, robbers, the authors and abettors of insurrections. . . ." A.T Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*.

¹² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 417.

¹³ Such occurrences are found at the time of His temptations in the wilderness and various times when He was sorely harassed by the taunts of Romans or Jews. In fact, while He was hanging on the cross the suggestion was made, "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ..." (Luke 23:35).

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1957), p. 1075.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1967), p. 155.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 237.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 559.

¹⁸ *The Life of Victory* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1924); *His Cross and Mine* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1927); *Lambs Among Wolves* (Nashville: Review 8c Herald, 1957); *Does God Care?* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1942).

¹⁹ Meade MacGuire, *The Life of Victory* (Washington, D.C.: Review 8t Herald, 1924), pp. 33, 35, 37.

²⁰ L.E. Maxwell, quoted in *Born Crucified* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1945), p. 60.

²¹ Ellen G. White, "Have You the Wedding Garment?" *The Youth's Instructor* (Oct. 28, 1897).

²² Ellen G. White, *Peter's Counsel to Parents* (Washington, D.C.: Review 8t Herald, 1981), p. 58.

²³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 466.

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1956), p. 62.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1956), p. 47.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1956), p. 9.

²⁷ Ellen G. White, "Overcome as Christ Overcame," *Signs of the Times* (Nov. 25, 1895).

²⁸ We speak of initiating this, but we are responding to God's willing *and* doing. (Philippians 2:13)

²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review 8c Herald, 1900), p. 159, emphasis mine.

³⁰ We need to remember that we "die" to self—die to self's power over us; dead people are not bothered by annoyances anymore—not the other way around. That is why we keep being tempted. But we don't have to succumb!

³¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1956), p. 488.

³² Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1956), p. 70.

³³ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1948), p. 373.

³⁴ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* (Chicago: Moody), 163.

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³⁵ Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1964), p. 78.

³⁶ Ellen G. White, "Character-Building," *The Youth's Instructor* (May 16, 1901).

³⁷ F. B. Meyer, a pastor and revivalist of the middle 1800s, liked to use this phrase in his books, many of which are published by the Christian Literature Crusade of Fort Washington, Penn.

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *Peter's Counsel to Parents* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1981), p. 38.

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Chapter 16

Current Discussions on Creation

Key Theological and Methodological Issues

By Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, PhD

Director, Public Campus Ministries, Michigan Conference

Author, *Must We Be Silent?* and *Receiving the Word*

Very few people can deny that there are divergent and incompatible views within the Seventh-day Adventist Church over its doctrine of Creation. Based on naturalistic interpretations of scientific data and through the use of contemporary higher criticism in the interpretation of the Bible, some Adventist scholars now:

- (a) hold a long, rather than short, chronology for the age of our earth (i.e., they measure the age of the earth in millions, instead of thousands, of years);
- (b) advocate views that reinterpret the days of Creation to represent millions of years, instead of the six literal days taught by the Bible;
- (c) argue for gradual, uniformitarian deposit of the geologic column in millions of years, instead of catastrophism (such as described in the Biblical account of the Flood in Noah's day);
- (d) maintain that Noah's Flood was a local event, not a global, universal catastrophe;
- (e) insist that there was death in the animal kingdom long before the creation and fall of Adam and Eve, and that there will even be death in the new creation.¹

In the opinion of those pushing these new views of Creation, the traditional Seventh-day Adventist view is not based on a correct understanding of the Bible, but rather on nineteenth-century church tradition, cultural influence, and the writings of Ellen G. White.

The supposedly "correct" understanding of Scripture is the one presented by the methodology of higher criticism (the historical-critical method). This liberal methodology has left many students in our institutions confused. It has

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produced a generation of preachers, Bible teachers, church leaders, editors, and publishers who are unsure of or who seek to reinterpret some of our historic beliefs and practices. It has also shipwrecked the faith of many youth and new believers, whether they be in Seventh-day Adventist classrooms or churches.²

In 2001, in response to questions being raised by some within our ranks about the Seventh-day Adventist teaching on Creation, the General Conference Executive Committee at an Annual Council authorized a three-year series of "faith and science" conferences. These conferences were begun in 2002 (Ogden, Utah) and concluded in August 2004 (Denver, Colorado) with an "Affirmation of Creation" report that was later presented to and received by the General Conference Executive Committee at the Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 11, 2004.³

In this article, I will briefly summarize the nature and implications of the theological and methodological issues that have been raised in recent years by those who are attempting to revise the church's position on Creation.

Faith and Science Conferences (2002-2004)

Three Faith and Science Conferences were conducted between 2002 and 2004 to increase clarity regarding the church's understanding and witness about the Biblical account of origins. Two of these were called "International Conferences" because of the widespread international representation from theologians, scientists, and church administrators. The first (Ogden, Utah, in 2002) was designed to acquaint participants with the divergent explanations within the church for the origin of the earth and life. The last "international" conference (Denver, Colorado, 2004) summarized the key issues that had been discussed during the three years, and drafted an "Affirmation of Creation" report for consideration by the church's leadership.

Sandwiched between the two "international" conferences were "regional or division-wide" conferences at which the issues on Creation were discussed locally. In all, seven of the church's thirteen divisions conducted their own division-wide or regional conferences.⁴ Among these was the North American Division's (NAD) Faith and Science Conference that took place at Glacier View Ranch, Colorado, August 13-20, 2003.⁵

Given the fact that many of the revised views on the Creation doctrine are being propagated by church scholars and leaders from North America, it was not surprising that the 2003 NAD Faith and Science Conference at Glacier View drew a lot of attention. The importance attached to this conference was evidenced by the stature of people present at the meeting. Besides scholars (scientists and the-

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ologists) from the leading Adventist institutions in North America, the Biblical Research Institute, and the Geoscience Research Institute, there were also several church leaders (including GC vice-presidents and the NAD president), pastors, lay people, and editors of the church publications *Ministry*, *Adventist Review*, and *Signs of the Times*. Also present were the editors of other Adventist publications, both liberal and conservative. In all, there were about 120 attendees.

The papers presented at the 2003 NAD Faith and Science Conference were preselected, and the presentations covered a wide range of areas: philosophy, theology, biology, physics, paleontology, geology, time, Biblical inspiration, the writings of Ellen G. White, etc. On the whole, leading proponents ably presented opposing views, with special focus given to Creation, the age of the earth, the Genesis Flood, the great controversy, and death.

Some may justifiably consider the Faith and Science Conferences as an unnecessary waste of time and a distraction from the church's mission. However, as one who participated in two of the three Faith and Science Conferences—the 2003 North American Division conference and the 2004 international Conference—I believe the discussions were helpful to the church in two major ways.

First, the conferences enabled the church to clearly understand the theological and methodological issues at stake in the debate over Creation. The "Affirmation of Creation" report that was prepared at the end of the three-year series of discussions not only upheld the church's historic position on Creation, but in my opinion the conferences clearly revealed that the revised views on Creation are Biblically illogical, inconsistent, and erroneous.

Second, the Faith and Science Conferences revealed that the revised views on Creation are incompatible with the Adventist message and mission. For if, indeed, the new views on Creation are false, then as deceptive teachings they are harmful to the eternal welfare of souls, and wherever and whenever they are taught or preached they endanger the unity of the church. Consequently, as a necessary protection of the church's integrity and identity, such erroneous views cannot be entertained within the church's big tent. For if the church embraces theological pluralism and its program of an "inclusive" or "common approach" to the problem, such a cohabitation of truth and error would be detrimental to the life and mission of the church.⁶

The SDA Understanding of Creation

The Seventh-day Adventist view of Creation is reflected in three important documents: (1) Fundamental Belief #6 (formulated in 1980); (2) the book

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Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (1988); and (3) *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12 of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (2000). Among other things, these important works affirm the following features as essential to a correct understanding of the SDA doctrine of Creation:⁷

- (i) God is Creator of all things.
- (ii) Scripture contains the authentic account of His creative activity.
- (iii) The Creation record in Genesis 1 and 2 is literal and historical.
- (iv) Creation occurred in six literal, continuous, contiguous 24-hour days.
- (v) At the completion of God's creative work at the end of the six days, He Himself declared it "very good." Therefore, all evil and death we see in the world today is the consequence of the Fall.
- (vi) A literal six-day Creation is the foundation for the seventh-day Sabbath; without a literal six-day Creation, the seventh-day Sabbath is meaningless.

In recent times however, with the possible exception of the first one, all of the above six essential elements of the Adventist doctrine of Creation are being questioned by some within our ranks. Those who are challenging the longstanding Adventist teaching employ a number of arguments (theological, methodological [i.e., hermeneutical], and scientific) to argue for a revision of our historic understanding of Creation.

This article focuses on the *theological* and *methodological* (or hermeneutical) arguments being advanced in favor of the revised view on Creation. Other writers in this volume have addressed the *scientific* objections to the church's Biblical position.⁸

The Calls for Revision in the Church's Doctrine on Creation

Despite the fundamental importance of the "how" of Creation, proponents of the revised view on Creation think otherwise. They insist that the accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 describe primarily the *Who* of Creation, but not necessarily the *how* or *how long*. To them, issues associated with the "how" and "how long" of Creation are matters of "doctrinal minutiae." In the words of one such scholar, "strictly literal interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2 . . . are not essential to Seventh-day Adventist faith and life."

Since they consider the "how" of Creation to be of little doctrinal impor-

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tance, the advocates of change have adopted a pruned version of the Adventist teaching on Creation. The essential contours of their revised doctrine include the following:

"Literal interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2 are the result of theological tradition and cultural influence; . . . they are not essential to Seventh-day Adventist faith and life."

"The different accounts (e.g., Genesis 1 and 2, Proverbs 8) may suggest different sequences of events and different methods of creating, but God is always the Creator."

"A common ground approach would suggest that one could retain Creation and Sabbath without necessarily linking them together."

"The Biblical Flood is of monumental proportions; but to argue that it was necessarily a worldwide flood in our sense of worldwide is going beyond the Biblical evidence."

"The common ground" eschatology should simply view God as One "Who comes to restore the world." It should not matter whether we "envision a New Earth where there is still death and a certain amount of controlled mayhem" or whether it is "a world without death at all."

Some Theological Implications

The suggested revisions in the traditional Seventh-day Adventist position on Creation undermine the authority and reliability of Scripture, impugn the character of God, overturn key aspects of the doctrine of salvation, overthrow the foundation for morality, and seriously erode distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

1. Denial of Literal Six-day Creation: First, denying a literal six-day Creation implies that:

(i) if Adventists continue keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, they must reinterpret its origin and significance;

(ii) if Sabbath observance is retained, there would be no solid basis for *seventh-day* worship, setting the stage for the end-time recognition of Sunday sacredness in place of the true Sabbath;

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(iii) if the Bible's authoritative record of Creation, which Jesus Christ confirmed (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 2:27-28), can be so easily set aside, we can also ignore its authority in other areas (e.g., morality and lifestyle).

(iv) the denial of the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 questions the fact that Adam and Eve were real figures who lived in space and time. But the Bible teaches that there was a historical Adam. This historical Adam was connected

(a) to Noah by the Genesis 5 genealogy;

(b) to Abraham by the Genesis 11 genealogy, and to the human race by the Luke 3:34-38 genealogy.

(c) To question the historicity of the Adam of Genesis 1 and 2 is to place oneself at odds with Jesus and Paul, who both believed that "in the beginning" God created a historical Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4—"Have ye not read, that he which made [them] at the beginning made them male and female . . .?"; 1 Timothy 2:13—"For Adam was first formed, then Eve").

(d) Notice also that Paul and Jude link the historical Adam to Enoch and Moses (Jude 14—"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints ..."; Romans 5:14—"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses ...").

(e) To reject the Biblical account of Creation and the literal Creation week overthrows the foundation of marriage. Did God ordain marriage as a sacred covenant between male and female at the beginning, or did marriage just arise because it promotes survival and procreation? This question raises ethical concerns about the morality of homosexuality, and goes to the heart of the current discussion about gay marriage and civil union of homosexuals.

2. Death Before Adam and Eve: The proponents of change in the traditional Adventist understanding of Creation teach that there was death before the creation and fall of Adam and Eve. The implication is that death was part of God's plan for the development of life on this planet. This new view raises major theological questions:

If animals were dying millions of years before the existence of human beings, then

(i) death (even of animals) is not the result of human sin. But the Bible says that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and that because of sin "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:22).

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(ii) Also, if death came before sin, Paul's statement that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Romans 5:12; cf. 8:22) is not trustworthy; neither can we believe that "as by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One [Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18).

(iii) Pursuing this argument to its logical end raises serious doubts about the necessity and efficacy of Christ's death for our sins, the possibility of human redemption, and the likelihood of Christ's Second Coming and a new creation (see 2 Peter 3:1-15).¹⁰

(iv) The proponents of change also imply death in the earth restored. But the Bible teaches no death before the Fall. Hence God created "every green plant for food for animals (Genesis 1:30). Animals were not created as predators, nor will they be predators in the New Earth (Isaiah 65:25). There will be no more suffering, pain, or death (Revelation 21:4).

(v) A God Who will heap cruelty upon animals for billions of years must be a cruel God, a torturing God. This kind of God is not a loving God, but a sadist God. A God Who will terrorize creation in order to bring something good out of it is not the loving and benevolent God of the Bible. Besides casting a shadow on the character of God, such a view also implies a certain kind of hell before the Fall.

3. Denial of Universal Flood in Noah's Day: The Bible teaches that God's judgment of the antediluvian world by Flood was the "undoing of Creation" (or "de-Creation"). To deny the global Flood in Noah's day is to deny the New Testament testimony that a global Flood destroyed the antediluvian world *cosmos* in Greek, from which we get our English word "cosmic"):

(i) Jesus says the Flood in Noah's day "swept them *all* away" (Matthew 24:39);

(ii) Peter says that God "did not spare the ancient world [*cosmos*], but preserved Noah with seven other persons.... when He brought a Flood upon the world [*cosmos*] of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5); "a few, that is eight persons were saved through water" (1 Peter 3:20);

(iii) Paul states that Noah "condemned the world [*cosmos*]" (Hebrews 11:7).

The above New Testament statements suggest that a local flood would not have ended the antediluvian world.

Moreover, to deny the historicity and universality of the Flood is to deny

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the judgment by fire at the end of the world. But NT Flood typology assumes and depends upon not only the historicity, but also the universality, of the Flood to theologially argue for the imminent worldwide judgment by fire (2 Peter 3:6, 7). Just as there was a worldwide judgment by water causing the unbelieving antediluvian world to perish, so in the antitype there must needs be a global end-time judgment by fire to destroy the wicked.

Finally, the universal Flood not only links Creation (protology—the teaching about beginnings) with the new creation (eschatology—the doctrine of end-time or last-day events), but the doctrine of judgment also teaches human accountability to God—a crucial element of morality or ethics. Without accountability, there can be no moral obligations, and hence no genuine morality or ethics. Conversely, only the Biblical teaching of divine, purposeful Creation and universal judgment can provide a legitimate basis for morality and ethics.

4. Denial of an Adventist Distinctive: In short, the denial of the Adventist doctrine of Creation for naturalistic evolution is a denial of a key pillar of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. It simply doesn't make sense for one to be a "Seventh-day Darwinian." In the words of Clifford Goldstein,

If evolution is true, then the Adam and Eve story becomes null and void. If that's null and void, what happens to the Fall? Without the Fall, the cross becomes an empty gesture, which destroys any grounds for the Second Coming. Thus, it seems impossible to reconcile Adventism with evolution. Someone can be one (an Adventist) or the other (an evolutionist), but not both. All of which comes to the real point of my article: considering that evolution and Adventism cannot be reconciled, should we be paying people to stand in our classrooms or pulpits and promote evolution?"

Why the Theological Disagreements/Tension?

How do we explain the differences in views on the doctrine of Creation? It was evident at the NAD Faith and Science Conference that participants ascribed different reasons for the shift in views.

For example, some suggested that the disagreements are due to differences in "temperament profile." Others maintained that it is the attempts to marry "mutually exclusive world views (natural and supernatural) that provide the tensions and issues with which some Adventist scientists [and theologians] wrestle." For others, it was a lack of appreciation of "the complex literary struc-

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ture" of Genesis 1 and 2. Still for some, it was due to an unwillingness to be open to "new understandings" or "clearer understanding" of Scripture.¹²

In my opinion, the theological disagreements on Creation arise from different methods to arrive at truth (i.e., different epistemologies) and to different attitudes towards the Bible (Biblical inspiration and interpretation).

1. Different Methods of Arriving at Truth (Epistemology).

Epistemology raises questions for Bible-believing Christians regarding the starting point for discussions on theological issues. As far as Creation is concerned, the key epistemological question is: Should our doctrine of Creation be built on *observation*, *introspection*, or on Biblical *revelation*? One's response determines whether the Bible or the hypothesis of naturalistic evolution will provide the grounds for ascertaining, for example, whether or not Genesis 1 and 2 teach a literal-day Creation—an issue that affects the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath.

The shift from the sole authority of Scripture to empirical data is remarkably illustrated in the case of a former Adventist university president and General Conference vice president. After reviewing theories of continental drift, fossil records, and radioactive isotope dating, he concluded that:

animals [were] living in the earth . . . millions of years before these [continental] plates separated. And, moreover, as I got to looking into the geologic column, I had to recognize . . . that the geologic column is valid, that some forms of life were extinct before other forms of life came into existence. I had to recognize that the forms of life that we are acquainted with mostly, like the ungulate hoof animals, the primates, man himself, exist only in the very top little layer of the Holocene, and that many forms of life were extinct before these ever came in, which, of course, is a big step for a Seventh-day Adventist when you are taught that every form of life came into existence in six days. . . . I had felt it for many, many years, but finally there in about 1983 I had to say to myself, That's right. The steadily accumulating evidence in the natural world has forced a reevaluation in the way that I look at and understand and interpret parts of the Bible¹³

Agnosticism, the End Result. It should be noted, however, that giving up the Bible's teaching on origins may lead to theological skepticism or agnosticism. The experience of a former Adventist, a grandson of a General Conference president, illustrates this danger.

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In the introduction to his book *The Creationists*, he explains how he gave up his Adventist views on a literal Creation and became an agnostic:

*Having thus decided to follow science rather than Scripture on the subject of origins, I quickly, though not painlessly, slid down the proverbial slippery slope toward unbelief. . . . [In a 1982 Louisiana Creation-evolution trial, he elected to serve as an expert witness for the evolution cause, against the Creationist lawyer, Wendell R. Bird. At that trial, he continues,] Bird publicly labeled me an "Agnostic." The tag still feels foreign and uncomfortable, but it accurately reflects my theological uncertainty.*¹⁴

In summary, the slide into the abyss of theological uncertainty begins with a departure from the Bible as the Christian's sole norm of authority. Then follows a reinterpretation of the Scriptures according to the extra-Biblical knowledge, whether from science, experience, tradition, psychology, or other sources. As the retired General Conference administrator himself said: "The steadily accumulating evidence in the natural world has forced a reevaluation in the way that I look at and understand and interpret parts of the Bible."

Ellen G. White's Comment:

God has permitted a flood of light to be poured upon the world in both science and art; but when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. It may be innocent to speculate beyond what God's Word has revealed, if our theories do not contradict facts found in the Scriptures; but those who leave the Word of God, and seek to account for His created works upon scientific principles, are drifting without chart or compass upon an unknown ocean. The greatest minds, if not guided by the Word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation. *Because the Creator and His works are so far beyond their comprehension that they are unable to explain them by natural laws, they regard Bible history as unreliable. Those who doubt the reliability of the records of the Old and New Testaments, will be led to go a step further, and doubt the existence of God; and then, having lost their anchor, they are left to beat about upon the rocks of infidelity.*

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These persons have lost the simplicity of faith. There should be a settled belief in the divine authority of God's Holy Word. The Bible is not to be tested by men's ideas of science. Human knowledge is an unreliable guide. Skeptics who read the Bible for the sake of caviling, may, through an imperfect comprehension of either science or revelation, claim to find contradictions between them; but rightly understood, they are in perfect harmony. Moses wrote under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and a correct theory of geology will never claim discoveries that cannot be reconciled with his statements. All truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations.¹⁵

2. Different Attitudes Toward the Bible (Inspiration and Hermeneutics).

In the course of the discussion at the Faith and Science Conference it became evident that, besides different methods of arriving at truth (epistemology), Adventist scholars also hold conflicting views about the Bible and its interpretation. The following are some of the troubling questions that were raised:

1. Basis of SDA Doctrine of Creation: Tradition or Scripture? Is the church's traditional doctrine of a literal six-day Creation based on "unwarranted traditions" or solidly upon Scripture? Historically, Adventists have maintained that their doctrine is based on a correct understanding of the Bible. But at the Faith and Science Conference some argued that the church's insistence that the days of Genesis 1 had to be literal, consecutive days is "based on the best understanding at the time they [church doctrines] were formulated." Or, as another stated, "strictly literal interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2 are the result of theological tradition and cultural influence; . . . they fail to take seriously the evidence of the actual Scripture text."

2. What Is the Source of the Creation Account? How does revelation/inspiration work in the Creation account of Genesis (and Scripture in general)? Specifically: Did God reveal all the information in Genesis 1? In other words, is the account of Genesis 1 fully inspired, or not? That is to say, did the Holy Spirit only inspire "the author in some way" as was asserted by one of the proponents of the new views? Did the events described in Genesis 1 actually happen as described—in seven days, and in the manner and order in which the Bible states? This issue has to do with the historicity and trustworthiness of the Creation account in Genesis 1 and 2.

3. Literal Historicity of Genesis Vs. Other Biblical Doctrines. What is the relationship between one's understanding of the literal historicity of Genesis 1 and other teachings of the Bible? For example, does a belief in death as a result

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of sin, in marriage as being blessed by God, in the Sabbath as a day of rest ordained by God—require the literal, chronological, historical reading and understanding of Genesis 1? Until recently Adventists unanimously have said "Yes." But now some within our ranks do not think so. The question is: Can a Bible-believing Adventist *consistently* extricate these doctrines from a literal historicity of the Genesis Creation account?

4. *How did the New Testament Writers Use the Old Testament Creation Passages?* While acknowledging that the New Testament writers believed in a literal six-day Creation and global Flood, proponents of the new views on Creation attempt to discredit the NT writers' understanding of the Old. (a) Did the New Testament writers misunderstand the Old or did they, led by the Spirit, bring out the Old Testament's full meaning? (b) Did the NT use a faulty method of Biblical interpretation, that is to say, did they use a "different hermeneutical approach than ours, more in line with the rabbis of Jesus' day, in some ways, in their willingness to take Scripture out of context and squeeze old truths into new situations that might or might not be analogous"? (c) Did the NT writers "draw metaphorically from earlier [OT] work as if it were literal, yet without the author necessarily believing the source to be literal"?

5. *The Use of Extra-Biblical Data.* Should an insistence on sola scriptura (the Bible and the Bible only) require interpreters to interpret Scripture solely on the basis of the Bible, and not by any extra-Biblical data—whether modern (archaeology, science, psychology, public opinion, etc.) or ancient (e.g., data from ancient Near Eastern cultures, Jewish, Greco-Roman, and traditions of the church fathers, Reformers, SDA pioneers)? In other words, should Scripture be its own interpreter? And what is the proper role of extra-Biblical data in Biblical interpretation? At the NAD Faith and Science Conference, one church scholar and university administrator stated that while at face value the Bible clearly teaches a global Flood, he opts for a local flood because of the evidence from science and archaeology.

6. *The Place of Ellen G. White.* Given the fact that the Bible itself teaches us to listen to God's true prophets, and given the fact that Seventh-day Adventists recognize Ellen G. White as a recipient of the true gift of prophecy, what should be the relationship between her writings and the Bible? Should her inspired counsels and insights on Creation-evolution be given more weight than the theological/exegetical insights of any uninspired authority or expert, whether church leader or scholar?¹⁶

7. *New Light From the Spirit.* Can the Holy Spirit lead believers today into "new truths" or "new light" that contradict truths already established in His inspired Word?¹⁷

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8. *The Question of Science and History*. Which authority should be accorded the higher authority when the interpretations and conclusions of modern science and secular history conflict with that of Scripture?¹⁸

It is obvious from the above questions that the divergence of thought on the Adventist doctrine of Creation raises some hermeneutical (or methodological) issues. In a sense, these questions are not new. They are essentially the same kinds of issues that engaged the attention of the church as it has debated the legitimacy of the higher-critical method in a Seventh-day Adventist method of Biblical interpretation.

Conclusion

While other important questions can also be raised,¹⁹ in my opinion, the issues outlined in this paper constitute the key theological and hermeneutical questions in the current Seventh-day Adventist conflict over the Bible. Behind the new proposals regarding the Adventist doctrine of Creation is the liberal methodology of contemporary higher criticism (historical-critical method).

In my opinion, those who are pushing the revised views of Creation within our ranks are simply intimidated by the current interpretation of the scientific evidence. They seem to believe that the paradigm of naturalistic evolution is the best explanation of the scientific data, seemingly unaware of the fact that the evolutionary theory is itself facing formidable challenges.²⁰

Given the fact that evolution and Adventism's doctrine of Creation are incompatible, we must honestly ask whether it is right for the church to continue paying people to stand in our classrooms or pulpits and promote evolution. In this connection, I would like to call attention to the following counsel by Clifford Goldstein.

For anyone, especially our young people, struggling with these issues, I say: Keep seeking with a fervent and honest heart. As long as you stick to the Bible (and Ellen White's books and articles) you will not go wrong. For those among us who have already decided—despite the Bible and Ellen White—on evolution, there are plenty of other churches for you. Ours isn't one. And to those teaching in our schools who believe in evolution and yet take a paycheck from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I say: If you honestly reject a literal six-day Creation in favor of theistic macroevolution, fine; now turn that honesty into integrity and go somewhere where you won't have to cloak your views under the anfractuositities of language.²¹

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The above counsel may not be "politically correct." But it is the truth. I pray that church leaders and institutional administrators who have oversight over who preaches and teaches in our Seventh-day Adventist churches and institutions will see the wisdom in the above counsel.

Endnotes

¹ For a helpful summary of Adventist views, see James L. Hayward, "The Many Faces of Adventist Creationism: '80-'95," *Spectrum* 25/3 (March 1996) :16-34. He concludes his documented survey thus: "By the end of 1995, Adventist creationism stood at an important cross-road. Earlier voices were fading. A larger and more diverse generation of scientists and theologians was setting the terms of conversation now than in 1980" (ibid., p. 31). Both the new and the long-standing Adventist views on Creation were presented at the August 13-20, 2003 NAD Faith and Science Conference. Generally speaking, while most of the "revised" views regarding Creation and origins are found in *Adventist Today* and *Spectrum*, the positions that uphold the traditional Adventist views are found in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, *Adventist Perspectives*, *Dialogue*, *Origins*, and ADVENTISTS AFFIRM; and the sympathies of the editors of *Adventist Review* have tended to be on the side of revised views. See editorial by Roy Adams, "Creation: A Mystery," I and II, *Adventist Review* (April 6, 1989, p. 4; April 20, 1989, p. 4).

² For more insight on how contemporary higher criticism (the historical-critical method) is impacting Adventist beliefs and practices, see Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Berean Books, 1996). See chapter 20 of this volume.

³ The "Affirmation of Creation" report can be found on the Seventh-day Adventist Web site: http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat54.html. See chapter 22 of this volume.

⁴ East-Central Africa Division, Euro-Africa Division, North American Division, South Pacific Division, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, Southern Asia Division, West-Central Africa Division.

⁵ Rightly or wrongly, Glacier View seems to have earned a reputation in the church as a venue to resolve "heretical" views. When in 1979 Desmond Ford raised questions about the church's sanctuary doctrine, it became apparent that three critical issues were involved in his challenge: (1) Were Ford's views merely doctrinal in nature? (2) Were they dictated by his theological methodology (including his view of revelation, inspiration, and interpretation)? (3) Or both? At a 1980 meeting between the church's scholars and the denominational leaders at Glacier View, Colorado, the doctrinal issue was discussed. Since that time, the church has been debating the methodological issue (the issue of Biblical inspiration and interpretation), an issue unrelated to the current controversy on Creation-evolution. It is not without significance, then, that the 2003 NAD Faith and Science Conference took place at Glacier View.

⁶ Notice this important statement from the Seventh-day Adventist "Statement on Theological and Academic Freedom": "The historic doctrinal position of the church has been defined by the General Conference in session and is published in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* under the title, 'Fundamental Beliefs.' It is expected that a teacher in one of the church's educational institutions will not teach as truth what is contrary to those fundamental truths. Truth, they will remember, is not the only product of the crucible of controversy; disruption also results. The dedicated scholar will exercise discretion in presenting concepts which might threaten church unity and the effectiveness of church action. Aside from the fundamental beliefs there are findings and inter-

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pretations in which differences of opinions occur within the church, but which do not affect one's relationship to it or to its message. When expressing such differences, a teacher will be fair in his presentation and will make his loyalty to the church clear. He will attempt to differentiate between hypotheses and facts and between central and peripheral issues." This "Statement on Theological and Academic Freedom" was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council session in Washington, D.C., October 11, 1987. The entire document is available on the official SDA Web site: http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat36.html.

⁷ Two statements capture the essence of the SDA understanding of Creation: "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. (Genesis 1; 2; Exodus 20:8-11; Psalms 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Hebrews 11:3.)" [Fundamental Belief #6, emphasis mine].

"Seventh-day Adventists hold that the record of Creation in *Genesis 1 and 2 is literal and historical*, just as was largely held until the eighteenth century. . . . Among the features of this account, which are held to be literal, are the references to time. Given the formula about the time elements, it is evident and clear that the writer of the text was referring to literal 24-hour days, each with its day and night. *This gives a full basis and foundation for the seventh day as the conclusion to Creation week.* That day was a day for the rest of God, in which He took into full account all of the good things that He had created, even the human beings with which His **creative** event culminated. For good reason God set that day apart, and blessed and sanctified it for the use of human beings." (*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, volume 12 of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* series, p. 450, emphasis mine).

⁸ See especially the articles by Jim Gibson "Problems with 'Intermediate Models' of Origin"; Sean Pitman, "The Emperor Has No Clothes"; Frank L. Marsh, "Origins: Evolution and the Bible"; Robert Gentry, "From Evolutionist Scientist to a Believing Creationist"; Walter Veith, "My Difficult Journey from Evolution to Creation"; Ariel Roth, "Adventism and the Challenges to Creation."

⁹ The quotations that follow are from papers presented at the 2003 NAD Faith and Science Conference. I cannot identify which church scholar said what because of certain restrictions imposed by organizers of the conference.

¹⁰ For more on this, see John T. Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2002); Marco T. Terreros, "Death Before the Sin of Adam: A Fundamental Concept in Theistic Evolution and Its Implications for Evangelical Theology," (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1994); idem, "The Adventist Message and the Challenge of Evolution," *Dialogue* 8/2 (1996) : 11 -13; Richard M. Davidson, "In the Beginning: How to Interpret Genesis 1," *Dialogue* 6/3 (1994) :9-12; John T. Baldwin, "Progressive Creationism and Biblical Revelation: Some Theological Implications," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 3/1 (1992):105-119. See also the insightful articles by Frank L. Marsh, "Evolution and the Bible," *Adventist Review*, January 16, 1992, pp. 8, 9; "The Conflict Over Origins," *Adventist Review*, January 23, 1992, pp. 17; "Variety—The Species of Life," *Ministry*, February 1981, pp. 24, 25.

¹¹ Clifford Goldstein's insightful article, "Seventh-day Darwinians" in *Adventist Review* of July 24, 2003, brought a heated response from a certain segment of the reading public. Although Goldstein's article reflected the views of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, interestingly (or sur-

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prisingly), the editor of *Adventist Review* felt compelled to state that "Goldstein's view and tone represented himself only, not the editors or the church." The above quote by Goldstein was his partial response to his critics.

¹² If the theological disagreements can be explained on the basis of differences of temperament, then one can easily employ psychological or sociological models or techniques, such as the Myers-Briggs temperament profile to help foster understanding. On the other hand, if the disagreements have to do with conflicting worldviews, and a lack of understanding of the nature and meaning of the Genesis account, then they can only be resolved theologically by serious study of the Bible.

¹³ Richard Hammill, "Journey of a Progressive Believer," transcript of a talk given to an Association of Adventist Forums convention, Seattle, Washington, October 13, 1989, cited by Hayward, "The Many Faces of Adventist Creationism: '80-'95," *Spectrum* 25/3 (March 1996) :27, 28, emphasis supplied. See also Richard Hammill's other works: "Fifty Years of Creationism: The Story of an Insider," *Spectrum* 15/2 (August 1984) :32-45; "The Church and Earth Science," *Adventist Today*, September-October 1994, pp. 7, 8; Pilgrimage: Memoirs of an Adventist Administrator (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1992). Fritz Guy, Larry Geraty, etc., adopted the same position at the 2003 NAD Faith and Science Conference.

¹⁴ Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists* (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1992), p. xvi, emphasis supplied.

¹⁵ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 113, 114.

¹⁶ While upholding *sola scriptura*, and thus referring to her works as the "lesser light," Ellen White herself described her twofold function in the church as follows: "God has, in that Word [the Bible], promised to give visions in the 'last days'; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from the Bible truth" (*Early Writings*, p. 78, emphasis mine). The light God gave her, she explains, "has been given to correct specious error and to specify what is truth" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 3, p. 32, emphasis mine). Notice that the writings of Ellen White are not to establish a new rule of faith apart from the Bible. Rather, they have been given the church to "comfort" God's people (when they are in the right path), to "correct" them (when they err from the truth), and to "specify" what is truth (when they are not sure). With so many confusing, conflicting voices involved in Biblical interpretation, can anyone doubt the importance and urgency of the Spirit of Prophecy in the hermeneutical enterprise?

¹⁷ For Ellen White, the answer is very simple: "The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested" (*The Great Controversy*, p. vii). Again, "The old truths are essential; new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. It is only as the old truths are understood that we can comprehend the new" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 127, 128). Ellen White discredits the claims of the revisionist proponents of "present truth" or "progressive revelation." Anticipating the modern reinterpretations and applications of Scripture that contradict Scripture, she wrote: "When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. The truth for this time God has given us as a foundation for our faith. One will arise, and still another, with new light, which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit. . . . We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 161).

¹⁸ Ellen G. White affirmed the full trustworthiness of the Bible's historical and scientific accounts. First, the Holy Spirit "guided the pens of the sacred historians" in such a manner that "the Bible is the most instructive and comprehensive history that has ever been given to the

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world. . . . Here we have a truthful history of the human race, one that is unmarred by human prejudice or human pride" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 286; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 84, 85; cf. *Education*, p. 173). There are no distortions in the biographies and history of God's favored people for, in the words of Ellen White, "This history the unerring pen of inspiration must trace with exact fidelity" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 370). Whereas uninspired historians are unable to record history without bias, the inspired writers "did not testify to falsehoods to prevent the pages of sacred history being clouded by the record of human frailties and faults. The scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work themselves. They penned the literal truth, and stern, forbidding facts are revealed for reasons that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend" (*ibid.*, p. 9).

Second, the Bible's science is also authentic. "Its sacred pages contain the only authentic account of the Creation. . . . There is harmony between nature and Christianity; for both have the same Author. The book of nature and the book of revelation indicate the working of the same divine mind" (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 84, 85). "Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation; and in the effort to restore harmony, interpretations of Scripture have been adopted that undermine and destroy the force of the Word of God." Ellen White rejected naturalistic evolution and the long ages of geology. "Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of the Creation. Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of Creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years. Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for. The Bible record is in harmony with itself and with the teaching of nature" (*Education*, pp. 128, 129).

¹⁹ See, for example, Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Must We Be Silent?: Issues Dividing Our Church* (Ann Arbor: Berean Books, 2001), pp. 455-521.

²⁰ Besides some of the insightful articles in this present volume, see also John F. Ashton, ed., *In Six Days: Why 50 Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation* (Frenchs Forest NSW, Australia: New Holland Publishers, 1999); Colin Mitchell, *Creationism Revisited: A New Look at the Case for Creationism* (Alma Park, England: Autumn House, 1999); Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler and Adler, 1986); Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991); Brian Leith, *The Descent of Darwin: A Handbook of Doubts About Darwinism* (London: Collins, 1982); Scott M. Huse, *The Collapse of Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983); J.P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994); Percival Davis and Dean H. Kenyon, *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins* (Dallas: Haughton, 1989); Michael Polanyi, "Life's Irreducible Structure," *Science* 160 (June 1968) :1308-1312; Alvin Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible," *Christian Scholar's Review*, No. 1 (1991) :8-32; W. R. Bird, *The Origin of Species Revisited: The Theories of Evolution of Abrupt Appearance in Science* (New York: Philosophical Library), vol. 1.

²¹ Clifford Goldstein, "Seventh-day Darwinians" *Adventist Review* (July 24, 2003), available at <http://www.adventistreview.org/2003-1530/story4.html>.

Chapter 17

Adventism and the Challenges to Creation

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The newspaper headlines read, "Creationism Is Scientific Prostitution." I had heard a prominent scientist make this exact statement the day before, but I was surprised that such an accusation should make the headlines. I was in New Orleans attending the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America, and of special interest to me were two symposia on Creation and geology.

The statement quoted above came from a professor of geology at Oregon State University. Other statements from noted scientists included: creationists are "as crooked as a three-dollar bill" and they "intentionally and cynically mislead well-intentioned citizens." "Biblical catastrophism is dishonest, nasty." Creationism is the "tyranny of a well organized and strongly motivated minority," "erroneous pseudoscience they pass off as scholarship," "a ruse," and one "should not let science fall to the fraud of creationists."

This was not your usual scientific meeting presentation. The emotionalism I saw far exceeded that of ordinary scientific discussion. Gone was the image of the white-coat-clad, cool, calm, calculating, objective scientist.

Scant Acceptance. Lest we creationists settle smugly into self-righteousness, I should note that these scientists were reporting on a number of well-documented errors made by creationists. It is not that difficult to find significant errors in any broad area of science. What had especially irritated these scientists Has a Gallup poll of adults in the United States taken two months earlier that showed how few were accepting the evolutionary model that life came about by itself. The same poll has been taken during the last two decades, and the results indicate a consistent preference for the creation of humans by God within the last 10,000 years (44-47%) as compared to an evolutionary process over millions of years where no God is involved (9-12%). A significant group (37-40%)

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believes that God has guided the development of humans over millions of years.

Scientists at these symposia discussed why so few were following them. Some suggested poor teaching. In my opinion this was not the problem. More important was the fact that they had a weak product to sell. It is difficult for many to believe that all of the universe's amenities for life, and the complexities of life itself, just happened by themselves.

Warfare. The Gallup poll demonstrates the ongoing warfare between science and the Bible—one of the greatest intellectual battles of all time, and especially during the last two centuries. Science advocates evolution, sometimes called naturalistic evolution, which postulates that life developed on Earth, all by itself, without God, gradually, over billions of years. The Bible, on the other hand, suggests Creation, also called Biblical Creation or recent Creation, in which God created life in a six-day period a few thousand years ago. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a special concern about this matter; both because of our belief that the Bible is the Word of God and because our Sabbath is based on a day of rest that followed a six-day Creation by God. Science's evolutionary model negates both of these tenets.

How has our church been affected by this conflict of views? What are some of the solutions that have been proposed? How do these measure up to the evidence, both in nature and in Scripture?

Discussions of Origins Within Adventism

Our early church pioneers were not especially concerned about the burgeoning theory of evolution. Sometimes they discussed it, but usually they simply dismissed it as invalid. They were more concerned about the Bible, its prophecies, and carrying the Gospel to all the world. Ellen G. White occasionally referred to evolution; she considered it, and ideas that life developed over eons of time, as incorrect and even harmful. In the first half of the last century, pioneer Adventist scientists such as George McCready Price, Harold Clark, and Frank L. Marsh helped steer the church away from any evolutionary ideas, all affirming that God had created life on Earth in six days a few thousand years ago.

However, by the middle of the 20th century some Adventist science teachers had some concerns, especially about radiometric dating and the fossil record. At their suggestion, in 1958 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists organized what became the Geoscience Research Institute. It was not long before some scientists at the Institute started suggesting, subtly at

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first, and later more openly, that life had existed on Earth for a much longer time than the few thousand years suggested in the Bible. Other scientists at the institute felt that the scientific data could be reinterpreted otherwise, and indeed some data suggested a much briefer period than the millions of years that science was claiming.¹ This discussion among scientists in the church has continued ever since then.

Scientists. For Adventists, the main issue is not especially about whether evolution or Creation is correct. Most Adventist scientists do not accept the main tenets of evolution. The real question is whether life developed gradually over millions of years, or whether God created life in six days a few thousand years ago as the Bible indicates.

A survey of Adventist college-level science teachers in North America taken in 1994 found that nearly two-thirds believe in a six-day Creation. More than two-thirds of those that believe in a six-day Creation think it occurred less than 10,000 years ago, while the rest opt for a six-day Creation between 10,000 and 100,000 years ago. Only 18.2% opt for life's having developed by God's activity over millions of years, while a few have other ideas.

Almost two-thirds of the scientists believe that most fossils result from the Biblical Flood. This great worldwide³ Genesis Flood is a crucial point in the discussion,⁴ because that Flood is the way one can reconcile the sequence of fossils found in the crust of the earth with a six-day Creation. Instead of the fossils' having been laid down gradually over millions of years, as evolution postulates, the Creation view proposes that most fossils resulted from burial of animals and plants during the year-long Genesis Flood.

Theologians. We do not have a survey of the thinking of Adventist theologians in North America on this question. In some of our institutions most of them would support a six-day Creation while in others almost all would side against the concept. Sometimes the discussion on this issue is friendly, and sometimes it generates more heat than light. Most of the debate's participants are sincere and concerned scholars who evaluate science and the Bible in different ways.

Unfortunately, in some cases emotions have been so strong that participants have compromised the truth, both in oral and written argumentation. In my opinion, the discussion would profit from a greater willingness on the part of some Adventist scholars to be more open to alternatives to traditional scientific interpretations. Science repeatedly reverses its views. Today's dogma can be tomorrow's heresy.

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Books. Recently an unusual number of books on this topic have been published within the broad Adventist sphere of influence. I know of at least ten within the last five years.³ Nine of these strongly support the Biblical model of a recent Creation. Of special note is the book *In Six Days: Why 50 Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation*, which validates the fact that one can be a scientist and also believe in Creation. The most comprehensive book in the list is *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture*, which is, or soon will be, available in fifteen translations, including Chinese and Russian. These translations are being published largely by Adventist publishing houses and reflect the depth of interest within the church in the relation of science to the Bible.

Adventism's rank and file are not greatly troubled regarding the validity of the Bible and its Creation account. They generally accept the Bible as the Word of God. The church focuses on evangelizing the world, and membership is growing at an unprecedented, almost unbelievable, rate.

However, not all is well. Questions arise about the truthfulness of the Bible and its Creation account, especially in some of our advanced educational institutions. This is more important for Adventism than would seem so at first, because Adventist beliefs are largely maintained or changed in our influential advanced educational institutions.

Alternatives to Creation

While many view the battle between science and the Bible as a conflict between Creation and evolution, the issue is complicated by important views that try to reconcile one to the other by accepting and rejecting parts of each. These intermediate views, popular in many mainline Christian churches, figure largely in contemporary Christianity's debate about origins. In these intermediate models you can still have a personal God and yet have life develop over millions of years, as evolution asserts.

A variety of such models has been proposed.⁶ The two most prominent ones are progressive creation and theistic evolution. Recently a new movement called intelligent design has appeared. Its focus is very much on the scientific evidence for the existence of a designer. This movement's parameters are broad enough to incorporate theistic evolution, progressive creation, and many other such views.

Progressive Creation. This model assumes that God performed many different creation events over many millions of years. Within this model, some try to interpret the days of creation as vast periods of time (the day-age inter -

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pretation), but the order for the various kinds of fossils we find on Earth does not at all match the Genesis sequence of the Creation events (Genesis 1:9-29). Still, those who hold this view interpret the limited degree of progression from simple to complex in ascending through the fossil layers of the earth as degrees of progression in God's creative acts. The progressive creation model faces a number of problems:

- Neither the data of nature nor the Bible suggests directly that Creation occurred this way. The idea itself lacks support from any good source of evidence.

- The model disallows the Bible's concept of a six-day, all-inclusive Creation as given in Genesis and the Ten Commandments.

- In the progressive creation model, the presence of fierce predators long before the creation of man—such as the 50-foot, flesh-eating dinosaur *Tyrannosaurus rex*—negates the Genesis account of a good Creator and a perfect Creation. Here we have evil, in the form of predation, before the Fall of humanity and the consequences of sin (Genesis 3:14-19). This challenges not only the Genesis account of beginnings; in the New Testament, the apostle Paul attests that evil originated with man's transgression (Romans 5:12-19).

- Progressive creation also implies many errors or failures by God over long periods of time. Thousands of important groups of plants and animals at various levels in the fossil record are not now living on the earth's surface. Why would a loving, all-knowing God create so many forms of life, just to have them die out? Again, in the progressive creation model, this occurred long before the advent of man, his Fall, and the consequences of sin on nature as reported in Scripture. Progressive creation raises this question without providing a good explanation. One can imagine a God Who would create by this method, but this would not be the kind of God portrayed in the Bible, Whose Creation is described as "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The explanation for these extinct organisms that harmonizes with Scripture is the worldwide Flood brought on as a result of human wickedness.

Theistic Evolution. The theistic evolution model associates God with a continuous process of evolutionary development from simple to complex over many millions of years, with evolution a paramount part of the process. The idea fits fairly well with many concepts of the general theory of evolution while still permitting God's activity. God is available to bridge some of the difficult barriers that evolution faces.

The model, however, faces some serious difficulties:

- The problems we noted above for progressive creation also apply to

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theistic evolution.

- In addition, the missing links between the major fossil groups suggest that no continuous evolutionary process ever occurred. Where we would expect thousands of evolutionary intermediates, especially between the major groups of organisms, virtually none are found that can be considered valid.

- The model is demeaning to God. In contrast to the all-powerful Creator described in the Bible, this God uses the crutch of evolution to produce advanced forms. An evolutionary model implies slow progress and competition, but these challenge God's creative power, knowledge, and goodness. Survival of only the fittest by competition and the death of the weak, as proposed for the evolutionary model, seems especially out of character with the God of the Bible Who has concern for the sinner (Isaiah 44:21, 22), does not forget the sparrow (Luke 12:6), and Whose ideal for life includes the lion and the lamb living peacefully together (Isaiah 11:6; 65:25).

Relation to Scientific Data

The evolutionary model, as accepted by science, faces serious scientific problems.⁷ While evolutionists suggest some answers, these are unsatisfactory, and the problems persist. Especially noteworthy are:

- How could living forms, which even at their simplest level are very complex, arise all by themselves?

- How could complex organisms or systems gradually evolve from simple ones? Random evolutionary changes have no foresight to plan ahead, and survival of the fittest would eliminate the intermediate forms because they could not function and would be useless until all the necessary parts had evolved. The very mechanism that Charles Darwin proposed for evolution would actually interfere with the gradual development of complex biological systems.

- The gaps or "missing links" between the major fossil groups suggest that evolution never occurred.

- In several ways, a significant body of geologic data suggests that the long geological eons proposed for evolution and the deposition of the earth's sedimentary layers did not occur. For instance, the present rate of erosion of the continents by rain and rivers is so fast that, if the earth had existed for as long as geologists claim, we should have no continents left by now. They would have disappeared in less than just one percent of their proposed geologic age. Evolution needs all the time it can muster for the highly improbable events it postulates, and the billions of years suggested are totally inadequate, yet the rate of erosion of the continents suggests that much less time was available.

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- When we look at the arrangement of fossils in the layers of the earth's crust from the perspective of long geological ages, we see a very strange thing. During the first 5/6 of the assumed evolutionary time (i.e., 3,000 million years), virtually no evolution took place. Organisms are essentially still in the one-cell stage over that entire period of time. Then suddenly, in less than 1/35 of evolutionary time (less than 100 million years), practically all the major groups of animals appear. Plants also appear quickly but a little less suddenly. Evolutionists call this sudden appearance of animals the Cambrian explosion, and acknowledge the problem. This pattern does not fit what we should expect from a gradual ongoing evolutionary process. The pattern fits better with Creation. In that model the Cambrian explosion represents the marine organisms buried in the lowest seas during the great Genesis Flood.⁸

To all this we can add the new evidence for the fine-tuning of the universe. That evidence points to a number of physical constants that are essential to our universe's existence and that are so precise that they must have been designed by some intelligent mind. All of these things make one wonder how the data of nature can point so well towards God, while scientists keep pointing away from Him. How long can scientists keep on pretending that there is no God?

Mixed Scientific Picture. In poorly authenticated views such as theistic evolution and progressive creation, which are intermediate between naturalistic evolution and Biblical Creation, one finds a mixed picture regarding the scientific data. Some of the problems listed above for evolution, such as the data that challenge the long geological ages, also apply to both theistic evolution and progressive creation. The existence of gaps or missing links between major fossil groups favors both the Biblical Creation and progressive creation models, because one would expect missing links in both models. However, the same data challenge both naturalistic evolution and theistic evolution, where missing links are not expected.

Challenges to Creation. The most serious challenges that the Creation model faces from science are:

- A general increase in complexity of fossil types as one ascends through the layers of the earth's crust. Evolutionists consider this as evidence for evolutionary progression over time. One creationist explanation for this is that it reflects the distribution of organisms before the Genesis Flood. The gradually rising waters of the Flood buried these organisms sequentially, in order. Today's distribution of organisms on the earth, with microorganisms in the

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deep rocks in the lowest position, marine organisms in the oceans in an intermediate position, and the most advanced on land higher up, reflects some of this general increase in complexity. In other words, the pattern of increased complexity of fossils is not due to evolution but to the effects of the Flood on the organisms in their natural distribution.⁹

- Radiometric dating methods such as potassium-argon and carbon-14 often give dates far beyond a Biblical time frame. These methods are complex and involve many exceptions and assumptions. The dates obtained are subject to some valid reevaluation when the Genesis Flood is taken into account.¹⁰ We would expect such a Flood to change some of the parameters associated with these complex dating methods.

Many of the scientific problems of evolution, and the evidence for design referred to above, provide scientific support for the Biblical Creation model. The new trend in geology, called neocatastrophism, interprets a significant portion of the geologic layers as a result of rapid catastrophic deposition.¹¹ This is scientific evidence that especially supports the Biblical model of a worldwide Flood.¹²

Relation to the Bible

The only model that fits the Bible is that of a recent Creation by God in six days. The Bible has only one model of Creation. Nowhere do we find suggestions that life developed over eons of time. In this respect the Biblical Creation model stands in stark contrast to models such as naturalistic evolution, theistic evolution, or progressive creation. Ellen White also supports only the Biblical model of origins.¹³ The question of the amount of time for the development of life on Earth is a major difference between Biblical Creation and the other leading models that propose millions or billions of years for the gradual development of life.

Allegory or History? Those who adopt one of the views intermediate between Creation and evolution often assume that the Creation and Flood accounts in the first part of Genesis (Genesis 1-11) are allegorical. Such an approach undermines the Bible as a whole because, either directly or by implication, the leading Bible personalities refer to the first part of Genesis as factual history and not allegory. Their testimony supports the truthfulness of the Biblical account of beginnings.

Peter, Paul, Christ, and God are among those in Scripture who in various ways authenticate the truthfulness of the Creation and Flood accounts.¹⁴ In the

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most direct words we have from Him, written with His Own finger (Exodus 31:18), God Himself states in the Ten Commandments that we should keep the Sabbath holy because He created all in six days (Exodus 20:11).

If you believe in the Biblical account of beginnings, you are in the good company of Peter, Paul, Christ, and God. It would be a strange kind of God Who would create over millions of years and then ask human beings to keep holy the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial of His creating all in six days.

Repeatedly Scripture tells us that the God of the Bible always speaks the truth and detests lying. As God, He could order that the Sabbath be kept for a variety of other reasons. It would likewise be a strange God Who for millennia would allow His prophets to misrepresent the all-important story of beginnings, only to wait for Charles Darwin and others to present the correct view.

There does not seem to be any way to reconcile the Biblical account of beginnings with the long geological ages proposed in models like naturalistic evolution, theistic evolution, and progressive creation.

Some Implications

Eroded Beliefs, Membership. Views lying somewhere between Biblical Creation and naturalistic evolution have profoundly influenced the beliefs of many Christian churches. Since the theory of evolution became popular more than a century ago, many religious denominations have adopted various ideas of life's progressive development over many millions of years. It is disappointing to see churches that once placed a high priority on Biblical truth eventually abandon their position, yet it occurs, often slowly and insidiously.

Loss of membership often accompanies erosion of beliefs.^b In recent years the mainline churches in the United States—that no longer believe in the Biblical account of Creation and many other traditional Biblical concepts—have lost millions of members, while the more conservative evangelical churches have grown rapidly. It is particularly difficult to convince people that Christianity is for real when churches consider the Bible to be in error, especially with respect to the important question of origins.

Drifting away from the Bible and God is a common sociological pattern, repeatedly illustrated in Biblical history. Over and over again, God had to use drastic means to reverse such trends. Incidents such as the Genesis Flood, the Israelites' long sojourn in the desert, and the Babylonian captivity depict how difficult but important it is to resist such pressures.

Educational Drift. Modern educational institutions also reflect the same

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tendency to drift. A large number of institutions of higher learning in the United States (such as Auburn University, Boston University, Brown, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, Rutgers, Tufts, the University of Southern California, Wesleyan University, Wichita State University, and Yale) began as religious institutions but have moved well down the path of secularization and are no longer church-related. It is significant that (at least to this writer's knowledge) no institution that began as secular has become religious. Here also the trend seems to be away from God.

This is not entirely surprising. As long as the dominant climate of scholarly pursuits is secular, we can expect this to happen. Without special efforts to counter these trends, we must expect drifting. Public educational institutions, and many private ones, no longer condone, let alone encourage, religious commitment. Throughout history, the pattern of gradually sliding away from God illustrates how one can easily and imperceptibly amble from a belief in a recent Creation by God to a naturalistic evolutionary model where there is no God. Adventism needs to be especially wary of such insidious trends.

Conclusions

Adventism is facing some of the same sociological pressures that have brought other churches to give up belief in Biblical Creation. However, one of the problems facing those who reject the Biblical model is their failure to provide a more authenticated model than Creation or an adequate substitute for the Bible as the Word of God. It is becoming increasingly clear that for two centuries science has led us down an evolutionary pathway that is becoming less and less tenable. Has science also led us down an erroneous pathway about the amount of time life has been on Earth? Some of the scientific data that challenge the long geological ages is hard to explain away.

Makes Sense. When I look at both the Bible and the data from nature, the Creation model makes much more sense to me than the other proposed models. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a particularly important Creation message for this time. The first angel's message urges the worship of the Creator. The seventh-day Sabbath, essentially our most distinctive doctrine, is founded on a seven-day Creation week.

Our confidence that the Bible is the Word of God does not allow for such alternatives to Creation as progressive creation, theistic evolution, or naturalistic evolution. We should not yield to fruitless speculation. As "the people of the Book," we have a special opportunity and responsibility to represent the whole

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Bible, including its Creation message, to a world that is adrift on the great question of how life began here on Earth.

Endnotes

¹ For some examples, see chaps. 13 and 15 in Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1998).

² F. Peterson, "Science Faculty Vary in Views on Creationism," *Adventist Today*, November-December 1994, p. 19.

³ Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood," *Origins* 22 (1995) :58-73.

⁴ John T. Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000).

⁵ J.F. Ashton, ed., *In Six Days: Why 50 Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation* (Sydney: New Holland Publishers, 1999); John T. Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement* (see n. 4, above); Leonard Brand, *Faith, Reason, and Earth History* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997); J. Flori and H. Rasolofomasoandro, *En Busca de Los Origenes: ¿Evolution o Creadon?* (Madrid: Editorial Safeliz, S.L., 2000); P.A.L. Giem, *Scientific Theology* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1997); C. Mitchell, *Creationism Revisited* (Alma Park, Lines., England: Autumn House Limited, 1999); James L. Hayward, ed., *Creation Reconsidered* (Roseville, Calif.: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000); Dwight K. Nelson, *Built to Last: Creation and Evolution: A Thoughtful Look at the Evidence That a Master Designer Created Our Planet* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1998); Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (see n. 1, above); Randall W. Younker, *God's Creation: Exploring the Genesis Story* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1999).

⁶ For numerous references to some of the literature and for an evaluation of a number of these models, see the following by Ariel A. Roth: chap. 21 in *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (see n. 1, above); "How to Invalidate the Bible—Unconsciously: Some Thoughts on Pluralism About Origins," *Adventist Perspectives* 2/2 (1988) :12-27; "Implications of Various Interpretations of the Fossil Record," *Origins* 7/2 (1980) :71-86.

⁷ For discussion of these problems, see chaps. 4-8, 11, 13, and 15 in Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (see n. 1, above).

⁸ See n. 5, above.

⁹ For a comprehensive discussion of this and other explanations for the fossil sequence in a Creation context, see chap. 10 in Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (see n. 1, above).

¹⁰ For further information, see Robert H. Brown, "Compatibility of Biblical Chronology With C-14 Age," *Origins* 11 (1994) :66-79; Robert H. Brown, "Correlation of C-14 Age With the Biblical Time Scale," *Origins* 17 (1990) :56-65; chap. 5 in P.A.L. Giem, *Scientific Theology* (see n. 5, above); and chap. 14 in Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (see n. 1, above).

¹¹ See chaps. 12, 13, and 15 in Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (see n. 1, above).

¹² For some references, see Ariel A. Roth, "Catastrophism? Yes!" *Dialogue* 10/2 (1998) :11-15.

¹³ See, for example, *Education*, p. 128.

¹⁴ See 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:3-6; Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 11:8; 15:22, 45; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14; Hebrews 11:4-7; Matthew 19:4-6; 24:37, 38; Mark 10:6; Luke 17:26, 27;

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Isaiah 54:9; Exodus 20:11; 31:17.

¹⁵ Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1972, 1977).

Chapter 18

Origins: Evolution and the Bible

By Frank L. Marsh, PhD

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Recent controversy in the United States over the teaching of "creation science" in the public schools has renewed public interest in the question of the origin of our planet and its life-forms. The public media describe the events as a conflict between science and religion.

But is it really so? Is the controversy between Creation and evolutionary teachings really a choice between unprovable religious dogma and hard scientific fact? To answer that question, we need to be clear about two things: first, the nature of the origins problem itself, and second, the nature of the evidences we bring to bear on the question.

The Nature of the Origins Problem

If the problem of the origin of living forms were of the same nature as that of the shape of the earth, careful scientists would have solved it long before this. But there is a very great difference between the problem of the shape and motions of our earth and that of the origin of plants and animals. The shape of the earth is a present condition that we can test, measure, and demonstrate scientifically. Likewise, we can examine its motions as an astronomical body. Because the earth is *now* round and is *now* moving, we can study its shape and motions in a scientific manner.

But the problem of the origin of living forms is of an entirely different nature. Basic types of plants and animals are not right now appearing, either by evolution or special Creation. Hence, neither evolution nor special Creation of basic types can be demonstrated today in the laboratory. Furthermore, this has been true as far back as authentic records extend. No human being has ever witnessed the emergence of a basic type of plant or animal life.

Scientists, then, who assert today that evolution of new basic types is as

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completely demonstrated as is the shape of our earth, are completely wrong. If they would be truthful, they would have to say, "We cannot *prove* in the laboratory that evolution of new basic types has occurred or is occurring, but we *believe* such to be the case." Likewise, believers in the Bible account of origins will not be able to *prove* that it happened in that manner, though they may find much evidence for their belief.

The Nature of the Evidence

Adherents of both the evolutionary and the creationist views need to remember the *nature* of the evidence that bears upon origins. A careful, open-minded student of the subject will find, perhaps to his amazement, that of the long list of evidences set forth to prove that evolution has occurred, not one item is coercive in quality.

What do we mean by coercive? Evidence quite generally can be placed in one of two categories. Either it is more or less coercive, or it is more or less persuasive. Coercive evidence admits of only one interpretation; persuasive evidence may point the researcher toward a certain conclusion, but it does not rule out other interpretations.

A good illustration of coercive evidence is found in the proof that our earth is round. Even before we had satellites orbiting the earth and photographs taken from the moon, there was just *no* other reasonable explanation of such phenomena as the appearance first of the tops of mountains when an observer approaches land from the ocean, or of the fact that if a world traveler will proceed in one direction he will eventually arrive back at the point from which he started. Because such evidence can be interpreted reasonably only by assuming that the earth is round, we say the evidence is coercive.

By contrast, *every item* on the list of evidences for evolution is of a very different sort. For example, let us take the order of the fossils in the rock layers. It is an observable fact that generally, wherever several fossil-bearing layers of sandstone, shale, limestone, and the like are found in contact with one another in an undisturbed vertical relationship, the fossils in the lower layers are of simpler animals (such as brachiopods and trilobites) than those in the higher layers, which may be reptiles or even mammals. Evolutionists proclaim this natural order of the fossils as one of the most powerful evidences that complex animals evolved from simpler animals. They consider it to be quite coercive in quality.

However, the careful student will see clearly that the order of the fossils does not constitute coercive evidence for evolution, since this arrangement

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could have occurred without evolution entering the picture whatsoever. A universal Flood, as described in Genesis 6-8, could have produced the same results in a world upon which every kind of animal was living at the same time.

We read in Genesis that the Noachian Flood did not come as one great overwhelming tidal wave, but instead rose gradually over a period of about six weeks before it crested some twenty feet above the highest pre-Flood mountain. The waters were very tempestuous as they gradually crept higher and higher.

Animals such as brachiopods and trilobites, which could not flee from the boisterous waters, were covered with sediment first. The more complex creatures that could retreat to higher ground did so and were finally buried in layers above the trilobites. The powerful animals and those that were agile climbed above the noisy, tumultuous waves as long as high hills and mountains were available. But they were eventually overwhelmed and became entombed in the upper layers or were left dead upon the surface when the Flood retreated. It would have been a most unnatural and strange thing if one of the huge brontosaurus had permitted itself to be entombed with the trilobites in some low spot at the first onslaught of the floodwaters.

Thus the present order of the fossils is not coercive for evolution or for special Creation. For one who has strong faith in evolution, the fossil order, simple to complex, can be explained "reasonably and logically" by evolution. But likewise, the person who has strong faith in special Creation sees the same arrangement explained "reasonably and logically" by the Flood. The believer in one doctrine may storm and rave about the strength of his own position and deride the supposed extreme weakness and even absurdity of the position of the other school of thought, but the fact remains that the evidence is subjective and capable of explanation from more than one point of view.

So the sincere student of origins must recognize that neither evolution nor special Creation can be demonstrated. They are not continuing processes, else we *could* demonstrate one or the other. Variation is everywhere manifest today, but *variation is not evolution*. In order for evolution to occur, new basic types must appear. A hundred years of careful study has revealed that variation can do no more than erect new breeds or races or clusters within a basic type already on hand.

The controversies that we see today over origins are not, therefore, truly conflicts between proven scientific facts and religious speculations, but between two different statements of faith, neither of which is subject to proof in the full scientific sense. Belief in long ages of evolution, though supported (its adherents claim) by overwhelming scientific data, still requires faith, for its processes cannot be observed or duplicated today, and its evidences are not

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scientifically coercive.

The Order of Fossils in Rocks

Among what evolutionists consider to be their strongest evidence for organic evolution is what they call "the order of fossils in the rocks from simple upward to the complex and specialized." However, the situation that actually results here was pointed out long ago by Austin H. Clark, a prominent evolutionist (at one time a curator in the National Museum):

When we examine a series of fossils of any age, we may pick out one and say with confidence, "this is a crustacean"—or a starfish, or a brachiopod, or an annelid, or any other type of creature as the case may be....

Since all the fossils are determinable as members of their respective groups by the application of definitions of those groups *drawn up from and based entirely on living types*, and since none of these definitions of the phyla or major groups of animals need be in any way altered or expanded to include the fossils, it naturally follows that throughout the fossil record *these major groups have remained essentially unchanged*. This means that the interrelationships between them likewise have remained unchanged.

Strange as it may seem, the animals of the very earliest fauna of which our knowledge is sufficient to enable us to speak with confidence, the fauna of the Cambrian period, were singularly similar to the animals of the present day.²

Here is very strong evidence (coercive, possibly) encountered every time a fossil is picked up, from Cambrian (earliest) to recent, and its identification sought. Is there any wonder that this fossil situation is not noised abroad today? Most evolutionists are not aware that the scientific evidence here is actually all for special Creation.

The believer in the Bible account of the origin of life need not be intimidated by claims that his belief conflicts with the established findings of science. Science is powerless to prove anything about the origin of the basic types of plants and animals. It still requires an act of faith from its adherents, even as belief in the Bible's accounts requires faith. Though we do not have answers

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to every question, we may place our faith in the Word of God without sacrificing the intellect He has given us. If even an evolutionist must *choose* to believe his doctrine, why should we not choose to believe the Word of the One in Whom we have trusted for our salvation?

Evolution: An Act of Faith

In the Western world today, the evolutionary view is certainly the dominant explanation of origins. Yet because evolution of new basic types is not now observed, it cannot be considered a demonstrated fact, simply because no laboratory proof is available for it. There are subjective items, yes, by the thousands, but these are also compatible with the doctrine of special Creation. This means that the evidence is all circumstantial, subjective, or persuasive, rather than coercive. It will admit of more than one possible explanation, depending on the assumptions the interpreter brings to it.

As we recognize that laboratory science is unable to prove whether things evolved or were specially created, we realize that accepting either the doctrine of evolution or the doctrine of special Creation is purely an act of faith, though one that should harmonize with experience.

Experience says that substance does not appear from nothing, neither do natural forces originate themselves. To be wise and reasonable, we must recognize that all these natural things require an Originator and Maintainer Who is greater than they. The origin of matter, natural forces, living substance, and basic types of living things call upon us to acknowledge an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God. This God is the One Who speaks to us through the words of the Bible.

Compromise

Some today seek to find a middle ground between the prevailing scientific views of origins and those of the Bible. While professing to accept the teachings of Scripture, they endeavor to express an understanding of them that would harmonize with evolutionistic interpretations of the evidence in the natural world.

Even within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, some may try to accomplish this. Certainly there is no virtue in being needlessly out of harmony with the rest of the world. We need to determine where the issues really lie and not make false distinctions.

Some quote Ellen White on the importance of seeking the harmony of nature and Scripture: "Since the book of nature and the book of revelation

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bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony. . . . The book of nature and the written Word shed light upon each other. They make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the laws through which He works" (*Education*, p. 128). But a reading of this whole chapter ("Science and the Bible") in *Education* would reveal that Mrs. White rejected some of the very means by which people still try to harmonize evolution with the Bible.

What are some of these approaches, and how should we receive them?

- **Nonliteral Genesis.** All of the attempts at harmonization claim that, in some manner, we are not to understand the Bible's Creation account literally. This position is necessary if one is to make room for long ages of development, as evolution teaches, rather than the sudden emergence of all living things at almost the same time.

Genesis 1 portrays all basic kinds or types of living things as created in six 24-hour days. Nowhere in this account or in the rest of the Bible do we find anything even suggesting that modern basic types had their origin through a slow progressive development from simple to complex. In Genesis 1:11, 12 we see every manner of plant from the most lowly to the giant of the forest appearing suddenly from the earth in one 24-hour day. In verses 20 and 21 we see "every living thing that moves" in the waters, from one-celled forms to the giant sea monsters, appearing on the fifth day. In verses 24 to 27 we find that in one day, not only did every land animal, largest as well as smallest, appear, but also man, the vicegerent of God on the earth.

- **Day-Age Theory.** Some have tried to harmonize evolution with the Bible by saying that the six days of Creation are each symbolic of long, indefinite time periods during which life-forms evolved. But even if, for the sake of argument, we grant this assertion, the Bible's days of Creation cannot be made to fit the evolutionary scheme. The order and distribution of events in the two systems simply will not match. One cannot have plants evolving over long ages before the appearance of the sun, for instance, nor would plants that require pollination by bees or other animal life be able to develop if animals came on the scene eons later.

In the Bible, not the slightest excuse is given for imagining that these days were longer than twenty-four hours. There is only one length of day that can be marked off by evening and morning. If the days of Creation week are not taken as 24-hour days, one must do great violence to the simple, clear, precise wording of the chapter.

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- **Theology-Not-Science Theory.** Some today claim to accept the Bible's teaching about Creation, but they say that its account is theology, not science. The teaching of Genesis 1 and 2, they say, is that God is the Creator, but they deny that the Bible gives us a factual account of *how* God did His work. Science, they say, tells us how; the Bible tells us Who.

The one who claims to accept the Bible's theology of Creation must be prepared to accept it all, else his claim is suspect. And we find that the concept that God made everything *good* is a part of the Bible's theology of Creation. The Bible makes it clear that in order to reveal His love to man, God created a perfect world outfitted to make man completely happy, with each plant and animal especially created and fitted into its complex environmental niche. The completed creation constituted a system in which no death of animals occurred. Through the warp of plant life was woven the beautiful woof of animal life, where all kinds existed harmoniously. It was a peaceful creation produced by a God of love, a creation in which the created forms neither hurt nor destroyed. "It was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

The Bible also tells us that into this perfect Creation stepped the destroyer. Our Earth became a scene of controversy between Christ and Satan in the natural world. Satan's great hatred against Christ, the Creator, manifested itself in the destruction and derangement of what originally was beautifully ordered and harmonious. Through manipulation of natural processes he has brought in the harsh order of bloody fang and claw. Where the original creation was completely harmonious, with no order of survival in which the strongest and most cruel won, we now live in a world where might makes right. This temporary reign of hate, with its law of tooth and claw, has very nearly stamped out the delicate, the refined, the lovely, and the fair. These degenerations are the work of a god of hate and are a wide departure from the perfection and harmony that the God of love established here originally.

Evolution, on the other hand, assumes that the system of natural selection with survival of the fittest has always existed and with processes of variation has brought about the erection of basic types. Churchmen of our day attempt to harmonize such an origin with the Bible, but the result is a base, inaccurate, hybrid doctrine. Upward development of man through the beasts, even if by the Creator, is diametrically opposed to the Scriptural representation of the God of love. Evolution presents a bloody, ruthless struggle for existence from the very beginning, where there is much waste of living substance and many false starts and blind alleys. At its very best it is a travesty upon the perfect work of an all-wise Creator. The inefficiency and cruelty of evolution is utterly incongruous with the *theology* of the Bible's portrayal of origins.

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Seventh-day Adventists can never adopt such a belief system.

Implications

The Bible's theology is affected at its center if we deny its account of the Creation. Cardinal doctrines of the Bible depend on this account.

For example, the Bible claims that death came as a result of sin. Both in Genesis 2 and 3, this point is clear. And in Romans we read that "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin," (Romans 5:12). But evolution teaches that death existed from the beginning, long before there ever was a human being. In other words, death is not a result of sin.

If death and the law of tooth and claw existed long before man, and if man evolved through these "natural" processes, then there could not have been a perfect Garden of Eden nor a perfect Adam and Eve. Nor could there have been a real Fall, in which man became subject to sin. If that is so, what is the theological meaning of Jesus' incarnation and atonement? Paul connects the two: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

If God used evolutionary processes of death and development to make our world and its inhabitants, then in what sense could Paul say that "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly," and that "the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption" (Romans 8:20, 21)? More specifically, from what do we need redemption and deliverance? If there was no Garden of Eden with its tree of life, what is the future that Revelation 22 depicts for the redeemed?

And of course, the seventh-day Sabbath loses its significance if it does not commemorate the creative work of God completed in six literal days.

The Bible's Message. The Word of God knows but one origin for living things. They appeared by special Creation in the six 24-hour days of the Creation week. Creation was a perfect work—there was nothing of trial and error, chance, or competition, with a survival of the fittest. Every organism is fitted harmoniously into the overall picture, so that the web of life, displaying no bloodstains, was marvelously intricate and beautiful to behold—worthy of an omniscient, omnipotent Author.

Man was formed of common material with the beasts, but he was distinct from them, sharing no common blood. He enjoyed the significant distinction of being made in the image of God, a son of God (Luke 3:38). The Word of God portrays a glorious future for us because we were created sons and daugh-

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ters in God's image and thus are members of the household of God. We can look forward with every assurance that in the earth made new, nature will be cleansed of all disharmony and every defilement of sin. The beautiful accord of the original Eden will be restored, and mankind will continue to enjoy soul-satisfying fulfillment through the ceaseless reaches of eternity.

All this is contained in the Bible's teaching about Creation. The church can do no better than to stand firmly by it today as we eagerly await the return of our Creator and Lord.

Endnotes

¹ This article is reprinted from ADVENTISTS AFFIRM 16/1 (Spring 2002) :25-32. It first appeared in two parts in the *Adventist Review*, January 16 and 23, 1991.

² Austin H. Clark, *The New Evolution* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1930), pp. 100, 101.

Chapter 19

How Long Was the Creation Week?

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Daniel 7-12: Prophecies of the End Time

The title to this brief study presents a rhetorical question comparable to questions like, "Who was buried in Grant's tomb?" or, "What color was Washington's white horse?"

All adults in the Western world and most in the Eastern world realize that a week lasts seven days. So when we refer to the Creation week of Genesis 1, we expect that it should also have lasted seven days. Indeed, it is the origin of the seven-day week. Outside of the Hebrew Scriptures, no other culture of the ancient Near East knew of or used a seven-day week until Babylonian astronomers devised a week of seven days in the Hellenistic period (4th-3rd century B.C.).

In other words, outside of the Bible, the only seven-day week known from the ancient world was not invented until after the books of the Old Testament closed in the Persian period (ca. 400 B.C.).

The imperial army took this Babylonian week back to Rome in the time of Caesar Augustus in the first century B.C. This was important for the later apostasy in Christianity, giving it another seven-day week in Rome for a template upon which to substitute Sunday for the seventh-day Sabbath in the newly emerging Christian church.

Origin of the Seven-day Week

Thus we are directly dependent upon the Hebrew Scriptures for a knowledge of the ultimate origin of the seven-day week. The Creation narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:4 lays out this origin for us. There God's six major creative acts are set off by six individual and successive days, followed by the seventh day upon which He rested from those creative acts.

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The text spells out the chronology of these creative acts quite specifically with a series of statements about time that conclude the record of each one of those creative acts. These statements are so emphatic that there need be no misunderstanding about the units of time involved. The statements begin with a form of the verb "to be" (= "there was"), followed by the Hebrew word for "evening." A conjunction joins this to a repetition of the same form of the verb "to be," followed by the Hebrew word for "morning." These paired statements indicate that there was a period of time marked off by the evening, at sunset, and this was followed by a period of time marked off by the morning, or sunrise. Each of these time units transpired, one following the other.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament we find similar statements about the daily sacrifice of the burnt offering. This was actually a pair of offerings, one offered in the morning and the other in the evening (Numbers 28:1-8).

Another parallel is the description of the pillar of cloud that accompanied the Israelites during the forty years of their wilderness wanderings. At evening it became a pillar of fire, and in the morning it changed back to a pillar of cloud (Numbers 9:15-21). With the clear meaning of these parallels, there are no linguistic grounds for confusing what these time elements mean in Genesis 1.

[Moses,] the writer of Genesis 1, could have written these chronological notations in such a way as to refer to the "third evening and the third morning" or "the fourth evening and the fourth morning," but he did not. Instead he added an additional summary phrase, "the third day" and "the fourth day." These, then, are the summary statements of what the evening and morning together make up. They made one day, and each one of those days was numbered.

No gaps.

The numbers with the days in Genesis 1 do not skip over gaps, such as 1, 4, 7, 16, and 25. Nor do they skip around in order like 1, 7, 3, 8, and 2. They give a direct and connected sequence with no gaps and no numbers out of order. They follow the full and complete sequence of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, with 7 as the concluding numbered day. There are no more days than seven, nor are there any fewer than seven. This, then, was the foundation of the original seven-day week that the later Israelites preserved.

On occasion, the Hebrew word for "day" (*yom*) can refer to longer periods of time. For example, the Day of the Lord—the Day of Judgment that came to Samaria, the northern kingdom's capital (Amos 5:18-20)—lasted more than one day. Completing that Day of Judgment took a three-year siege

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by the Assyrians until the city fell (2 Kings 18:8-12). There are no cases, however, where a day enumerated as "the fourth day" means anything other than a literal fourth day, nor does "the fifth day" ever mean anything other than a literal fifth day.

Thousand years?

The oft-quoted text in 2 Peter 3:8, "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," presents a comparison between God's perspective on time and our human perspective. It does not provide a "thousand years equals a day" principle by which to interpret the numbered days of Genesis 1. Even if this text did provide such a principle, it would be little comfort to the evolutionist, who requires millions of years, not thousands, for his scheme.

There could hardly be any more specific way in Hebrew to indicate that the numbered days of Genesis 1 were literal days just as the writer knew in his time and as we know today. Paraphrasing this repeated date formula rather freely, it means, "I started creating in the evening of the x^{th} day and I continued creating on the morning of the x^{th} day and I ended that act of creation just before the evening at sunset of the next day. All of this was one day of the Creation week, Day x ."

Various Theories.

The problem here is not that the Hebrew language or its translation into various other languages is unclear. It is direct, explicit, and clear. The problem is that modern man does not want to believe it. He prefers the evolutionary concept that life forms on Earth developed by a slow, very slow process over 600 million years. This concept does not fit well with the chronological statements expressed in Genesis 1. To make such a match, one would have to stretch the single days of Genesis 1 into 100 million years each. The fit is very poor. There is no exegetical or hermeneutical magic by which those days can be stretched anywhere near that far.

Thus, people have advanced various theories to get around the plain and clear statements of the text. Prominent among them is the so-called day-age theory, which holds that each one of the chronological statements in Genesis 1 does not mean a literal day but rather stands for a long period of time.

When the idea of evolution became widely known following Darwin's publication on this subject in 1859, the day-age theory was the most prominent proposal that the mainline seminaries and churches put forth to accommodate the text of Genesis 1 to theistic evolution. While this accommodation

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was going on, Ellen G. White was given a very specific vision that dealt with it. This was her first major statement on the subject. It was published in 1864, only four years after Darwin's book was published.

"I was then carried back to the Creation and *was shown* that the first week, in which God performed the works of Creation in six days and rested on the seventh, was just like every other week. The great God in His days of Creation and day of rest, measured off the first cycle as a sample for successive weeks till the close of time" (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 90, emphasis mine).

Unfortunately, many have focused mainly upon what she had to say two to three pages later about the ages proposed by geologists in contrast to the ages of the Bible. We should rather emphasize what she specifically said in the very first paragraph of that chapter about what she was shown in vision, which we have quoted above. As the mainline churches were accommodating to the theory of evolution by the day-age theory, in this vision God provided the antidote for that false theory. This is another way to show that the day-age accommodation to evolution is wrong, as is already evident from the plain and clear reading of the chronological phraseology in the original text.

This conflict over the Creation week has not ended; no doubt it will not end until the Second Coming of Christ. In the meantime, the church is charged to preach "the everlasting Gospel," which includes a Judgment-hour message that calls people to "worship Him Who made heaven and Earth, the sea and the fountains of waters" (Revelation 14:7). This is the first of three end-time messages that culminate in the Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 14:14). As various lexicographers have noted, the phraseology of Revelation 14:7 parallels that of the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:11). How appropriate, then, to worship the world's Creator by keeping holy the day on which He ended that Creation week—the seventh day, the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is not a memorial of 600 million years of evolution, but a memorial of the seven days of the Creation week in Genesis 1:1-2:4.

Chapter 20

Consequences of Moving Away From a Recent Six-day Creation¹

By **Randall W. Younker, PhD**

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Introduction

During the last two years we have heard many presentations that challenge the Adventist traditional, Biblically founded position of a recent six-day Creation. I believe there are many problems with the "objections" and the alternatives they offer.

In this brief article I will outline three of the many consequences that I believe would result from rejection of a recent six-day Creation: (1) hermeneutical inconsistency and poor exegesis (this can lead to a loss of understanding and authority of the Bible); (2) a diminishing importance of the cross; (3) the loss of effective witnessing due to mutually exclusive messages.

Requires Hermeneutical Inconsistency and Poor Exegetical Practice

Let's begin with some basic definitions. In scholarly discussions, the principles and science of interpretation is called *hermeneutics*; and bringing out of the Biblical text what is already there is referred to as *exegesis*. In contrast to exegesis, which is a sound hermeneutical practice, *eisegesis* refers to the practice of interpreters reading into the text what is not there.

Speaking as a so-called conservative with regards to our current discussions on Creation, I have been particularly disappointed that none of those opposed to our longstanding position has been able to offer any sort of a systematic and consistent hermeneutic or theology. Rather, we are simply told that the traditional interpretations of Genesis are wrong—that the author of

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Genesis intended something else other than a literal historical understanding. This is my impression, anyway. But what is the justification for this nonliteral interpretation?

A number of hermeneutical approaches to Scripture have been adopted by different groups of Christians through time. Of special interest are those schools of interpretation that have arisen since the advent of modern higher criticism (i.e., the historical-critical method) in the 19th century. We may classify these schools as:²

(i) the "Liberal" view—denies the full inspiration, authority, internal consistency, and trustworthiness of Scripture; because the Bible is believed to be a fallible human document it cannot always be trusted; this view employs the methodology of higher criticism to interpret Scripture;

(ii) the "Fundamentalist" view (some refer to it as the "Ultra-Conservative" view)—which upholds the full inspiration, authority, internal consistency, and infallibility of Scripture, *and a mechanical dictation or word-for-word mode of inspiration; this view tends to employ the "proof-text" method* of interpretation, using an isolated text arbitrarily to prove one's own point;

(iii) the Evangelical "Orthodox" view (also known as the Conservative view)—this view holds that the Bible *is* the inspired and authoritative Word of God, fully inspired, internally coherent, and trustworthy or dependable in whatever it teaches or touches upon; this view rejects the mechanical dictation view of inspiration (unless the text indicates otherwise), and employs the plain reading method of interpretation (known technically as the *grammatical-historical method*);

(iv) the "Neo-Orthodox" view (sometimes referred to as the Barthian view, after Swiss theologian Karl Barth)—which holds that the Bible is not the Word of God; it only *contains* the Word of God or that it only *becomes* the Word of God to individuals when it grips their hearts; it also employs higher criticism to interpret Scripture;

(v) the "Neo-Evangelical" or "Neo-Reformed" view (some call it the "Moderate Liberal" view)—which, while claiming to believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible on issues of salvation, is nonetheless skeptical about the Bible's full inspiration, authority, authenticity, and reliability on historical and scientific issues; this view employs *modified* aspects of higher criticism to interpret Scripture.

As far as I know, few Adventists have advocated anything like the Liberal, Fundamentalist or Neo-Orthodox views, at least as defined above. However, the *Evangelical-Orthodox (Conservative)* view and the *Neo-Reformed or Neo-Evangelical* view are especially relevant to our own current discussions. These

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two systems of interpretation seem to be competing in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³

Historically, the *Evangelical-Orthodox* or (*Conservative*) view arose in part as a response to the historical-critical approach to Scripture. Its leading advocates were Archibald Hodge and Benjamin Warfield. The Orthodox view of Scripture sees the Bible as not only containing the words of God, it is the Word of God; it acknowledges that Scripture is conveyed through humans but is infallible; the Bible is self-consistent and is historically and scientifically true. The Orthodox view holds to plenary and verbal inspiration (when the text so indicates—there are direct quotes from God), but denies that it was mechanically dictated. The Orthodox view also teaches that Biblical criticism (the historical-critical method) should not be allowed to contradict what Scripture says about itself.

The *Neo-Evangelical* or *Neo-Reformed* (or *Moderate Liberal*) view is more recent. Its leading advocates have been Gerrit Cornelius Berkouwer (1908-1996) and Jack B. Rogers—the latter represents a more recent and extreme form of this view. The Neo-Reformed view holds that the Bible is *both* Word of God *and* word of man—they emphasize the truly human aspect of Scripture and note that humans err. They believe in divine sovereignty, but argue that it is subject to human limitations. They believe the Bible *contains* the word of God, but does not equal the Word of God. The Bible is not an infallible divine word, but rather, reliable human words—especially about salvation. The Bible is a *witness* to divine revelation, but is not itself revelation. Concerning historical and scientific matters, the Bible is errant; it contains myths; its purpose is salvation, not science. Neo-Reformed scholars protect the central saving message of Christ; however, this message is better known subjectively and experientially. Historical criticism is a legitimate approach to Scripture.

From a scholarly perspective, the biggest problem with the Neo-Reformed view is its lack of hermeneutical and exegetical consistency; this is especially evident in how Genesis 1-11 is treated.

Traditionally and officially, the Adventist Church has endorsed the conservative *grammatical-historical* approach to the text, including Genesis 1-11.⁴ Accommodating a nonliteral view of these chapters (which is necessary for a theistic evolutionary and other alternate approaches that deny a recent six-day Creation) requires *rejection* of the grammatical-historical approach and a literal interpretation of these chapters.

Ironically, a nonliteral interpretation flies in the face of sound exegetical practice among *both liberal and conservative* scholarship. It requires ignoring

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internal textual indicators by which Genesis 1-11 was intended to be treated and understood like later materials in Biblical books such as Chronicles and Kings that have traditionally been understood as "historical" books by virtually all scholars except the "minimalists."

The understandings of modern science should not be used to "force" the text to say something contrary to what the ancient author thought or intended—to read an unintended meaning into the text is *eisegesis*, NOT *exegesis*, and represents poor scholarship.

Genesis 1-11: Literal or Nonliteral?

The controversy about how properly to interpret Genesis 1-11 is not unique to Adventists, as illustrated by a recent exchange by two well-known Christian philosophers from Notre Dame, Ernan McMullin and Alvin Plantinga.⁵

McMullin took issue with Christians who read Genesis 1-11 literally by claiming, "The great majority of contemporary Scripture scholars agree [that to interpret early Genesis] literally or quasi-literally is to misunderstand the point that the writers of those narratives were trying to make."

We have heard similar claims by some Adventist scholars in our current (2004 Faith and Science Conference) forum. However, Plantinga directly challenged McMullin's claim that most Scripture scholars believe that Genesis was not intended to be understood literally.

First, of course, there are whole coveys of phalanxes of conservative critics—e.g., E.J. Young and G.C. Aalders—who think that the writers of Genesis meant to teach much more than that Creation depends upon the Lord (There was of course, Thomas Aquinas, who took early Genesis to teach that God created the world in six 24-hour days.) But the same goes for their more liberal colleagues.⁶

Plantinga then quotes three *liberal* representatives from different periods of Old Testament scholarship—Julius Wellhausen, Herman Gunkel, and James Barr—who all believe that Genesis 1-11 is to be understood literally. According to Wellhausen:

[The author of Genesis] undoubtedly wants to depict faithfully the factual course of events in the coming-to-be of the world, he wants to give a cosmogonic theory. Anyone who denied that is confusing the value of the story for us with the intention of the author.⁷

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Then Plantinga cites Herman Gunkel:

People should never have denied that Genesis 1 wants to recount how the coming-to-be of the world actually happened.⁸

Finally, Plantinga cites James Barr:

To take a well-known instance, most conservative evangelical opinion today does not pursue a literal interpretation of the Creation story in Genesis. A literal interpretation would hold that the world was created in six days, these days being the first of the series which we still experience as days and nights.

. . . so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the *writer(s)* of Genesis 1-11 *intended* to convey to their readers the ideas that:

- (1) Creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience
- (2) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the Biblical story
- (3) Noah's Flood was understood to be worldwide and extinguish all human and animal life except for those in the ark.⁹

Plantinga reminds us that Barr's statements are within a context in which

. . . he [Barr] means to discredit the 'fundamentalists' or 'evangelicals' by showing that they profess to take Scripture at its literal word, but in this case clearly do not do so, since it is obvious (at any rate to those professors at world-class universities) that the writer(s) of Genesis meant to assert the three things Barr mentions.

For Barr, evangelicals who try to read Genesis in a nonliteral fashion in order to conform to the claims of science are both inconsistent and demonstrate poor Biblical scholarship. Barr argues that there is no doubt that the author of Genesis *intended* to describe things in a historical-literal way, but he [Barr] doesn't believe it because of modern science. For Barr, this is the more honest and scholarly approach.

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Why the difference of opinion? Here I can only speculate, but I suspect that the philosophers like Mullen are more driven by the findings of science than the exegetical demands of the text. Here I would point out an observation that I have noted recently—while it is not 100%, I have noticed that those theological scholars who feel more free to reinterpret Genesis in a nonliteral fashion are *not* usually trained as Hebrew, Old Testament or Ancient Near Eastern scholars—rather, they tend to be trained in some area of religion or theology—systematics or philosophy, etc.

I have also noticed that the *nonliteral* scholars tend to come from more conservative, evangelical schools or backgrounds, but have moved to the more "liberal" end of the spectrum within those contexts—they have a respect for Scripture, but are powerfully impressed by the scientific method and the findings of modern science. These evangelicals, with their desire to preserve an inspired Bible, are more willing to help the Bible out of its "difficulty" of apparent ignorance concerning Creation (and other "scientific facts"), by ascribing different intents and understandings—nonliteral—that they believe the author of Genesis must have had in mind while composing his work. Ironically, secular liberals are at least more faithful to the text—they will acknowledge that the writer intended to be taken literally, but according to modern science, he was simply wrong.

The Need for Consistency

However, for the scholars with the Neo-Evangelical methodology to be *consistent*, it requires that one also deny a historic patriarchal period (Abraham), the sojourn (Israel in Egypt), the Exodus (Red Sea), Mt. Sinai (Ten Commandments—Sabbath), the conquest (Jericho), and probably the existence of the monarchy (Solomon and David)—even the resurrection of Christ could be denied. It would appear that some Neo-Evangelicals are willing to move part way down this road, although there is a general resistance to playing with the "Christ event."

True liberal historical critics have already seen this. This is nicely illustrated by Max Miller, a practicing historical critic—he knows what the Bible says and does not deny that this is what the ancients may have believed, but because of modern science (including scientific history) he, as a scholar, must reject it. As he points out:

Remember that *the Bible presupposes* a dynamic natural world into which God, from time to time, intrudes upon human affairs. It is a

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world with waters rolling back, burning bushes, and ax heads floating. God directs the course of history by simultaneously instructing Moses, regulating Pharaoh's heart, and bringing unnatural disasters upon Egypt. God hands down laws on Mt. Sinai, and sends angels to defend Jerusalem against Sennacherib's massive army.

Modern historians perceive the world to be more *orderly*, on the other hand; and another of the standard tenets of modern historiography is that *any* natural or historical phenomenon can be explained *without* reference to overt divine involvement. . . . we modern historians bring [Biblical narratives] into line with the world as we perceive it. We leave out miracles, for example . . . (emphasis added).¹⁰

If we are going to start inserting nonliteral meanings into the Biblical text every time the text conflicts with the findings of modern science or historiography, then we must be consistent in the application from a hermeneutical perspective. This raises the question of how much are we willing to give up for consistency?

Surrendering the historicity of the text means that *theological conclusions* which are based on an assumption of historicity must also be given up. I remind my students that Adventist theology and all of the doctrines of which it consists, were formulated with an assumption that the Biblical texts presented actual historical situations in which God spoke and interacted with humankind—the giving of the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath and sanctuary at Mt. Sinai, etc.

A movement to a Neo-Evangelical (all moderate liberals) hermeneutic could result in Adventists abandoning the Ten Commandments (Sabbath), the sanctuary (there was no Mt. Sinai experience), the nonimmortality of the soul, the resurrection (ideas that did not exist in OT times); in terms of the NT we must abandon the Second Coming, and, especially significant, is denial of a literal blood atonement on the cross!

There have been attempts to preserve the historicity of later Biblical events (like the cross) by certain Christian (usually evangelical) scholars, but only by accommodating evolution in denying the historicity of Genesis 1-11, they are forced into *methodological and hermeneutical inconsistencies* that preclude them from being taken seriously by either "mainstream" scholarship or "true" conservatives.

Tried and true exegetical tools must be employed. The words must be

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examined in their original language, lexicons consulted, syntax studied, context explored (including extra-Biblical contexts), other relevant passages in Scripture examined, etc. Certainly, the genre must be determined, but this must be determined both by internal indicators in the text and by external literary parallel when available.

Those Adventist scholars who employed these methods (appropriate to the field) came to conclusions on Genesis 1-11 that are in harmony with the consensus found among leading scholars in both liberal and conservative Biblical scholarship outside of Adventism. The only difference is that the Adventist scholars *believe* the Biblical text—the liberal scholars do not—but they do agree on what the text says and means! The author of Genesis *intended* to depict in a literal way the timing and manner in which the earth became inhabitable and occupied by all known living forms (formed and filled).

Impact on the Cross and Human Salvation

Besides the problem of a lack of exegetical rigor and consistency, interpretative approaches that deny the historicity of a recent six-day Creation pose serious problems on the doctrine of salvation (what scholars refer to as *soteriological* problems).

Simply put, a denial of the historic Creation week also necessarily denies the creation on day six of that week of the *first historic humans* who were responsible for introducing sin into the human race; this in turn denies the spread of sin from that first human couple, the introduction of death into the world, and the need for the cross—at least how these things have been traditionally explained by mainstream Christianity for centuries.

Historically, Christians have traced their sinful condition and need for Jesus to the event known as the Fall (Genesis 3). Christians believe that somehow, the results of the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God were passed on to all of their biological descendants—as Paul says in Romans 3:23, we all need Jesus "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The church father Augustine attempted to explain the phenomenon of how all of Adam and Eve's descendants became sinners in his doctrine of Original Sin. This teaching has led to a considerable amount of theological discussion and controversy that is our well beyond our present discussion.

In brief, however, there were two central components to Augustine's teaching: (1) that all humankind inherit Adam's actual guilt for his rebellion: (2) that humans inherit from Adam a tendency to continue sinning—as Ellen White puts it—a *propensity* to sin is the common lot of all humans.

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While Adventists have *not* subscribed to Augustine's idea that we inherit and are condemned for Adam's personal *guilt* that derived from his own act of rebellion, we *have* maintained that we do inherit a sinful *nature* with a propensity to sin that is so irresistible that we will inevitably commit our own sinful acts. Because of this inherited sinful nature, we need Christ's death on the cross to forgive us our own sinfulness, and the grace of His Spirit to overcome our natural sinful tendencies."

Theistic evolution, on the other hand, has no place for a historic Adam and Eve or a historic Fall. To fully appreciate this, it is important to understand how most physical anthropologists explain the origin of humans.¹² In brief, they do not believe that a single pair of human beings evolved into existence.¹³ Rather, it was an *entire population* of hominids that somehow became isolated from a "parent" population and, due to a variety of factors, evolved into a new species that they define as the "first" modern humans.

Most theologians immediately recognized the implications of this view of human origins. The most liberal scholars have candidly admitted that the traditional doctrine of human salvation is no longer valid and must be done away with. For example, theologian John Hick has noted, "Until comparatively recent times the ancient myth of the origin of evil in the Fall of man was quite reasonably assumed to be history."¹⁴ This view, says Hick, is

open to insuperable scientific ... objections___We know today that the conditions that were to cause human . . . mortality [death] . . . were already part of the natural order prior to the emergence of man and prior therefore to any first human sin.¹⁵

In a similar vein, Catholic theologian Hans Kung quotes with favor his fellow Catholic theistic evolutionist, Karl Schmitz-Moormann as follows:

The notion of [the] traditional view of redemption as reconciliation and ransom from the consequences of Adam's Fall is *nonsense* for anyone who knows about the evolutionary background to human existence in the modern world. Karl Schmitz-Moormann tells us what the new meaning of redemption must be: Salvation "cannot mean returning to an original state, but must be conceived as perfecting through the process of evolution."¹⁶

This conclusion has led various theologians to propose a number of different solutions for the various soteriological problems that are immediately

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evident if one accepts a long-age, evolutionary approach to human origins. Some solutions involve the fall of an entire population, some have redefined "fall," and still others suggested that God picked two of these new, modern hominids and infused them with a "soul," making them truly human, after which, these two chose to rebel against God. There are still other explanations that have emerged, but all of them reside in a realm of speculation outside of the Biblical text, require rather creative "exegesis," and pose as many theological problems as they solve.

The only common thread among them is that they agree that the Biblical depiction of the Fall cannot be understood in the simple manner in which the text reads.

Directly related to the teachings of human Fall and salvation is the belief that from Adam and Eve's historic act of rebellion, *death* was first introduced into the planet. Romans 5:12 says "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned...."

The understanding that evolutionary geology and paleontology contradict the Biblical teaching of the Fall's impact on both the human and subhuman creation has long been acknowledged. As early as 1840 Dr. Edward Hitchcock—a theologian and geologist (and President of Amherst College in Massachusetts, and that state's first official geologist)—clearly saw the implications of the new science of geology on the doctrine of the Fall and its impact on nature. He wrote:

The general interpretation of the Bible has been, that until the Fall of man, death did not exist in the world even among the inferior animals. For the Bible asserts that by man came death (1 Corinthians 15:21) and by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin (Romans 5:12). But geology teaches us that myriads of animals lived and died before the creation of man."

While some might argue that the death talked about in Romans 5 is only human death—not subhuman death—passages such as Romans 8 which talk about the *entire creation (ktsis)* being subjected to futility and hoping that it will be set free from its slavery to corruption, indicate that the corruption of death penetrated all created life forms.

That things changed in the animal kingdom in particular after the Fall is supported by references to a pre-Fall vegetarian diet for the animals, and to their post-Fall participation in the blood-letting acts of violence (*hamas*) that

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resulted in the judgment of the Flood and the institute of capital punishment for animals that kill humans—imposed on the animal kingdom immediately after the Flood. That the deadly predator-prey relationship that existed in the animal kingdom *after* the Fall was *not* seen as an ideal is clearly expressed in eschatological passages such as Isaiah 11.¹⁸

In summary, a denial of a recent Creation (six-day Creation week) requires the abandonment of the creation of a historic pair of ancestral humans—Adam and Eve—their literal Fall, the entrance of sin and death into the world, and the need of Christ's atoning death on the cross.

Historically, Adventists have found the Bible's own view of how salvation works, including the origin of sin through the Fall, its spread to all humanity and nature, and its eradication by Jesus on the cross, as the most complete, convincing, and satisfying explanation.

The Loss of Effective Witnessing

Finally, I believe that the endorsement of both a recent six-day Creation and long age perspectives will seriously impede the church's witness. I don't question that both recent creationists and, say, theistic evolutionists, can win people to their viewpoint. This has been demonstrated many times. The real question is, Can the church survive diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive positions? I don't believe so. We must be honest and admit that the differences are not minor.

I will restrict my comments on this last section to a personal experience. I had an occasion to witness to two non-Adventist scientists about our church's position on Creation. They had been trained in traditional evolutionary thought, but seemed to show a genuine interest in Adventism and were curious as to how Adventists dealt with evolution. I gave a careful but honest reply, explaining that we believed in a recent six-day Creation, and how we attempted to understand the consensus scientific position in light of this Biblical position. The scientists did not make fun of my arguments—indeed, they seemed to consider them thoughtfully. Later, within earshot, they followed up this conversation by asking more questions of another Adventist. This Adventist, however, was of a more "progressive" orientation, and dismissed the claim that Adventists held to a recent six-day Creation by asserting that only backward and uninformed Adventists would hold such a position. The scientists who had expressed interest to me in Adventism quit asking questions and showed no further interest in Adventism.

One cannot help but think of Lincoln's words (paraphrasing Matthew

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12:25): "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Or, "Can two walk together, unless they be agreed" (Amos 3:3)?

I recognize that this personal experience may be dismissed as simply a pragmatic reason and not theological, but it seems to me that the best environment for successful outreach occurs when people are united in their core beliefs.

But it needs to be recognized that for many, if not most of us, our traditional understanding of Creation, the Fall, and the cross are central to our conversion experience and are at the core of our individual self-understanding as Adventists; they thus form an integral part of our individual witness and hence, cannot be compromised. If we work at cross-purposes on issues that are part of someone's core beliefs, the effect will be to impede the work of the Gospel.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, I see at least three important consequences if we move away from a six-day Creation church (there are more): (1) an inadequate hermeneutic and inconsistent exegetical practice that will undermine confidence in and the authority of God's Word; (2) an undermining of our understanding of salvation, including belief in the Fall, the penalty of sin, and the importance of Christ and the cross (also the divine origin of humans and the doctrine of the soul are at stake); (3) finally, our ability to witness effectively will be reduced because we will be witnessing to conflicting truths.

Endnotes

¹ This article is based on a paper presented at the 2004 Faith and Science Conference in Denver, Colorado, August 20-26, 2004, printed in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15/2 (2004) :59-70.

² For the classifications used in this area, I have conflated the descriptions given by Norman L. Geisler, *Decide for Yourself: How History Views the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) and Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Berean Books, 1996) and his *Must We Be Silent?* (Ann Arbor: Berean Books, 2001), pp. 445-546.

³ Koranteng-Pipim refers to these competing systems of interpretation in the SDA Church as the Bible-believing (conservative) position and the Bible-doubting (or moderate liberalism) position. See his *Must We Be Silent?*, pp. 445-453.

⁴ At the 1986 Annual Council meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, church leaders representing all the world fields of the Seventh-day Adventist Church approved the report of the General Conference's "Methods of Bible Study Committee" as representative of the church's hermeneutical position. The "Methods of Bible Study" document was published in the *Adventist Review*.

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January 22, 1977, pp. 18-20. Cf. Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), pp. 58-104.

⁵ See the essay by Plantinga in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Robert T. Pennock (Bradford Books, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2001, pp. 197-235).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹⁰ See Max Miller in *What Has Archaeology to Do with Faith?*, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver (Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 60-74.

¹¹ John Fowler has provided a concise summary of the Adventist position by stating that "Adventists do not stress the idea of original sin in the sense that 'personal, individual moral guilt adheres to Adam's descendants because of his [Adam's] sin. They stress, instead, that his sin resulted in the condition of estrangement from God in which every human being is born. This estrangement involves an inherent tendency to commit sin." John Fowler, "Sin" in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Review and Herald: Hagerstown, Md., 2000), p. 265.

¹² See also James Gibson's remarks in his paper "Issues in 'Intermediate' Models of Origins" presented at the 2004 Faith and Science Conference in Denver, Colorado. See chapter

¹³ A typical explanation, taken from a textbook on human evolution, is thus: "Speciation, or the development of a new species, does not happen suddenly, nor is it the result of one or two mutations in the history of a single family."... "Speciation may occur if populations become so separated from each other geographically that gene exchanges are no longer possible. In adapting to their separate environments, the two populations may undergo enough genetic changes to prevent them from interbreeding."

¹⁴ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 283.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁶ Hans Rung, *Credo* [New York: Doubleday, 1993], p. 22. See also Karl Schmitz-Moorman, "Evolution and Redemption: What Is the Meaning of Christian Proclaiming Salvation in an Evolving World?" in *Progress in Theology* 1, No.2 [June 1993] : 7.

¹⁷ Edward Hitchcock reference is from *Elementary Geology* (Iverson and Phinney: New York, 1840), p. 273.

¹⁸ So-called problem passages that seem to describe death in the Edenic or New Earth, were dealt with in my paper given at this conference last year.

Chapter 21

Problems in "Intermediate" Models of Origins

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Introduction

Discussion of issues in Creation is often focused on contrasting the theory of naturalistic evolution with the Biblical model of a recent, six-day Creation. The differences between these two theories are profound, and the contrasts can readily be identified in such issues as whether the universe and human life were purposefully designed, the nature and extent of God's actions in the universe, and the extent to which answers to philosophical questions can be inferred from nature and from Scripture.

Biblical Creation is based on a literal-phenomenal' interpretation (real events described in the language of appearance) of Genesis 1-3 and other Creation texts. The Biblical model affirms that humans were separately created in a supernatural act of creation, some thousands of years ago, at the end of a six-day Creation. They were endowed with the image of God and the possibility of eternal life. The original human pair freely chose to distrust God, bringing death and other evils into the world.

In contrast, naturalistic evolution is based on a naturalistic approach to science, without respect to Biblical teachings. Naturalistic ("scientific") evolution claims that humans developed from apelike ancestors, through strictly natural processes, over several millions of years. Humans have no special status in nature, and there is no basis for believing in life after death. Death, disease, and suffering are simply natural by-products of the processes operating in nature, and cannot be considered good or evil in any "moral" sense. The differences between the two models could hardly be more dramatic.

However, other models have been proposed that tend to blur some of the contrasts between the Biblical and naturalistic theories. A number of attempts have been made to develop intermediate models, in which elements of the Biblical story of Creation are mixed with elements of the naturalistic story of

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origins. All of these models share the Biblical idea that nature is the result of divine purpose, and the "scientific" idea of long ages of time.

We do not have time to consider every variety of origins model, but most of them are variants of two major categories of models, often called "progressive creation" (or "multiple creations") and "theistic evolution." Neither of these categories is consistently defined, and each includes a range of models that differ in significant details. Thus it will be necessary to define our terms and describe some of the major variants in order to identify their implications and analyze their strengths and weaknesses.

The major objection to the Biblical model is the relatively short time scale it implies, while the scientific data seem to point to a much longer time scale. The intermediate models described here were created in response to the scientific problem of long age faced by the Biblical literal-phenomenal model. The primary goal of this paper is to explore the major intermediate models to see how well they fare scientifically.

Defining "Creation" and "Evolution"

The terms "creation" and "evolution" are both used in a variety of meanings that tend to confuse rather than clarify the issues. For this reason, I will attempt to define the terms for the purposes of this paper.

By *Creation*, I mean the concept that God acted directly, through personal agency, to bring diverse lineages of living organisms into existence. He may have created the first individuals of each lineage *ex nihilo* (Hebrews 1:3), or from non-living materials (Genesis 2:7), or in some combination. Creation in this sense does not include the proposal that God caused new forms of life to appear through secondary processes, such as by guiding the process of evolution. Nor does it include the appearance of new individuals through reproduction. In the sense used here, God (directly) created only the founders of each independent lineage. (Of course God created the entire universe *ex nihilo*, but here we are concerned primarily with the origins of living things.)

By *evolution*, I mean the concept of universal common ancestry² (monophyly) regardless of the mechanism, whether naturalistic or divinely guided. Evolution is the theory that all organisms, including humans, descended from the same original ancestor. I would distinguish between "evolution" and some other terms commonly associated with it. Variation and speciation do not entail universal common ancestry, so they are not the same as evolution. Evolution is sometimes defined merely as "change over time," but this is not an adequate definition. Every individual changes over time, yet individuals do not

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evolve—it is populations that evolve. "Change over time" does not necessarily imply universal common ancestry. The term "macroevolution" has no single accepted definition, and I will avoid the term in order to avoid the confusion its use brings.

Classifying Models of Origins

Several attempts have been made to classify intermediate models of origins.³ My classification borrows from these previous attempts but emphasizes elements that seem to be particularly useful for evaluating the models. These are: the origin of humans, whether separately created or derived from animals; the interpretation of "days" in Genesis; and, in the case of theistic evolution, the extent of direct divine activity in the process.

The definitions of Creation and evolution discussed above will be used in describing and evaluating intermediate models of origins. By *long-age creation* I mean any theory that includes the stepwise appearance of living organisms over the long ages of the geological time scale, and the idea of separately created lineages, especially the special creation of humans. Since all the major forms of long-age creation involve a series of discrete creation acts, I regard the term *multiple creations* as a synonym for long-age creation. The interpretation of the "days" in Genesis will be used to help distinguish the various models of multiple creations.

I will use the term *theistic evolution* for those theories that accept the continuous development of living organisms over the long ages of the geological time scale, and universal common ancestry, including humans, in a divinely guided process. The proposed extent of divine activity in nature provides a way to help distinguish the various models of theistic evolution. Theories that do not include any divine activity are beyond the scope of this paper.

Long-age Creation Models (including "progressive creation")

Long-age creation models include any model that incorporates the two ideas of: 1) the geological time scale and 2) the separate creation of humans, and numerous other independent lineages. These models are usually associated with the idea that if there was a six-day Creation or Biblical Flood, they were local events, rather than global. Ramm⁴ introduced the term "progressive creation" and argued for many separate creations, each followed by "horizontal" but not "vertical" radiations. However, this term is used for a wide variety of models, at least one of which includes an animal ancestry for humans. Because

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"progressive creation" is so vague, I prefer to use "long-age creation" or "multiple creations."

Probably the most significant distinguishing feature of long-age creation models is the interpretation of the word "day" in Genesis 1. Certain long-age creation models hold that the creation "days" are literal, sequential days of creation, while other long-age creation models hold that the "days" are nonliteral and/or nonsequential. (Theistic evolution models necessarily hold that the "days" are nonliteral.) I use this difference to help classify the long-age creation models discussed below.

Multiple-creation models with sequential, literal creation days

Gap theory. One of the first models of multiple creations over long ages was the "gap theory."⁵ This theory maintains that Genesis 1 refers to a recent creation in six literal, contiguous days, but this creation was preceded by another creation that had been destroyed. Proponents of this view often claim that the phrase "the earth was without form and void" (Genesis 1:2) should read "the earth *became* without form and void," which represents a change from its original condition (compare with Isaiah 45:18).⁶ The destruction might have been due directly to Satan's activity when he supposedly was in control of the world⁷ or the results of a war between Satan and God.⁸

The gap theory founders on both exegetical and scientific grounds. Exegetically, the gap theory is based on the supposition that Genesis 1:2 means that the world "became" without form and void. However, the Hebrew word (*hayetha*) does not have that meaning. The text states that the earth was without form and void, not that it became without form and void.⁹

Scientifically, the gap theory predicts a gap in the fossil record, with the rubble of the old destroyed creation below the gap and the record of the new creation above the gap. But there is no such gap in the fossil record, and most scholars abandoned the gap theory long ago.

Some scholars have attempted to get around this problem by claiming that the animals and plants of the first creation closely resembled God's work in re-creation.¹⁰ Thus, the gap would be undetectable. In this view, some fossils that appear to be humans were actually humanlike animals, while others were true humans with moral accountability.¹¹ Fossils from the two creations are morphologically indistinguishable. It hardly needs to be pointed out that this idea lacks any Biblical, scientific, or philosophical support, and it is perfectly understandable why the idea of an "invisible gap" has not been widely accepted.

Intermittent creation days (multiple gaps). A few scholars have attempted to preserve the idea of literal days in a long time frame by proposing that the days

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were intermittent rather than contiguous.¹² Thus, there were actually six literal creation days in the sequence recorded in Genesis, but they were separated in time by millions of years.

However, the sequence of events in Genesis conflicts with the fossil sequence, falsifying this proposal. To get around this problem, a leading a major proponent of this view states that "each successive day opens a new creative period."¹³ The "literal" days are actually only beginning points of successive "overlapping ages" of creation. The successive creation events begin on specific days, but are completed some time later (see below). This strategy effectively transforms the "intermittent" creation days into the "overlapping day-age model."

Multiple-creation models with sequential but nonliteral days

Nonliteral days. Various suggestions have been made that cut the relationship between literal days and the creation process. One is the "day-age" interpretation discussed in the next section. A similar suggestion is the "relativistic day" interpretation of Schroeder,¹⁴ that proposes that "day" means a regular day to humans, but a period of time much different to God.

A third suggestion is that the Genesis "days" are "days of proclamation" or "fiat," in which God uttered the creative words in a series of six literal days. Each fiat might have initiated the creation process, but the events were only completed sometime during the millions of years of the "age."¹⁵ The latter proposal has the obvious problem of how one can have a first literal "day" before the solar system (or even the universe?) was created.¹⁶ Another problem with this interpretation is that Genesis records "and it was so" before the conclusion of each day. This seems to indicate that each day's creative activity was completed before the beginning of the next day.

Each of these interpretations, in the form discussed here, attempts to retain the sequence of Genesis events. Hence, they are included with "day-age" models.

In contrast, some models reject both the literalness of the days of creation and the sequence of creation events. One variant of this category is the suggestion that the Genesis "days" are days of revelation, in which Moses received a series of six symbolic visions about the creation,¹⁷ but the actual sequence of creation is not revealed. Another member of this category is the proposal that the "days" of creation are overlapping ages. Each age began when God uttered a command, but the actual creation events may have been completed during any of the "ages."¹⁸ Again, the sequence of creation is unspecified.

The "literary framework interpretation"¹⁹ is the best-known model of

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this type within the long-age creation category. In this view, the Genesis "days" are somehow "analogues" of God's activity in Heaven. Models that do not maintain the Genesis sequence are included in the "nonliteral, nonsequential days" category.

Day-Age theory. I include here any model that maintains the Genesis sequence of creation, and in which the events of a creation "day" are not completed in a literal day, but may extend over long, sequential ages of indefinite length.²⁰ The following models should be included: the "overlapping day-age" theory;²¹ the "intermittent-day" theory of Newman;²² and the "relativistic-day" theory of Schroeder.²³ The day-age interpretation can also be included in a model of theistic evolution. Since all sequence-based, long-age models of origins conflict with the order of the fossil sequence, the problems described here would also apply to any theistic evolution model that attempts to preserve the Genesis creation sequence.

The "day-age" interpretation has very serious exegetical issues.²⁴ The exegetical problems include the Biblical description of each day as literal, with an evening and a morning. The phrase "and it was so" precedes the statement "and the morning and the evening were the [*n*th] day," and seems to indicate that the action of each day was completed before the day ended. Also, the fourth commandment specifies a literal Sabbath day as commemorating the (by inference) literal Creation days. It is widely acknowledged that the natural reading of the text is that the days were literal.²⁵

Scientific issues were probably more influential than the exegetical problems in causing the demise of the day-age theory.²⁶ The sequence of creation events does not match the sequence seen in the fossil record. In Genesis 1, the Creation sequence of living groups is:

- 1) land plants and fruit-bearing trees (Day 3);
- 2) water creatures and flying creatures (Day 5);
- 3) land vertebrates, including mammals and humans (Day 6).

In the fossil record, the sequence of first appearances is:

- 1) water creatures (Cambrian);
- 2) some land plants and land insects (Silurian);
- 3) flying insects and land vertebrates (Carboniferous);
- 4) mammals (Triassic-Cretaceous);
- 5) birds (Jurassic/Cretaceous);
- 6) fruit-bearing trees (Cretaceous);

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7) humans. (Plio/Pleistocene).

The primary similarity is that humans appear last in both lists, and that water creatures appear before flying or land creatures. Otherwise, the lists are quite different.

These problems have led to the wide-scale abandonment of the day-age interpretation by most scholars. Hugh Ross, of *Reasons to Believe*, is probably the most vocal contemporary proponent of the day-age interpretation of multiple creations. Ross argues that the sequences are actually in harmony.²⁷ Ross appeals to flying insects rather than birds to place flying creatures before land creatures. However, if flying insects are to be included, land insects should also be included, and they appear before flying insects in the fossil record.²⁸ The relative order of land plants and water creatures differs in the two sequences, as does the relative order of flying creatures and land creatures. These conflicts are sufficient to falsify all long-age models that incorporate the sequence of Genesis 1.

The conflict between the sequence of Genesis and the sequence of the fossil record has been known for more than a century. Thomas Huxley commented on attempts to reconcile Genesis with geology, in a debate with William Gladstone. Gladstone apparently promoted the view that the days of creation were successive long ages, evolution was the method used by God to create, and the fossil sequence supported the sequence in Genesis. In a memorable passage, Huxley responded to this proposal:²⁹

This statement appears to me to be the interpretation of Genesis which Mr. Gladstone supports, reduced to its simplest expression. "Period of time" is substituted for "day"; "originated" is substituted for "created"; and "any order required" for that adopted by Mr. Gladstone. It is necessary to make this proviso, for if "day" may mean a few million years, and "creation" may mean evolution, then it is obvious that the order (1) water-population, (2) air-population, (3) land-population, may also mean (1) water-population, (2) land-population, (3) air-population; and it would be unkind to bind down the reconcilers to this detail when one has parted with so many others to oblige them.

Multiple creation models with nonliteral, nonsequential days

Some scholars have proposed that the creation "days" are not literal periods of time, but refer figuratively to God's activity in creating. Overlapping day-age

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models are included in this category if they deny that the sequence of creation events is actually the same as that recorded in Genesis. Theistic evolution models could probably also fit this description, although they are discussed in a different section of this paper.

Literary framework hypothesis. One of the best-known models in this category is the literary framework hypothesis.³⁰ The literary framework interpretation treats the "days" of Genesis 1 as neither literal nor sequential, but merely as a literary device for telling the theological truth that the world is a creation. No model of creation is offered, although the special creation of a personal Adam and his subsequent Fall are considered to be true historical events.

A key concept of the framework hypothesis is the "two-register cosmology." According to this formulation, the earth forms a visible "lower register" and the heavens form an invisible "upper register." The two "registers" are related "analogically." This framework is applied to Genesis 1 to explain the "days" as periods of time that belong to the invisible "upper register," and not to the literal world in which the creation events took place. The authors of this view insist that the creation "days" refer to something real and significant in the "upper register," although it is not clear just what that means, since they deny the sequence represented in God's "daily" activities.

The literary framework interpretation is not really a creation model, but an exegetical hypothesis. It makes no predictions about the fossil sequence and is infinitely flexible in its application. Therefore, the framework hypothesis is a nonscientific theory, and must be evaluated exegetically and theologically.

Exegetically, the framework interpretation has very serious problems.³¹ The narrative style of the text, the words used to describe the events, and the rest of Scripture, including the fourth commandment, all combine to indicate the author's intention to describe literal, consecutive days. All New Testament writers appear to accept the Genesis story as literal.³²

The literary framework interpretation has the ability to explain away any exegetical inconvenience by referring it to the invisible "upper register," where it need not concern us. Any text that challenges our own opinions can be safely removed from the "real world" in which we live and relegated to the invisible "upper register," where its meaning becomes very vague.

The framework interpretation suffers from the implication of a distinct separation of God's activities in the "upper register" from the world of the "lower register." God is continuously acting throughout the entire universe, and is not confined to an "upper register."³³ It also faces serious theological problems with its implications for the character of a God Who intentionally

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created a world of violence, death and suffering.³⁴"

"Serial creation" model. The idea of "progressive creation" was championed by Bernard Ramm.^{34b} I use the term "serial creation" because subsequent discussion has blurred the meaning of the term "progressive creation." According to this model, the fossil record shows two kinds of "creative" processes: creation by fiat; and diversification by ordinary processes, guided by the Holy Spirit. Instances of fiat creation can be identified by the sudden appearance of new types of organisms in the fossil record. The number of creation episodes is not specified and can be adjusted to whatever the fossil record indicates. Between creation events, numerous varieties of preexisting types were "evolved," producing more nearly continuous fossil sequences. The major idea of the model can be summarized in the phrase that evolution can proceed "horizontally [variations] but not vertically [new types of organisms]."

The "serial creation" model is an attempt to explain the fossil sequence by appealing to a Creator whenever a gap is found in the fossil record, while appealing to "natural" processes the rest of the time. The model makes no predictions; hence philosophical and theological considerations must dominate any evaluation of the model. Philosophically, the model is unsatisfying because it is entirely conjectural and ad hoc. One may choose to believe it, but there is no particular reason to do so. Theologically, the model requires a long history of repeated destructive catastrophes. Biblically, the model is based on inconsistent exegesis, accepting some parts of the Biblical story of Creation as real, while denying other parts of the story. Scientifically, it resembles the theory that God supernaturally arranged the fossil sequence during the Flood. For these reasons, and others, the theory of "serial creation" has never gained widespread acceptance.

Problems Specific to Long-age Creation Models

All long-age creation models suffer from numerous problems. Many of these problems are shared with theistic evolution and will be discussed later. A few problems unique to long-age creation are noted below.

First, all versions of long-age creation are essentially conjectural. They all lack direct support, either scientific or Biblical. The scientific evidence does not suggest a series of discrete creations of living organisms over long ages of time.³⁵ The Biblical evidence points away from such a suggestion, toward a single week for the creation of terrestrial life. While divine activity seems necessary in explanations of nature, the absence of Biblical support makes long-age creation models appear entirely *ad hoc* and difficult to defend. There seems no

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particular reason to accept the theory of long-age creation, in any of its forms.

Second, all forms of long-age creation that preserve the sequence of events outlined in Genesis are in conflict with the sequence of the fossil record. Thus, the intermittent day theory and day-age theory are both scientifically untenable. Attempts to modify these theories to match the fossil sequence, such as the proposal that the "days" are "overlapping," convert them into a different category of models: those that invoke nonsequential, nonliteral days of creation. The chief example of this category, the framework interpretation, does not explain anything in nature; it merely attempts to explain away the Creation text of Genesis and offers no substance of its own.

Third, there is a troubling inconsistency in interpreting Genesis 1 in a long-age context.

[O]ld earth special creationism, by its choice to accept the scientifically derived timetable for cosmic history, is in the exceedingly awkward position of attempting to interpret some of the Genesis narrative's pictorial elements (interpreted as episodes of special creation) as historical particulars but treating the narrative's seven-day timetable as being figurative.³⁶

Thomas Huxley, not known for his "political correctness," stated the problem rather sarcastically:³⁷

If we are to listen to many expositors of no mean authority, we must believe that what seems so clearly defined in Genesis—as if very great pains had been taken that there should be no possibility of mistake—is not the meaning of the text at all. The account is divided into periods that we may make just as long or as short as convenience requires. . . . A person who is not a Hebrew scholar can only stand aside and admire the marvelous flexibility of a language which admits of such diverse interpretations.

Fourth, a multiple creation model is also a multiple destruction model. The fossil record is a record of death and extinction, including numerous mass extinctions in which large numbers of species disappear from the record simultaneously. The extinction of a single species requires the death of every individual of that species. It is not difficult to understand how this can happen if the species is confined to a small region. It is much more difficult to explain the extinction of an entire order or class of organisms, especially if the group has a

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global distribution. Such extinctions require catastrophic events of global magnitude. What kind of god would repeatedly create and destroy on a global scale?³⁸

Numerous other problems are shared with theistic evolution, and will be discussed later in this paper. They include the problem of the origin of humans, the effects of the Fall, the problem of multiple mass destructions, and the problem of death before sin.

Conclusions Respecting Long-age Creation Models

Several models of long-age creation have been proposed. They share two characteristics: acceptance of the long geological time scale, and the separate creation of humans and other lineages. When the models are considered in detail, it is apparent that none of them is free of scientific problems. The gap model predicts a gap in the fossil record, which is nonexistent. The intermittent creation day model and the day-age model conflict with the fossil sequence. The literary framework interpretation merely explains every observation in the fossil column with the words "God did it" (or, perhaps, "The Devil did it."). Neither the "days" nor the sequence has any literal or even symbolic meaning. Problems in interpretation are not solved, but merely pushed off into some ethereal "upper register." Overlapping day-age models seem logically problematic due to the attempt to blend the sequence of Genesis days with a denial of the sequence of events of those same days.

Long-age creation models were proposed with the intention of resolving the scientific problems faced by the Biblical literal-phenomenal model. However, all long-age creation models have serious scientific problems. The fossil sequence falsifies most of the clearly stated models of long-age creation. The historical setting of Adam and the effects of the Fall are problems for all long-age creation models. Scientific problems can be minimized only at the cost of trivializing important issues and denying the teaching of Scripture.

It seems pointless to reject the obvious meaning of Genesis on scientific grounds in order to accept another model with serious scientific problems. Seventh-day Adventists cannot improve their position by adopting any presently available model of long-age creation.

Ellen White was aware of the day-age theory and firmly rejected it:³⁹

But the infidel supposition that the events of the first week required seven vast, indefinite periods for their accomplishment, strikes directly at the foundation of the Sabbath of the fourth command-

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merit. It makes indefinite and obscure that which God has made very plain. It is the worst kind of infidelity; for with many who profess to believe the record of Creation, it is infidelity in disguise. It charges God with commanding men to observe the week of seven literal days in commemoration of seven indefinite periods, which is unlike His dealings with mortals, and is an impeachment of His wisdom.

This point seems to apply to any of the theories in which the Genesis days are not interpreted as literal, contiguous days of creation.

Theistic Evolution Models

Theistic evolution models include any models that are based on 1) universal common ancestry of all organisms, including humans, and 2) the common descent of all organisms as the result of a divinely guided process over long ages of geological time. Several other terms are sometimes used for models of this type: "evolutionary creation";⁴⁰ "fully gifted creation";⁴¹ "providential evolution";⁴² and "continuous creation."⁴³

Theistic evolution models differ among themselves primarily in how they propose that divine guidance is accomplished.⁴⁴ The number of minor variants of theistic evolution is too large to consider each one separately, but they can be grouped into categories. One category includes views holding that God created nature to be autonomous, so that continuing divine influence on nature is unnecessary. The second category is that God is continuously interacting with nature in the regularities we recognize as natural law, yet He is somehow influencing the outcome for His Own purposes. The third category is that God continuously and directly acts in nature to accomplish His will, but this is accomplished only through gradualistic processes.

Theistic evolution through autonomous "natural law"

One form of theistic evolution holds that nature is autonomous. This seems to be the view of Van Till,⁴⁵ who calls it the "fully gifted creation." According to Van Till, God did not "withhold" anything from the creation that would be needed for it to maintain "functional integrity."

In this view, God does not personally control any natural event. Instead, God intentionally designed the laws of nature so that evolution is the natural result. God established the laws of nature at the time of the big bang, and no further divine action is needed.⁴⁶ God intended that consciousness would

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evolve, but He did not need to "coerce material into assuming forms that it was insufficiently equipped to actualize with its God-given capabilities."⁴⁷

The emphasis here is on the sufficiency of natural law. God is not a participant in the evolutionary process but merely an observer. This view would be ordinary deism except for one thing. Van Till does allow God to occasionally intervene in the lives of believers,⁴⁸ but, apparently, not in the flow of nature. So the model is quasi-deistic, although Van Till dislikes that term.

The autonomous model of theistic evolution has some very serious difficulties. In the Bible, nature is not autonomous, but totally and continuously dependent on God for continued existence. There is no Biblical support for the idea of a God Who does not interact with His creation, and much Biblical evidence against this idea.⁴⁹

Scientifically, this model has serious problems. There are just too many apparent gaps in the "natural economy." Some of the most glaring examples include: the cause of the big bang; the origin of life;⁵⁰ the origin of gender and sexual reproduction;⁵¹ the origins of multicellularity, cellular differentiation, and embryonic development; the origins of the metazoan phyla and classes in the Cambrian "Explosion"⁵² and other major groups; the rapid radiation (assuming the long age view) of "crown groups" of mammals and birds around the Cretaceous-Tertiary boundary;⁵³ and the origin of consciousness, language, and morality in humans. No known natural law can explain the origin of any of these phenomena. The fact that they may operate in harmony with natural law says nothing about their respective origins.

Second, there seems to be too much evidence of intelligent design in nature. For example, the structure of the human brain appears to be designed for far more mental capacity than required for survival under the "law" of natural selection.

Theistic evolution driven by God's continuous *but undetectable* interaction with nature

Several versions of theistic evolution postulate that God continuously interacts with nature. Nature is not autonomous but is totally dependent on God's continuous sustaining activity. God's activity is observed in the "laws of nature." But God is not merely sustaining nature; He is somehow influencing its directionality.⁵⁴ As God sustains nature, He somehow acts providentially to bring about His will, in ways that are generally undetectable to us. This raises the issue of how God can influence nature to accomplish His will without violating the regularity of the natural laws He chose as His method of sustaining the universe.

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Some have proposed⁵⁵ that God acts through chaotic systems that are unpredictable to us, although it is possible that God can predict the outcome. However, chaotic systems, while unpredictable to us, are driven by deterministic mathematical equations.⁵⁶ Another possibility is that quantum uncertainty may provide an opening for God to act in undetectable ways.⁵⁷ However, quantum events, although uncertain individually, act statistically in predictable, lawlike ways,⁵⁸ which tends toward determinism rather than an opening for divine action.

This model, or one much like it, is widely held among scientists and is the primary object of criticism by the intelligent design group. If natural law is sufficient to explain evolution without God's intervention, why insist that there is actually an invisible, undetectable God somehow acting to influence events?⁵⁹

Some versions of theistic evolution are open to the possibility of occasional direct divine "intervention," as in miracles.⁶⁰ Miracles are uncommon, special acts of God. Miracles for the benefit of believers are often accepted by theistic evolutionists⁶¹ but usually not in nature.⁶² Some, however, would permit miracles in the course of nature. God might "intervene" in nature, for example to help evolutionary processes over difficult obstacles⁶³ such as the gaps mentioned previously.

Theistic evolution through constant divine "tinkering"

A third model of theistic evolution proposes that God is continuously and directly experimenting with nature. In its most rigid form, this model is highly deterministic, with every atomic movement individually directed by God. Alternatively, natural law might limit what God can do, but He can still constantly tinker to see what can be done through genetic experimentation, etc.

This model has not been widely promoted or accepted, perhaps because it implies that God is directly causing every event in the universe. Most of us believe we have free wills, which would not be the case if God were directing every event at the atomic level. Furthermore, most people conceive of a good God and exclude the possibility that He is directly causing every cancerous tumor, every genetic defect, and every murder.

Problems With Theistic Evolution Models

All forms of theistic evolution have numerous problems. First, a direct reading of the fossil record, even with the assumption of the long age geological time scale, does not suggest a single evolutionary tree with all organisms

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descending from a common ancestor. The "evolutionary tree" as reflected in the fossil record, is full of morphological gaps.⁶⁴ These are especially glaring at the level of phyla and classes. The morphological pattern in the fossil record is summarized in the phrase "disparity precedes diversity."⁶⁵ Descent with modification would produce the opposite pattern.

Second, the fossil record exhibits too much evil for the evolutionary process to appear guided by a beneficent creator. There are too many extinctions and too much evidence of suffering and disease. The problem is not solved by the various suggestions that have been offered:⁶⁶ e.g., that we may be wrong in judging such things as evil;⁶⁷ or that God's participation in suffering somehow makes it easier to take;⁶⁸ or that God was limited to working with nature as it is;⁶⁹ or that God was unable to (or chose not to) directly create humans in His image, and was forced to impose suffering on amoral creatures in order to create us.⁷⁰

Third, the deleterious effects of most observed mutations seem difficult to reconcile with the notion that God is guiding them. The origin of cancer and birth defects from mutations are related problems.⁷¹

Fourth, the origin of morally accountable humans is a difficult problem for all forms of theistic evolution. How can a continuous, gradual process account for a discontinuity in the origin of spiritual humans? In other words, how would one justify the position that a particular individual was morally accountable but his parents were not? A variety of conjectures have been brought forward, but none of them seems satisfactory. One proposal is that the humans gradually became morally conscious, and gradually fell.⁷² Another suggestion is that Adam was not the first genuine human, but a person in whom God chose to create His "image."⁷³ Another idea is that hominids became human when they gained a religious sense.⁷⁴ All these views imply that some humanlike fossils are not truly "human." By the same reasoning, one may ask whether all living races of humans are truly "human."⁷⁵ Both Biblical and scientific data indicate that all humans are truly members of the same species in every respect.

Fifth, the possibility of human freedom seems difficult to harmonize with the view that the human mind arose through purely natural processes in which all chemical reactions were and are driven by natural law. Natural law does not seem capable of producing a brain with freedom of choice. Quantum uncertainty has been suggested as a solution to this problem, but quantum processes do not really provide a suitable mechanism for freedom of choice.⁷⁶ Individual events are unpredictable, which is not a good basis for free choice. Collective events are statistically deterministic, again not a good basis for free

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choice. Most humans believe they actually have freedom of choice, and they hold other humans accountable for their behavior. This would not be logical if natural law and/or God were directing every atom and every chemical reaction, rather than some reactions being subject to human will.

Sixth, the "Fall" of Adam is difficult to explain in the context of theistic evolution. In evolution, humans are on an upward trajectory⁷⁷ rather than the downward trajectory described in the Bible. This implication of theistic evolution introduces theological problems by undermining the Biblical teaching of Calvary and the atonement.⁷⁸

Seventh, theistic evolution tends toward panentheism, although not all advocates accept panentheism.⁷⁹ The proposal that God is somehow acting "within" the creation, continuously influencing its directionality, tends to blur the distinction between Creator and creation in the minds of some theistic evolutionists.

Theistic evolution raises many other serious Biblical and theological problems. These are too numerous to discuss here, but some of them have been discussed elsewhere.⁸⁰

General Problems With All Intermediate Models

Certain problems are inherent in all intermediate models of origins, whether long-age creation or theistic evolution. The origin of humans in the image of God, and the relationship of natural evil to the Fall of Adam are perhaps the most interesting of these.

The problem of Adam and the origin of humans

All intermediate models of origins have a serious practical problem with the origin of humans. When one accepts the long geological time scale, one by implication accepts that there was a series of increasingly humanlike fossils, stretching back more than a million years. Where do Adam and Eve fit into this scenario?

Theistic evolutionists often deny there was any individual Adam, but that Adam was a generic representation of the evolutionary advance from primate to human.⁸¹ Another view is that Adam was a divinely selected individual in whom God implanted a soul.⁸² Some theistic evolutionists accept the reality of Adam as a Neolithic farmer with emergent self-consciousness rather than a soul.⁸³ This Adam was not the ancestor of all humans, but the "federal representative" of the race. The image of God was first placed in Adam and later perhaps given to the remainder of the species.

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Long-age creationists have responded in a variety of ways. Some have proposed that Adam was created less than ten thousand years ago⁸⁴ or as much as 60,000 years ago⁸⁵ in a world already containing other humanlike lineages. Another proposal is that Adam was the first anatomically modern human⁸⁶ created perhaps one hundred fifty thousand years ago. In either case, there were already humanlike, but nonspiritual, organisms in existence before the creation of Adam. These purported groups are the "pre-Adamites." Yet another proposal is that language is a defining capability of humans, and paleoanthropological evidence indicates the existence of language at least 400,000 years ago, and perhaps as far back as two million years.⁸⁷

What, then, is the origin of the "pre-Adamites"? Were they simply animals created by God with human bodies and animal natures? Were they humanlike animals produced by Satan's experiments? Did they leave any living descendants? Multiple creation theories would propose answers to these questions different from theistic evolution theories, but both would share the problem of locating Adam in history.

According to anthropologists, American aborigines reached the New World before 10,000 years ago, and Australian aborigines reached Australia by 40,000 years ago. Europe has been continuously populated for some 35,000 years. The out-of-Africa hypothesis of human origins proposes that humans and their ancestors have lived in Africa for several million years. Placing the creation of Adam less than 10,000 years ago raises the question of how his sin could affect the rest of mankind, since many groups of humans are not genetically related to him.⁸⁸ It also seems to imply that the atoning sacrifice of the "second Adam" does not benefit most races of humans, since they are not descendants of the first Adam. On the other hand, extending the time for Adam's creation back several millions of years to include all "hominids" means that the image of God is present in the australopithecines, or at least in the erectines.⁸⁹ This is as difficult to accept on scientific grounds as on Scriptural grounds.

The problem of the effects of Adam's "Fall" on nature

The Fall of Adam into sin is identified in the Bible as a major turning point in human experience, with serious effects on nature as well as on the human condition. Integrating the Fall into a long-age chronology poses significant challenges.

Those interpretations of the Fall that propose a significant change in nature when Adam sinned run into scientific trouble with the fossil record, since evidence of disease, predation, and mass extinction are found through-

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out the fossil record.

On the other hand, those interpretations that attribute no physical changes in nature at the Fall run into theological trouble with the relationship of moral and natural evil.⁹⁰ Attributing natural evil to God's intentions does not fit with the Biblical revelation of God's character, and seems contrary to the Biblical promises of redemption and restoration. This problem is discussed further in the next section.

Theistic evolutionists often reject the story of Adam's Fall, interpreting it as symbolic of the undeniable fact that we are estranged from God and in a less than ideal world.⁹¹ Some claim there was no Fall, but "we appear to be rising beasts rather than fallen angels."⁹² Such views conflict with the most fundamental teachings of Scripture.

Berry⁹³ offers a contrasting position, that there was a real Fall, which was a failure in responsibility by Adam and Eve. The result of the Fall was the negative ecological effects resulting from the abuse of nature by humans. However, if ecological problems are a moral evil, who was responsible for them before Adam sinned?

The problem of death and suffering before sin

The problem of death and suffering is related to the problem of the effects of the Fall, but can be discussed separately. All long-age models entail the idea of death and suffering before, and thus independent of, the sin of Adam. The fossil record thus becomes a record of God's activity, not a record of the results of Adam's sin. Repeated episodes of mass extinctions in the fossil record do not seem to reflect the behavior of a caring Creator. What kind of God would permit, or cause, such mass destruction for no apparent reason?

It is commonly claimed that the "death" that resulted from Adam's sin was only a "spiritual" death;⁹⁴ physical death was already in force. This conclusion has been severely criticized. Death resulting from Adam's Fall must have been physical, since it involved returning to dust, and was facilitated by preventing access to the "tree of life."⁹⁵ Furthermore, restoration involves resurrection of the body. Indeed, physical death is a "sign" that spiritual death has occurred.⁹⁶

The claim that God lacked the ability to create living organisms without paying the price of death and suffering⁹⁷ is neither intellectually satisfying nor consistent with Scripture. Some scholars have even suggested that God was inexperienced as a Creator, and had to learn by practice.⁹⁸

The existence of disease and suffering is another aspect of natural evil that has not received as much attention as the problem of death before sin. Yet there is good evidence that animals suffer now, and that they suffered from dis-

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ease, injury, and perhaps even emotional trauma, in the past." Suffering is not necessary for evolution, and it is difficult to see how it can be justified theologically. A common response is simply to give up trying to justify suffering, and speculate that somehow it is part of "God's good creation."¹⁰⁰ This leaves the problem unresolved, and is a major theological challenge to all long-age models of origins.

Some have attempted to clear God of responsibility for evil by removing Him from direct control over nature. Kenneth Miller is an example of this thinking, when he criticizes the theological implications of God directing

Intelligent design [Miller's term for multiple creations] does a terrible disservice to God by casting Him as a magician who periodically creates and creates and then creates again throughout the geologic ages. Those who believe that the sole purpose of the Creator was the production of the human species must answer a simple question—not because I have asked it, but because it is demanded by natural history itself. Why did this magician, in order to produce the contemporary world, find it necessary to create and destroy creatures, habitats, and ecosystems millions of times over?

Ironically, Miller's criticism strikes his own preferred view, theistic evolution, just as strongly. God is equally responsible whether He directly causes every evil event, or whether He simply established the laws that cause them to happen and then withdrew.¹⁰² We do not exonerate a terrorist whose bomb explodes after he leaves the scene, but hold him just as accountable as the one who throws a grenade directly into a crowd.

A superficially more attractive, but entirely conjectural, answer to the problem of death before sin is the claim that pre-Adamic death and suffering are the result of Satan's rebellion.¹⁰³ This idea has a certain appeal, but it seems strange that God and Satan would battle for 600 million years over trilobites, tabulate corals, and such things. This idea also runs into serious difficulties with the problem of the lack of distinction in the fossil record between the supposed works of Satan and those of God. It is quite unsatisfactory to state that, within what appears to be a single species, some individuals were actually the product of Satan's work while others were actually the product of God's work.¹⁰⁴ This becomes an especially onerous idea when applied to the human species. Most, but not necessarily all, theistic evolutionists seem to reject the existence of Satan. Thus, this explanation is primarily limited to advocates of long-age

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creation, who generally do believe in the existence of a personal Devil.

Theological problems

Numerous theological problems are associated with long-age models of origins. The exact nature of the problems varies somewhat with the specific variety of model. The seventh-day Sabbath, the nature of the atonement, the character of God, the nature of inspiration, the nature of humanity, the basis for marriage, the nature of the future life, and other doctrines, are logically related to the story of origins to greater or lesser degrees.

Summary and Conclusion

We started this investigation with the question of how alternative models fare scientifically. The answer is—not very well. All of the models described here suffer from serious scientific problems, or are entirely ad hoc and conjectural. It may be that there really is no way to find harmony between the Biblical view of origins and current scientific thinking:

The various *via media* positions are attempting to reconcile viewpoints that are, in their simplest form, contradictory....

These two perspectives [science and religion] can have, at best, some kind of uneasy truce. They can never be reconciled.¹⁰⁵

The Biblical six-day Creation also faces serious scientific problems. This is often given as a reason to abandon Biblical Creation in favor of some intermediate model. However, a review of the intermediate models shows that they also have serious scientific problems. Thus, the existence of scientific problems seems a poor reason to prefer one of these theories in place of another. One may adopt an attitude of agnosticism, but this hardly seems appropriate for a Christian.

Only one family of models enjoys Biblical support—those based on the literal-phenomenal interpretation of Genesis. This is the model on which the Biblical story of redemption is based, and the model on which Seventh-day Adventist theology is based. Although many questions about the Biblical model remain unanswered, the fact that the model has scientific problems does not distinguish it from the alternative models discussed here, nor does it justify abandoning the model. Indeed, abandoning the Biblical view of Creation would undermine the church's mission and message, and transform

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us into just another social group with religious roots.

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Endnotes

¹ B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, 1966 reprint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p.67

² K.W. Giberson and D.A. Yerxa, *Species of Origins* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 49.

³ Many attempts have been made. Here are a few: B. Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery, Ala.: Apologetics Press, 1995) (long-age creation models); "Report of the Creation Study Committee, Presbyterian Church of America" (downloaded from the Web:) <http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics>; D.L. Wilcox, "A Taxonomy of Creation." *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 38 :244-250 (1986); L.J. Gibson, "Biblical Creation: Is There a Better Model?" *Ministry* (May 2000), pp. 5-8.

⁴ B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, 1966 reprint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

⁵ A.C. Custance, *Without Form and Void: A Study of the Meaning of Genesis 1:2*. (Ottawa: Doorway Pub., 1970), 211 pages. Also available on the Web: http://www.ringsurf.com/netring?ring=Gap_Theory;action=list; WW Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1976), p. 40; Discussed in IT. Taylor, *In the Minds of Men: Darwin and the New World Order* (Toronto: TFE Publishing, 1984), pp. 362-364; see also chapter 9 in B. Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery Ala.: Apologetics Press, 1995).

⁶ E.g., H. Rimmer, *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1937 [1962 printing]), pp. 27,28; Some Seventh-day Adventists have written favorably about this possibility (see endnote 103).

⁷ H. Rimmer, *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1937 [1962 printing]), p. 28; A Web site advocating this view is www.kjvbible.org/satan.html. A similar view was suggested in C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, first Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1996). p. 120.

⁸ G.H. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages* (New York: Revell, n.d. [1876?]); B. Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery Ala.: Apologetics Press, 1995), p. 161.

⁹ R.W. Younker, *God's Creation: Exploring the Genesis Story* (Nampa Idaho: Pacific Press, 1999); B. Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery, Ala.: Apologetics Press, 1995), p. 161; WW. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1976).

¹⁰ This idea is promoted on the Web site: www.kjvbible.org/satan.html, and is implicit in any theory that explains pre-Adamic natural evil as the result of Satan's activities. The argument is not necessarily dependent upon Satan's involvement; it could be that God's successive creations were indistinguishable morphologically.

¹¹ For a similar view in the context of a variant of the day-age model see D. Fischer, "Days of Creation: Hours or Eons?" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 42: 15-22 (1990).

¹² E.g., R.C. Newman, "Progressive Creationism" (old-earth creationism), pp. 105-141, in J.P. Moreland and J.M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids:

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Zondervan, 1999); D. England, *A Christian View of Origins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), pp. 110, 111; cited in B. Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery Ala.: Apologetics Press, 1995), p 213.

¹³ R.C. Newman, "Progressive Creationism" (old-earth creationism), pp. 105-141, in J.P. Moreland and J.M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), p. 107.

¹⁴ G.L. Schroeder, *The Science of God* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

¹⁵ H. Miller, *The Testimony of the Rocks; or, Geology in Its Bearings on the Two Theologies, Natural and Revealed* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable & Co., 1867), pp. 157-191; A. Hayward, *Creation and Evolution: The Facts and the Fallacies* (London: Triangle, 1985), pp. 167-178. This is the effect of "overlapping day-age" models, including Newman's "intermittent day" proposal (see endnote 13).

¹⁶ This is also an objection to recent creation models that include the creation of the entire universe in the six days of Genesis.

¹⁷ P.J. Wiseman, *Clues to Creation in Genesis* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1977); cited in Hayward, 1985, ch. 10, endnote 13 (see endnote 15).

¹⁸ H. Ross and G.L. Archer, "The Day-Age View," in D.G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Mission Viejo, Calif.: Crux Press, 2001), pp. 123-163.

¹⁹ L. Irons and M.G. Kline, "The Framework View," in D.G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Mission Viejo, Calif.: Crux Press, 2001), pp. 217-256; M.G. Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony." *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48:2-15 (1996). The basic idea of the framework hypothesis is also compatible with theistic evolutionary models.

²⁰ H. Ross, and G.L. Archer, "The Day-Age View," in D.G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Mission Viejo, Calif.: Crux Press, 2001), pp. 123-163.

²¹ Embraced by P.P.T. Pun, *Evolution: Nature and Scripture in Conflict?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) p. 265; and apparently by Fischer, 1990 (see endnote 11).

²² R.C. Newman, "Progressive Creationism" (old-earth creationism), in J.P. Moreland and J.M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), pp. 105-141.

²³ G.L. Schroeder, *The Science of God* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

²⁴ G.F. Hasel, "The 'Days' of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal 'Days' or Figurative 'Periods/EPOCHS' of Time?" *Origins* (1994) 21 :5-38; B. Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery Ala.: Apologetics Press, 1995), pp. 132-147; Pipa, J.A., "From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-Literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:1-2:3," in J.A. Pipa and D.W. Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Taylors, S.C.: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999), pp. 153-198; J.L. Duncan and D.W. Hall, "The 24-Hour Response," pp. 165-177, in D.G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Mission Viejo, Calif.: Crux Press, 2001), pp. 123-163.

²⁵ E.g., R.L. Harris, "The Length of the Creative Days in Genesis 1," in J.A. Pipa and D.W. Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Taylors, S.C.: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999), pp. 101-111; P.P.T. Pun, "A Theology of Progressive Creationism," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 39 :9-19 (1987).

²⁶ A. Hayward, *Creation and Evolution: The Facts and the Fallacies* (London: Triangle, 1985), p. 166.

²⁷ This remarkable claim is made in H. Ross and G.L. Archer, "The Day-Age View," in D.G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Mission Viejo, Calif.: Crux Press, 2001), pp. 123-163; see also the Web site at: <http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/testablecreationsummary.shtml?main>.

²⁸ M.J. Benton, *Fossil Record 2* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1993).

²⁹ T.H. Huxley, *The Interpreters of Genesis and the Interpreters of Nature*. Collected Essays

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IV, 1885, pp. 155, 156. Available on the Web at:

<http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE4/GeNat.html>.

³⁰ Kline, 1996; Irons and Kline, 2001, see endnote 18; for a brief history of the idea, see B. Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery, Ala.: Apologetics Press, 1995), pp. 215-218.

³¹ For a brief history of the idea, see Thompson, pp. 215-218 (see endnote 3). For a critique, see Joseph Pipa, "From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Framework Hypothesis," in J.A. Pipa and D.W. Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Taylors, S.C.: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999), pp. 153-198.

³² R.M. Davidson, "In the Beginning: How to Interpret Genesis 1," *Dialogue* 6:(3) :9-12 (1994), endnote 14.

³³ H. Ross and G.L. Archer, "The Day-Age View," pp. 123-163, in D.G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Mission Viejo, Calif.: Crux Press, 2001), p. 274.

^{34a} A criticism repeated, ironically, by a theistic evolutionist: K.R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (1999) (New York: Perennial; first Perennial ed., 2002), p. 128.

^{34b} B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, 1966 reprint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

³⁵ First fossil appearances could be interpreted as separate creations; cf. A. Hoffman, *Arguments on Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 7, 8. However, first fossil appearances do not produce any generalized pattern that could be recognized as discrete creation events.

³⁶ H.J. Van Till, "The Fully Gifted Creation," pp. 161-218, in J.P. Moreland and J.M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), p. 211.

³⁷ T.H. Huxley, *The Three Hypotheses Respecting the History of Nature*. Collected Essays IV, 1877. Downloaded from the Web at <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE4/LecEvol.html>.

³⁸ K.R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (1999) (New York: Perennial; first Perennial ed., 2002); see also J.W. Provonsha, "The Creation/Evolution Debate in the Light of the Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan," (1985) in J.L. Hayward, ed., *Creation Reconsidered* (Roseville, Calif.: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), pp. 303-311.

³⁹ E.G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1 (1870), reprint ed., p. 86 (Washington, D C : Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969); E.G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3 (1858-1864), facsimile ed., p. 91 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945).

⁴⁰ G.B. McGrath, "Soteriology: Adam and the Fall," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 49 :252-263 (1997). McGrath comes close to using the term "progressive creation" for his version of theistic evolution.

⁴¹ H.J. Van Till, "The Fully Gifted Creation," pp. 161-218, in J.P. Moreland and J.M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

⁴² G.P. Elder, *Chronic Vigour: Darwin, Anglicans, Catholics and the Development of a Doctrine of Providential Evolution* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996).

⁴³ Discussed in T. Peters, "On Creating the Cosmos," pp. 273-296, in R.J. Russell, W.R. Stoeger, and G.W. Coyne, eds., *Physics, Philosophy and Theology* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1988).

⁴⁴ "The central question for theistic evolution is: How is God involved in the evolutionary process?" K.W. Gilbersen and D.A. Yerxa, *Species of Origins* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 172.

⁴⁵ H.J. Van Till, "The Fully Gifted Creation," pp. 161-218, in J.P. Moreland and J.M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

⁴⁶ A. Peacocke, "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," *Zygon* 34 :695-712 (1999).

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⁴⁷ Van Till, 1999, p. 187 (see endnote 39). Note the highly prejudicial language.

⁴⁸ Van Till, 1999, p. 187 (see endnote 39).

⁴⁹ The entire Bible is a record of divine interaction with the world. Well-known examples of divine interaction in nature include Genesis 1-11; Psalms 19, 104, 148, etc. Direct divine activity is necessary if God is to affect events in the real world, a point made cogently by T.F. Tracy. "Particular Providence and the God of the Gaps," pp. 289-324, in R.J. Russell, N. Murphy, and A.R. Peacocke, eds., *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1997).

⁵⁰ W.L. Bradley, "Response to Howard J. Van Till," pp. 219-225, in J.P. Moreland and J.M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

⁵¹ Several of these problems are discussed in: J. Maynard Smith and E. Szathmari, *The Major Transitions in Evolution* (Oxford and New York: W.H. Freeman, 1995).

⁵² E.g., S. Conway Morris, "The Cambrian 'Explosion': Slow-fuse or Megatonnage?" *Proceedings, National Academy of Sciences* 97 :4426-4429 (2000).

⁵³ Numerous "radiations" have been identified in the fossil record, e.g., A. Feduccia, "'Big Bang' for Tertiary Birds?" *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 18 :172-176 (2003). For a discussion of the problem, see L.J. Gibson, "Rates of Evolution" unpublished manuscript, Geoscience Research Institute.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., W.R. Stoeger, 1997. "Describing God's Action in the World in Light of Scientific Knowledge of Reality," pp. 239-261, in R.J. Russell, N. Murphy, and A.R. Peacocke, eds., *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, and various other papers in the same volume, 1997).

⁵⁵ E.g., J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1989).

56 T.F. Tracy, "Particular Providence and the God of the Gaps," pp. 289-324, in R.J. Russell, N. Murphy, and A.R. Peacocke, eds., 1997 *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1997); A. Peacocke, 1997. "God's Interaction with the World: The Implications of Deterministic 'Chaos' and of Interconnected and Interdependent Complexity," pp. 263-287, in R.J. Russell, N. Murphy, and A.R. Peacocke, eds., *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1997).

⁵⁷ W.G. Pollard, *Chance and Providence* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); A. Peacocke, 1997. "God's Interaction with the World: The Implications of Deterministic 'Chaos' and of Interconnected and Interdependent Complexity," pp. 263-287, in R.J. Russell, N. Murphy, and A.R. Peacocke, eds., *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1997); R.J. Russell, "Special Providence and Genetic Mutation: A New Defense of Theistic Evolution," pp. 335-369, in K.B. Miller, ed., *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵⁸ J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 26-28; J. Polkinghorne, "The Quantum World," pp. 333-342, in R.J. Russell, W.R. Stoeger, and G.W. Coyne, eds., *Physics, Philosophy and Theology* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1988). The entire premise that indeterminacy in nature is needed for God's action is challenged by: J. Byl, "Indeterminacy, Divine Action, and Human Freedom," *Science and Christian Belief* 15 :101-116 (2003).

⁵⁹ Many scholars have discussed this point. It was raised specifically in response to Van Till's view in J.J. Davis, "Response to Howard J. Van Till," pp. 226-230, in J.P. Moreland and J.M. Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), p. 228.

⁶⁰ M.A. Jeeves and R.J. Berry, *Science, Life, and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); R.J. Berry, "What to Believe About Miracles," *Nature* 322 :321, 322 (1986).

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⁶¹ K.R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (1999) (New York: Perennial; first Perennial ed., 2002), p. 239; J. Polkinghorne, 1989. *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 45-58.

⁶² K.R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (1999) (New York: Perennial; first Perennial ed., 2002), p. 218; A. Peacocke, "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," *Zygon* 34 :695-712 (1999).

⁶³ Mentioned briefly in M.A. Jeeves and R.J. Berry, *Science, Life, and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 79; and advocated more explicitly in G.C. Mills, "A Theory of Theistic Evolution as an Alternative to the Naturalistic Theory," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 47 :112-122 (1995).

⁶⁴ A. Hoffman, *Arguments on Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 8.

⁶⁵ S.J. Gould, *Wonderful Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), p. 49.

⁶⁶ Summarized in: R. Wennberg, "Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 :120-140 (1991); see also J.C. Munday, "Animal Pain: Beyond the Threshold?" pp. 435-468, in K.B. Miller, ed., *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁶⁷ R.J. Berry, "This Cursed Earth: Is 'the Fall' Credible?," *Science and Christian Belief* 11 : 29-49, p. 42 (1999). Berry claims that "evil" in the pre-Adamic world is just an error in our interpretation, not the actual state of nature.

⁶⁸ J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 59-68.

⁶⁹ K.R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (1999) (New York: Perennial; first Perennial ed., 2002), p. 218.

⁷⁰ A. Peacocke, A., "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," *Zygon* 34 :695-712 (1999).

⁷¹ Famously noted by S. Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), p. 250.

⁷² A.J. Day, "Adam, Anthropology and the Genesis Record—Taking Genesis Seriously in the Light of Contemporary Science," *Science and Christian Belief* 19 :115-143 (1998).

⁷³ A. Held and P. Rust, "Genesis Reconsidered," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 51 :231-243 (1999).

⁷⁴ R.A. Clouser, "Genesis on the Origin of the Human Race," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 43 :2-13 (1991).

⁷⁵ M.A. Jeeves and R.J. Berry, *Science, Life, and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 111, 112, affirm that not all humans are genetically related to Adam, although they do not claim this makes them nonhuman.

⁷⁶ J. Polkinghorne, 1988. "The Quantum World," pp. 333-342, in R.J. Russell, W.R. Stoeger, and G.W. Coyne, eds., *Physics, Philosophy and Theology* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications; Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 340.

⁷⁷ A. Peacocke, "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," *Zygon* 34 :695-712, p. 701 (1999).

⁷⁸ P.A. Williams, *Doing Without Adam and Eve* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 182; see also H.G. Wells, *Outline of History*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 776, 777: "... If all the animals and man had been evolved in this ascendant manner, then there had been no first parents, no Eden, and no Fall. And if there had been no Fall, then the entire historical fabric of Christianity, the story of the first sin and the reason for an atonement, upon which the current teaching based Christian emotion and morality, collapsed like a house of cards."

⁷⁹ E.g., A. Peacocke, "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," *Zygon* 34 :695-712 (1999), appears to endorse panentheism, while Polkinghorne does not: J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 15, 16.

⁸⁰ E.g., F. Van Dyke, "Theological Problems of Theistic Evolution," *Perspectives on Science*

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and *Christian Faith* 38 :11-18 (1986); L.J. Gibson, "Theistic Evolution: Is It for Adventists?" *Ministry* (January 1992), pp. 22-25; A.M. Rodriguez, "Theistic Evolution and the Adventist Faith: An Analysis," unpublished paper presented at the East-Central Africa Division Faith and Science Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, May 5-6, 2004.

⁵¹ A.J. Day, "Adam, Anthropology and the Genesis Record—Taking Genesis Seriously in the Light of Contemporary Science," *Science and Christian Belief* 19:115-143 (1998); M.A. Jeeves and R.J. Berry, *Science, Life, and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), chapters 7, 8.

⁵² Adam defined by receiving a soul is the most common explanation for the origin of humans in theistic evolution theories, e.g., G. Schroeder, *The Science of God* (New York: Free Press, 1997), pp. 137-145; Pope John Paul II presented a now famous statement on evolution, in which the immediate creation of the soul is emphasized: Pope John Paul II, "Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences," (1996) on the Internet at:

<http://www.cin.org/users/james/files/message.htm> or <http://www.cin.org/jp2evolu.html>.

⁵³ M.A. Jeeves and R.J. Berry, 1998. *Science, Life, and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), chaps. 7, 8.

⁵⁴ D. Fischer, "In Search of the Historical Adam: Part 1," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 45 :241-251 (1993); D. Fischer, "In Search of the Historical Adam: Part 2," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 46 :47-57 (1994).

⁵⁵ H. Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994); H. Ross and G.L. Archer, "The Day-Age View," pp. 123-163, in D.G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Mission Viejo, Calif.: Crux Press, 2001), p. 141; a date of about 40,000 years ago seems favored by: J.P. Hurd, "Hominids in the Garden?" pp. 208-233, in K.B. Miller, ed., *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵⁶ D.L. Wilcox, "Adam, Where Are You? Changing Paradigms in Paleoanthropology," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48 :88-96 (1996); D.L. Wilcox, "Establishing Adam: Recent Evidences for a Late-Date Adam (AMH@100,000 BP)," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 56 :49-54 (2004).

⁵⁷ G.R. Morton, "Dating Adam," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 51 :87-97 (1999).

⁵⁸ R. Russman, "Correspondence," *Science and Christian Belief* 12 :165, 166 (2000).

⁵⁹ G.R. Morton, "Dating Adam," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 51 :87-97 (1999).

⁶⁰ R. Isaac, "Chronology of the Fall," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48 :34-42 (1996); see also R.C.W. Roennfeldt, "Some Theological Implications of Three Christian Origins Models," unpublished paper presented at South Pacific Division Faith and Science Conference, Avondale College, July 11-14, 2003.

⁶¹ E.g., I.G. Barbour, *Religion and Science* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), p. 301; J. Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 88, 89.

⁶² A. Peacocke, "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," *Zygon* 34 :695-712, p. 701 (1999).

⁶³ R.J. Berry, "This Cursed Earth: Is 'the Fall' Credible?" *Science and Christian Belief* 11 :29-49 (1999).

⁶⁴ E.g., R.J. Berry, "This Cursed Earth: Is 'the Fall' Credible?" *Science and Christian Belief* 11: 29-49 (1999); H. Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), pp. 61-64; C. Menninga, "Disease and Dying in the Fossil Record: Implication for Christian Theology," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 51 :226-230 (1999).

⁶⁵ P.G. Nelson, "Correspondence," *Science and Christian Belief* 12 :166, 167 (2000).

⁶⁶ P. Duce, "Comment on 'This Cursed Earth,'" *Science and Christian Belief* 11:159-167 (1999).

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⁹⁷ R. Wennberg, "Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 : 120-140 (1991); A. Peacocke, *God and the New Biology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 55; see also endnotes 56-60 in this paper.

⁹⁸ J.O. Morse, "The Great Experimenter?" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 49 : 108-110 (1997).

⁹⁹ J. Stambaugh, "Creation, Suffering and the Problem of Evil," *CEN Technical Journal* 10 : 391-404 (1996); R.J. Berry, "This Cursed Earth: Is 'the Fall' Credible?" *Science and Christian Belief* 11:29-49 (1999); C. Menninga, "Disease and Dying in the Fossil Record: Implication for Christian Theology," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 51 :226-230 (1999). R. Wennberg, "Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil," *Christian Scholar's Review* :120-140 (1991).

¹⁰⁰ C. Menninga, "Disease and Dying in the Fossil Record: Implication for Christian Theology," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 51 :226-230 (1999); R.J. Berry, "This Cursed Earth: Is 'the Fall' Credible?" *Science and Christian Belief* 11 :29-49 (1999).

¹⁰¹ K.R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (1999) (New York: Perennial; first Perennial ed., 2002), p.128.

¹⁰² C. Southgate, "God and Evolutionary Evil: Theodicy in the Light of Darwinism," *Zygon* 37 :803-824 (2002).

¹⁰³ A. Held and P. Rust, "Genesis Reconsidered," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 51 :231-243 (1999); see also references in endnote 6. Discussed in R. Wennberg, "Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 :120-140 (1991); and in B. Thompson, *Creation Compromises* (Montgomery Ala.: Apologetics Press, 1995). A few Seventh-day Adventists have speculated on the possibility of Satan's involvement in pre-Adamic death: H.F. Pearl, "An Anti-Evolution Model for the ICFS, 2002," unpublished manuscript for the First international Conference on Faith and Science, Ogden, Utah, August 23-29, 2002, in conference notebook volume 2, Tuesday section [August 27]; J.W. Provonsha, "The Creation/Evolution Debate in the Light of the Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan," pp. 303-311 (1985), in J.L. Hayward, ed., *Creation Reconsidered* (Roseville, Calif.: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ The suggestion that Satan might be able to direct the evolution of hominids "lacking only the 'image of God'" was made by J.W. Provonsha, 2000, p. 310. The idea is implied in the position taken on the Web site: www.kjvbible.org/satan.html.

¹⁰⁵ K. W. Giberson and D.A. Yerxa, *Species of Origins* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 196.

Chapter 22

Recent *Affirmation of Creation* Statements

Official Church Documents

[In 2001, in response to questions being raised by some within our ranks about the Seventh-day Adventist teaching on Creation, the General Conference Executive Committee at an Annual Council authorized a three-year series of Faith and Science Conferences. These "Faith and Science" Conferences were begun in 2002 (Ogden, Utah) and concluded in August 2004 (Denver, Colorado) with an "Affirmation of Creation" report. Prepared by the Organizing Committee of the International Faith & Science Conferences 2002-2004, the report was presented to and received by the General Conference Executive Committee at the Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 11, 2004. Upon the reception of the "Affirmation of Creation" report, the church leaders who were gathered at the Fall Council meeting voted its own "Response" to the report. This chapter presents the two recent church statements on Creation—the "Affirmation of Creation" report and the "Response to Affirmation of Creation."—Editor.]

Affirmation of Creation¹

The International Faith & 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 . . ." (Genesis 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." —Psalm 19:1, NIV.

From this view of the world flows a series of interlocking doctrines that

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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 (Romans 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

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Church has encouraged the development of 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 sciences. Seventh-day Adventist members and students encounter this view and its implications in many areas of daily life.

In its statement of Fundamental Beliefs [#6] the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms a divine Creation 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."—Genesis 1; 2; Exodus 20:8-11; Psalms 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Hebrews 11:3.

Reasons for the Faith and Science Conferences

Because of the pervasive and growing influence of the theory of evolution, the General Conference 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, nonoverlapping 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 knowl-

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edge 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?

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 seven⁷ 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 [August 2004] was the concluding conference of the three-year series. Its agenda began with summaries of the issues in theology and science, then moved on to several questions regarding faith-science issues in church life. These questions included:

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- The ongoing 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 reexpressions of, doctrinal views?

Scholarly papers by theologians, scientists, and educators were presented and discussed in all the conferences. (The Geoscience 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

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origins in conflict with the Biblical 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 in 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

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bringing added clarity to what is really meant in Fundamental Belief #6.

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 reexamination 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

As a result of the two international conferences and the seven division conferences, the Organizing Committee reports the following 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 history.

5. We affirm that our limited understanding of origins calls for humility

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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 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

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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. . . ."—Revelation 4:11; 5:12, NKJV.

Church Leaders' Response to an Affirmation of Creation³

Whereas belief in a literal, six-day Creation is indissolubly linked with the authority of Scripture, and;

Whereas such belief interlocks with other doctrines of Scripture, including the Sabbath and the atonement, and;

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 & 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 in 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.

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Endnotes

¹ The statement can be found on the Seventh-day Adventist Web site: http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat54.html.

² East-Central Africa Division, Euro-Africa Division, North American Division, South Pacific Division, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, Southern Asia Division, West-Central Africa Division.

³ As a response to the *"An Affirmation of Creation—Report"* this document was accepted and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church Executive Committee at the Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 13, 2004. This document is available at http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat55.html.

Chapter 23

From Evolutionist Scientist to Believing Creationist: One Physicist's Testimony

By Robert V. Gentry, DSc (hon.)

Author, *Creation's Tiny Mystery*

Introduction

All Seventh-day Adventists should appreciate the church's 2004 *Affirmation of Creation* statement and the church leaders' *Response to the Affirmation of Creation* document.¹ Both statements support the church's historical, Biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation, with each day being 24 hours in length.

The documents also advocate that our young people especially should receive a scientifically rigorous affirmation of these beliefs as they are also taught about competing theories of origins that dominate contemporary scientific discussion.

This chapter is designed to assist all who wish to communicate scientific results that affirm our beliefs by briefly recounting my personal experiences in going from a young person who believed in the Biblical record of Creation, to one who entered Adventism as an evolutionist due to my university training in physics. The problem I faced was my inability to reconcile my reemerging faith in Genesis and in Christ with evolution. As a result I initiated, along with my wife Pat, a several decades-long research project that would answer whether there really exists any scientific evidence for Creation that would also expose the flaws in the evolutionary scenario.

Though it is not yet widely known in denominational circles, scientific evidence supporting the Genesis Creation record and in particular the fourth commandment's "in six days the Lord made heaven and Earth and the sea and all that in them is ..." has been discovered and widely published in certain of the world's leading scientific journals for over 30 years. Those discoveries remain unrefuted until this day²

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University Physics Training: A Faith-shaking, Evolutionist-producing Experience

At the University of Florida I enrolled in the standard evolutionary biology course. I had grown up in a Christian home, had the opportunity of reading the Bible, and for all practical purposes believed in the Genesis Creation record. In high school there was a very brief suggestion of evolution, but my faith remained intact until I enrolled in the university biology course.

Nevertheless, I didn't become an evolutionist until I was in graduate school. There, as I was taking a graduate course in physics—relativistic cosmology—I was fascinated as, week after week, the professor explained the theory of the big bang. In those days the big bang supposedly occurred about five and a half billion years ago. Today, the number is around 14 billion. I was fascinated with tensor calculus, relativistic mechanics, and dynamics, in connection with the big bang. In fact, I got so involved with the whole idea that day by day, as we were in the class, I found myself absorbing the material.

However, one problem confronted me, at least I thought there was only one problem; it was that the big bang offered no explanation of how the matter got here in the beginning. In class one day the professor seemed to realize there were doubts about the whole idea, and so he said, "I will tell you what. It really isn't as bad as you might think it is. There was a cosmologist, George Lemaitre, a Catholic physicist who was also a priest, who in the 1930s proposed that the big bang didn't come about by chance at all. It was really initiated by the finger of God. That's what he said started it." And that resolved most of my doubts about the origin of the big bang.

From then on it was much easier to accept everything about the evolution of the universe—the origin of the galaxy, the origin of the stars down to the so-called proto-Earth, and then the evolving Earth through several billion years of geological time.

One particularly strong point in favor of the big bang was the seemingly overwhelming experimental evidence for an ancient age of the earth. It was taught that the age of the earth was based on unquestionable laws of radioactive decay. Radioactive elements such as uranium were held to have decayed at a uniform rate to the daughter product, lead. By measuring the uranium and lead in a rock together with the uniform decay rate postulate, it was concluded that the earth had to be billions of years old. And since this age was presumed to fit exactly with the geological part of the big bang scenario, I concluded the earlier part of it had to be true as well. I was a happy theistic evolutionist.

From Evolutionist Scientist to Believing Creationist

The six days of Creation that I had grown up with were no more part of my belief system. They had become six long geological or cosmological periods of time. I graduated from the University of Florida with a master's degree in physics and went to work in the defense industry in Ft. Worth, Texas, as a nuclear weapons specialist. At every opportunity I vigorously defended the big bang theory of evolution to my scientific colleagues, all the while still retaining a belief in God. Several years later I experienced a rude awakening.

Seventh-day Adventism Challenges My Belief System

I later transferred to a defense company in Orlando, Florida, working in the same capacity. Soon thereafter my wife Pat and I began watching the *It Is Written* television program hosted by Seventh-day Adventist evangelist George Vandeman. After several months he held a crusade in Orlando, and we diligently attended. His stand on Genesis caught our attention. During this time he visited our home and specially pointed out that the fourth of the Ten Commandments says, "In six days the Lord made heaven and Earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11).

This statement raised a real question in my mind because it no longer seemed possible to relate the six days of Creation with six long geological periods of time. I had run into a contradiction. Here we were believing in a God Whom we thought was a God of truth, and we were happily going down the road of theistic evolution with six long geological periods of time.

But now a monkey wrench was thrown into the works, and we didn't know what to do! Well, I thought about it and thought about it, and the more I thought, the more it seemed that I couldn't reconcile a literal six-day Creation with an ancient age of the earth. Was my cherished belief in radiometric dating wrong? On the other hand, if God had really created this world as the Bible says, why wasn't there some evidence of it?

So I began to ask people: Do you know anything about this thing called Creation, or about the Flood? Very few seemed to know anything at all. I got a book here and a book there with very limited information; details about origins were always sketchy, and my questions remained unanswered. I had a conflict, and it wouldn't go away. Pat and I talked about it many times; after all, one has to live with oneself—at least she had to live with me—and I had this problem, this dilemma, and she did as well.

As earlier stated, at the initial time of this uncertainty over the age of the earth, I was still employed as a physicist in the defense industry. My work still

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involved nuclear weapons effects. I began to question if this was really the type of work for a Christian to be doing. So I quit and went back to the University of Florida to teach.

Pat completed her degree in mathematics while we were there. During that time she enrolled in the same biology course I had taken several years before, and would daily recount to me the faith-destroying tactics that instructors used to ridicule the Genesis Creation account as myth, while promoting evolution of life, the earth, and the cosmos as the only truly scientific model that intelligent persons could ever possibly entertain. I could relate to what she was witnessing because it had earlier happened to my brother and me, and he eventually would see his faith slip, never to return to what it had been. For him this was the beginning of what would later unfold as the greatest of life's tragedies.

A Glimmer of Light Begins to Shine Out of Darkness

Two years later we went to Walla Walla College to teach for a year. Surely we thought we would there find answers to the critical issues that concerned us. But this was not to be. There we found science faculty members divided, some holding fast to the Spirit of Prophecy statements about planet Earth's creation being only about 6,000 years ago, versus those who supported a several billion-year age. Students there were losing their faith over this, and we were further confused.

While there I learned about *The Genesis Flood* (1961), by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, and it served to turn the key in my quest for truth. The main thing bothering me was the age of the earth and radiometric dating. I couldn't find anything wrong with the physics of it. But one day it occurred to me to question whether what I had been taught was absolute fact; namely, how do we know that the radioactive decay rate has been constant over billions of years?

There in *The Genesis Flood* was a short discussion about *pleochroic halos*, which I had never heard of before. Now they caught my attention because *supposedly this was the evidence that established the constancy of the decay rate over geologic time*. And I said to myself, If there is something wrong with radiometric dating, this is where it must be, or at least I need to find out if there is anything wrong. I had to look into these pleochroic halos—whatever they might be—and find out for myself what is going on, instead of doing what I had done before, which was to naively depend on the authority of others for truth. So Pat and I continued to pray for light as I began this work.

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"Your Chances of Finding Anything Are Microscopic": A Prophetic Statement

Without getting into a lot of technical details, these little halos are formed by radioactivity in various rocks. They are especially easy to find in mica because it is easily split into thin leaves for viewing under a microscope. Radioactive particles shoot out from tiny specks in the mica and form spherical shells, microscopic in size. If you split mica as thin as a piece of paper so that it appears translucent, you can actually put it under a microscope and see that the cross sections of the spherical shells are just concentric rings. The element uranium forms the rings of a certain type of one of these halos, and these rings were supposed to be the key as to whether or not the decay rate was constant.

After teaching at Walla Walla College for one year, I accepted a teaching position at Georgia Tech while working on my PhD in physics. I was still enthused about the possibility of doing research on these halos, hoping to at last find the scientific truth about the age and origin of the earth. So I talked to the chairman of the physics department at Georgia Tech about doing a thesis on this topic. Well, he was very honest and forthright with me. He confided that earlier in life he had believed the Genesis record of Creation. "But," he said, "the older I've become, the more I'm convinced that evolution is the scientific explanation for our Earth. It has to be very old." He continued, "What I want you to do is to think about this for awhile and then come back and talk to me, but I just don't see that you're headed in the right direction if you're considering Creation as an alternative to evolution."

After a lot of reading, study, and prayer I concluded that I had to do research on the halos. To me it seemed that the Biblical record of Creation took us back only about 6,000 years. And the fourth commandment said, "In six days the Lord made heaven and Earth, the sea, and all that in them is." On this basis I couldn't reconcile part of the earth being quite ancient and another part quite recent. This was the essence of my conflict.

So I went back to the department chairman and emphasized how important it was for me to investigate the halos and try to find the scientific truth about the age of the earth.

He said, "You have some theological beliefs, don't you?" And I said, "I certainly do, and I want to find out if they're right. I just don't believe there can be that much of a discrepancy between science and the Bible." I concluded, "I need to find the answer."

He replied, "I think *your chances of finding anything are microscopic*, but

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if you insist on doing this, you'll have to do it some other place. I can't let you do that thesis topic here because, What would happen to the physics faculty at Georgia Tech if you did find something new and published it—something that we know is at variance with the standard view of the age of the earth and things like that? We couldn't have it. That would be an embarrassment to this institution." In other words, choose a different thesis topic or leave. So I left!

My research began with very little money—just a few hundred dollars. This was in the summer of 1964. About a year earlier I had borrowed funds to travel to Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, to borrow some halo-containing mica specimens that earlier belonged to a scientist who had done work at Dalhousie in the 1930s. I was looking for good uranium halos to observe what kind of ring structure they had, so I could find out more about the decay rate, and hopefully, more about the age of the earth. Fortunately, Pat was in agreement with my goals, in spite of what some people thought was a rather unconventional approach.

That summer I worked on a preliminary report to present to a higher education meeting of Adventist scientists and educators. Nothing came of the meeting, and it was evident that I was in for an uphill endeavor to continue the research so that I could present the results to a wider audience within the scientific community.

That fall I found a job as a substitute mathematics teacher at a local high school in Atlanta. During the day I worked as a teacher, and at night I'd do experiments. I had converted my bathroom and kitchen into a chemical laboratory of sorts, and the backroom into a darkroom. I worked hard to be ready to make another presentation—this time to the American Association of Physics Teachers at their annual meeting in New York, January 1965. I thought I had found a little something significant in my research that needed to be reported to the world of science.

It is now embarrassing to admit that in January 1965 I used about all of the money Pat and I had in savings and flew to New York City to present my paper to that meeting.

Well, only about 10 or 12 physicists were there, and only one person said anything to me after my presentation. I was thinking, This isn't so great after all. But one good thing did occur—a relatively new Adventist couple we had met a few months earlier thought I wasn't completely off-track. They had been evolutionists, and one of them had had difficulty becoming an Adventist until we were able to explain the fallacies of accepting evolutionary assumptions as facts. So they decided to help us continue our research as best they could. We considered that this was God working in our behalf.

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Discovery of God's Fingerprints of Creation

This was now the spring of 1965. I would get up early in the morning, go over to the microscope, and scan over these little samples of mica day after day.

I have to back up now and tell you that, in the midst of looking at all these uranium halos under the microscope, there were other halos that I kept seeing while scanning these samples of mica. Although these other halos had never been identified conclusively by others who had seen them before, it was speculated that they were from different radioactive isotopes of the chemical element polonium, all of which are radioactive and have relatively short half-lives, which means they have only a fleeting existence.

To understand why these new halos began to attract my attention goes back to the time I took the graduate course in big bang cosmology years earlier. Even though I had become an Adventist and had in principle accepted Creation, yet my mind was still permeated with the standard evolutionary approach to the development of the earth and how all its chemical elements had their origin either in the big bang itself, or much later in stellar nucleosynthetic events in supernovae.

In this theory, all of Earth's chemical elements formed hundreds of millions or billions of years prior to the time matter finally began to condense to form the proto-Earth as a molten ball of matter. In this scenario the first rocks which began to form as the surface cooled are thought by geologists to be the so-called Precambrian rocks because they don't have any evidences of life in them—no fossils.

The interesting thing is that the Precambrian granites, which are the basement rocks underlying the continents, constitute the major part of the rocks that contain the uranium halos and the polonium halos. These granitic and other hard crystalline rocks form the foundations of all the continents and hence are designated as Earth's foundation rocks.

I didn't realize it at the time, but foundation rocks are those the Bible identifies as the rocks that were made in the beginning (Psalm 102:25 and Hebrews 1:10).

The scientist at Dalhousie University who earlier published his ideas about polonium halos, hypothesized that the polonium was somehow derived from uranium after the rock had crystallized, instead of existing before the rock crystallized. I accepted his views for a long time. However, my own experiments showed a different result. They did not reveal any evidence that the polonium for these halos had come from uranium. This continued to puzzle me for a long time, during which period I took the opportunity to read, pray,

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and study many statements on Creation given in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

One spring afternoon in 1965, I was at the microscope in my home laboratory. Pat and I had three small children at that time, and this happened to be their nap time. I can remember looking up from the microscope and peering out the window. The house was very quiet, and I was contemplating the polonium halos that I had just seen under the microscope. I was thinking, How in the world could I ever solve this enigma?

On one hand, the big bang theory held that granite had cooled slowly from a melt, over eons of geologic time. On the other hand, the polonium would have disappeared within a short period of time, just minutes. So how could the polonium have been around when the granite cooled into a solid?

At that point almost instantly two Bible verses flashed into my mind: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.... For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6, 9).

I just sat there at the table, stunned at these thoughts. Immediately it occurred to me that God had left His fingerprints of Creation in the very foundation rocks that the Bible designates as the created rocks (Hebrews 1:10).

These were the evidences that God left in the rocks to reveal their instantaneous creation. It disproved what I had long thought was a fact about granites cooling from a melt. It was not a fact of science as I had been taught for so many years, but instead a fallacious assumption that was only a prop for the big bang and Earth's ancient age. The imprints of polonium halos in granites can be compared to Polaroid photographs of something that existed for only an instant of time.

At first I informed only a few close friends about what I fully believed was an impression from the Holy Spirit. However, they were skeptical. So I refrained from spreading it among fellow church members because I realized how difficult it would be for anyone to believe it without further substantiation. I began to feel a strong obligation to pursue a course of research that would scientifically investigate every conceivable explanation for these polonium halos, except the one I had just thought of—that they were created. If evolutionists failed to refute this evidence and provide a verifiable, conventional explanation for the halos, then I would know that God had created them, along with the rocks that contain them, to provide Earth's last generation with unambiguous scientific evidence supporting the Genesis record of the literal six-day Creation and the seventh-day Sabbath.

Especially did I ask the Lord for the opportunity to carry on this research in a first-class laboratory from which my results could be published and dis-

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seminated to the worldwide scientific community. It appeared that the Lord had helped me identify the Genesis rocks and that in time He intended this information to go the world to glorify Him and to scientifically affirm His record of Creation and the Creation Sabbath, in preparation of His soon return.

God's Providences Lead: The Oak Ridge National Laboratory & the Arkansas Creation/Evolution Trial

About a year later I was invited to carry on my research at Columbia Union College. While there, I published a paper substantiating the Creation origin of the polonium halos and the granites as Earth's Genesis rocks in *Science*, one of the world's leading scientific journals. But much more work was needed to repeatedly bring all this to the attention of the world's evolutionary community. And the Lord had a plan for this to happen.

Through a series of God's providences I was invited to become a visiting scientist in the chemistry division of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) for one year. That one year was extended to 13 years, as I continued to produce research papers that were published in the world's leading scientific journals.

The focus of many of these papers was the polonium-halo evidence for Creation. These publications and others led Columbia Union College to confer an honorary doctor of science on me in April 1977. The world's great evolutionists, as well as creationists—actually everyone in the world—have now had over 30 years to refute this evidence, and have failed to do so. So, how have things turned out?

In the spring of 1981, while I was still at ORNL, the State of Arkansas passed a law requiring the teaching of evolution along with Creation in the public schools. Because of my publications, the State of Arkansas asked me to testify as an expert witness for Creation in the Arkansas Creation/evolution trial held in December of 1981.

Pat and I prayed, and we had very definite evidence of God's Providence that I should go and testify, even though we recognized that ORNL might receive very negative feedback from my participation, and hence my visiting scientist position there could well be in jeopardy as a result of that.

I did testify at great length, and one of the world's eminent evolutionists was there, testifying for the ACLU and proclaiming radiometric evidence for a great age of the earth. However, when he was cross-examined about the polonium-halo evidence for Creation, he was unable to refute it, saying that I had found a very "tiny mystery" that he would someday hope to solve.

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Nevertheless, my testimony received very negative write-ups in the scientific press, and six months later, at the end of June of 1982, my guest position at ORNL was rescinded.

Evolutionist's "Tiny Mystery" Becomes Creation's Tiny Mystery

Despite this apparent setback, we were providentially able to begin to retrace the odyssey of our discoveries and how the evolutionists opposed to God's great works of Creation have worked to suppress this evidence from further discussion in scientific journals and the public arena. Others have strenuously opposed the matter coming to the attention of the church.

At the 1981 Arkansas trial, the star geology witness for the ACLU labeled the polonium-halo evidence for Creation as a "tiny mystery" that he would someday like to solve. As of this writing, over 23 years have passed, and neither he nor any other scientist has published a refutation of this evidence for Creation in the standard, peer-reviewed scientific journals such as the ones in which my reports were published.

So, when Pat and I began to write up the odyssey of our work, including my scientific papers, we could think of no better title for our book than *Creation's Tiny Mystery*, which was first published in 1986. It is now in its 4th edition and is available on order from bookstores.³ Clearly, polonium halos are actually Creation halos.

In 1993 the video *Fingerprints of Creation* describing this evidence of Earth's rapid creation was released by the Adventist Media Center, and in 1994 our additional discoveries supporting Earth's young age, *The Young Age of the Earth*, was also released by the Adventist Media Center. In 1996 and 1997 this latter video aired nine times across North America on the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), which is part of the global Catholic TV network. This video was extremely well received, and in 2002 the prior favorable exposure to our results led to my son, Dr. David Gentry, and I, being invited to participate as the only two non-Catholic speakers in two Catholic Creation Conferences—one held in Virginia and the other in Rome. Also, during the last several years, both videos have aired on various PBS TV stations across the nation.

Defeating the Big Bang

For over a decade, I have given papers at national scientific meetings c: the American Physical Society showing why the big bang is scientifically flawed. On February 17, 2005, I appeared on *3ABN Today LIVE* to present

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these discoveries. A book is underway, describing these discoveries, as well as a new video that will present the downfall of big bang cosmology and the evidence for this new Creation model of the universe.

Presentations of these results to many Adventist churches, both of the evidence of Earth's rapid creation and the new discoveries about the downfall of the big bang, have repeatedly been shown to strongly affirm the first angel's message of Creation in Revelation 14:6, 7 and the seventh-day Sabbath of Creation. It is our belief that wide dissemination of these results would greatly strengthen the faith of our young people in the scientific accuracy of the Genesis record of Creation and the Sabbath.

Unveiling Last-day Deceptions About Creation

I close by noting that the process by which I became an evolutionist was by accepting false evolutionary premises as if they were fact. I suggest that the same is happening in the church today, and this is the ultimate cause for some scientists to claim that they have scientific truth that differs from the sacred record of Creation.

In fact, it is only pseudotruth that masquerades as *the* truth. The tension that is said to exist in the church about the scientific evidence for Creation is due to the acceptance of false evolutionary assumptions. These lead to false conclusions. In essence, no one can expect to arrive at a correct scientific understanding of the accuracy of the Genesis record without first divesting themselves of the many fallacious assumptions that are popularly used to prop up evolution and to denigrate Genesis. More information is available at www.halos.com and www.orionfdn.org.

Endnotes

¹ The *Affirmation of Creation—Report* was the report of the Organizing Committee of the International Faith & Science Conferences 2002-2004. It was submitted to the General Conference Executive Committee, through the office of the General Conference President, on September 10, 2004, and adopted at the 2004 Fall Council meeting of church leaders. As a response to the *Affirmation of Creation—Report*, a *Response to An Affirmation of Creation* document was accepted and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Church Executive Committee at the Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 13, 2004. The entire texts of these documents are available in the documents section of the church's official Web site: http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat54.html and http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat55.html. Both documents are reproduced in the previous chapter of this present volume.

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² Much more information is available at www.halos.com and www.orionfdn.org. The reader may address me at The Orion Foundation, P.O. Box 12067, Knoxville, TN 37912; or by e-mail: esa@halos.com.

³ More information about it is available at www.halos.com.

Chapter 24

The Emperor Has No Clothes

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Almost everyone has heard the children's story by Hans Christian Andersen entitled, "The Emperor's New Clothes." It is a very interesting story about human nature. When the emperor parades around in clothes that are invisible, no one says anything because everybody thinks that if they cannot see the clothes that they are stupid, ignorant, or insane . . . or at least others will think that they are. The farce continues until a child exclaims, "The emperor has no clothes!"

This paper deals specifically with the theory of evolution and the hold that this theory has taken upon the scientific community as well as the popular imagination. The theory of evolution has become so popular and so pervasive that it is difficult for anyone to question it without being branded as "ignorant, stupid, or insane." The passion of those who hold such views testifies to their firm belief in evolution as "more than a theory." So why don't I get it? What is wrong with me?

Some might suggest that I am too biased by my upbringing or religious background to see the truth of naturalism and the theory of evolution. Certainly it is true that I am human, prone to bias. But at least I am aware of this and really do desire to know the truth—wherever it may lead.

I am a firm believer in the scientific method and in its power to increase human knowledge of all knowable truth concerning the world outside the mind—to include "religious" truths, since even scientists are religious in their thinking.

Interestingly enough, though, the scientific method does not detect truth directly. The power of the scientific method comes from its ability to detect error, thereby limiting the places where truth may be found. Since no theory is ever fully proven by the scientific method, no one should ever consider any theory or even "fact" above all question. When a theory or interpretation can

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no longer be questioned, it leaves the realm of science and moves into the realm of holy, untouchable, religious dogma. Often the thought crosses my mind that scientists are just as fervent and religious in their thinking as any other churchgoing community. The only difference is the object of worship.

I'm not saying that a little religious zeal is a bad thing—even for scientists. Many truths are very important and should be defended. However, human ideas of "truth" are not, or at least should not be, above all question. In fact, truth is made all the more clear when it is challenged. Why then does it seem like many scientists defend naturalism and the theory of evolution as if their lives and very souls depended on it?

The dedication of the scientific community at large to the doctrine of naturalism is generally no less dogmatic and passionate than the religious fervor of the most hardened sectarian fundamentalist. And yet, the scientific method really does not support the use of any "a priori" assumptions when evaluating the truthfulness of any hypothesis or theory. The position that the mindless processes of nature *must* explain the origin and diversity of life on this planet is not a requirement of the scientific method, but is rather a philosophical position.

The funny thing is, scientists do theorize the involvement of intelligent minds all the time when it comes to forensic investigations or searches for extraterrestrial intelligence. Why then is the origin of life any different? Upon what basis are all considerations of the workings of an intelligent mind excluded when it comes to determining the origin and diversity of life on this planet?

Consider the form of a humble amorphous rock. Does its form give evidence of deliberate design, over a mindless cause? Humans are in fact capable of designing amorphous rocks, but so are very lowly mindless natural processes. The same is true if I were to walk by a house in the morning and see that it had a broken window. In this case I could quite rationally hypothesize either a mindless nondeliberate cause (i.e., a tree limb, strong gust of wind, hail from a storm, etc.) or a deliberate, intelligent cause (i.e., a robber, a kid with a rock or pellet gun, etc.).

However, if I were to walk by that same house later in the day and find that this same window had been repaired, how easy would it be for me to hypothesize a mindless process? The same thing could be said for analyzing symmetrically intricate crop circles in England or a box of otherwise identical red and white marbles where all the red marbles are on the same side of the box.

This line of reasoning might seem fairly convincing if not for the fact that many scientists take on an "a priori commitment to materialism."² Certainly one might conclude that the facts are overwhelmingly in favor of one position

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over another after extensive testing is done, but the scientific method necessitates no prior commitment to outcome *before* the outcome is actually tested. Scientists do seem to agree on this point, and yet many of them still feel "forced by an *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated." Many go on to explain that "materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door."³ But why is this preconceived notion so important to many members of the scientific community?

It seems as though most scientists are uneasy with any theory that does not have its basis in the workings of a mindless nature, for fear that the only alternative to this position, intelligent design, might bring back the darkness of superstition. However, many of these same scientists hope to find evidence, even historically based evidence, of intelligent life in the universe beyond our own world. Even within our own world, entire scientific disciplines, such as forensic science, are based on discovering the workings of purpose and intelligence. Clearly, then, scientists seem quite confident in their abilities to detect intelligent activity as long as it has nothing to do with the origin of life or the workings of the universe.

In the case of science today, it seems to me as though "Design is ruled out not because it has been shown to be false but because science itself has been defined as applied materialistic philosophy."³ It is becoming more and more clear to me that the theory of evolution has taken on an almost sacred status. Who dares question it or openly admit that they do not see the emperor's clothes without putting their reputations and, on occasion, even their careers in jeopardy? I for one have been honestly looking for the emperor's clothes for some time now. But the more I look the more naked he gets.

Surprisingly, I am not alone in my blindness. A number of very highly educated men and women of science have and are openly questioning the sacred status of the theory of evolution. Of course, we may be too ignorant, stupid, or insane to see the rich clothes that are right there before our very eyes. However, never underestimate the "crazy" or the "blind." History has often shown that those who were crazy and blind in their own day turned out to be right after all.

Genetics

Unfortunately for some, an understanding of evolution requires an understanding of genetics. Evolution happens or doesn't happen in DNA. In

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short, evolution is defined as change over time. When it comes to living things, changes in physical appearance involve changes in the underlying code upon which the physical appearance is based.

The fact that living things can change physical appearance over time is what Charles Darwin (1809-1882) noticed when he observed unique differences in various groups of living things, like the various types of finch beaks in different groups of finches. He quite reasonably asked himself if these little changes could add up over time to form bigger and bigger changes. Ultimately, could every living thing, to include all the vast variety in type and complexity that we see around us today, have come from a common ancestral life form?

This idea is not at all unreasonable. Change certainly happens. So, what is there to limit the extent of these changes? If no limits to such a process can be found, then what evidence is there to believe the Biblical interpretation that the different "kinds" of living things were all made distinctly and suddenly without natural selection or survival of the fittest acting over millions of years?

As it turns out, Darwin's most famous observations are now known to have had nothing at all to do with the evolution of anything new as far as genetic information is concerned. The work of Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), the father of modern genetics, showed how the physical expression of an underlying pool of genetic options could change over time without any change in the information content of this pool of genetic options.⁴ This is why the same two parents can produce offspring that look very different from each other as well as from their parents. The problem is that Mendelian variations cannot produce any new genetic functions that were not already present in the original gene pool of options. Using Mendelian processes alone, the offspring of a dog will never morph into a fish, chicken, cat, or anything other than a dog. Many different doggy looks may arise, but all will be dogs with different expressions or reflections of different aspects of the same gene pool.⁵

However, we now know of many examples of what I would call "real evolution." For example, antibiotic resistance is a famous case of random mutation and natural selection producing truly novel genetic functions that were *not* in the gene pool of options beforehand. Consider that many types of bacteria gain resistance to a particular antibiotic, like penicillin, by random, genetically coded modifications or "mutations" to the target of that antibiotic. These changes disrupt the antibiotic-target interaction so that the antibiotic cannot attack the target as effectively. Most of the time, all that is needed is just one character change in the genetic sequence of bacterial DNA. Assuming billions of bacteria in a given environment, odds are very good that at least one of them will randomly experience the "right" character change or "mutation" either

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before the arrival of the antibiotic or during sublethal levels of antibiotic exposure—in a very short period of time. And, in reality, this is just what happens. Antibiotic resistance evolves very quickly to just about any antibiotic that comes along.^{6,7}

However, evolutionary processes like these do not have a very easy time when it comes to more complex functions, such as independently acting single-protein enzymes. Many of these enzymes are made up of hundreds of fairly specified protein parts, known as amino acids, whose specific arrangement gives rise to specific functions. In other words, these functions cannot be achieved by disrupting or destroying other preestablished functions or interactions. Some of these enzyme codes, such as the gene for the famous penicillinase enzyme, have never been shown to evolve *de novo* in any bacterial colony in real life. Occasionally however, certain single-protein enzymes have evolved in real life.

One very interesting case of enzyme evolution was reported in 1982 by Barry Hall, an evolutionary biologist from the University of Rochester. What Hall did was to delete the gene for the lactase enzyme (which digests the lactose sugar for energy) in *E. coli* bacteria. He then grew these mutant bacteria in a lactose-rich environment to see if they would evolve back this very useful enzyme . . . and they did! In just one generation, with just one point mutation, this colony of bacteria evolved an entirely new lactase gene (*ebgA*). This is where most descriptions, such as the one used in Kenneth Miller's book, *Finding Darwin's God*, end. However, what Hall did next is most interesting. He deleted the newly evolved gene as well, to see if any other sequence would evolve the lactase function in *E. coli*. . . and nothing happened. Despite observation for tens of thousands of generations the double mutant colony never evolved the lactase function back again. In fact, some types of bacteria have been observed for over a million generations without evolving the lactase function—despite the distinct survival advantage it would provide if it were evolved. Frustrated, Hall suggested that the double mutant colony had "limited evolutionary potential."^{8,9} So, what is it, exactly, that limits the evolutionary potential of a living thing and its offspring?

Consider the sequence: cat to hat to bat to bad to bid to did to dig to dog. We just evolved from cat to dog, where each step was meaningful in the English language system. Easy. Now, try doing the same thing with a seven-letter sequence. A bit harder, right? But why? The answer is that the ratio of meaningful vs. meaningless three-letter sequences is about one in 18, but only about one in 250,000 for seven-letter sequences. The longer a specified sequence gets, the exponentially fewer meaningfully beneficial sequences there will be out of all the *potential* sequences. After a point, a particular beneficial sequence of just

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a few hundred characters in length will be so isolated from other potentially beneficial sequence in the vastness of "sequence space," that to get from one small island or related cluster of sequences to any other cluster involves a "random walk" of billions or even trillions of nonbeneficial mutations. During this time, the powers of natural selection are useless because, without a change in detectable function, nature cannot tell the difference between equally meaningless sequences.

For example, what is the meaningful difference between quiziligook and quiziliguck in the English language system? They are both equally meaningless—right? So, selection between them, based on function, will be random, since they have an equally meaningless meaning.

This creates a problem because, without a directing influence, random drift evolution just takes too long to get beyond the lowest levels of the functional complexity found in all living things—even given millions and billions of years. In real life this is demonstrated by the fact that the evolution of truly novel functions never goes beyond those functions requiring more than a few hundred fairly specified protein parts (amino acids) working together at the same time. Functions like bacterial motility systems, which literally require several thousand fairly specifically oriented amino acid parts all working together at the same time, have never been shown to evolve in real time. Beyond this, not even one of the proposed evolutionary steps required to put together such a machinelike system has ever been demonstrated in real life experiments. It just doesn't happen, and statistically it cannot happen this side of trillions upon trillions of years of time.

Rocks and Fossils

But what about all of those dinosaurs and other fossils that appear to be millions and billions of years old? What about the ancient mountains and canyons and layers of rock? What about the fact that the fossils show a clear evolutionary sequence from "simple" to more "complex"? Clearly, the Biblical interpretation of a recent creation of life on this planet cannot be true, given all of the "mountains of evidence" to the contrary!

Often, things are not as they might first appear. Perhaps the most obvious problem is the fact that the layers of rock that form the "geologic column" around the world are extremely flat relative to each other—like pancakes. Although they may have been warped since they were first deposited, it is obvious that very little if any erosion or geo-disturbances were in play for tens or even hundreds of millions of years during the formation of these layers. Long-

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term erosion always results in uneven surfaces, and this unevenness is only accentuated over time. How then are the layers found throughout the geologic column so generally even and smooth relative to each other?

Consider also the fact that the current weathering rate for the continents of today is, "at the very least 6 cm/thousand years."¹⁰ This means that in less than 10 million years, the entire continental shelves of today would be washed into the oceans.

This problem has been well recognized for some time now. Back in 1971 Dott and Batten noted that, "North America is being denuded at a rate that could level it in a mere 10 million years, or, to put it another way, at the same rate, ten North Americas could have been eroded since middle Cretaceous time 100 m.y. ago."¹¹

Also, back in a 1986 article published in the journal *Geomorphology*, B.W. Sparks commented, "Some of these rates [of erosion] are obviously staggering; the Yellow River could peneplain [flatten out] an area with the average height of Everest in 10 million years. The student has two courses open to him: to accept long extrapolations of short-term denudation [erosion] figures and doubt the reality of the erosion surfaces, or to accept the erosion surfaces and be skeptical about the validity of long extrapolations of present erosion rates."¹²

Note also that the Colorado River is currently removing enough sediment from the Colorado Plateau that, at its current rate, around 10,500 vertical meters of sediment would have been removed from this region in the 70 million years since the uplift of this region is thought to have begun.¹³ That is enough erosion to wash all the sedimentary layers of the entire plateau completely away three times over.

There are many geologic formations, to include the Grand Canyon, the Scablands of Washington State, and Monument Valley, which simply scream *catastrophe* on an unimaginable scale. Take the lava dams of the Grand Canyon for instance. For a long time scientists believed that these lava dams were each slowly worn away in sequences of tens of thousands of years as water flowed over them during a total course of around 5.5 million years.

However, scientists recently published astonishing evidence that the Grand Canyon lava dams each collapsed catastrophically within *80 minutes*. The 2,000-foot wall of suddenly released water carved out the western Grand Canyon very rapidly. The age of this portion of the Grand Canyon has since been reduced from 5.5 million to around 600 thousand years.^{14,15}

Talk about getting younger with time! Almost a tenfold decrease in supposed age is a very dramatic reduction. How could geologists have been so far

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off in their dating techniques? It makes one wonder if they might still be just a little "off". This is especially interesting because the initial age estimates were supposedly backed up by fairly "reliable" potassium-argon (K-Ar) radiometric dating techniques (based on clocklike decay of radioactive atoms over time), which are now thought by some to be inaccurate in this region due to the lack of complete removal of the argon daughter product at the time of initial formation of the lava dams.¹⁵

In other words, if the settings of the clock at the time of an event are uncertain, regardless of how reliably the clock is ticking now, how can the clock be used to date that event?

The same thing happened to Mather Gorge and Holtwood Gorge in Pennsylvania. These gorges were once thought to have eroded over the course of 180 million years. However, recent research (the measurement of beryllium 10 that builds up in quartz when exposed to cosmic rays) done by Luke J. Reusser, a geologist at the University of Vermont in Burlington, and other colleagues, suggests that these gorges may be as young as 13,000 years instead of 180 million years.¹⁶ That is a difference of over four *orders* of magnitude.

Now, how can those who are this far off with their own basis of faith be so confident in their negative judgment of Biblical accounts that are often based on eye-witness testimony—testimony that has proven true many times in the face of "higher" criticism?

Also, within the rocks of the Grand Canyon, specifically the Coconino Sandstone layer third from the top, can be found very well preserved footprints of lizards, salamanders, arthropods, spiders, and a number of other creatures, all going uphill. Oddly enough for a supposed desert environment, the level of preservation in this type of sand required a great deal of dampness or even underwater formation. But beyond this, what sort of natural desert environment only preserves uphill tracks?¹⁷

Then, just look at a globe and notice how many of the continents seem to fit together, like pieces of a giant puzzle. This observation is what led to the idea of continental drift beginning some 200 million years ago with today's continents splitting off of a supercontinent by the name of Pangea. Obviously, continental drift happened, but if it happened 200 million years ago, would the continents still fit together so well? Consider what just one centimeter of coastal erosion per year over 200 million years would look like today. That's 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) of erosion from all sides. With much greater erosion rates changing coastlines today, does the 200-million-year idea seem reasonable when looking at the globe?

It is also very interesting to note that in some places where there are many

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layers containing volcanic sediment (i.e., the layered fossil forests of Yellowstone National Park), there may be only three to four different chemical volcanic "fingerprints" or "signatures" among all the layers, sometimes with the top and bottom layers having the same signature (in real life, magma changes its chemical signature every few months).^{18,19}

The fossils themselves show evidence of huge catastrophic burials covering multiple continents. Massive burial grounds exist all over the globe to include hundreds of fossil whales all buried together without evidence of significant decay or predation. In fact, they were so well preserved that soft tissues like baleen were also preserved.²⁰ Very large intact dinosaurs have been found still standing up, fighting each other,²¹ and many large dolphin-like ichthyosaur fossils have been found around the world, locally facing the same direction, without evidence of significant decay or predation, and several in the process of giving birth, with the baby halfway out of the birth canal.²²

Living coelacanths, large fish that supposedly died off some 80 million years ago, were found alive and well in 1938 off the coast of Madagascar, and several other places since then.²³ Of course, they were given different species and even genus names despite the fact that they are no more different from the fossilized specimens than a German Shepherd is from a Great Dane.

Fossil forests in Yellowstone, claimed to have grown sequentially over many tens of thousands of years, have no branches or bark, few layers have any soil or the soil is halfway up the tree, the "soil" that is present shows no decay with depth and is often water-sorted, abundant broad leaves and few pine needles are present although 70% of the trees are pine, no animal remains or even droppings are present, and tree ring analysis has shown that trees in different layers lived at the same time.^{24,25}

Hundreds of thousands of sedimentary lake layers or "varves," once thought to represent one year per varve (like tree rings), have since been experimentally proven to be laid down much more rapidly, even daily or hourly in some cases.²⁶

But what about all of those hominid fossils, those "missing links" between humans and apes? Beyond the fact that certain famous hoaxes have been uncovered, the missing links have all turned out to be either ethnic human variations or true apes. Creatures like *Homo habilis*, supposedly intermediate in the evolution of bipedalism between *australopithecines* and *H. erectus* (modern humans) have recently been shown, via Fred Spoor's inner ear studies of semicircular canals, to have relied less on upright posture than *australopithecines*.²⁷ At the same time, evidence of modern humans (i.e., a modern human femur) has been found in the same layers as the bones of *H. habilis*

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(KNM-ER 1470).²⁸ This femur was assumed to belong to *H. habilis* only because it was found in the same layer, but we now know that it could not belong to *H. habilis* because of the inner ear problem. So, what is a modern human femur doing in the same layer as an early hominid ancestor?

Consider also the work of Germaine Henri-Martin, who excavated Fontchevade Cave in France from 1937 to 1954 and discovered fairly modern hominid remains dating before the time of the Neanderthals. Analysis of the sediments in the cave revealed much about the daily lives of these "first Frenchmen," described in surprising detail. Then, several decades later, digital laser analysis done on remaining sediments showed horizontal and perpendicular orientation with respect to the cave walls.²⁹ In other words, the layers in the cave were nothing more than flood deposits.

Scientists being interviewed in a 2002 PBS documentary explained, "What made it look real to the archaeologists was an overwhelming desire to see the past in a certain way. The urge to distance ourselves from Neanderthals or to pull them closer to us is a surprisingly powerful force. Archaeologists Jean Philippe Rigaud and Jan Simek are well aware of the problem." Jan Simek added, "I think that we're as guilty of it today, of that kind of preconceived approach to our data, as anybody has been in the history of archaeology or anthropology. It's almost inevitable that our own views of the world will be brought to bear."²⁹

Dr. David Pilbeam, an anthropologist from Harvard, commented that, "perhaps generations of students of human evolution, including myself, have been flailing about in the dark: that our database is too sparse, too slippery, for it to be able to mold our theories. Rather the theories are more statements about us and ideology than about the past. Paleoanthropology reveals more about how humans view themselves than it does about how humans came about. But that is heresy."³⁰

The preservation of intact DNA is also quite interesting as far as age calculations are concerned. DNA has been sequenced from insects trapped in amber apparently tens of millions of years old or from apparently 20 million-year old leaves that are still wet.³¹⁻³³ Even more amazing are the findings of Dr. Cano, a microbiologist at California State Polytechnic University who dissected a Dominican stingless bee trapped in amber, which was thought to be 25 to 40 million years old. What he found were very well preserved bacterial spores inside. In fact, they were so well preserved that they actually grew when placed in the right environment. In other words, they were still alive! And, interestingly, their DNA closely matched the DNA of modern bacteria that grow inside modern bees.³⁴ Also, fairly recently, a viable bacterium was isolated from a primary salt crystal

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dated at over 250 million years old.⁵

The problem here is that DNA and other organic molecules degrade quite rapidly, especially when wet. In living cells, DNA is maintained by repair mechanisms, but after death DNA self-destructs at a rather rapid rate. In a recently published review of the chemical stability of DNA, Tomas Lindahl (1993) has said, "Deprived of the repair mechanisms provided in living cells, fully hydrated DNA is spontaneously degraded to short fragments over a time period of several thousand years at moderate temperatures". Lindahl went on to argue for the "contamination" of all such specimens by modern DNA, suggesting that "the apparent observation that fully hydrated plant DNA might be retained in high-molecular mass form for 20 million years is incompatible with the known properties of chemical structure of DNA."³⁶ In a 1991 issue of *Science*, Jeremy Cherfas expressed his bewilderment, noting, "That DNA could survive for such a staggering length of time was totally unexpected—almost unbelievable."³⁷ R. John Parkes commented in a fairly recent issue of *Nature* concerning this and other similar phenomena, noting that "There is also the question of how bacterial biopolymers can remain intact over millions of years in dormant bacteria; or, conversely, if bacteria are metabolically active enough to repair biopolymers, this raises the question of what energy source could last over such a long period."³⁸

The Weight of Evidence

As far as my own personal investigation is concerned, I have found the Bible to be far more reliable than those oft-revised or discarded notions of scientists or higher critics that go counter to the plain statements found within the Biblical accounts. Certainly the very existence of the universe and of life is a great mystery that may never be even remotely understood. I believe certain realities like these simply go far beyond human comprehension. With David, I stand in daily awe of Creation saying, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:14).

Even so, my limited comprehension is able to understand that the mystery of God is far more capable of explaining what I see around and within me than are all the mindless forces of the universe—however grand, mysterious, and awe-inspiring. Mindless natural processes can only do so much, and then, when we see that a certain phenomenon goes far beyond what any known mindless process has ever even come close to achieving, evidence of a highly intelligent mind becomes overwhelmingly clear. As with the work of any human author or designer, overwhelming evidence of purposeful authorship

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is written all over the world around and even within each one of us. Though disfigured, we, along with all of nature, still carry the distinctly recognizable signature of our Creator.

"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. . . . Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:20, 22).

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Chapter 25

My Difficult Journey

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Your mother will go to Hell," my religion teacher repeated over and over. "She will be tormented forever and ever." Right then I decided, *if there is a God, I hate Him. How can a God of love punish a faithful mother like mine?* By age 10, I was a confirmed atheist. For me, God did not exist.

How I Became an Atheist

My strict Roman Catholic father planned to enter the priesthood until he fell in love with a lovely young German Lutheran—my mother. Before Vatican II, Catholics had looked on Lutherans as lost and excluded from Heaven, but my parents never once argued about religion. My father promised to raise his children Catholic and mother accepted this.

When I was almost 8, tragedy struck. Doctors diagnosed my mother with cancer and gave her two to four months to live. With strong faith and determination she lasted more than four years. During these most miserable years of my life, I watched my mother suffer through numerous operations and painful radiation. Like most young boys I felt very attached to my mother. *Why does God let her suffer like this?* I questioned.

I attended a German Lutheran school in South Africa. Since my father pledged to raise me Catholic, the school arranged for me and other children with Roman Catholic parents to receive religious instruction from a nun who came to our school daily. The sister assigned to my class proved overzealous for her religion. For a boy watching his mother die, it proved a disaster.

"It's so sad your mother is a Protestant who will never see the Kingdom of Heaven," she would tell me. "Your mother will suffer in Hell forever." *My dying mother has enough suffering,* I thought. *How can a God of love make her suffer more?* I attended church every Sunday with my father and did all the

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things good Roman Catholics do. But having a nun continually harp about my mother going to Hell made me increasingly resentful. One day I became so angry, I took my catechism, tore it up, and threw it at her. In unkind language, I told her exactly what she could do with her God.

Immediately I was expelled from her class. Soon I got in trouble with another teacher and was thrown out of his class, too. I became defiant, speaking disrespectfully, skipping classes—even throwing pinecones at my teachers! An impossible child, I never told my parents that I acted like a little monster at school. And they never found out.

When my beloved mother died shortly after I turned 12, my father remarried. My stepmother found me totally impossible. Problems increased at home and at school. Finally, the school asked me to leave. My parents decided it best to send me away from home to a trade school. That's when I woke up. *No way*, I thought. *This is not for me*. I lived in several places before persuading relatives to send me to another school where I started doing well.

After completing high school I attended the University of Cape Town where I majored in zoology. This school, founded as a religious university, still had a school of theology, but its science faculty were incredibly secular. They championed evolution.

Every class had an evolutionary basis. I learned the whole evolution theory very quickly. *This is the answer to my problem*, I rejoiced. *My mother's not burning in Hell. There is no Hell. There is no Heaven. There is no God!* My professors included brilliant men whose work on the evolution of human skulls had been sent to museums around the world.

On weekends and holidays, I went to the home of my college roommate. Here I met his very attractive sister. I convinced her that she would make a much better roommate than her brother, and we married.

I was an atheist, but my wife had been raised in an entirely different environment. Her father, a news reporter, had extensively investigated occult occurrences in Africa. At first he believed the supernatural to be a big joke. Then at one seance an unseen arm grabbed him. As he delved more and more into the occult, strange things began happening in his home. He had a cane that used to go walking by itself. Dishes flew through the house and smashed into the wall. A small child went to bed and its shoes came stepping through the house. He wrote books on African witchcraft and the New Age. Later, his influence would haunt us.

After we married, I earned my doctorate in zoology studies and got hired as a lecturer. Then I received an appointment as senior lecturer at Stellenbosch University. My whole life revolved around evolution. I taught evolution. I

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based my research on evolution. As a philologist, I studied evolutionary literature. God did not exist. If anyone dared mention Him, something inside me would burn like fire.

A Rude Awakening

During one lecture to 300 freshmen on evolution, a young girl stood up. "Excuse me," she said. "What you are saying. Dr. Veith, is a lie. God created the heaven and the earth in six days. He is the Creator of the universe."

I exploded, tearing into this young woman like you can't imagine. She finally sat down and cried. *Job well done*, I thought. Students left impressed with my eloquence in proving how ridiculous it is to believe in Creation.

Back in my office, I sat at my desk elated, but not for long. A small voice in the back of my mind began to torment me. "You're mean! How could you attack and humiliate a girl like this?" My conscience wouldn't let me go. I felt really bad. By now, my wife was pregnant with our third child, and my father-in-law moved into an apartment next to our home. His influence and relationship with the occult seemed to bring problems. My wife spent her entire pregnancy in and out of the hospital. We believed she would die. Finally, she gave birth to a baby boy.

One night after bringing our child home, I dreamt I was being strangled. I woke up at 2 a.m., perspiring profusely, my heart pounding like someone was beating a drum inside my chest. Immediately in the next room, our baby screamed as if he were being murdered. My wife and I ran to his bed and picked him up.

"Why is this baby shaking so violently?" I asked. My wife exclaimed, "He's got a very high fever! I think he's going to die!" We rushed our little one to the hospital where they put him in a cooling unit and started IVs. His life was "touch and go" for many agonizing hours. When the fever finally broke, we took him home.

It was uncanny. Less than four weeks passed and precisely at 2 a.m., I again awoke and shouted to my wife, "I just dreamed I was being strangled!" Instantly in the next room our baby screamed. His temperature soared and then he went unconscious. We feared he would die before we got medical help. Back at the hospital doctors and nurses worked feverishly to keep him alive.

This happened at least eight times—so frequently, in fact, that the hospital kept the cooling unit ready for our arrival. Doctors could not explain to us what was wrong. On one occasion, the doctor said, "This is incredible. Your boy is less than one year old and it took four adults to hold him down. He must

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be possessed."

Even a hardened atheist begins to think when the same thing happens for weeks and months on end. *These two events must be connected.* Sitting next to my son in the hospital, I reviewed the whole situation. *There appears to be no medical help. Doctors have no remedy. Where can I find a solution to our baby's problem? Is this related to my terrible dreams or influenced by my father-in-law's delving into the occult?*

I thought of the Roman Catholic Church and its power over demons. *I'm going back to my old church and ask for help,* I determined.

At the church the next day, I found a not-so-sober priest with a bottle of brandy. I walked up and said, "I'm a Roman Catholic, but I don't attend church anymore."

He looked at me, "So what's your problem?"

"I'm a scientist and an atheist." Stammering, I continued, "I really don't know what to say. We've been having very strange happenings in our home."

"Hold on!" he stopped me. "I don't want anything to do with this. It's not my field. Give me your name and number and someone will get back to you."

I soon got a call from another priest who sounded very sophisticated. "Come and meet me at the monastery," he invited.

I hurried to meet him. *What an impressive man,* I thought. I accepted his invitation to sit down. His kind eyes looked right at me. "You have a problem in your home." My mouth dropped open. "Satan is trying to kill your son and you are being terrorized."

"How do you know this?" I demanded. "I've never told anyone."

"Never mind how I know," he said. "The problem is so severe, it will take the highest levels of action to get rid of it. We will have to say a mass in your home."

He continued, "It's illegal to say mass in a private home without permission from the bishop, but don't worry. I already have permission."

He showed me a letter. It was signed by the bishop authorizing him to say mass in my house. *How can this be?* I puzzled. *I haven't told him anything. He knows my problem and everything is already arranged.*

"Fair enough," I said. "You may come to my home and do whatever you need to do." I continued, "You need to know I'm an atheist and haven't been to church for years."

"You won't be an atheist anymore. What about your wife?"

"She's not even Catholic," I replied. "She's Dutch Reformed."

"That's no problem," he assured me.

When he arrived at our home, my wife was just as impressed as I. The

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priest asked us to take him through the house. He stopped in our baby's room. "This is the worst room in your house," he said, "but we have to exorcize your entire home. Please bring me some water."

To the water he added "holy salt" and made the sign of the cross in the water with the salt. With his bowl of "holy water" he went throughout the house, making the sign of the cross above each window and door.

This priest told me he had a ring, a relic from a saint, potent in exorcizing. He started saying the mass, and every pet in our house came running and sat down. *Wow! This is really weird, I thought. What's going on?*

After the mass, he gave me amulets from Lourdes and told me to put one over each of our children's beds. Before leaving, he took off his ordination cross, handed it to me and said, "Put this on your baby's bed. I hate it when the Devil destroys little children."

My wife and I were anxious for night to come so we could see what would happen. Normally our child cried terribly when we put him to bed. He'd go into a fetal position and start hitting the sides of his crib. Now he rolled over on his back, started making happy "goo-goo" sounds and fell asleep. For the first time in his life he slept through the night. Then the next night, the next week, the next month. And I had no more nightmares.

How does a hard-nosed atheistic scientist react to this? *What am I going to do? The church has solved a major problem in our home. Will I keep saying, "There is no God?" Do I have a responsibility to this God? My wife and I wrestled with this for months.*

Finally I said, "Look dear, I have no choice. I'm going back to church." But even while going to church, I asked myself, *Do I really believe in God? I'm not sure.*

New Questions

One day I decided to remodel our kitchen. I asked a German carpenter to come and do the work. When he came, I noticed his car's bumper sticker that read: "My boss is a Carpenter." After we agreed for him to do the work, he said, "By the way, I walk with the Lord."

I looked him in the eye. "You walk with the Lord—I just want a kitchen. Is that OK?" He said, "OK, but I can give you this," and he handed me a pamphlet. I took it and stuck it in a drawer. In the meantime, I attended church every Sunday. I asked the priest about evolution and Creation. He said, "Everyone knows we exist through evolution." *Wonderful, I thought. I can continue with evolution and believe in God, too.* I began to feel very comfortable.

As I read the catechism, I became puzzled. *Why does God want the same*

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ritual over and over? The weekly celebration of the Eucharist began to trouble me. *Why do they say the same prayers and celebrate the same ritual over and over?* The doctrine of transubstantiation boggled my mind. *Does the priest really have power to change the bread and wine into the true body of Christ?*

Once, I walked into the Catholic church and sat alone in a pew near the back. A little red light blinked on a box, meaning the host or wafer was inside. It hit me. *They have God locked up in that box.* At my church, the host or wafer was kept in a box.

This made me irritated and even angry. *But God must be here!* I struggled. *Look at the changes in my home. We have peace. My wife's even willing to convert to Catholicism.* I'd called the priest to come to our house so she could join his church, but he always seemed to be busy.

I tried to pray. "Where are You, God? I don't know You." Sitting there in a pew with no one around, I finally said, "OK, God, if You truly exist, You must show me." Feeling better, I got up and hurried home. Rummaging through a drawer, I pulled out the pamphlet left by the German carpenter a year before. I laughed when I thought about his "walking with the Lord."

The pamphlet had three columns displaying the Biblical version, the Lutheran version, and the Catholic version of the Ten Commandments. It explained how the Roman Church changed God's law, giving Bible texts to show how it was changed. *This is garbage,* I thought. *It's pure rubbish.*

We had lots of catechisms around. I grabbed one and discovered the commandments exactly as the Catholic version in the pamphlet. I called my wife. "Please bring me a Bible!"

"I don't think we have one," she said. I remembered a box of books in our garage, given to us by an old lady. *Little old ladies usually have a Bible,* I thought. Sure enough I found a Bible.

I turned to Exodus 20. The Ten Commandments were different from those in the catechism. This really puzzled me. I phoned the carpenter. "Remember you installed a kitchen for me last year?"

"Yes," he said. "I don't know why, but I've been trying to call you all day."

"Please come over," I invited.

My Bible and catechism were open to the commandments when he came. I met him with a question. "Why are they so different?"

He took me to the prophecies of Daniel 7. We studied until almost 3 a.m. He came back the next day and the next. In three days we went all the way through Daniel and Revelation. He showed me all the historic facts about kings, kingdoms, and the rise of the papacy. *Interesting,* I thought, *but I don't believe a word of it.* Mulling it over, I decided to resolve this by finding it out

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for myself.

At the university's theology and history departments, I checked out all the material I could find. It didn't take long to discover that what the carpenter had shown me from the Bible about Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, followed by ten European kingdoms, was really true. The big shocker came when I realized that historically, the little horn of Daniel 7 could be none other than the Roman Catholic Church.

Wanting to be sure, I even researched the view that the little horn represents Antiochus IV Epiphanes. But it didn't fit the Scripture criteria. In order to be fair, I called my priest. "I have an issue I want to talk over with you," I said. "Please come to my home."

He sat with my wife and me while we looked at the prophetic chapters in Daniel. "It's clear," I explained. "The Bible predicted a power would rise and attempt to change God's commandments."

My priest looked at us and said, "I can't talk with you on this issue because I'm not into Scripture." Stunned by his response, I thought, *You're a priest and not into Scripture?* He continued, "The Church has specialists who study prophecy, but it doesn't make any sense to me." Then he simply got up, excused himself, and left.

I invited ministers from other churches to my home. Every time we got to the little horn, they said, "It's Antiochus Epiphanes." I'd stand up and say, "Gentleman, it can't be, because the little horn arose after Rome. It can't be in Greek times." Soon, they'd all get up and go, leaving me more convinced than ever. *The little horn power has to be the Church of Rome.*

This left me with a tremendous dilemma. *Should I keep attending church on Sunday when Bible prophecy portrays the Roman Church as working against Christ?* Even worse, the carpenter started talking about the Sabbath. He went through all the Sabbath texts.

"This is ridiculous," I said. "How can you keep a commandment that says the Lord created the heavens, the earth, and the sea in only six days? It's a fact of science. Everything came into existence through evolution over millions of years."

My carpenter friend smiled, "No, not evolution. God created everything." The face of the freshman girl popped into my mind. I turned toward the carpenter. "Friend, what you are saying about a six-day Creation is absolute rubbish."

"Wait," he said. "I'll prove to you that Creation is true."

"OK, you try," I responded. He tried. The next day he came with a big pile of books on Creation and handed them to me. Every time I finished a lecture

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at the university, I'd go back to my office and go through his books. When I returned them he asked, "What do you think?"

"Garbage," I said. He didn't argue. He just brought me another pile of books. After looking at these, I returned them. "They're so unscientific," I stated. "I cannot accept the confusing material published in your books. You belong to the Flat Earth Society."

Every time he said, "God is the Creator," I'd kill him with science. I had all the terminology. I was an evolutionist. I'd been trained to wipe out anyone who dared to suggest that God had anything to do with our existence.

The poor carpenter, frustrated with me, finally said, "I don't have a problem with Creation. You have the problem. You solve it."

Intense Bible Study

This put the ball in my court. I studied the Bible like you can't imagine. I wore out a copy in just two months and had to throw it away. My wife said, "This Sabbath idea is stupid. It makes no sense."

One day the secretary of my department handed me a thick pile of documents. A quick look in a spare moment revealed it was written against the Sabbath and Seventh-day Adventists. This amazed me because no one knew we struggled over the Sabbath issue. My colleagues were all atheists. I'd never admitted to thinking about religion.

Still wrestling with evolution, I gave the material to my wife. "You go through this," I said. "Maybe there's a way out for us." While I grappled with Creation, she struggled with the Sabbath.

Completing the material, my wife said, "This document has convinced me the Sabbath is right. I've gone through every statement and put it next to the Bible. Every time it turns out to be the word of man against what God's Word clearly teaches." A document *against* the Sabbath proved to her that the Sabbath is the day for Christians to keep.

"This is a major problem for me," I told her. "I'm not keeping a day holy for a six-day creation when everyone knows it took at least six billion years."

Struggling over the Sabbath and Creation, I finally prayed, "OK, God. If You exist and there is something wrong with the evolution theory I believe and teach, You must show me."

Our university housed the largest evolution-based library in the southern hemisphere. I went there and signed out a book. A colleague stopped me on the way out. "Wait," he said. "Why are you taking this? There's a brand-new edition." We went back in the library, and I checked out the newer version.

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I began reading the books together, page by page. The old edition said there is a major problem with cetaceans or whales because they appeared suddenly in the fossil record fully formed. The new edition used a lot of scientific terminology and said cetaceans have an ancient origin evolving from one to another.

I went through evolutionary model after model. The old edition always admitted to unresolved difficulties while the new version never admitted to a problem. *There's something fishy here*, I thought. It seemed like a miracle happened every time I went to the library. One book would say one thing and another the exact opposite.

Day and night I kept thinking about this. Teaching genetics at the time, I started making a list of problems to be solved if evolution were true. My list grew so fast it stunned me. I discovered enormous problems.

As we continued to study, our baby, now a toddler, began having problems again. One night at 2 a.m. I had the same old dream about being strangled. I woke up with a jerk. In the next room the child screamed. He ran a high fever, but we were able to get things under control. *This is too strange*, I thought.

My carpenter friend listened patiently as I told him some of what was going on. "Don't worry," he said. "We'll pray for you." The problem stopped. The carpenter had asked people to set their alarms, get up at 2 a.m., and pray for a family they didn't know. Word got around that we were having peace again, and one lady decided not to get up and pray. That night I had my dream and the child screamed.

Thinking back on this, I realize that God didn't need the prayer of that one individual, but there was a lesson that would become very important to me. God wants unity and He wants His people to stand together. The next night the lady set her alarm. God answered the prayer of people we'd never seen. No more nightmares for me, and our boy began acting like a little angel.

We reached the point where I said, "I can't sit on the fence forever. I've checked the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words with university professors. I've verified historic facts. I've discovered evolution to be an unproven theory. I've examined Bible prophecies. I've studied what other churches said. There's no way out." I told my family, "We're going to keep the Sabbath and start attending the Seventh-day Adventist church."

My wife burst into tears the first time she saw Adventists. "They look so different. They eat strange food. I want my old lifestyle back." I thought, *What a weird church*. I'd been going to mass wearing a T-shirt and jeans. *Yuck*, I thought. *Adventist men wear suits and ties*.

The Holy Spirit reached deep into my mind. "Here you are worshipping

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on Sabbath and still teaching evolution." I knew in my heart that I had to make a change. I prepared a lecture on genetics showing evolution to be impossible.

Two weeks later I was asked to lead a postgraduate discussion on evolution. My mind filled with fear. *Do I go into this lecture pretending to be what I am not or do I stand up for what I now believe? I'll lose face with all my colleagues.* My new friends at the Adventist church seemed less weird and promised to pray for me.

At this affair I faced all the graduate students and the entire staff. I began the lecture and went through the whole gene system highlighting every problem I'd discovered at that stage of my research. At the end I stated emphatically, "Therefore evolution is not possible!"

You could have heard a pin drop. Then all hell broke loose. One colleague turned bloodred and started screaming at me. When things quieted down, a young woman, an honor student, stood up. Turning toward her professors, she said, "When I came to this university, I believed in God and had a relationship with Him. I had a good life. Now I believe nothing. You've robbed me of my faith and my life is falling apart. Dr. Veith's lecture this afternoon shows you've been misleading me."

Can you imagine what happened? They held a special meeting and voted that the basis for all teaching must be evolution. This was the end for me. My life was worthless in terms of scientific credibility. I turned in my resignation.

The head of the department confronted me. "You can't just resign. You're a popular teacher and most of the postgraduate students are under your supervision."

The rector of the university called me in and we talked for a long time. "What if you decided not to rock the boat any more? We could promote you to a professorship." Ideas bounced in my head. *What a temptation. I'd be one of the youngest professors.*

I looked at him and said, "Sir, the price is too high. I must leave my teaching."

"It's your decision," he said. "By the way, who do you think has the truth?"

I answered, "The Bible has the truth."

"No, I want to know who you think has the truth."

I hedged. "It's those people who meet at Helderberg College."

"That's not what I'm asking you. What denomination has the truth?"

He'd asked me three times. In the back of my mind I could hear a cock crowing. "Sir, the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches the truth."

I'm a dead man, I thought, expecting a tirade from the rector. He simply said, "Thank you very much. Congratulations on your choice. I hope things go well for you."

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Marvelous Blessings

Having resigned, I put my house up for sale. The first man who walked in bought it. He paid the price. No haggling, nothing. We took the money and bought a dairy farm. My wife and I planned to make it a place to witness.

We planted wheat and it grew so high, farmers from the entire district came to look. They said, "A university man like you must know something we don't."

"No," I said. "We're doing exactly what you do." In the back of my mind I imagined, *It's because we're walking with the Lord*. I figured, *Now that we are Christians, everything will go just great*. Little did I realize the lessons God would soon teach me.

Besides money from the sale of the house, I'd inherited some from my father. We invested it all and I even took out loans to make sure we had the best farm around.

Then a huge flock of birds flew in. They ignored all the farms around with short wheat and made my tall wheat their home. They ate and ate and ate until my wheat was nothing but stubble. A big source of expected income had just vanished.

Economic sanctions followed, and the economy of South Africa was destroyed. Interest rates of three and four percent shot up as high as 28 percent. Loans that had been a cinch to pay became a nightmare. I cried out, "God, how can You do this to me? The birds ate my wheat. I have no way to support myself. My scientific credibility is gone. I can't go back to my old job. I'm finished."

It got worse. We lost both of our cars in major accidents. All I had now was the farm and more debt than the farm was worth. My wife became terribly depressed. We kept asking ourselves, *Have we done the right thing? Is this how God deals with those who love Him?* We sat down as a family and talked things over.

We were struggling when the priest called—the same one who had impressed us so much. "Why are you calling?" I asked.

"You know your father died. He's having terrific problems in purgatory."

"How do you know?" I asked. I'd studied the state of the dead and believed what the Bible teaches about sleeping in the grave until the resurrection.

He said, "Nuns who stay in a monastery and never see the outside world told me. Your father is in trouble because of you. You'd better get back to church and have masses said so his problem will go away."

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I considered the priest to be a sincere man but very deceived, so I responded, "Thank you very much for the information." I put the phone down, thinking, *Sorry, Devil, you're too late.*

I believe that when the priest said mass in our home and our child got better, it was a ruse. The Devil told the demons to step back and allow our child to relax and we would be snared. It happened. We went back to the Catholic Church. When we started studying the Bible, our boy had problems again. After we made our decision truly to follow Jesus, our troubled child became the sweetest, most spiritual little boy you can imagine.

God had led us to His truth, yet I couldn't understand, "Why are we without money and on the verge of losing the farm?" Ostracized by my university friends, I was the laughing stock of the academic world with no chance of going back to my old job. Without money and with no food on the table, our family knelt down together, claiming every promise in the Bible.

"Lord," I prayed, "You have promised to care for our needs. You promised that the children of the righteous will not be begging bread," (We'd actually written down all the promises.) I continued praying, "Lord, we believe these promises are for us. Please don't leave us with no money and no food. May Your will be done."

Our lives were in God's hands, and we slept well. I answered the phone the next morning. A professor from another university spoke with urgency. "We have a teacher who is taking an emergency leave for one year. Will you come and take his classes?"

"What about my belief in Creation? I won't be teaching evolution."

"Who cares?" he said. "Just stick to science. We're in a jam and need a replacement. Will you come?"

"That would be great. When do I start?"

"It'll take about three months to go through all the committees."

"Thank you," I said, and put the phone down.

Nice try, God, I thought. *In three months I'll be dead. My family will starve to death.*

Twenty minutes later I answered the phone again. The same professor was on the line. He said, "I went to the rector's office to request your service and start the ball rolling. He said, 'I don't have time for committees. Let me sign the authorization right now. You can have this man come tomorrow.'"

"So when do I start?"

It was Thursday. He said, "Monday."

Wow! I thought. *A thousand problems to solve in one weekend. It's impossible!* I turned to my wife. "I've got a job at the University of the Western Cape,"

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I exclaimed. "It's only for a year, but something will work out after that."

"Great," she said, "Who's going to take care of the farm? The cows?"

"That worries me too, but God has given us one solution. He can work out a solution for that, too." We knelt down to pray. "Lord, You know we are bankrupt. We don't have money to hire someone to take care of the farm. Please help us find a way out of our problem."

We had hardly finished praying when there was a loud knock at the door. We opened the door and met a young couple from Zimbabwe. I invited them in and we listened intently. "We're Seventh-day Adventists and lost our job on a farm for not working on Sabbath. We are looking for a place to live."

"Would you like to live here and work on this farm?"

"Sure," he said.

"But I can't pay you anything."

"It's OK, we just need a place to live."

"I'd like to have you take care of the dairy. You can sell the milk, and whatever you earn is yours." They agreed, and I figured I could pay interest on my loans out of my salary.

In 24 hours God had solved our problem. We had a family to care for the farm and I had a job at a university. We still had no food, no money to buy gas to move, and no place to live. In the next few days God worked miracle after miracle to supply every need. We found a place to live where we didn't have to pay rent until the end of the month. We enrolled our children in church school at Helderberg College.

A few weeks after I went back to teaching, an Adventist businessman who heard my story called. "We want to send you overseas so you can go on a Bible science tour led by Dr. Ariel Roth of the Geoscience Research Institute at Loma Linda," he said. "You'll get to visit many sites and see evidence to confirm your belief in the Biblical account of the Flood and Creation."

"It's impossible," I said. "I've just started a new job and I can't go and ask for six weeks off. No way!" But soon riots broke out at the university. My country was in chaos, with riots everywhere. The rector of the university ordered the school closed.

I went to my department head. "What shall I do now?"

He looked at me. "Go to the moon, for all I care. Go away and don't come back for six weeks." The timing was perfect. I went on the Geoscience tour and began developing my own series of lectures on Creation.

Back at the university, not one but several senior professors died, creating a number of vacancies. I'd worked hard to start a big postgraduate school, and my name came up to fill an important position. The search committee nar-

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rowed it down to a professor from Cambridge University and me.

I learned later that someone said, "You can't appoint Veith. He's too controversial. He has strange ideas." But following the student riots, it had become fashionable to be against the establishment. Another professor asked, "You mean he goes against what they teach at Stellenbosch? That's a plus!" I got the job.

Trust God

This is how God placed me in my position. I'm a professor and head of the zoology department in a secular university. I teach creationism. In human terms, it's impossible to imagine, but God placed me here and He can keep me here as long as He desires. When the door closes, He will find something better for me to do.

The Creator of the universe has showed me how to live. He died on the cross to save me from my sin. He's coming back to take me home with Him. The Holy Spirit has led my family step by step into God's truth. He wants to lead you, too. Take your stand for Christ. Do what is right. Have faith in Him, and He will fulfill every one of His promises.

Section 4
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Chapter 26

Inventing Styles of Worship

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Much discussion is taking place over what forms of worship are appropriate. Some alternative styles being tested are combinations of elements from various faiths. As long ago as December 17, 1990, a feature article in *Newsweek* spoke of the 1990s as "an age of mix 'em, match 'em salad-bar spirituality—Quakerpalians, charismatic Catholics, New Age Jews—where brand loyalty is a doctrine of the past and the customer is king."

In contrast to the present trend toward cafeteria-style worship, the Bible recognizes only two kinds of worship, true worship and false worship. An attempt to marry true and false worship is known technically as syncretism and Biblically as "Babylon." Because God's faithful followers have always resisted drifting toward syncretism, throughout history there have been many clashes between true and false worship.

Satan's rebellion in Heaven was centered on worship, for he lusted to sit on God's throne and share His adoration (Isaiah 14:12-14). The first death in human history was the death of Abel, resulting from a clash over how to worship God (Genesis 4). The contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal had to do with worship (1 Kings 18). Daniel and his three Hebrew friends were tested on the issue of worship (Daniel 3 and 6). One of the temptations of Christ in the wilderness dealt with worship. Is it any wonder that the final conflict in human history will also deal with the question of worship (Revelation 13-14)?

End-Time Crisis Over Worship

Some of the most fearful prophecies ever addressed to mortals are found in Revelation. They relate to the end-time crisis over worship.

On one side of the final conflict will be a power masterminded by Satan (Revelation 12:9), symbolized ultimately as a beast with lamblike horns. "He had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast

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should both speak and cause that as many as would not *worship* the image of the beast should be killed" (Revelation 13:15).

On the other hand, the Lord warns us through the third angel of Revelation 14 that "if any man *worship* the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night, who *worship* the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (Revelation 14:9-11).

Let us explore the nature of this end-time crisis.

1. A Global Conflict. The rival powers in the end-time crisis will expect every inhabitant of the world to follow their respective commands. Satan will cause "all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark" (Revelation 13:16, 17).

At the same time, God will warn against such false worship, commanding us instead to "worship Him That made heaven, and Earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Revelation 14:7)—a strong allusion to the claims of the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). Inasmuch as everyone will worship one power or the other, we can conclude that in the last days, everyone will be religious. But while everyone will profess belief in God, not everyone will believe God—His Word, His claims, His promises, and His power.

2. Worship: The Ultimate Test. It is significant that the crisis in the last days will end where it all began—over the issue of worship. Worship reveals whom or what is "number one" in a person's life, showing what or whom a person will live and die for. Moreover, worshippers conform to the likeness of the objects they worship (Romans 1:24, 25; 2 Corinthians 3:18). When all is said and done, our stand on contemporary worship styles may well determine where we will stand in the final conflict.

3. God's Law: The Key Focus. The final issue will center primarily on the first four commandments of the Decalogue, commands that deal with whom to worship and with why, how, and when to worship. The people on God's side in the end are expressly described as those who will "keep the commandments of God" (Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

4. No Neutrality. Each person in the world, regardless of race, gender, or status, will have to choose whom to obey in this crisis over worship. "Theological neutrality" (or "pluralism") will be exposed as a myth, embraced

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by those unwilling to take a stand for Biblical truth.

5. *Costly Decision.* Dire consequences will result from either worship choice. Those persons who choose to worship the beast will be burned with "fire and brimstone" in the presence of the Lamb. Those who choose God's side will be denied the right to buy and sell and will hear themselves denounced as stubborn, divisive troublemakers and therefore worthy of death. It seems evident, then, that how we worship goes far beyond one's personal, cultural, or generational preferences.

6. *Beliefs and Lifestyle.* After warning us against the beast and its image, the prophecy declares, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12; cf. 12:17; 19:10). Inasmuch as those who keep God's commandments and cherish the faith of Jesus are placed in contrast with those who worship the beast and its image and receive its mark, it follows that loving faithfulness in upholding sound doctrine and practice on the one hand, and, on the other hand, opposition to them will mark the distinction between the true worshippers of God and the worshippers of the beast.

7. *Assurance of Victory.* The reference to God's people as "saints" suggests that through a living faith in Christ they will be able to live holy lives amid the most trying circumstances. They will ultimately triumph in the great conflict over worship (Revelation 20:4; compare 12:11), proving to the entire universe that, indeed, holiness is possible even in this sinful world.

Yes, true worshippers will prevail in the last great conflict over worship. Having faithfully persevered in the "great tribulation," these victors will forever be with their Lord. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb Which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 7:13-17; cf. 21:3-7).

While the prospect of triumph is a strong motivation for the saints to be "faithful unto death" (Revelation 2:10), false worship has its own enticements, otherwise why would an overwhelming majority of people in the end-time prefer spurious worship over the genuine (cf. Revelation 13:8, 12, 15)?

Better to understand the attractiveness of some contemporary worship styles, let us look at Jeroboam's innovative people's church.

Jeroboam's Innovative Worship Style

As soon as Jeroboam, son of Nebat, heard that King Solomon was dead,

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he returned from his forced exile in Egypt and took up residence in his native town of Zeredah, among the hills of Ephraim.

Meanwhile, when the people asked Rehoboam, Solomon's son and rightful heir, to lighten their tax burden, Rehoboam replied haughtily, "I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:14, NIV).

Rehoboam's insensitive answer was the straw that broke the camel's back. Most of the people revolted. "When all Israel [though not Judah and, apparently, not Benjamin] saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!" (v. 16).

Having revolted against Rehoboam, most of the people of Israel now summoned Jeroboam to a large assembly, where they declared him their king. Only the tribes of Judah and, apparently, Benjamin remained loyal to the house of David.

Jeroboam seemed to be a perfect choice. He was experienced, having served well as Solomon's minister of labor. God, through the prophet Ahijah, had anointed him king of Israel (1 Kings 11:26-40), and now he was unanimously elected as the people's leader.

Regrettably, instead of recognizing his rise to power as a divine call to faithfulness, Jeroboam chose to secure his position by inventing an alternative form of worship that, though popular, was founded on principles contrary to God's Word.

Jeroboam's name can be interpreted to mean "one who pleads the people's cause." True to his name, he invented a style of worship calculated to please the people (instead of God). Thus his form of worship may be called a "people's church," an independent religious community organized to meet the people's felt needs.

Popular as it was, Jeroboam's people's church departed from God's ideal in at least seven respects: (1) its motivation for worship, (2) its blueprint for worship, (3) its object of worship, (4) its demands on its worshippers, (5) the center of its worship, (6) its ministers of worship, and (7) its time for worship (1 Kings 12:26-33). We shall look at each one briefly.

1. Motivation for Worship. True worship, we all know, is based on love. Jeroboam's false worship, however, was motivated by fear. He feared that worshipping in Jerusalem would draw people away from him to Rehoboam, his political rival (1 Kings 12:26, 27), resulting possibly in his own overthrow and even in his assassination. Fear is an expression of the lack of faith.

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How often have leaders, driven by a fear of losing members or of losing the votes of their constituencies, compromised the faith by adopting un-Biblical practices, even as Jeroboam did. "Every failure on the part of God's children was due to a lack of faith" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 657).

2. Blueprint for Worship. "*The king took counsel,*" we read, "and made two calves of gold" (1 Kings 12:28). Quite obviously, the king did not seek counsel from the Lord. Instead he consulted his team of "experts."

If Jeroboam had lived in our day, his worship and church growth specialists would have encouraged him to learn from the successful strategies of the megachurches of today's Canaan and Egypt. They would have encouraged him to adopt age-specific, gender-inclusive, and culturally sensitive strategies to attract the "bored, burned, and by-passed." Sociologists and public relations experts would have urged him to take surveys and opinion polls to find out what unconverted church people really *wanted*.

Perhaps the reason that Jeroboam didn't consult Moses or the Spirit of Prophecy (available to him in the person of Ahijah; 1 Kings 11) was that he felt that such sources of information belonged to the "Victorian" era of King David and were therefore not relevant to his current challenging situation. At all events, as we noted a moment ago, after consulting his advisors Jeroboam made two golden calves and said to the people, "Behold your gods" (1 Kings 12:28).

3. Changing the Object of Worship. Jeroboam's interest in calf worship may have developed during his exile in Egypt, where, no doubt, he came in contact with the impressive worship of Amon-Re. The challenge facing Jeroboam was how to introduce a similar style of worship among people who had been taught not to make any physical representation of God. Where could he learn the carefully nuanced theology that he so desperately needed? Where? In the example of Aaron at Mount Sinai, of course (Exodus 32).³ Was not Aaron's example a valid part of Israelite history? And what did Aaron say to the people as he introduced to them his golden calf? "Behold thy gods, O Israel." Jeroboam knew he could do the same; and he did (see 1 Kings 12:28). At last he had what he felt he needed for *his* visually oriented "MTV generation."

But despite Jeroboam's rationalization, God still condemned the worship of images. Through His Word, God had warned: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image____Thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them ..." (Exodus 20:4, 5).

The second commandment is not primarily against the worship of false

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gods (this is the concern of the first commandment) but is opposed rather to the worship of the true God in a false way. Rightly understood, the second commandment forbids all man-made images—whether metal or *mental*.

A leading evangelical scholar has wisely observed that "just as it [the second commandment] forbids us to manufacture molten images of God, so it forbids us to dream up mental images of Him. Imagining God in our heads can be just as real a breach of the second commandment as imagining Him by the work of our hands."³

Too often, expressions like, "My *view of God* is ..."; "I like to think of God as ..."; "I *have experienced* God to be ..."; "My *reality of God* is . . .," etc., are gross distortions, if not subtle denials, of what the Bible itself teaches about God.

Our author continues: "It needs to be said with the greatest possible emphasis that those who hold themselves free to think of God *as they think* are breaking the second commandment. At best, they can only think of God in the image of man—as an ideal man, perhaps, or a super-man. But God is not any sort of man. We were made in His image, but we must not think of Him as existing in ours. To think of God in such terms is to be ignorant of Him, not to know Him. All speculative theology, which rests on philosophical reasoning rather than Biblical revelation, is at fault here ____ To follow the imagination of one's heart in the realm of theology is the way to remain ignorant of God and to become an idol worshipper—the idol in this case being a false mental image of God, 'made unto thee' by speculation and imagination."⁴

If this scholar's observations are correct, those of us who feel at liberty to fashion the Biblical faith according to the metal or *mental* images of our day are but repeating the mistake of Jeroboam, and our theological innovations are bound to produce a cheap religion, as did Jeroboam's.

4. Changing the Demands on Its Worshipers. When Jeroboam told Israel, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem" (1 Kings 12:28), he was offering them a discount religion, a religion whose demands for discipleship cost less than those of true Biblical religion, a religion of convenience rather than of obedience.

By taking away the seventh-day Sabbath, Sundaykeepers today may generally be said to be offering a 10% discount on the Ten Commandments. And what about those within our own ranks who offer Christian lifestyles at sale prices, encouraging a *moderate* use of alcohol, a *tasteful* use of ornamental jewelry, the *occasional* eating of unclean meats, and endorsing divorce and remarriage for *incompatible* unions?

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The seriousness of discount religion lies in the assumption that in order to be truly "caring," a church must uncritically accept people "just as they are" without unpopular do's and don'ts. The *Newsweek* article that we read from earlier noted that "unlike earlier religious revivals, the aim this time (aside from born-again traditionalists of all faiths) is support not salvation, help rather than holiness, a circle of spiritual equals rather than an authoritative church or guide. A group affirmation of self is at the top of the agenda, *which is why some of the least demanding churches are now in greatest demand*" (my emphasis).

In this kind of worship, the *Newsweek* article continues, "each individual is the ultimate source of authority." Or as it quotes from an advertising campaign capturing the ethos of a consumer-driven church: "Instead of me fitting a religion I found a religion to fit me." The article explains that in this kind of worship members "inspect congregations as if they were restaurants and leave if they find nothing to their taste." Participation does not derive from a sense of commitment but from whether a church meets their felt needs. "They don't convert—they choose."

Even more insightful is this observation from the magazine: "Theologically, the prospects are even blander. In their efforts to accommodate, many clergy have simply airbrushed sin out of their language. Like politicians, they can only recognize mistakes which congregants are urged to 'put behind them.' Having substituted therapy for spiritual discernment, they appeal to a nurturing God Who helps His (or Her) people cope. Heaven, by this creed, is never having to say no to yourself, and God is never having to say you're sorry."

Such is the nature of a cheap, Jeroboam-like worship style that murmurs sweetly, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem" (1 Kings 12:28).

5. Changing the Center of Worship. Jeroboam was well in advance of today's "bold" innovators of worship in yet another way. He knew well that God's designated worship center was in Jerusalem, but Jeroboam changed it to two locations, one in Bethel and the other in Dan (see 1 Kings 12:29).

These sites were chosen strategically. Bethel, on the southern border of Israel's territory, was a site where the patriarchs had worshipped (Genesis 28:10-12; 31:13; 35:1-7; Hosea 12:4). Dan, in the north, was associated with a renegade Levite who had lived there in the days of the judges (Judges 18) and had set up his own form of worship. Bethel thus could appeal to *unconverted* "traditionalists," who could feel that they were holding onto old-time religion. Dan could attract the "progressives," *unconverted* professionals mature enough

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to "adventure in truth" by "refining and renewing" old beliefs and practices.

In this way, Jeroboam, our charismatic minister of worship, offered a choice for those who wanted "traditional" worship and those who enjoyed "contemporary," alternative worship.

Jeroboam had a very practical reason for choosing his two locations. Inasmuch as Bethel was 10 miles north of Jerusalem, its location would tempt Israelites to stop there instead of walking the rest of the dusty uphill road to Jerusalem. And Dan, being the northernmost city in Israel, would be easy to reach by people who would otherwise have to walk many miles to Jerusalem.

Apparently, convenience in worship was more important to Jeroboam than obedience in worship. "Why should the people go all the way to Jerusalem to worship?" he apparently asked. "Don't we need a community church, one that we can claim as our own—free from the control of the authoritarian hierarchy in Jerusalem?"

Notice, however, that no matter how his shrewd, politically motivated compromise may have pleased the people, the Bible describes it as the "sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, wherewith he made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 12:30; 16:26).

6. Changing the Ministers of Worship. Another of Jeroboam's innovations was his redefinition of the practice of ministry, making it more nearly "inclusive." We read that "he made an house of high places, and *made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi*" (1 Kings 12:31).

We are not surprised that Jeroboam faced strong opposition from many of the dedicated, *conservative* Levitical priests who lived in his territory (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). But how did he respond? He trained and ordained a new generation of priests. "Why," he apparently asked, "should ordination continue to be reserved exclusively for males from the tribe of Levi?"

The old tradition seemed "culturally conditioned," going back to the time of Moses, the rigid and irritable administrator who dared to withstand the bold, innovative Aaron. And had not Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, notable men in Israel's history who had boldly challenged Moses, argued that "all the congregation are holy" (Numbers 15:3)?

Jeroboam's new priesthood, based on the equality of all believers, must surely have appealed to the sense of fairness among all his "justice-inspired" followers.

7. Changing the Time for Worship. One more change that Jeroboam introduced had to do with the time of worship. He dared to change the date of

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the great annual fall festival from the seventh month, where God had placed it, to the eighth month (see 1 Kings 12:32). His reasoning must have resembled that of today's charismatic Jeroboams when they say that the choice of day doesn't matter; what matters is "*Christ*."

Clinging to God's timetable, say our modern Jeroboams, leads to triumphalism, bigotry, and intolerance towards God's *many* "remnant" peoples. Clinging specifically to the end-time implications of the Sabbath (seal of God, mark of the beast, etc.), they say, leads to "ethnocentrism," "xenophobia," and "paranoia," undermines the spirit of ecumenism, and ultimately hinders the church's witness to a twenty-first-century world.

Jeroboam created a man-made religion. Notes 1 Kings 12:32, 33, "So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that *he had made*: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which *he had made*. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month *which he had devised of his own heart*. . . ."

By inventing an alternative worship style in order to advance his own career, Jeroboam prostituted God's true worship. His independent "people's community church" altered the shape of true worship, by changing (1) the motivation for worship, (2) the blueprint for worship, (3) the object of worship, (4) the demands on worshippers, (5) the center of worship, (6) the ministers of worship, and (7) the time for worship.

What did Jeroboam gain? What did his people gain in the long run? Answered God through the prophet Ahijah, "Because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over My people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you—yet you have not been like My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My sight; you also have done more evil than all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke Me to anger and have cast Me behind your back—therefore, behold, I am bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bond and free in Israel, and I will make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam, as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone. . . . For the Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the Euphrates River, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger" (1 Kings 14:7-10, 15).

A religion of convenience, devised in one's own heart, is evidently an abomination to God. King Jeroboam has been forever branded as "Jeroboam

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the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin" (2 Kings 23:15).

Before embracing innovations in use among the megachurches of modern Canaan, would we not do well to remind ourselves of the following counsel, as we reflect on the fact that the end-time worship crisis looms dead ahead?

"If God has any new light to communicate, He will let His chosen and beloved understand it, without their going to have their minds enlightened by hearing those who are in darkness and error. . . . God is displeased with us when we go to listen to error, without being obliged to go . . . and the light around us becomes contaminated with the darkness" (*Early Writings*, pp. 124, 125).

Endnotes

¹ *Newsweek* (December 17, 1990) :50.

² It is, perhaps, more than a coincidence that Jeroboam's eldest sons, Nadab and Abijah (1 Kings 14:1, 20; 15:25), bore names almost identical to those of Aaron's sons, namely, Nadab and Abihu (Exodus 6:23; Numbers 3:2; 26:20). There are other parallels: (a) Both men responded to public opinion (Exodus 32:1-6; 1 Kings 12:28); (b) they both made similar responses (Exodus 32:4; 1 Kings 12:28); (c) non-Levitical priesthoods were established (Exodus 32:26-29; 1 Kings 12:31; 13:33); (d) the resulting sins adversely affected the entire nation (Exodus 32:21, 30, 34; Deuteronomy 9:18-21; 1 Kings 12:30; 13:34; 14:16; 15:26, 30, 34; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:29-31); (e) the punishments visited on the people were similar (Exodus 32:35; 2 Chronicles 13:20). For even more on the parallels between Aaron and Jeroboam, see the article on "Jeroboam" in Walter Elwell, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), vol. 2, p. 1121.

³ James I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), p. 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Newsweek* (December 17, 1990) :56.

Chapter 27

The "Third Wave" Roots of Celebrationism

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[Editor's note: Though first published a decade and a half ago, the reader will be struck by the currency of the author's treatment of celebration-style contemporary worship.]

The phenomenon of "celebration churches" in Adventism is both drawing a great deal of interest and causing considerable anxiety. What are the key roots of the celebration movement? Does it fit into a larger religious frame of reference, namely, the "third wave" of the charismatic movement? The answers may give us some insights into its momentary boon or potential doom for the movement's future in the Adventist Church.

The charismatic movement has had profound impact on Christianity in the twentieth century. It began its Pentecostal stage on January 1, 1901 at a newly founded Bible college in Topeka, Kansas, and at the famous Azusa Street meeting in Los Angeles in April, 1906, with the African-American pastor William J. Seymour. The most prominent characteristic of the charismatic movement in its Pentecostal stage is "speaking in tongues" (glossolalia), which its adherents identify with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.¹

Today, it is claimed that between 100 and 372 million Christians belong to the various forms of the charismatic movement around the world.² These are impressive figures.

Three Waves of the Charismatic Movement

As early as 1983, C. Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, spoke of the "third wave" of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. His identification of

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three waves of the Holy Spirit's manifestation in the twentieth century has attracted much attention.

1. First Wave. The "first wave" refers to the Pentecostal movement to which the typical "tongue-speaking" denominations belong and which began in 1901. Wagner says, "The first wave of this outpouring was the initiation and development of the Pentecostal movement [with glossolalia] in the very beginning of this century. The second wave was the charismatic movement, which started around 1960. Both of these waves have seen, and I believe will continue to see, explosive church growth. The hand of God is upon them in an extraordinary way."³

2. Second Wave. The "second wave," then, is the "charismatic renewal movement," also called neo-Pentecostalism, by which tongue-speaking entered into many of the non-Pentecostal churches and became the key charismatic phenomenon in these denominations. This wave began in the 1960s when Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican/Episcopal, Mennonite, Church of Christ, United Church of Christ, and other traditional churches, were penetrated by tongue-speaking, or glossolalia.

In 1967 tongue-speaking charismatics appeared in the Catholic Church and found subsequent support from many priests, nuns, bishops, and even the pope.⁴

Around 1970 some Adventists, particularly young people witnessing for their faith on the California beaches, began meeting these Pentecostal charismatics. A fair number of the Adventists had hands laid on them, and they began to "speak in tongues." Concerned, the General Conference created a commission that met in Georgia and rendered a report that called for caution regarding the phenomenon of glossolalia. As a result, the second wave with its glossolalia did not become a part of Adventism as such. The charismatic renewal movement of this stage left no significant mark on the Adventist Church.

We have noted that the major doctrinal distinctive of the second wave and its unique distinguishing mark is the experience of the "baptism with the Holy Spirit," that is, glossolalia. But something new developed.

Wagner notes the new development of the second wave, observing that "in the 1970s a new and extremely important phenomenon began to develop [as part of the second wave], namely the appearance of freestanding, independent charismatic congregations and clusters of fellowships of congregations, which function as minidenominations."⁶ This is a tacit admission that the charismatic renewal movement, the "second wave," sometimes threatened denominational unity, developing minidenominations that took on a shape of their own. Adventists were not affected at that time.

3. Third Wave. Now we live in the period of the "third wave" of the charis-

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matic movement as Wagner sees it. This wave began in the early 1980s. David Barrett, the charismatic Anglican editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, believes that in 1987 there were 27 million "third-wavers" worldwide.⁷

The third wave has certain characteristics of doctrine, church practice, and experience. As for doctrine, Wagner points out that "the two principal sources of data [for theology and doctrine] are the Bible and Christian experience."⁸

Here is a significant "and"! It says much about the theological methods at work in the third wave. This "and" demonstrates that the Bible is not the only source for doctrine and church life. The third wave does not differ in this regard from the first and second wave of the charismatic movement. Similarly, Catholics have "the Bible and tradition." Karl Barth called this "and" in Catholicism "the damned Catholic 'and'," because tradition was the dominant shaper of theology. Likewise, we may know what the dominant shaper of the charismatic movement is.

Can Adventists buy into this charismatic "and"? Christian experience is a source of pragmatism, which tends to outdo the Scriptures as the primary source in both the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements. Should Adventists follow the charismatic lead? From the point of view of methodology, theology, doctrine, and practice, Adventists have remained true to their heritage of the Bible and nothing but the Bible. For everything we believe, everywhere and on every subject, we have to remain grounded on our one authority: "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms."¹⁰

Doctrinally the third wave differs from the first two waves in not claiming that every person touched by the Holy Spirit has to be a tongue-speaker engaging in glossolalia, to prove that the Holy Spirit is at work. He may or may not speak in tongues. More important is the "filling" with the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Speaking in tongues, the unique identifying mark of Pentecostals and charismatics of the first and second waves, is still recognized as a spiritual gift, but in the third wave "you will not find tongues highlighted above any other gift."¹²

So then, we need to know: Is there a special spiritual gift that is highlighted in the "third wave" of charismatic renewal? Is there a unique emphasis? Wagner, a major spokesperson for the "third wave," affirms that "one can be filled with the Holy Spirit and minister through spiritual gifts in power and be a channel for healing the sick and casting out demons, all without speaking in tongues."¹³ The new emphasis is power prayer. Wagner's reference to ministering "in power" needs further attention, because of its links to the "power evangelism" approach pioneered and championed by John Wimber.¹⁴ Wimber joined Professor Wagner in coteaching the famous course "MC510: Signs,

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Wonders, and Church Growth" at Fuller's School of World Mission in early 1982.¹⁵ At the time, Wagner had suffered for years from high blood pressure, for which he was receiving medical treatment. In that course, John Wimber laid hands on Professor Wagner for healing.

Wagner was healed and became a participant. He reports, "I started laying hands on the sick, and learning how to minister to them in the name of Jesus. . . . Soon praying for the sick was a permanent part of my Christian life, even though at the time I did not yet have the gift of healing."¹⁶ He explains that in 1984, "two years after my paradigm shift [from a spectator to a participant¹⁷] had taken place, God gave me the gift of healing."¹⁸ Wagner now teaches that "all Christians have the role of laying hands on the sick and being open to see God use them as channels for healing."¹⁹

Wagner lays hands on his students for them to receive the Holy Spirit. Some Seventh-day Adventist pastors are said to have been thus prayed for with laying on of hands by Professor Wagner. Wagner believes that "every Christian person should be active in a ministry of laying hands on the sick and praying for their recovery. I do not think," he writes, "that this should be restricted to clergy, elders, or other church leaders or even to those with the gift of healing."²⁰

Wagner agrees with John Wimber on the so-called five steps for praying for the sick²¹ used by third-wave charismatics in their churches.

Praying for the sick as practiced by third-wavers can be accompanied by the use of salt, oil, holy water, the emblems of Holy Communion, or by nothing at all. Wagner recommends that the eyes be kept open so that one can see what is happening during the prayer.²²

The Third Wave and Adventist Renewal

Perhaps enough has been said to provide a background for understanding some new customs in certain celebration churches, where praying with laying on of hands is used today. In James 5:13-16, the New Testament outlines a clear ministry of prayer for the sick. The New Testament counsel for this kind of prayer differs from third-wave practice. The New Testament says that: 1) The sick one is to call for the "elders" to pray—not just any church member, deacon, or other person. 2) Oil is to be used for anointing—not salt, holy water, or something else. 3) Confession is to take place, and the person receive forgiveness of sins. 4) Prayer is to be offered in terms of a petition—not as a "command,"²³ as in power evangelism. The New Testament's prayer for the sick and the third-wavers' power prayer are not the same.

In general, John Wimber is very much in line with Wagner. However, he

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differs in seeing the third wave as "not so much another wave as the next stage of development in the charismatic renewal."²⁴ It is an extension of or another stage of the second wave.

Three Areas of Change

Wimber describes this "next stage" (Wagner's third wave) as one in which the "charismatic movement has taken root, burrowing into congregational structures, liturgy, and theology."²⁵ In these three areas—congregational structure, liturgy, and theology—the charismatic renewal movement seems to have had an impact on some Seventh-day Adventist churches, particularly the typical celebration churches.

I. Congregational Structure. As the charismatic renewal movement has witnessed the emergence of freestanding charismatic congregations independent of their denominational roots, so some Adventist celebration congregations downplay their connection to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At least one has chosen a name that shows little or no identity with Seventh-day Adventism.

Other indications of a more congregational, independent stance may be seen in some (not all) of these churches in such things as minimal use of the denominational hymnal, tolerating or even encouraging lifestyle practices of their members that are out of harmony with the Adventist body at large, and a neglect of preaching the distinctive message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Have some celebration churches developed into or function as minidenominations within the Adventist Church?

II. Church Liturgy. Wimber notes how the "next stage" has affected church life in liturgy [order and style of worship]. "First, the charismatic renewal [of the "next stage"] has introduced new forms of worship by using dance, theater, innovative hymnody, and (in some instances) singing in tongues. Alive, joyful music is one of the most significant contributions the charismatic movement has made in the church."²⁶

Have these things made inroads among the Adventist celebration churches? We might look at the kind of instruments used and the type of music played and sung. Whether the "swinging" in certain services that accompanies singing is what Wimber means by "dance" is not entirely clear. Is "theater" the use of various forms of skits and the like? The historic Sabbath School has been transformed and the church service adjusted.

III. Doctrines. Theologically, the emphasis is placed on love, forgiveness, and acceptance. This triad of theological themes has Biblical foundation, but the Bible has more foundations than these for genuine faith. These churches

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typically take a soft stance on lifestyle to woo yuppies and fringe Adventists. Strong theology demands strong ethics; soft theology nurtures soft ethics.

Bright Outlook Based on Scripture

The central point is that there is a larger contemporary religious movement to which the Adventist celebration churches seem to belong. If we are not mistaken, in the "third wave" (Wagner) or the "next stage" (Wimber) the charismatic movement has scored a major impact for the first time on the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Are the celebration churches the right solution for much of the malaise in first-world Adventism? What "sources" are celebration churches drinking from? What "fire" are they playing with? What spirit is at work? Where else does the movement lead? These are serious, gnawing questions.

What We Believe. We believe in the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter days, the time of the end. We believe in renewal of the believer's life. We believe in warm and friendly churches. We believe in worldwide evangelism, the proclamation of the "eternal Gospel" of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. We believe that God has called the Advent movement to be a special movement.

But if we are not mistaken, and I think we are not, it is not a charismatic movement. It is a movement in which the Holy Spirit will enable us to proclaim the truth of the Second Coming and the necessary preparation for it in power and with conviction. Such proclamation in the Spirit's power will change the lives of converts and members. We believe in Biblical proclamation evangelism.

We believe that many spiritual people feel a hunger for an experience with the Lord that they are not receiving in the church today. We believe that the church is in need of revival and reformation. We believe that we are a lukewarm Laodicea in need of letting the One Who stands at the door come into our church and into our hearts individually, to transform our goals, motivations, and all else. We believe that, unfortunately, there are thousands of Adventists no longer going to church; we need to love them back into the fold of our Shepherd. But what is the way to do this?

Best Approach? Is the "third wave/next stage" of the charismatic movement as seen in various forms in celebration churches the way to go? What else will the "third wave" of the charismatics bring us? Will it be prayer for the sick as practiced, preached, and taught by Wagner in disharmony with the plain teaching of Scripture? Will it be glossolalia, the so-called "baptism of the Holy Spirit," of which there are sporadic Adventist manifestations already? ²⁷ What

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else will it bring—charismatic ecumenism and a loss of our distinctiveness and our distinctives?

A better and wiser approach would be to study anew the Word of God sincerely with prayer, and again the writings of the messenger to the remnant, as the lesser light assisting us to appreciate so much more the greater light of Scripture.

A Crucial Question

Long ago a prophet asked the leader of God's people (who also were deeply in need of revival), "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?" "Is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His Word?" (2 Kings 1:3, 16).

The question is no less valid for us. In our spiritual hunger, in our longing for revival and power from on high, let us seek our direction from God's Word. In Scripture we will find renewed strength and divine power to discover and rediscover the will of God for His people in the end-time. Adventists are a people of the Book; and the Spirit Who speaks through that Book will renew us.

Endnotes

¹ See Watson E. Mills, ed., *Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research on Glossolalia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

² *Christianity Today*, September 16, 1991, p. 52, reports that of the 1.8 billion Christians in the world "about 372 million identify themselves as charismatic/Pentecostal." Other estimates are much more modest.

³ C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry Without Making Your Church Sick* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1988), p. 16.

⁴ See E.D. O'Connor, C.S.C., "The Literature of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal 1967-1974," *Perspectives on Charismatic Renewal*, ed. E.D. O'Connor (Notre Dame, Ind./London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 145-184.

⁵ Larry Christenson, "Baptism with the Holy Spirit," *Focus Newsletter*, Fellowship of Charismatic Christians in the United Church of Christ (June 1985), pp. 1-3.

⁶ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, p. 21.

⁷ David Barren as cited by Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, p. 17.

⁸ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, p. 24.

⁹ Cited by H. Kling, *Theologie im Aufbruch* (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 1987), p. 68.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

¹¹ John Wimber with Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 148-151.

¹² Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, p. 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ John Wimber with Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism*.

¹⁵ See *Signs & Wonders Today*, compiled by the editors of *Christian Life Magazine*

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(Wheaton, 111: Christian Life Missions, 1983).

¹⁶ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, p. 50.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 212.

²¹ John Wimber, *Power Healing* (San Francisco; Harper 8c Row, 1987).

²² Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, p. 228.

²³ Ibid., p. 227, where commanding is a definite form of prayer that is recommended.

²⁴ Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, p. 122.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

²⁷ It is reported that in an Adventist celebration church in Sydney, Australia, glossolalia has manifested itself. Recently the major church in what was East Berlin, though not a celebration church, has been split over the issue of glossolalia, with the glossolalists finally leaving the Adventist Church. In some Adventist churches in Italy and France, glossolalia is also a problem.

Chapter 28

Is Music Morally Neutral?

By Wolfgang H.M. Stefani, PhD

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Musician and teacher Henry Edward Krehbiel once quipped: "Of all the arts, music is practiced most and thought about least." Rather than take this as a rebuke, in today's postmodern world a significant number would respond with the words, "Bravo, and that's how it ought to be!"

Indeed, many people are convinced that music is to be felt and experienced, not thought about and analyzed. Because feelings are very subjective, the common view is that music means different things to different people, and hence its usage must be considered a matter of culturally conditioned taste and preference.

The notion that music is in some way governed by morality or that musical expressions could or ought to be evaluated as right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate according to external norms, is considered preposterous. Witness the almost irate statement of Maurice Zam (former director of the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music) made in a *Chicago Tribune* column to Ann Landers in 1993:

Let us emancipate ourselves from the myth that music has anything to do with morals. Music is as amoral as the sound of the babbling brook or the whistling wind. The tones E, D, and C can be sung to the words, "I love you," "I hate you," or "three blind mice."²

On face value, this illustration seems to hold, so people accept the premise as well. In fact, there are many today who would agree with Zam, including a large proportion of Christians.

Whether overwhelmed with the complexity of the issues or simply ambivalent, many Christians question whether or not decisions for Christ need to be made regarding music. A growing number feel that providing lyrics is acceptable, the music itself is not really an issue either for worship or everyday use. For them, music is simply a medium and as such is morally neutral.

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This view is forcefully presented in Dana Key's book *Don't Stop the Music*. A Christian rock musician, Key openly states that "*sound* is not the important issue. It's meaning. It's what the song is saying—and the *lyrics* of a song are what gives us that meaning." He goes on to assert:

I believe that music (particularly instrumental music) is absolutely void of moral qualities for either good or evil. This is not to say that there is not good instrumental music or bad instrumental music. Instrumental music can be good or bad, but that isn't a theological issue—it's an artistic one.

The "goodness" or "badness" of instrumental music is based on the performers' competence and skill. If the music is played without skill it is bad. If it is performed skillfully, it is good.³

Thomas Dorsey, the famous Gospel musician, came to the same conclusion. He said:

The message is not in the music but in the words of the song. It matters not what kind of movement it has, if the words are Jesus, Heaven, Faith, and Life then you have a song with which God is pleased regardless of critics and what some church folk say.⁴

Michael Tomlinson, writing in *Ministry* in September 1996, took a similar stance. He wrote: "I believe music itself is without moral qualities either for good or evil. The question has more to do with what the music is employed to say or do than with the music per se."⁵

Even classically trained Christian musicians go along with these ideas. In his book, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, Harold Best (Wheaton College) took the position that "with certain exceptions art and especially music are morally relative."⁶ Harold B. Hannum, well-known and respected Seventh-day Adventist musician and scholar, also maintained that "moral matters have to do with human actions and relations to others, not with the notes of a composition."⁷ Later in the same work he affirmed that "moral and religious values should be kept separate from purely aesthetic ones."⁸

The evident strength and assurance in these statements seems to suggest a consensus. So, why can't the issue be laid to rest once and for all? Perhaps the indignant suggestion that conservative religionists and other "self-appointed guardians of morals" (as Zam termed them) keep their interfering noses out of it and let others get on with using and enjoying music according to their tastes and preferences is valid? Or is it? Is there another side to this issue?

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Now, it should be said that it is legitimate to affirm that aesthetic values are distinct from moral values. Aesthetic criteria such as "unity, variety, balance, climax, integrity, logic, and a feeling of inevitability" are rightfully used in evaluating both musical compositions and performances. However, before dismissing all evaluation as simply a matter of assessing these parameters according to culturally conditioned taste and preference without reference to any moral dimension, it is worth considering the following.

A Historical Consideration

In contemporary Western culture, music has come to be viewed almost exclusively as a form of harmless entertainment intended to provide pleasure and create congenial atmospheres with individuals consulting their likes and dislikes as the basis for usage. This was not so, however, in earlier times. For example, two and a half millennia ago music was considered to be such a potent and influential force in society that leading philosophers and politicians advocated its control by the nation's constitution. This was the case in Athens and Sparta, city-states of ancient Greece.

In Japan in the third century A.D., an imperial office of music (the *Gagaku-ryo*) was established to control musical activities.¹⁰ Other ancient cultures, including those of Egypt, India, and China, evidenced similar concerns. Legislation or governmental censorship of this kind is considered almost unthinkable today." But, even during the twentieth century, Communist, Fascist, and Islamic regimes voiced concerns about and implemented laws within their borders to control music.

Why all the fuss? What was the problem? For the ancients the problem was clear. They believed music affected the will, which in turn influenced character and conduct. For example, Aristotle and Plato taught that:

Music... directly imitates (that is, represents) the passions or states of the soul—gentleness, anger, courage, temperance, and their opposites and other qualities; hence, when one listens to music that imitates a certain passion, he becomes imbued with the same passion; and if over a long time he habitually listens to the kind of music that arouses ignoble passions his whole character will be shaped to an ignoble form. In short, if one listens to the wrong kind of person he will become the wrong kind of person; but, conversely if he listens to the right kind of music he will tend to become the right kind of person.¹²

There is no mistaking the clear relationship of music and morality in this understanding. Half a world away in China, Confucius expressed a very similar understanding:

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If one should desire to know whether a kingdom is well-governed, if its morals are good or bad, the quality of its music will furnish the answer. . . . Character is the backbone of our human culture, and music is the flowering of character.¹³

The Greeks and Chinese were not alone in their view. The idea that music has moral influence is evident among early Christian writers,¹⁴ the Roman writer Boethius,¹⁵ and many others. Even the statement of a prominent contemporary cultural anthropologist, Alan P. Merriam, has strong implications for the connection between music and morality. He wrote: "There is probably no other human cultural activity which is so all-pervasive and which reaches into, shapes, and often controls so much of human behavior."¹⁶

So what do we make of this? Clearly there is wide historical support, apart from recent religious writers,¹⁷ that music and morality are intimately connected. Is this notion a relic of ancient superstition, or does it have some validity? One thing is clear, while some think that music is neutral, historically many others believed the very opposite. Obviously, it would be risky to decide the issue simply by a present-day popular vote without looking at some further evidence.

A Theological Consideration

From the Christian standpoint, there is a significant theological issue that influences the debate. Clyde S. Kilby framed the core concern in the form of a question: "A man may tie his shoelaces or brush his teeth amorally, but can he create anything apart from some degree of moral involvement?"¹⁸

There are a good many Christians who feel somewhat uneasy about the idea that on a sin-infested planet products of human creativity (which originate from deep within) are somehow undefiled and not subject to moral evaluation. As Kilby observed, common tasks may be adjudged as amoral, but can we really make that assessment of a product of human creativity?

There is general consensus that song lyrics need to be evaluated either as compatible or incompatible, right or wrong, in relation to Christian faith and outlook. But what about the music itself? Doesn't it need similar assessment? Unquestionably, if we respond in the affirmative we enter a difficult arena with another raft of perplexing issues to confront. However, why should that challenge manipulate us into a default acceptance that music is a neutral island?

Given the strong Christian belief in a moral universe, the question could well be asked: Why, then, have so few Christians grappled with this problem?

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Furthermore, why have so many argued for the moral neutrality of music, and the arts as a whole for that matter? Frank E. Gaebelien makes the following perceptive observation which throws considerable light on this:

The bulk of the work being done in the field of Christian aesthetics represents Roman and Anglo-Catholic thought. Its roots go deep into sacramental theology, Thomism, Greek philosophy, and such great writers as Dante.¹⁹

The dominance of Roman and Anglo-Catholic thought in the field of Christian aesthetics is highly significant. During the Middle Ages of Western cultural history, when this stream of theological thought prevailed, human creativity was seen as an aspect of humanity that was not touched by the Fall of Adam. Rather, it was a pristine remnant of the original *imago Dei*. This proved to be a consequential presupposition that still persists.²⁰

It meant that in evaluating the arts, appeal was made to aesthetic criticism to ensure good quality art, but moral accountability was never an issue because the creative impulse was considered to be essentially pure and innocent. Even the immoral life of an artist was considered of little moment as long as he/she produced aesthetically superior art. And, given that only the best was good enough for God, the best was equated with aesthetic excellence. So it was that during the time when the church dominated society, aesthetic excellence also came to be identified with the religiously acceptable.

Hence, aesthetic evaluation eclipsed moral considerations. However, as the church lost its hold over society and the culture became more secular, multiple worldviews surfaced, and aesthetic pluralism also emerged.²¹ As aesthetic excellence and the development of good taste continued to be upheld as the only way to evaluate music, good quality Rock, Classical, Jazz, Country and Western, Soul, and a host of other musical styles, each with its own individual aesthetic standards, have inevitably become acceptable forms of musical expression, even in worship contexts.

While this may bring understanding to some developments within the Roman and Anglo-Catholic traditions, particularly since Vatican II, for many Protestants this paradigm does not take into account the "radical distortion" that sin has wrought in every field of human endeavor.

Building on a concept of Emil Brunner, Gaebelien suggested that "those areas of thought and activity that are closest to our humanness and our relation to God are most severely twisted by the bentness in us."²² He went on to explain how he understood this to work out in life as follows:

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... [I]n the more objective fields like physics and chemistry they are less affected until in mathematics the distortion approaches zero. By such an estimate, the arts, which speak so subjectively and so very personally regarding who and what we are in relation to our Maker are very vulnerable to the distortion that sin has brought into the world. This means that Christian artists and all of us for whom the arts are an essential part of life and culture must constantly be keeping our eyes open to the marks of the Fall in them and in us also.²³

For Gaebelein, this does not mean that humanity is totally worthless, and neither is the image of God utterly wiped out. By the exercise of God's common grace, "humanity has been in the past and can still be today wonderfully creative to His glory."²⁴ However, we cannot be thoughtlessly *laissezfaire* here.

If Gaebelein's logic is correct, then Christians of Evangelical Protestant persuasion have no option but to explore meaningful and legitimate ways to evaluate music, not only to determine what is beautiful and genuinely skillful, but also to establish what is morally compatible with the worldview we espouse. This in no way supports cavalier, simplistic assessments that lack integrity and are spawned through ignorance. What I am suggesting is no easy task, or perhaps many would have already successfully tackled it. But, here are two suggestions as a beginning. They both highlight the fact that belief in the moral neutrality of music is untenable.

The Message in the Medium

Speaking at the Second International Symposium on Music in Medicine at Ludenscheid, West Germany, in 1984, Manfred Clynes (a neurophysiologist, researcher, inventor, and acclaimed pianist) made the following statement:

Music in fact is an organization created to dictate feelings to the listener. The composer is an unrelenting dictator and we choose to subject ourselves to him, when we listen to his music.²⁵

What does this prominent scientist mean when he says music "dictates feelings?" How can music do this? One simple way to understand how this happens is to tune into a movie soundtrack, bypassing the picture for awhile. How much can you determine about the film's action simply by listening to the background music? Often quite a lot!

Alternatively, imagine a scene in a sci-fi horror movie in which a lethal

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monster spider is creeping up on an innocent, unsuspecting child. You can almost "hear" the creepy background music, can't you?

But why do film producers use music to accompany such scenes, especially when some would have us believe that words, not music, actually carry meaning? And how do producers decide what music to dub with the scene? Why isn't "approaching monster music" dubbed onto a movie scene of a birthday party or a baby nursery? If lyrics such as "sleep baby sleep" were set to "approaching monster music" would it become a lullaby? Or would addition of the text "Jesus loves me this I know" render it suitable for children's worship? In this last example, would we only want to make sure that the "approaching monster music" was composed creatively and performed skillfully, or would we evaluate the music as intrinsically inappropriate, even wrong, in that context?

While this may be an obvious example, several salient points about the nature of music are highlighted here and they must not be lost to our discussion. First, music apart from lyrics communicates a message. Music is not a neutral medium. Words are not required in order for music to have meaning. Film producers make decisions about music, not lyrics, in background music applications.

Second, while some may argue that music means different things to different people and that its effect is really only a matter of conditioned response, this does not account for certain major assumptions made by film producers. For example, incorporating music on a film soundtrack takes for granted that music impacts all people similarly.

Indeed, if this were not the case a music soundtrack would be pointless. Even when a film is released internationally, only language tracks are changed. The musical soundtrack that "dictates the feelings," as Clynes put it, stays the same. The underlying belief is that background music will communicate the same basic message to all viewers, even across cultural boundaries.

Third, while it cannot be denied that with the rise of globalized mass media some mass conditioning regarding musical associations may have occurred, it is also clear that music's impact is not only a matter of conditioning. Even before mass conditioning could be said to be a factor, producers seemed to be able to predict very accurately what music fitted with specific scenes or sequences. It has never been a hit-and-miss venture.

Research over the last 30 years or so has verified that the way music is constructed and performed embodies certain inherent characteristics that have long provided intuitive clues to its meaning. That's precisely why the secular industry makes informed decisions about the music it uses quite apart from lyrics that may or may not be present. Sadly, the "children of this world"

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seem to be wiser than the "children of light"²⁶ in some of these things.

In the recently established discipline of sentics there is one example of how a growing body of documentary evidence is deciphering how human emotion is expressed and perceived, and how music is, in fact, a form of emotion communication. Indeed, respected contemporary thinkers about music have continued to affirm the conclusions of the Greeks about music representing the passions or states of the soul. For example, Susanne Langer:

The tonal structures we call "music" bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling____The pattern of music is that... form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life.²⁷

In similar vein, Gordon Epperson maintained: "Music is the expression ... of the emotions; an aural image of how feelings feel, how they operate."²⁸

In the development of sentics, Clynes has begun to show how music does this. Having demonstrated that the expression of emotion occurs through certain predictable forms (which he termed essentic forms)²⁹ Clynes has gone on to show how musicians can manipulate the pitch and loudness of individual tones to embody essentic forms in a melody line. This is achieved much the same way tone of voice is modulated to make a sentence meaningful. He describes it thus:

In producing a melody, a composer places the notes so that they in effect fit the outline of the appropriate essentic form. . . . Musical tones are placed at suitable points along the path of an essentic form so that internally they can act as markers in the generation of the form. That is to say, the musical tones engender internally the motor pattern of essentic form corresponding also to program points of a touch expression of the same quality.³⁰

When composers construct well and performers read and en flesh their compositions accurately, powerful communications can take place. Indeed, when an essentic form is expressed well "a melody has direct access to engender the emotional quality in the listener without the need of auxiliary symbolism."³¹ As Clynes elaborated:

... [I]t can touch the heart as directly as can a physical touch. A caress or an exclamation of joy in music needs not to be consciously trans-

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lated into a touch caress or a physical "jump for joy" to be perceived as of such a quality. It does so directly through perception of essential form.³²

Besides using the tones of a melody line, further embodiment of emotional communication can be demonstrated in the structure of the rhythmic pulse.³³

Of course, all this brings Zam's illustration quoted in the introduction to this paper into perspective. Actually, I am sure Zam is aware that the tones E, D, and C never exist in clinical isolation in a piece of music. The surrounding harmonies, rhythms, phrasing, accentuation, etc., make those three tones take on a variety of emotional colorations. Any composer setting Zam's three sets of lyrics ("I love you," "I hate you," and "three blind mice") to music would not compose identically in each case.³⁴ This is precisely where Zam's point begins to break down.

Without trying to be comprehensive at this point, enough has been provided to substantiate that a body of research now exists that demonstrates that music does communicate meaningfully in a way that can and ought to be evaluated for appropriateness, and even rightness or wrongness in a given context.

From a Christian viewpoint, emotions like anger, hate, fear, love, or joy are not intrinsically good or bad. However, to present the lyric, "Jesus loves me this I know" with an accompanying musical/emotional message of fear and suspense would not simply be a harmless mismatch of cognitive and affective communication. According to Christian belief it would surely be crass misrepresentation of the Gospel (especially in light of 1 John 4:18) and hence, morally wrong, not merely aesthetically poor. The same would be true if lyrics about Jesus' love for humanity were presented accompanied by music portraying anger, violence, and aggression. Such mixed messages provide a confused communication of truth that is morally reprehensible, not just a matter of taste.

This last scenario is not merely an idle, hypothetical example. In the late 1980s to early 1990s an extension of so-called heavy-metal rock music emerged and became known as Thrash or Speed Metal. The violence and aggression in the music was suitably acted out in the accompanying moshing pit where fans gyrated to the music in frenzied thrashing movements, sometimes even breaking limbs in the process.

This type of music continued to be popular and was much in evidence at the 1999 Woodstock Music Festival. In an essay in *Time*, August 9, 1999, Lance Morrow described the arson, pillaging, and freelance mayhem that "was much

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in the spirit of the music" at the festival.³⁵ A crowd the size of Rochester, NY in hot conditions and under the influence of drugs and "vehemently moronic music" became a riot. He summed it up in the words: "Garbage in, garbage out."³⁶

When this form of music first emerged, however, some churches in Los Angeles sponsored concerts and developed worship services around a Christian form of this music to cater for enthusiasts. Even *Contemporary Christian Music* magazine was in two minds whether to support or condemn this new phenomenon.³⁷ While the older, maturer commentators tried to weigh the pros and cons of violence in a Christian context, arguing about the end perhaps justifying the means etc., a letter from a young person to the editor of the April issue of the same magazine seemed to cut through the confusion. Alisa Williams of Chicago wrote:

What's with this "Moshing for the Master" crap?! [Feb. '89.] Some of those thrash people have their heads screwed up. I see absolutely nothing Christian about diving into an audience on top of people or running around like maniacs, risking being trampled to death! This kind of violence has no place in a Christian concert. No violence at all should be involved!

Now as for their "thrash" sound—it's a bit too wild. I know we all have different musical tastes, but once you over step a certain point it's just unbearable.

I know you mean well—You want to bring those headbanging unbelievers to Christ—but I think you've taken it a bit far. God bless you anyway!

By the way, this letter is not from an old granny. I'm 15 years old!³⁸

What this young person saw so clearly highlights the hypocrisy of allowing the market to dictate music choice. Despite the recognized meaning of this music, some considered it acceptable simply because it was popular. If we have no external moral yardstick by which to evaluate our music, market forces will become the moral rudder by default. Ironically, within a Christian music context, this means that you end up with those knowing least about the Gospel determining most about its expression. No wonder we are left with a plethora of mixed and confused musical messages!

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The Matter of Style

However, there is an even more pervasive factor that needs to be taken into consideration. It is often said by Christians discussing music that musical style is not an issue.³⁹ This idea is usually strongly argued by those supporting music's moral neutrality.

This view reflects a stance taken in Western musicology over the past several centuries. Since the Enlightenment, when the antisupernaturalist bias really began to grip Western culture, most disciplines have sought to become independent of metaphysical and religious considerations. Even in the study of the development of musical styles this is evident.

It has become fashionable to explore and emphasize the influence of environmental, sociological, economic, and even biological factors, despite general acknowledgment that religion is intimately intertwined with the development of music in every known culture.⁴⁰ However, ethnomusicologists working in non-Western cultures are gradually dragging Western scholars back to some important correctives in their understanding of how a musical style develops.⁴¹

Before continuing this discussion further, however, we need to define what is meant by "style." Style has been simply described as "a characteristic way of doing something."⁴² Style is a term used almost exclusively of human actions or creations. It designates a product of human choices. Clearly, in musical compositions humans don't create the tones, but the way tones are combined, how they are sounded, how they are organized in time, is all a product of human choice. Hence, these factors become known as characteristics of a particular style.

So, what drives the choices behind the development of style? Why compose this way, and not that? Paul Tillich once gave succinct utterance to a sweeping truth that sheds light on these questions. He wrote:

Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion.⁴³

It is becoming increasingly evident that fundamental beliefs or world-view factors are among the major determinants of music style. In other words, that which rules the heart forms the art.⁴⁴

For example, in any culture there is an observable human quest for

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compatibility between fundamental beliefs and the character of art utilized in a religious setting. J.H. Kwabena Nketia, describing sacred music in Africa, stated this was a fundamental principle that appears to underlie the use of music in worship: namely, that the selection of music used, the control of musical forms and instruments is in accordance with the conceptualization of the gods or of the individual focus of worship.⁴⁵

Similar substantiation could be cited from various other religions and cultures.⁴⁶

How this happens is well illustrated in the Islamic context. Al Faruqui described how Islamic sacred music style is molded by a significant, fundamental belief—the nonphenomenal and transcendent aspects of divinity. To worship such a god was to leave the everyday world behind and enter an awe-inspiring realm. Noting this theological emphasis in both Islam and early Christianity, she observed the following of their music:

Religious music . . . avoided the emotive, the frivolous, the unfettered responses either to great joy or great sorrow. The limited range and contiguity of notes in Gregorian and Quranic chant, the prevalence of stepwise progression, the avoidance of large melodic leaps—all these contributed to this demand. The relaxed tempos, the calm and continuous movement, the rejection of strong accents and changes of intensity or volume were likewise conducive to an attitude of contemplation and departure from worldly involvement. The use of regularly repeated metric units would have tended to arouse associations, kinaesthetic movements, and emotions incompatible with the notion of religiosity among Muslims and early Christians. These were therefore avoided.

. . . Music contributed little or nothing to dramatic/programmatic content or tone painting imitating the objects, events, ideas, or feelings of this world. Hence abstract quality has been a marked feature. . . . Formal characteristics accorded with this tendency, making elements of unity and change dependent upon correspondence with poetic units rather than with narrative or descriptive factors.⁴⁷

She continued by demonstrating that not only structure, but also performance practice was belief-driven.

Performance practice, relying on the human voice, has avoided the

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secular associations which instruments might bring, as well as the chordal harmonies which could be suggestive of emotional or dramatic effects. Even the use of the human voice or voices . . . has avoided the sensual and imitative in order to enhance the spiritual effect on the listener.⁴⁸

Notice the detailed extent to which style is influenced by belief in this case.

As one would expect, emphasis on the immanent conceptualization of deity spawns a very different style of music, including a deliberate rejection of the abstract and the contemplative in favor of a strongly psychophysically stimulating musical expression. Repetitive rhythm is emphasized over melody and harmony. Loud, percussive instrumental playing that promotes group participation and instinctive movement is commonplace.

Whereas in the transcendent orientation meditation or contemplation of the deity's self-revelation is worship's goal, in the immanent orientation, possession is the ultimate desired outcome. Two very different conceptions of god engender two very different styles of music, because whatever or whoever rules the heart, forms the art.⁴⁹ As Al Faruqi has observed:

One set of . . . religious beliefs predicates one kind of religious experience and, by extension, a particular notion of suitable religious music. Another set of religious beliefs gives rise to a different kind of religious experience and accordant religious music. . . .

The examples of religious music are then but reflections and expressions of the complex of religious ideas held in a given culture at a particular time.⁵⁰

As one begins to explore the intimate connection between worldview and music style, it becomes clear why Tillich suggested that it may be possible to "read styles" with appropriate discernment, to detect which ultimate concerns are driving them.⁵¹

The demonstrable relationship between style and belief exposes the superficiality behind the claim that musical styles are neutral and incapable of proclaiming worldview.⁵²

In fact, the very opposite is true. Music styles are value-laden. They are veritable embodiments of beliefs. Stylistic features are brought into existence in a search for fitting aesthetic expression of deeply held truths about the really

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real. If this is so, then decisions about the appropriateness, even rightness and wrongness of musical styles, especially for worship contexts, are mandatory, not merely a matter of cultural taste or preference.

Indeed, Titus Burckhardt has a point when he writes: "Granted that spirituality in itself is independent of forms this in no way implies that it can be expressed and transmitted by any and every sort of form."⁵³ He goes on to note that:

A spiritual vision necessarily finds its expression in a particular formal language; if that language is lacking, with the result that a so-called sacred arts borrows its form from some kind of profane art, then it can only be because a spiritual vision of things is also lacking.⁵⁴

With the constant borrowing of musical language from various sources that is so evident in contemporary Christianity, one wonders what the spiritual vision is that drives today's Christian musical expressions. It would seem that a major opportunity for unique aesthetic witness to the Christian worldview is being lost.

Christians have a moral responsibility to seek not only fitting lyrics for their songs, but a musical style that legitimately expresses their understanding of God and of life.

Clearly, the evidence indicates that the issues surrounding sacred music style discussions extend far deeper than petty likes and dislikes. At the bottom line, because of the inherent link between style and worldview, the clash over sacred music styles is really a clash of underlying beliefs about the ultimate nature of reality, not just inconsequential aesthetic preferences. Perhaps that's why the discussions won't go away, because intuitively people sense a deeper substratum even if they can't verbalize what it is.

Conclusion

What can we conclude about all this? I would suggest at least three points.

1. To seriously espouse the idea that music is a morally neutral medium may be understandable from a secular viewpoint or if one believes that human creativity is untouched by the Fall.

However, if one believes in a moral universe lovingly and purposefully created, but infected by sin to the extent that a terrible distortion has marred (though not totally obliterated) God's image in humankind, one is committed

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to both appreciating the evidences of good in our world and also recognizing and distinguishing the evidences of evil. The creative element (so closely tied to the very core of human nature) cannot be considered immune from sin's distortions. The answer is not to espouse moral neutrality in this domain, but to thoughtfully and prayerfully work out ways of facilitating discernment.

2. While individual letters in an alphabet may be neutral, as they are combined together into words, phrases, and sentences they take on meaning that can be evaluated as refined and decent, or crude and rude, reverent and respectful or blasphemous, appropriate or inappropriate, right or wrong, and so on, because of the ideas they encapsulate. In the same way, while individual tones may be neutral in themselves, they never appear in isolation. In music they are always presented in conjunction with other tones, played with certain accents, in certain rhythmic formations, and sounded on certain instruments. The ability to understand more precisely the vocabulary and syntax of music's emotional communication is beginning to emerge.

Hence, evaluations of calm and peaceful or angry and aggressive, bold and reassuring or fearful and apprehensive, appropriate and inappropriate, right or wrong, are increasingly possible. If accurate matching and assessment of music is possible in movie production, it is surprising, even ludicrous, to suggest that it is impossible in the worship setting.

3. As the evidence mounts that styles of music are artistic embodiments of significant worldview factors in the belief systems of individuals and cultural communities, the implications for moral evaluation are imperative for Christians. Taste and preference cannot be the arbiters of appropriate/inappropriate musical styles. However, evaluations cannot be made simplistically or superficially. Although a start has been made in my doctoral dissertation, much more study is required to provide increased discernment in "reading" styles of music and making accurate assessments. Clearly, this task is not an optional endeavor. The evidence gathered makes it imperative.

"Thinking about music," although sadly neglected as Krehbiel suggested, is a very important task and one that will be rewarded with great insights into one of God's noblest gifts to humankind. It may also open a way for Christians to develop a unique and more consistent aesthetic witness to the worldview they hold. At present, Christians tend to be followers rather than leaders in the arts, especially in music.

Christianity claims that it has a life-enhancing and life-changing message for the spiritual, mental, physical, social, and emotional facets of humanity. But what distinctive aesthetic witness to a lost world is being given in Christian musical communication? If it exists at all, it is in the lyrics, not in the music.

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Essentially the message is that in God's kingdom we do music the same as the world does it.

Pdsieri Frondizi posed a significant and worthwhile challenge when he wrote:

The essence of the moral reformer and of the creator in the field of the arts lies in not adjusting to the predominant norms, or tastes, but unfurling the flag of what "ought to be" over and above people's preferences.⁵⁵

This is the twenty-first century's challenge to all dedicated, Christian musicians.

Endnotes

¹ An aphorism quoted in *Australian Journal of Music Education*, 27 (October 1980) :12.

² Maurice Zam in a letter to Ann Landers, *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1993.

³ Dana Key with Steve Rabey, *Don't Stop the Music* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 69. This is very similar to Oscar Wilde's view about literature: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all." (Oscar Wilde quoted in James L. Jarrett, *The Quest for Beauty* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1957], p. 216.)

⁴ Thomas A. Dorsey quoted in Oral L. Moses, "The Nineteenth-Century Spiritual Text: A Source for Modern Gospel," in *Feel the Spirit: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American Music*, ed. George R. Keck and Sherrill V. Martin (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 50.

⁵ Michael Tomlinson, "Contemporary Christian Music Is Christian Music," *Ministry* 69 (September 1996):26.

⁶ Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), p. 42.

⁷ Harold Byron Hannum, *Christian Search for Beauty* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1975), p. 51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁰ Ivan Vandor, "The Role of Music in the Education of Man: Orient and Occident," *The World of Music* 22 (1980) :13.

¹¹ An evidence of this is the furor caused in the United States, when, in the mid-1980s, it was suggested that popular musical recordings should carry some kind of warning label regarding explicit, pornographic, and violent lyrics—let alone music.

¹² Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*, rev. ed. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1973) p. 7.

¹³ Confucius in *The Wisdom of Confucius*, ed. Lin Yutang (New York: Random House, 1938), pp. 251-272.

¹⁴ See, for example, the writings of the early church fathers such as Basil, John Chrysostom, and Jerome, in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: WW. Norton and Company, 1965), pp. 64-72.

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¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 79-86.

¹⁶ Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 218.

¹⁷ For example, Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), p. 653.

¹⁸ Clyde S. Kilby, *Christianity and Aesthetics* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1961), p. 24.

¹⁹ Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Christian, the Arts, and Truth: Regaining the Vision of Greatness*, ed. D. Bruce Lockerbie (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1985), p. 56.

²⁰ This view is still strongly presented in: Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Bollingen Series XXXV, no 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), pp. 374-376; John W. Dixon, Jr., *Nature and Grace in Art* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), pp. 61, 70, 73, 76, 200; Winfried Kurzschinkel, *Die Theologische Bestimmung der Musik* (Trier: Paulinus Verlag, 1971), pp. 328-334. The subject has been discussed in detail in Wolfgang Stefani, "Artistic Creativity and the Fall: With Special Reference to Musical Creativity," unpublished paper, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich.: 1987.

²¹ Roger Sessions alluded to this general problem at the outset of a chapter on aesthetic criteria in his classic book, *Questions About Music* (New York: WW. Norton, 1971), p. 124.

²² Gaebelien, *The Christian, the Arts, and Truth*, p. 74.

²³ Ibid., pp. 74, 75.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁵ Manfred Clynes, "On Music and Healing" in *Music in Medicine: Proceedings Second International Symposium on Music in Medicine, Ludenscheid, West Germany*, ed. J. Steffens, R. Spintge, and R. Droh, 1985), p. 4.

²⁶ Luke 16:8.

²⁷ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 27.

²⁸ Gordon Epperson, *The Musical Symbol: An Exploration in Aesthetics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990), p. 75.

²⁹ Manfred Clynes, *Sentics: The Touch of the Emotions* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), pp. 26-41.

³⁰ Manfred Clynes, "When Time Is Music," in *Rhythm in Psychological, Linguistic, and Musical Processes*, ed. James R. Evans and Manfred Clynes (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1986), pp. 184, 185.

³¹ Ibid, p. 185.

³² Ibid. It is unfortunate that in an article of this nature that all of this cannot be practically illustrated. When presented in seminar form with musical examples, it proves very persuasive.

³³ See, for example, Manfred Clynes, *Expressive Microstructure in Music, Linked to Living Qualities in Studies of Music Performance*, ed. Johan Sundberg (Royal Swedish Academy of Music, Stockholm, No. 39, 1983), pp. 120-122.

³⁴ Perhaps a comparison could be drawn with the use of the word "no" said in different settings (for example, in anger, in disbelief, in fear, and in defiance.). Although the same word is used, the colorations of the voice communicate the very diverse meanings and emotions.

³⁵ Lance Morrow, "The Madness of Crowds," *Time* (August 9, 1999), p. 64.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See Doug van Pelt, "Moshing for the Master?," *Contemporary Christian Music* (February 1989), pp. 20,21.

³⁸ *Contemporary Christian Music* (April 1989), p. 4.

³⁹ See, for example, Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in*

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Scripture (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), pp. 58-59; and Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Bruno Nettl, "The Role of Music in Culture: Iran, a Recently Developed Nation," in *Contemporary Music and Music Cultures* by Charles Hamm, Bruno Nettl, and Ronald Byrnside (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), pp. 98, 99; and Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 159, 165.

⁴¹ Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi, "Muwashshah: A Vocal Form in Islamic Culture," *Ethnomusicology* 19 (January 1975) :1; and Donna Marie Wulff, "On Practicing Religiously: Music as Sacred in India," in *Sacred Sound: Music in Religious Thought and Practice*, ed., Joyce Irwin, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Studies*, vol. 50 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), p. 149.

⁴² Robert L. Scranton, *Aesthetic Aspects of Ancient Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 28.

⁴³ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 42.

⁴⁴ This aphorism was developed during the writing of the author's doctoral dissertation. It is not really a new idea. It is simply a rewording of the Biblical principle from Proverbs 23:7: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (KJV), and Luke 6:45: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (KJV).

⁴⁵ J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *African Gods and Music* (Legon, Ghana: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1970), pp. 11, 12.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Bruno Bettelheim quoted in Robert L. Scranton, *Aesthetic Aspects of Ancient Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 2; Erik Routley, *The Church and Music*, rev. ed. (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company, 1950), p. 14; Ravi Shankar quoted in Donna Marie Wulff, "On Practicing Religiously: Music as Sacred in India," p. 153; Komla Amoaku, "Towards a Definition of Traditional African Music," in *More Than Drumming*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 37; Francesco Gabrieli, "Literary Tendencies" in *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, ed. Gustave E. von Grunebaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 87.

⁴⁷ Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi, "What Makes 'Religious Music' Religious?" in *Sacred Sound: Music in Religious Thought and Practice*, ed. Joyce Irwin, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Studies*, vol. 50 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), p. 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The implications of this transcendent/immanent contrast are profound for the Christian setting and are discussed in detail in the writer's doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style: An Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context* (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich., 1993), pp. 218-270.

⁵⁰ Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, "What Makes 'Religious Music' Religious?" p. 27.

⁵¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 40.

⁵² See, for example, Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, p. 42; and Nick Mattiske, "What Would Jesus Think of Today's Music?" *The Edge*, Issue 16 (Record Supplement, March 4, 2000), p. 5.

⁵³ Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*, trans. Lord Northbourne (London: Perennial Books, 1967), p. 7.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

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⁸⁸ Risieri Frondizi, *What Is Value? An Introduction to Axiology*, 2nd ed. (La Salle, 111.: Open Court Publishing, 1971), p. 29.

Chapter 29

The Power of Music

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As an art form, music is unique. It is made up of a variety of ingredients such as rhythm, harmony, texture, and melody. Depending upon the presence and balance of these and other related components, music can be soothing or invigorating, ennobling or vulgarizing, philosophical or orgiastic. Music can be the source of the richest blessings or an adjunct of rebellion and sinful behavior.

This is because, on a very basic level, music influences our feelings and emotions.

Even in Bible times, physicians were aware of the power of musical stimuli. Those who attempted to treat King Saul's despondency recommended music to help restore his emotional balance.

To hear music is to respond to it. It enters our being on what is called the subverbal level. So when we are in the presence of music we are powerless to keep it from having an impact, and as we listen to it we are having an emotional experience. Physiological changes take place within our bodies, producing glandular secretions that can modify our emotions and feelings. Psychologists call it an "affective response."

The Body's Response to Music

The body's response to music can influence behavior in two ways. The emotional changes the music prompts may begin to develop certain thought patterns in us; since thoughts inspire actions, music can modify our behavior. But music may also bypass thought and affect our behavior directly, as may be seen on a simple level by anyone who has ever found his toe tapping to music he was not even consciously aware of hearing.

Music can produce within the body a number of physical phenomena that are typical of the changes that occur during other kinds of emotional episodes. There can be changes in respiration, blood distribution within the

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body, and variations in the blood sugar levels. Under the influence of music, pupillary reflexes change, brain-wave patterns are modified, and metabolism is affected. As these changes take place within the body a person may be stimulated or sedated, depending upon the nature of music he is responding to.¹

Music psychologists report that similar musical experiences produce nearly parallel moods or emotional changes in different people within a given culture. Emotional reactions to music do not appear to be closely related to intelligence, musical aptitude, musical education, or age level above the sixth grade.²

Ancient Insight

Long before the Christian era thoughtful people recognized the influence of music on society. A Confucian scholar wrote, "Music is intended to arouse man to turn back from wickedness and evil. For changing the mores and improving the customs there is nothing better than music."³ The Greek philosopher Plato recommended that the ideal state should promote music that had an influence for good, and that music with an evil influence ought to be outlawed. The use of music in mystic rites contributed to the Greek doctrine of *Ethos*, giving music an unparalleled function in the molding of character.⁴

The Greeks believed certain musical modes or scales to be manly and strong, and others to promote emotions of ecstasy and passion. Some modes were thought to induce lasciviousness and still others sadness and mournful thoughts. More recently, Martin Luther warned against the wrong use of music and was well aware that Satan uses this divine gift for his own devilish purposes.

The anthropologist Alan P. Merriman states that all cultures have music as a vehicle for the expression of those ideas and emotions not revealed in other ordinary types of disclosures. Their musical communications are involved with both special and general feelings such as exaltation, grief, longing or passion, joy in motion, sexual excitement, and a variety of other emotions as well.⁵

Since music releases certain kinds of feelings or emotions, and since these feelings affect behavior, is it not important to exercise considerable care in the selection of the music to which we listen? The most important criterion that the Christian can employ in making such a choice is: *How does this music affect me?* What does it do to my emotional balance? Do the music and the words suggest only ideas that are wholesome and actions that are Christlike? If we want to "guard well the avenues of the soul,"⁶ we must be watchful on both counts. Beautiful music does not nullify the effects of improper words, nor do

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fine sentiments (even Christian ones) undo the power of the wrong kind of music to affect us.

Music and Emotion

Psychologist Lewis Thorpe lists three general classes of emotions: the mild, upbuilding emotions, the strong, emergency emotions, and the emotions of sex, including lust.⁷

Martial music appeals to the strong, emergency kind of emotions, and can be a stimulating experience in a military parade, for example. When one hears a full and vibrant orchestral performance of an allegro movement of one of Beethoven's symphonies, the joyful and upbuilding emotions are affected. The performance of Handel's "Halleluiah Chorus" or of a sacred anthem gives the performers and the listeners an emotional experience that is desirable and uplifting.

In the third category, there are certainly appropriate love songs that stimulate the love emotions in a proper way without vulgar expressions that are so much a part of modern popular music. But an appeal to the sexual emotions, including lust, is surely very much in evidence in performances of many kinds of jazz and rock. Such compositions as "Satisfaction," "Let's Spend the Night Together," or "Lay Lady Lay," as well as many other less extreme examples, can incite lustful emotions and suggest improper thoughts and sinful actions.

Jazz, rock, and their variants are the music that is used almost exclusively in nightclubs, taverns, discotheques, houses of prostitution, and striptease joints. Why? Simply because these kinds of music are more in harmony with the objectives of these places than compositions by Mozart, Debussy, Stockhausen, or Varese would be. The kind of music used in these establishments helps to attract customers by taking advantage of their natural enjoyment of musical sounds, and the qualities of the music itself tend to reduce the inhibitions of the customers as well as of the entertainers.

When we consider the power of music to affect us physically and emotionally, and to deliver suggestions to us both through the music and the lyrics, how particular we should be about what we choose to listen to! The message of the music will register, not only in our minds, but in our very bodies. Clearly, "I like it" is not enough justification for the Christian to listen to any particular kind of music. We must ask, "What is this music designed to do to me—what is its intended effect?" and be prepared to answer honestly and without special pleading.

Music has a tremendous power, not only for evil, but also for good. For

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instance, the sincere message of a simple hymn, when sung at the appropriate time, can have a tremendous appeal to those with whom the Spirit of God is working. Many evangelists appropriately use a musical selection as the high point of their appeal for decisions for Christ. The musical medium can be used effectively by those who are trying to lead others to Him. Ellen White confirms this: "Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God."⁸ This is the highest use of music, and the primary purpose for which the musical gift was given to mankind.

Dangers of Religious Music

But even religious music is not without its dangers. Not long ago, at the invitation of one of my non-Adventist music students, I visited a local Pentecostal church and was able to witness a use of Gospel music that was totally out of harmony with normal standards of worship. In the front of the church, which seated no more than 250 worshippers, were enough drums, synthesizers, amplifiers, and loudspeakers to fill a room many times that size with sound at a decibel level that would even then be decidedly uncomfortable.

At the beginning of the worship service, the performance of standard Gospel hymns began at a relatively soft level, at a moderate tempo and very little use of the drums. However, the musicians gradually abandoned the *pianissimo* in favor of the *forte* and then *fortissimo* with all twelve speakers at maximum volume level. The percussion instruments, at high volume and with complex rhythms, were leading out in a drastic change in the conduct of those who had come to this evening worship service.

As tempo and sound level increased, the congregation began to stir in the pews and soon were standing and raising their hands. As the music progressed from simple melodies and rhythms to higher volume levels and rhythmic complexities, many in the congregation (of primarily Anglo-Saxon heritage) began to dance in the aisles and chancel of the little church.

The dancing was not with another person, but individual parishioners would jump and whirl, often shaking violently as they fell to the floor—with screams of ecstasy. As the service was at its height of excitement, the musicians very gradually lowered the volume while simplifying and softening the beat. Gradually, the physical manifestations moderated, and within a few moments all were back in their pews singing softly and occasionally raising one or both hands while recuperating from the strenuous exercises they had just experienced.

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This congregation had been led through this entire thirty-minute experience by the influence of music—music that led them in tiny increments of excitement by means of skillfully played instruments. During the zenith of the service, a young man seated behind me asked me, "Are you saved?" He was apparently puzzled by my lack of participation.

I asked a high school-age girl, "What does it feel like to be writhing on the floor with people praying over you?" "It is the most ecstatic and glorious experience you can imagine," she replied. However, if it had not been for the musical excesses, these "high" experiences would not have taken place. I did not sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church that evening; I felt instead that the congregation had been violated by the musicians.

An Adventist Example

Most Seventh-day Adventists are acquainted with the controversy over music that arose as a result of the camp meeting held in Muncie, Indiana in September of 1900.⁹ Elder S.N. Haskell attended this meeting as a representative of the General Conference. It was not an insignificant gathering. The Muncie *Daily Herald* of September 13 noted that an estimated 3,500 people were present at some of the meetings.

S.N. Haskell wrote to Ellen White reporting that musical instruments were used to such an excess that "everything is drowned but simply the noise of the instruments. It is a mixture of truth and error, with much excitement and music."¹⁰

A layman who attended the camp meeting wrote that "they worked themselves up to a high pitch of excitement by the use of musical instruments, such as: trumpets, flutes, stringed instruments, tambourines, an organ, and a big bass drum."¹¹ His list more or less coincides with the listing given to Ellen White by S.N. Haskell.¹² Others reported hysterical manifestations such as falling on the ground, and violent shaking of the entire body.

The Muncie *Daily Star* reported in detail on many of the events at the camp meeting. When a reporter asked the conference president about dissension caused by the musical instruments, he argued that they used only those instruments mentioned in the Bible. However, much of the criticism had to do not with the presence of the instruments, but with the manner in which they were used.

Ellen White addressed the issue. "The things you have described as taking place in Indiana, the Lord has shown me would take place just before the close of probation. Every uncouth thing will be demonstrated. There will be shout-

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ing, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit." Several paragraphs later she added,

"No encouragement should be given to this kind of worship. The same kind of influence came in after the passing of the time in 1844. The same kind of representations were made. Men became excited, and were worked by a power thought to be the power of God."¹³

Her counsel alerts the concerned Christian to the dangers that are inherent in the thoughtless or unwise use of even religious music—dangers to which Seventh-day Adventists are not immune. Is it possible that some with the talent of musical leadership in our churches are tending in that direction? Today witnessing groups often use music as the primary means of communication; those in charge of some Sabbath worship services seem to be similarly motivated. It is very possible that the popularity of this trend rests much more on the type of music employed and the style in which it is performed than on the spiritual message inherent in the words.

The clapping of the hands in rhythm to the strong beat of the music is often followed by other responses to the volume and rhythm until the entire body is affected by the musical stimulation.

This kind of behavior is rampant in many non-Adventist congregations, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church could easily become similarly involved. However, these actions are neither Biblical nor in harmony with the thoughts presented by Ellen White on the use of music in worship. She said about those who tended to overuse music in their worship services, "Their religion seems to be more of the nature of a stimulus rather than an abiding faith in Christ."¹⁴ Perhaps we could apply the advice given in Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God."

No human being knows more about the influence of music on behavior than does Satan. He was the leader of music in Heaven, and he is very much aware of its influence. We know for a certainty that he has perverted every gift that God has given us—and this perversion includes not only secular music but also music for the church. Surely he has an interest in infiltrating our worship services with false doctrine and with the wrong kind of music. No one is better equipped than is he to know how to use music to detract from a true worship experience.

The conditions found in ancient Israel must not be repeated in our time. Speaking to His people through the prophet Amos, the Lord commanded the Israelites, "Take thou away from Me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear

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the melody of thy viols" (Amos 5:23).

We must take very seriously the need to be discriminating in our choices of both secular and sacred music. Each kind of music can be either a blessing or a curse depending upon personal choices.

In all her many writings, Mrs. White refrained from opposing either kind of music as such. Instead, she sought to have music used wisely and in proper balance. And she repeatedly taught that music can be used to help gather souls to Christ; for singing especially, when used along with Bible reading and prayer, can touch the hearts of unbelievers.

Endnotes

¹ Dorothy M. Schullian and Max Schoen, *Music and Medicine* (Abelard-Schuman), p. 266.

² Robert W. Lundin, *An Objective Psychology of Music* (Ronald Press), p. 260.

³ Wingsit Chan et al., compilers, *The Great Asian Religions* (Macmillan), p. 130.

⁴ Gretchen L. Finney, *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature: 1580-1650* (Rutgers University Press), p. 52.

⁵ Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Northwestern University Press), p. 220.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 518.

⁷ Lewis P. Thorpe, *Psychological Foundations of Personality* (McGraw-Hill), p. 251.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 293.

⁹ A full account of this experience can be found in Paul E. Hamel, *Ellen White and Music* (Review and Herald). See also J. David Newman, "Ellen White and Musical Instruments," *Adventist Review*, November 1, 1990, p. 16.

¹⁰ S.N. Haskell to Ellen White, September 25, 1900.

¹¹ Burton Wade to A.L. White, January 12, 1962.

¹² Haskell to White.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, pp. 36, 37.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 502.

Chapter 30

Music and the Ten Commandments

By **Eurydice V. Osterman, DMA**

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This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius." For those old enough to remember, these words appeared in a hit song recorded in the late 1960s by a group called the Fifth Dimension. Perhaps the message of the song was a subtle announcement that the stage had been set for events leading to the "new world order" that was just over the horizon.

Malachi Martin, a former Jesuit and professor at the Vatican's Pontifical Biblical Institute and an expert on the Catholic Church, says that the new world order involves a plan to unite the world and transcend all barriers that now separate cultures and religions. It is about who will establish and control the first one-world system of government and control every individual and community, all money, trade, commerce, education, and emblems of national identity. Martin adds that Pope John Paul II "insists that men have no reliable hope of creating a viable geopolitical system unless it is on the basis of Roman Catholic Christianity."

On the other hand, George Herbert Walker Bush when President of the United States felt differently. In his State of the Union address on February 18, 1991, President Bush indicated that a unified world order could be established only by the United States.

On the surface, the quest for the new world order may appear to be a contest among nations. According to the Bible, however, the hidden agenda is really a plan devised by Satan that will be implemented through an alliance of the Catholic (or "universal") Church and the United States of America. I contend that music (the universal language) will be one of the main tools of this global alliance.

Music and the New Ecumenism

One way of implementing the new world order that is currently under way is ecumenism, the uniting of religions by setting aside theological and ide-

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ological differences and emphasizing elements held in common. Today's religious music is "generic"; in harmony with the usual pattern of ecumenicity, it chooses not to define the religious and theological beliefs to which it refers. Instead, it focuses on general themes, such as praise to God, the love and grace of God, unity, and so on.

Further, as innocent as they may appear, songs such as "Hail, Holy Queen, Enthroned Above" and "Never a Dying Soul," and others that also speak of being in Heaven with loved ones, foster the teachings of spiritualism, with its perpetuation of the lie, "Thou shalt not surely die."

As Seventh-day Adventists we have been affected by ecumenism in that some of us have begun to adopt seemingly innocent customs and terminology from other denominations. Yet we are warned by Ellen G. White that "when Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, . . . then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan, and that the end is near" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 451).

The beat and feel of today's popular music may be called "unicultural," in that it has transcended cultural barriers. While traveling in Europe, I rode in a taxi to the train station in Prague, Czech Republic. The driver, who could not speak English, seemed to enjoy a song by Michael Jackson being played on the radio. Although the driver didn't understand the words, he did understand the music. As I have traveled from country to country, not only in Europe but in other continents as well, I have observed that commercial music has indeed broken down many barriers and seems to have made the world smaller. It sounds the same everywhere.

The origin of the new world order can be traced back to the war in Heaven between Christ and Lucifer (see Revelation 12:7, 9, 17). What could possibly have been the cause of this controversy? Why would Lucifer, the most exalted of the angels, seek to challenge God? Music must have been one of the reasons.

When God created the heavens and the earth, He created two special *musical* beings, Lucifer, the crowning act of Creation in Heaven, and Adam, the crowning act of Creation on Earth. Lucifer was apparently able to harmonize with himself vocally and may have been created with his own innate drums. Ezekiel 28:13, KJV refers to his "pipes" (plural for wind instruments) and also to his "tabrets" (percussion instruments). We may conclude that he fully understood music, including its rhythmic aspects and the effect rhythm and beat can have on people.

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When God created humans, although He did not make them as elaborate as Lucifer, we know that He wrote music into the very fiber of their humanity. Being the consummate musician that he is, Lucifer (it is easy to suppose) became incensed when God created new musical beings without consulting him! For this reason, among others, he waged war in Heaven and ever since has sought to mock God and malign His character.

Music and the Decalogue

God specifically says that His commandments, which represent the essence of His character, are to be obeyed, that they should be in our thoughts at all times—and that we should teach them diligently to our children, talking about them at home, in the way, at bedtime and when we get up (see Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Satan, however, has invented numerous devices to make the commandments null and void. Through the medium of music he has very skillfully and very subtly programmed those who are not on guard to accomplish his goal without their realizing it.

The principle behind the first commandment, "**Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,**" is that of total commitment to God. For those who spend hours listening to music while neglecting personal prayer and Bible study, has not music become their personal god? "Music has occupied the hours which should have been devoted to prayer. Music is the idol which many professed Sabbathkeeping Christians worship. Satan has no objection to music if he can make that a channel through which to gain access to the minds of the youth" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 585, 586).

"Whatever we cherish that tends to lessen our love for God or to interfere with the service due Him, of that do we make a god" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305).

The second commandment deals with idolatry. "**Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.**" Satan entices us to bow down and worship him, not only through his music but also through idolizing the artists who perform it, many of whom are not Christians or, worse, some of whom are homosexual, in spite of the fact that they sing about Jesus. Purchasing their music and putting their pictures on the wall and wearing their images on clothing condone and support their sinful lifestyles. "Though in a different form, idolatry exists in the Christian world today as verily as it existed among ancient Israel" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 511).

"The attempt to represent the Eternal One by material objects would

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lower man's conception of God. The mind, turned away from the infinite perfection of Jehovah, would be attracted to the creature rather than to the Creator. And as his conceptions of God were lowered, so would man become degraded." "Idolatry being spiritual adultery, the displeasure of God against it is fitly called jealousy" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 306).

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." This commandment deals with mixing the holy with the profane. It applies not only to using God's name in profanity, but also to verbalizing God's name in music that does not glorify His name. Before the late 1960s it was easy to distinguish sacred from secular music; today it is often difficult to do so, because so much religious music has become commercialized.

Many people are deluded into believing that if the music is classified as "religious," it is all right to listen to it or perform it. They do not realize that not all religious music is good music. We must be ever mindful that for every original Satan has his counterfeit. As a matter of fact, although we sometimes use the terms "Christian" and "religious" interchangeably, there can be a vast difference between the two. Christian music is spiritual, elevating, refining, and appeals to both the intellect and the emotions. It focuses attention on God. It fosters commitment to duty and obedience to God's commandments. "Religious" as applied to music is a generic term that includes commercial products that are primarily concerned with sales, not souls. It is very often shallow and superficial, tending to minimize one's responsibility to obey God's requirements. Whereas Christian music glorifies God and focuses on Him, commercial religious music all too often tends to glorify the performer.

Richard Harrington, a correspondent for the *Washington Post*, says that the religious record industry has come to recognize the "untapped audiences" for "positive pop" and is capitalizing on its opportunity to make big sales by fusing current popular sounds with religious words. Harrington refers to a statement by John Styll, editor of the *Contemporary Christian Music Magazine*, which says that "the record companies realize they are dealing with a commercial product and they have to consider the entertainment factor of the record. The message may be great, but unless the framework is well executed, people are not going to listen to it."² God has not weakened His commandments for the purpose of making Christianity more marketable! The Gospel must be offered free from all adulteration. "By the frequent and thoughtless repetition of His name, we dishonor Him.... All should meditate upon His majesty, His purity and holiness, that the heart may be impressed with a sense of His exalted character; and His holy name should be uttered with reverence and solemnity" (*Patriarchs and*

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Prophets, pp. 306, 307).

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy...." The Sabbath is the issue over which we will either receive the mark of the beast or the seal of God, and the way in which we observe it is a test of our allegiance to God. By observing the seventh day as a day of worship we acknowledge God as Creator of the universe and recognize that He is worthy of our praise and adoration.

When it comes to worship, the enemy makes it very difficult for us to focus our attention on God by creating distractions. There are some who tend to base their Sabbath "blessing" on whoever sings, plays, or speaks. Their expectations appear to have been created in an environment of entertainment. In many cases the music that worshippers enjoy is nothing more than an aural stimulant that is mistaken for the working of the Holy Spirit. Is it any wonder that over the years many congregations have been transformed into *audiences*? "Satan determined, if possible, to intermingle with religious services his evil influences. Let there be no theatrical display, for this will not help to strengthen belief in the Word of God. Rather, it will divert attention to the human instrument" (*This Day With God*, p. 359).

"Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." This is the one commandment containing a promise of longevity, because God knew that, if left unchecked, disrespect for parents leads to disrespect for civil authority and ultimately to disrespect for God. In many homes music is a cause of rebellion and disrespect for parents. Once, when speaking with a parent, I noticed a gash on his forehead. He explained that his son had struck him during an argument over the type of music he was listening to. Arguments between parents and children over music are all too common. "He who rejects the rightful authority of his parents is rejecting the authority of God.... It [the fifth commandment] also enjoins respect for ministers and rulers and for all others to whom God has delegated authority" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 308).

"Thou shalt not kill." The body is the "temple of God" (see 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Satan uses his music in an attempt to defile and ultimately destroy the body as God's temple. Today's music contains elements (lyrics, beat, volume, etc.) that are not only harmful to the physical body but also have potential for destroying the spiritual temple. "The spirit of hatred and revenge [such as characterizes much of today's pop music], or the indulgence of any passion that leads to injurious acts toward others, or causes us even to wish them harm;... are, to a greater or less degree, violations of the sixth commandment" (*ibid.*, p. 308).

"Thou shalt not commit adultery." Today, the number one selling agent

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is sex. Sex is used to sell cars, clothes, toothpaste, and yes, even religious music. If you pick up any newspaper or magazine or listen to any news report or television show, the basic theme is a reflection of what is in the lyrics of most of today's popular music—sex. Society is literally acting out what it constantly feeds upon, and is subliminally being trained to break down its moral values through music. "This commandment forbids not only acts of impurity, but sensual thoughts and desires, or any practice that tends to excite them. Purity is demanded not only in the outward life, but in the secret intents and emotions of the heart" (ibid.).

"Thou shalt not steal." There are those who will not pay an honest tithe, but yet will pay whatever the cost to attend a concert or to purchase the latest CD, tape, poster, or T-shirt of an admired artist. By spending most of our free time and means on music we not only rob God of His time with us but also of the means He has given us for spreading the Gospel. "Both public and private sins are included in this prohibition [against stealing]" (ibid.).

"Thou shalt not bear false witness." To say that a song is "sacred" when in fact the nuances of the music, the beat, and even some of the lyrics incite sensuality, is indeed bearing false witness. This is a common occurrence in "crossover" songs of religious pop music. Take for instance phrases like "No one can love me like You do," "I need Your love," and "You bring Your love to keep me warm." Phrases like these reduce God's pure and holy *agape* love to human eroticism. If the lyrics and the character of the music do not reflect the principles of Christianity, then they indeed bear false witness. "An intention to deceive is what constitutes falsehood. . . . Every hint or insinuation calculated to convey an erroneous or exaggerated impression, even the statement of facts in such a manner as to mislead, is falsehood" (ibid.).

"Thou shalt not covet." Satan wants us to take our eyes off Jesus by distracting us with aspirations of wealth and fame while he stealthily seeks to capture our souls. The question is whether our choice of music lessens our desire to be like Christ and to represent Him in our dress, diet, associates, and lifestyle. "The tenth commandment strikes at the very root of all sins, prohibiting the selfish desire, from which springs the sinful act" (ibid.).

Summary

What role does your choice of music play in the scenario of the new world order? Are you bowing to the beast unawares? When Christ returns to claim His "peculiar" people, what role will your choice of music have played in the salvation of your soul?

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Music being the only art that we know we will take from earth to Heaven, God has not left us in the dark about it. He has given us His Word, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Prophecy—and even the Ten Commandments—to guide us in making decisions that will impact our eternal destiny. The choice is ours.

Endnotes

¹ Malachi Martin, *The Keys of This Blood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 492.

² Richard Harrington, "Christian Music Has Big Business Message," *Huntsville Times*, December 10, 1980, p. 1C.

Slightly adapted from the Introduction to Eurydice V. Osterman, *What God Says About Music* (Huntsville, Ala.: AWSAHM Music, Inc., 1998). Used by permission.

Chapter 31

The Language of Praise: What the Bible Says About Music

By Wolfgang H.M. Stefani, PhD

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Introduction

Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, praise His name;
proclaim His salvation day after day.
Declare His glory among the nations,
His marvelous deeds among the peoples.

For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
He is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before Him;
strength and glory are in His sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name;
bring an offering and come into His courts.
Worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness;
tremble before Him, all the earth.

—*Psalm 96:1-9*

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One of the most prevalent and positive injunctions of Scripture is to "*Praise the Lord!*" This is evident in the Scripture passage above (see vv. 2, 4) and the Psalms and other Biblical books are replete with further examples. However, in reading the Scriptural references about praise, something becomes very apparent. For example, in Psalm 33:1, the inspired cantor writes:

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise Him.

The Hebrew parallelism here suggests that Bible writers considered singing and music to be synonymous with praise. In fact, music could be termed the "language of praise."

In many ways music is singularly suited for this role. The combination of cognitive and affective communication (words and music) has long been recognized as a powerful and complete means of expression. The use of this highly effective form of communication on significant occasions in Bible times confirms this.

For example, music and singing, rather than mere prose or even stand-alone poetry, was the chosen language of praise used by angels to greet God's great creative work (see Job 38:1).

Similarly, Miriam and Moses used it to celebrate the triumph over the Egyptians at the Red Sea (see Exodus 15:1-21). David chose this unique form of expression to convey his personal expressions of gratitude, hope, and confidence in God in the Psalms, and the children used it to express their joyful hallelujahs as Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:16). Apparently, it will flood Heaven as the redeemed of all ages gather on the sea of glass before the throne of God (Isaiah 35:10). The prophet declares that "they will enter Zion with singing," and John the Revelator speaks of them singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (see Revelation 15:3).

More fascinating still, music is God's chosen form of expression to communicate His joy in us. "The *Lord* your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17). No wonder we share a love and appreciation for music, and are touched by its power along with other created beings.

While it is relatively easy to establish that music is the language of praise in Scripture, is it axiomatic that all music is "praise"?

How is the language of praise defined? Is it determined by whatever is popularly accepted in a culture in any given generation? Or is it simply sponta-

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neous—an instinctive outburst that every worshipper invents for him/herself? What do Bible writers really mean when they direct us to "praise the Lord"?

A study of Scripture sheds some light on these questions. For example, Psalm 96:9 commands us to "worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness," suggesting that both the mode of approach and the attitude of the worshipper ought to derive from the holiness of God.

Psalm 89:5-8, 14, 15 begins by describing the worship ethos in Heaven and then makes a telling observation about those who seek to worship the Lord. Verse 15 says: "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim You, who walk in the light of Your presence, *O Lord*." Interestingly, the psalmist speaks of people who have "learned" to acclaim God (NIV and NEB), or who "know the joyful sound" (KJV and RSV).

Could it be that the language of praise appropriate for the God of Heaven must actually be learned? Is it something His children come to know? If so, the suggestion seems to be that it is not merely an instinctive outburst, although God may well accept such in the spirit in which it is given. Maybe God has something in mind that is different from what we are generally accustomed to—something new (see Psalm 96:1) that He longs to teach us and that is beyond what comes naturally to sinful mortals.

The Connection Between Music and Religion

Many meanings are ascribed to the term "praise" in Scripture, including giving thanks, assigning glory and honor, extolling, celebrating, commending, and rejoicing over. These meanings certainly explain why praise is intimately allied to worship, though not exclusively to the worship of Jehovah. On the contrary, the language of praise is connected with religious worship in all cultures. As one ethnomusicologist observes:

This strong connection of music with religion draws us to the conclusion that one of the main functions of music for man is communication with the supernatural; . . . we may readily believe that at its beginning, [music] was somehow connected with religion; we can see this tradition carried on in all known cultures, simple and complex, in the world today.³

In other words, music is the language of praise and communication with the supernatural in all religions the world over. Describing this phenomenon in Africa, J.H. Kwabena Nketia notes:

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. . . One of the attributes of the gods is that they are music-loving gods. The most common situation in which they manifest themselves is the musical situation in which music which affects them is performed.... They are known to object to the singing of particular songs or to show displeasure when performance is lacking in animation or vigor....

[This has resulted] in the creation of music types appropriate for the worship of each god or pantheon of gods, and in the building up of a repertoire of songs and dances through which they can be reached. Music "effective" with one god may not be so with another god even in the same locality.³

Obviously, even in non-Christian religions, not all music is automatically considered legitimate "praise." (The Bible intimates this as well in Amos 5:23). However, Nketia is raising an even more significant point. He asserts that in Africa certain music types are specifically created, even tailored, for the worship of particular deities. A study of world religions reveals similar trends in all faiths. A sort of "rule of thumb" is at work here, a principle that is true across the board of religious music. It can be expressed thus:

That which rules *the HEART*, forms the *ART*.

In all cultures the development of the language of praise is governed by the concept of whom or what is worshipped. Its picture of God controls a religion's language of praise. Nketia substantiates this further by observing that in Africa the selections of music and the control of forms and instruments is strictly in accordance with the conceptualization of the gods or the individual focus of worship.⁴ Similar observations could be cited in other cultural settings, both East and West.

It is not surprising then that when God brought the Israelites out of bondage He set up a distinctive worship and music program among His people. He directed them to make a sanctuary and set up services according to the specific pattern given to Moses (Exodus 25:8, 9). Clearly, Israel's worship was intended to reflect the worship carried on in Heaven itself (Hebrews 8:5). This is quite clear in Jehovah's instruction given through Moses. After commanding Israel to destroy every last vestige of pagan worship in the Promised Land. Moses added: "You must not worship the *Lord* your God in their way" (Deuteronomy 12:4). As if to emphasize the point, Deuteronomy 12:30, 31

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repeats and amplifies the idea:

... [B]e careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.' You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the *Lord* hates. [Notice a similar stipulation in Leviticus 18:3.]

These directives must have included music, because when Israel was settled in the land God instructed David and several prophets to set up a model for the language of praise in conjunction with temple worship in Jerusalem. This is evident from 2 Chronicles 29:25, 26:

He stationed the Levites in the Temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps, and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the *Lord* through His prophets. So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets.

The Biblical Language of Praise

God established a model for the language of praise. But what were its elements? How did it function? What was the prophetic instruction? The following discussion offers some suggestions:

1. *Who were the musicians?* According to 1 Chronicles 23:2-5 the musicians were all Levites. (The families and individuals are listed in 1 Chronicles 6:3-47 and 25:1-31.) For twenty-first century Western readers this immediately raises a question: Why were all the sanctuary musicians chosen from the tribe of Levi? Were they the only musically gifted ones in Israel? If not, why weren't others with musical talent appointed to serve? Apparently God took into account factors other than obvious musical aptitude.

First, it seems that although God enjoys distributing talent, He valued loyalty above giftedness among those who would develop the language of praise. God can gift anyone, but He can't compel loyalty. Allegiance is an individual's heart response. Sadly, through the stream of history some musicians and artistically creative people have not always made loyalty to God a priority. There are those who have chosen to be part of a rebel element, including the covering cherub, Lucifer. Perhaps God was, and still is, trying to tell us that loyalty to Him is of paramount importance among the musically creative in

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His family.

Second, there is an intrinsic reason for God's choice of the Levites. If it is true that "that which rules the heart forms the art," then naturally God wanted those most closely in touch with Him to develop His nation's language of praise. In music, as in all other endeavors, the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10).

In the wilderness, the other eleven tribes had lapsed into thinking of God as a golden calf, incorporating Egyptian music and modes of expression into the worship of Jehovah. What God needed most when He wanted to establish true worship forms were people who really knew Him as He was, not as they would like to conceive of or imagine Him. Psalm 50:21 and Isaiah 55: 8,9 make it clear that humanity is only too prone to create God in its own image. This may, in part, explain why the psalmist admonishes us to worship God "in the splendor of His holiness" (Psalm 96:9).

Obviously, developing the language of praise is not merely a matter of personal taste. It is not simply a matter of musicians musing: "Hmm, I think this chord or that rhythm, or this melody or that instrument is cool—let's use it!" The Bible makes plain that the natural heart isn't automatically attracted to the things of God. Writing specifically about music, Ellen White corroborates this:

Young persons assemble to sing and, although professed Christians, frequently dishonor God and their faith by their frivolous conversation and their choice of music. *Sacred music is not congenial to their taste.* (Emphasis supplied.)⁵

Could it be that appreciation of sacred music is, after all, an acquired taste? As the end time approaches and evidences of degeneration become increasingly apparent, neither personal taste nor the surrounding musical culture can safely serve as the sole reference point for determining what ought to be done in the sacred context.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, intuitively sensed this in his age. He consciously chose musicians who were also theologically trained and ministers who were musically trained to lead out in his fledgling movement. Frequently they cooperated in team ministries. Luther, for example, worked with Johann Walther, and Paul Gerhardt joined with Johann Cruger to develop the language of praise in their respective parishes. Revealing his own vision and concerns, Luther writes:

It is necessary indeed that music be taught in the schools. A teacher

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must be able to sing; otherwise I will not as much as look at him. Also, we should not ordain young men into the ministry unless they have become well acquainted with music in the schools.⁶

Clearly, Luther attached considerable significance to music. He sensed its power and wanted to see it make a positive contribution, especially among the young who were still developing their habits and tastes. In 1524, in the preface to his *Geistliches Gesangbuchlein*, Luther went on to say:

The music is arranged in four parts. I desire this particularly in the interest of the young people, who should and must receive an education in music as in the other arts if we are to wean them away from carnal and lascivious songs and interest them in what is good and wholesome. Only thus will they learn, as they should, to love and appreciate what is intrinsically good.⁷

Obviously the underlying issues and concerns here are not new. They merely reflect what is also evident in the Bible record.

But, how do they apply today? Obviously, the Levitical tradition is no longer germane. So, do these ideas have any relevance for the twenty-first century? Certainly they do. The crucial point is still that musicians are challenged to ensure that their personal walk with God is a genuine heart experience based on a deep knowledge of the Scriptures, so that what they create arises from a reliable substratum. It was never more true than today that:

Man will rise no higher than his conceptions of truth, purity, and holiness. If the mind is never exalted above the level of humanity, if it is not uplifted by faith to contemplate infinite wisdom and love, the man will be constantly sinking lower and lower. The worshippers of false gods clothed their deities with human attributes and passions, and thus their standard of character was degraded to the likeness of sinful humanity. They were defiled in consequence.⁸

These comments speak eloquently about the development of sacred music as much as other aspects of worship. Clearly, God valued the development of this special language of praise at His Temple so much that He designated it a full-time job (1 Chronicles 9:33) supported by tithe. Today many would consider this unaffordable, even unnecessary. But perhaps it is instructive that God did not think this way.

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2. *What type of music did they develop?* If only we knew more! (Wouldn't it be wonderful if some archeologist could unearth a CD somewhere!) However, we do know some things:

(a) The evidence suggests that accompanied vocal music was given priority in Israelite worship. This is not to say that independent instrumental music had no place, however, emphasis was placed on the combination of word and music. As noted earlier, this is evident throughout the book of Psalms and various other songs, such as the song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), the psalm of thanks (1 Chronicles 16), and the new song recorded in Revelation 5:9, ff. Music in Israelite worship tended toward logocentric (word-centered) communication, where the word was considered paramount and the music's role was to support and facilitate its expression. Music was the affective vehicle to transmit a cognitive message.

Certain instruments were regularly utilized in the worship setting. While Israel used a variety of instruments in everyday life, for worship they used mainly harps, lyres, and cymbals (see 1 Chronicles 25:6, 7; cf. 15:16). In fact, on some occasions only strings are mentioned (see Psalms 92:3; 33:2; 108:2). It seems that King David specifically provided these instruments for worship (see 1 Chronicles 23:5). Two silver trumpets (see Numbers 10:1-3) and rams' horns were also regularly used but probably served a signaling function rather than an overt musical role at regular services.

On special festival occasions, extra trumpets were sometimes used to swell the musical forces, (see 2 Chronicles 5:11-14) probably to deliver sufficient sound to permit the extra thousands of people in and around Jerusalem, removed by distance from the proceedings, to hear and participate in the celebrations.

However, apart from such special occasions, it is clear that harps, lyres, and cymbals were considered particularly appropriate, even set aside for the purpose of praise in worship (2 Chronicles 30:21; 1 Chronicles 16:42). In the context of Biblical culture, this meant that regular worship was accompanied by a predominantly soft string sound, with a few cymbals (probably a single pair used by the conductor) used for signaling purposes. Garen Wolf explains: "String instruments were used extensively to accompanying singing since they would not cover up the voice or the "word of Jehovah" which was being sung."

Notice too, John Kleinig's and A.Z. Idelsohn's explanation of how the cymbals were used:

The cymbals were not used by the precantor to conduct the singing by beating out the rhythm of the song, but rather to announce the

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beginning of the song or a stanza in the song.¹⁰

The percussive instruments were reduced to one cymbal which was not employed in the music proper, but merely to mark pauses and intermissions.¹¹

Consequently, Israel's worship music was generally more soft and subdued than that of the nations around them. This can be deduced from the account in Exodus 32:17-19, where Joshua initially interprets the more aggressive, Egyptian-type sounds of the golden calf worship as the sound of war. Similarly, in Ezekiel 26:13 the prophet proclaims Tyre's noisy music to be part of its demise. Alfred Sendrey's comments confirm this:

The ethnographic, economic, and cultural interrelationships between Phoenicia and Israel might give a support to the assumption that the music of both peoples had many affinities. Such conclusions would be logical, were it not for one serious but completely insurmountable obstacle: the gap between the religious ethics of the two neighboring peoples.

The Phoenician religion was based upon the cult of Ishtar . . . and indulged in the cruel service of Moloch in which human sacrifice had to be offered to the gods....

[At] the great fire-festival of Astarte . . . the orgiastic music of double oboes, cymbals, and drums created among the onlookers such a delirious frenzy that young men emasculated themselves with their own hands.¹²

Clearly, if music was used to accompany such practices, it is not surprising that it was boisterous, loud, and aggressive. It may even have been designed to mask the cries and shouts of emotionally agitated and anguished worshippers. Sendrey's summary of the situation is noteworthy:

The characteristics of musical civilization of the ancient peoples in the Near East . . . [have] . . . a rather homogenous pattern. This music, for the most part, had a sensuous, orgiastic quality. That often turned into mournful lament. . . . Its character was . . . determined by the use of blaring trumpets, or harsh sounding horns, of

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noisy cymbals, and of an arsenal of instruments of percussion, which created a mood and a tone color considered orgiastic by their contemporaries. Sedate and dignified music . . . [with] the noble outlines of its melodic aspect... did not come into its own prior to the Hebrews and Greeks.¹³

The lure of this "orgiastic" or more exciting music may have been one of the reasons why Israel was consistently drawn towards the pagan religions of their neighbors. It is certainly doubtful that alternative theology or the prospect of sacrificing children drew them in. For instance, Ellen White describes the apostasy at Mount Peor as follows:

At Balaam's suggestion a grand festival in honor of their gods was appointed by the king of Moab, and it was secretly arranged that Balaam should induce the Israelites to attend. . . . Beguiled with music and dancing, and allured by the beauty of heathen vestals, they cast off their fealty to Jehovah.¹⁴

On another occasion, speaking of the singularly successful use of music in drawing people into situations they might otherwise avoid, she writes: "A love for music leads the unwary to unite with world lovers in pleasure gatherings where God has forbidden His children to go."¹⁵

Knowing music's power, it is not surprising that God sought to establish a unique music among His chosen people. Incorporating the more noble, dignified, and even meditative qualities into its language of praise, it was intended to testify to the Source of its inspiration. Ellen White wrote: "Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God" (ibid.). God knew that models for this would not readily be found in a world where the strongest impulse is to employ music "to exalt self, instead of using it to glorify God!"¹⁶

No doubt, these considerations have relevance even outside the sacred music arena, but how much more so in the worship context, where God overtly seeks to teach His people the difference between the holy and the common. (See Ezekiel 44:23.) But if we apply these principles to our contemporary situation, are we to conclude that only vocal music, accompanied by strings, is permissible in Christian worship?

Such a conclusion would be a wooden, literalistic response; however, it is instructive to draw principles from our discussion. This is also supported in

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the writings of Ellen White. On a number of occasions she encouraged God's people to emulate in their earthly worship the heavenly language of praise. She writes: "Music forms a part of God's worship in the courts above, and we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs."¹⁷

Now, Ellen White was not a musician and she did not write about music in a technical way. However, there is a remarkable consistency in her descriptions from visions that compare the music of Heaven with that used on Earth.

For example, describing the singing, she repeatedly uses phrases such as "clear, soft tones," "not with harshness and shrillness that offend the ear," "not *loud* singing," but "clear intonation," "correct pronunciation," and "distinct utterance."¹⁸ She asserts that music ought to have "beauty, pathos, and power."¹⁹ She writes that musical instruments should accompany voices in their songs of praise,²⁰ but not compete with and overpower them with noise and confusion.²¹ Good singing is "subdued and melodious" like the music of the birds.²² Dramatic, operatic style is out of place.²³ "Sharp, rasping voices" are likewise inappropriate.²⁴

She repeatedly indicates that voices need to be "modulated, softened, and subdued."²⁵ It seems this was by far her most overwhelming general impression. Heavenly melodies are described as "cheerful, yet solemn," but "not funeral tones."²⁶ Writing to a sensitive choir director, she stresses that music suited to the stage was foreign to the worship context. Forced or strained vocal deliveries that emphasize loudness, along with undignified, unrefined gestures and "acting attitudes," are out of keeping with the worship atmosphere of Heaven. The "softer," "finer," "sweeter," "more silvery strains" are "more like angel music," whereas opposite attributes tend to be driven by self-centered "love of praise."²⁷

Ellen White's writings certainly define a marked contrast between what occurred in the heavenly language of praise and what was typically encountered in the earthly setting of her day. It would seem arrogant to assert that today's situation was markedly better.

It should not be construed, however, that Ellen White's descriptions preclude the use and enjoyment of an awesome, grand, and full-bodied sound at appropriate times. But it is clear that the harsh, strident, and often forced loudness of today's amplified culture, so frequently filled with traces of aggression, competition, and projection of self, is inimical as a style for the worship of God.

It seems self-evident that in the normal course of events on Earth, sinful humanity will tend towards valuing musical ideals that are alien to that which

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Heaven enjoys and fosters. Nowhere will this be more evident than at the end-time. This is highlighted in a more general comment made by Ellen White about preparing for Christ's return:

The Lord has ever required His people to show in all their habits of life a marked difference between themselves and worldlings. . . . In both the Old and the New Testament the Lord has positively enjoined upon His people to be distinct from the world, in spirit, in pursuits, in practice, to be a holy nation, a peculiar people. The east is not farther from the west than are the children of light, in customs, practices, and spirit, from the children of darkness. And this distinction will be more marked, more decided as we near the close of time.²⁸

It would be hard to argue that this statement excluded music! But if we acknowledge that it is included, serious reflection and a clear strategy for approaching the issue is needed if ministers and musicians are to provide authentic leadership in the development of a legitimate twenty-first century language of praise—one that emulates Heaven rather than merely copies what is going on around us.

Unfortunately, today this is a duty that is all too often minimized, even ignored. For many, the language of praise is viewed as a minor, inconsequential, and/or morally neutral area where personal taste and preference holds sway. However, the Scriptural and *Spirit of Prophecy* evidence do not support this line of reasoning.

3. *There are at least two other valuable insights to be gained from the Scriptural record:*

(a) First, doing the right thing without genuine sincerity of heart is an abomination to God. (See Amos 5:21-24.) Even when the Temple music was performed as prescribed, it was only noise in God's ears unless accompanied by genuine commitment and a sincere desire on the part of the worshippers to do His will.

(b) Second, the corollary is also true—sincerity on its own is not enough. David learned this through bitter experience. Undoubtedly, he and his people were sincere in their desire to return the ark to Jerusalem and thus give glory to God. Consequently, the death of Uzzah leaves the casual reader confused.

However, it is instructive to note that the differences in arrangements before and after the tragedy are not simply a matter of transport (cf. 1 Chronicles 13:7-10 and 2 Samuel 6:5 with 1 Chronicles 15:12-22). Not only does the king

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remember Numbers 4:15-20, concerning who should carry the ark, but he also directs changes in the music the second time around.

Whereas initially it is a sort of "jam session" with everyone joining in as they pleased, making a "joyful noise," for the second time round only the instruments typically associated with sacred music are employed, and the singers are led in a manner compatible with the sacred context. Apparently, in God's economy the language of praise is unquestionably encompassed in "the difference between the holy and the common" (see Ezekiel 44:23 and 22:26).

Interestingly, in the history of Adventism God again used a prophet to point out that enthusiasm and sincerity coupled with imported music styles (described by Haskell as "a complete copy of the Salvation Army method" at the time) won't automatically lead to right action and God's favor.²⁹

As we look around us today, it is clear that music is increasingly at the crux of the battle for human minds. We should not be surprised, then, if a "language of praise" that projects a popular sense of worship and that has been developed by a mastermind ex-heavenly musician, will again play a role in uniting people of all nations, languages, and tongues in an *act of false worship* (cf. Daniel 3:5). There will be no doubting people's sincerity then, either.

Finally, I would like to return to the initial ideas raised in the introduction to this paper. I would like to consider the deeper purpose in the meaning of our Scripture passage, "sing to the *Lord* a new song ..." (Psalm 96:1).

On several occasions the Bible records that God yearns to give us, or invites us to sing a "*new song*" (cf. Psalms 33:3, 40:3, 93:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1; Isaiah 42:10). These invitations can probably be understood on two levels. First, there is a sense in which every redeemed person, when they are released from the burden of sin, sings a "new song" because they have accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour. That "song" is unleashed inside and is deeply meaningful to them. It is like their testimony of conversion. It is "new" because it expresses a new experience, a newfound freedom, a new relationship with their Lord.

But one senses that it also has a second level of meaning. Couldn't it also mean that God longs for us to learn the language of Heaven in every aspect of our lives, even our modes of praise, so that our music is not just a copy of what surrounds us?

Imitating the heavenly in our language of praise may well be different or new compared to what is generally heard around us. It would provide a unique artistic challenge for composers and performers that, if embraced, could ultimately provide a unique aesthetic witness to the Gospel. The admonition to "not conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2), and not to yoke darkness and light together (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1) is as applicable to

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sacred music as it is to any other aspect of our lives. Indeed, "unless there is within us that which is above us; we shall soon yield to that which is around us!"³⁰ What an exiting challenge this could be to a community of faith who took it seriously!

The truth of this was brought home powerfully to me about ten years ago while studying with a distinguished professor at Melbourne University. I had traveled from North America to Melbourne, Australia, to study the implications of a new discipline he had developed for understanding musical communication. One day while we were in conversation, he asked me to tell him more about why I had come to work with him. I told him I was a minister as well as a musician and I wanted to gain a better understanding of how to use music meaningfully in Christian worship. He turned to me and laughed. "You Christians!" he said. "Often when I hear music in your churches as I walk past it is no different from what I hear on radio and TV shows. It often speaks more of aggression and sexuality than it does of reverence. Does that say something about your God? If you really want to touch and draw me, I'm looking for something different from what I can get blaring from every commercial radio station in the land."

To be honest, I was very taken aback and didn't know how to respond. But the message was clear. There are people who are looking for an alternative to what they already have—not only an intellectual alternative but also a genuinely unique aesthetic expression. Perhaps what they crave is that "New Song"—God's true language of praise. The question is: Are we as Christians exemplifying it in its fullness, truly witnessing to the God we seek to serve?

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ADDITIONAL NOTE

Frequently questions arise concerning the meaning of Psalm 150 in the context of the above discussion. For example, some contemporary Christian musicians consider Psalm 150 as support for using any instrument, or any style of music in the worship of God. It may be seen as divine license for an "almost anything goes" approach to the language of praise. In light of this, several points deserve consideration:

1. A hermeneutical principle: A basic principle of Biblical hermeneutics is the comparing of Scripture with Scripture, rather than developing doctrines on a single passage. Further, didactic and narrative passages need to be used to interpret and elucidate the meaning of poetic passages where metaphor, simile, and various poetic devices are used to heighten or embellish meaning. To suggest that the poetry of Psalm 150 is divine license for a musical jam session in worship is to ignore all the other narrative passages cited above. Ultimately, Scripture does not contradict itself, although it may appear to do so to the casual reader.

2. A contextual, cultural consideration: Israel lived all life, whether in sacred or common time, under the purview of God. Thus, whether they were worshipping on Sabbath or returning from battle on some other day of the week, their songs always included thanks and praise to God. There is evidence to suggest that a number of the songs of Scripture, including psalms, were not necessarily composed specifically for Sabbath worship. For example, the song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-18 was initially used to celebrate victory over the Egyptians. Interestingly, it was also on this occasion that the women danced with tambourine accompaniment. There is, however, no evidence that this was a sacred or Sabbath event. Most probably it was simply a "secular" or "common" cultural celebration of victory over a dreaded enemy that rightfully included praise and thanksgiving to God as part of the celebration. A similar pattern is suggested in 1 Samuel 18:6, 7. It is quite likely that such songs subsequently came to be viewed as metaphors of spiritual victory over sin, and were perhaps

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even used in the sacred context. However, they were not necessarily performed then in the same way as they were originally in the secular, cultural festival. Psalm 81, which mentions tambourines as well as harps and lyres (verse 2), was also a song used at a festival to remember Egypt's defeat (see verses 4-7, 10, 14, 15). The same is true of Psalm 149, where dancing and tambourines are included in the context of the promise of victory over enemies (see verses 6-9).

In this context, Psalm 150 may be deliberately placed at the end of the inspired hymnal because it is a fitting musical metaphor for the ultimate victory of God's kingdom. In many ways, it is the culminating paean of eschatological praise that foreshadows the eventual victory over sin. In that final grand festival the sacred and common are welded together. Whether an instrument is used regularly for worship or for common secular celebration matters not anymore. It is a metaphoric way of indicating that one day "one pulse of harmony will beat through all creation." The sacred and the common realms will merge in one joyous celebration that has God at its center. Onlookers on that day will have no difficulty knowing whether the music emanates from the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. The music style of this ultimate paean of praise, joining the sacred and secular realms in one pulse of unity, will exhibit the harmony of Heaven rather than the cacophony of Hell.

Understood this way, rather than being license for a musical "free-for-all," Psalm 150 is an invitation to catch the echo of the heavenly new song, to begin to partake in the time when every aspect of life, both sacred and secular, will be seamlessly and fully under the lordship of Yahweh. Undoubtedly this music will be worth listening to and participating in!

But for the child of God living in the present, the message is simple: Whatever we do in life, whether in a sacred worship setting or in a wholesome cultural festival in nonworship time, we ought to "praise the Lord." The consciousness that we live in the presence of God at all times will make God's children want to honor, and not misrepresent Him, in all situations. Whatever musical instruments are used, the imperative here is to "praise the Lord"—whether it is a stringed instrument, a woodwind, or a percussion instrument—use it in a way that will "praise the Lord," not demean or dishonor Him.

Endnotes

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotes are taken from the New International Version.

² Bruno Nettl, "The Role of Music in Culture" in *Contemporary Music and Music Cultures*, by Charles Hamm, Bruno Nettl, and Ronald Byrnsie, pp. 98, 99.

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- ³ J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *African Gods and Music*, p. 1.
- ⁴ See Nketia, *African Gods and Music*, pp. 11,12.
- ⁵ Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 506, cited in *Messages to Young People*, pp. 295, 296.
- ⁶ Martin Luther in *Luther on Music*, p. 85.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- ⁸ Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 91.
- ⁹ Garen Wolf, *The Music of the Bible in Christian Perspective*, p. 287.
- ¹⁰ John Kleinig, *The Lord's Song*, p. 82.
- ¹¹ A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development*, p. 17.
- ¹² Alfred Sendrey, *Music in the Social and Religious Life of Antiquity*, pp. 68, 69.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 76.
- ¹⁴ Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 454.
- ¹⁵ Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 143, 144.
- ¹⁹ *Gospel Workers*, p. 325.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, pp. 36, 37.
- ²² *Evangelism*, p. 510.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Evangelism*, pp. 507, 508.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Manuscript 5,1874.
- ²⁸ *Review and Herald*, Nov. 12, 1914.
- ²⁹ See *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, pp. 33-38.
- ³⁰ P.T. Forsyth in Franklin Segler, *Christian Worship, Its Theology and Practice* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), p. 81.

Chapter 32

What to Do?

If Contemporary Music Is a Problem in Your Local Church, What Should You Do?

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[Editor's note: This article originally appeared in ADVENTISTS AFFIRM, Spring 1998, the entire issue being devoted to music. Two follow-up issues in Spring 1999 and Summer 2000 discussed dancing and applause in the church.]

If you are convinced that celebration-style contemporary Christian music has no place in your church even though some church members are trying to introduce it there, what should you do? Here are several suggestions.

1. *Pray, of course*, and ask God to help you to be not only forthright and courageous but also humble and courteous.

2. *Don't fight; educate and persuade*. A fighting spirit incites a fighting spirit. We all know this! And once a person starts fighting us, we know it's almost impossible to change him. So let's educate and persuade.

a. Distribute copies of the Spring 1998 and Spring 1999 issues of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM to all the musicians and all the elders and Sabbath School officers and department superintendents. Better yet, in addition distribute copies of the Spring 1997 issue, the issue on the spread of Pentecostalism as the "Third Wave of the Holy Spirit."

b. If you are an adult Sabbath School superintendent or song leader, set up a plan to teach the Sabbath School members some point or two each week about appropriate and inappropriate music.

c. If you are the leader of a children's division, plan to teach your children some of the charming children's hymns that are included in our *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. On pages 809-810 in the back of the hymnal you will find three full columns of hymns that children and youth of various ages are known to enjoy. (Incidentally, "Lift Up the Trumpet," no. 213, a perennial favorite with children, is listed as "Jesus Is Coming Again.") Do remember that children will

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learn to enjoy singing any quality of hymn they are taught to enjoy singing!

d. If contemporary Christian music appears in your church only during an occasional solo accompanied by a noisy tape, you might gather your church musicians and together develop a rule about the use of such tapes. Quite a number of churches, including some large ones, have a blanket rule forbidding all use of taped accompaniments. A small church that lacks a good accompanist may prefer to limit the use of tapes to only suitable ones—and there are some suitable tapes—but such a rule may prove difficult to enforce.

e. It may be that your pastor is your challenge. It is remarkable how, in Old Testament times, the entire nation of Israel or Judah changed religion in step with the religion of whoever came into power. Much of the impetus for contemporary Christian music in Seventh-day Adventist churches is coming from pastors. If your pastor is your challenge, by all means seek to persuade him. A few casual comments may suffice in some cases. More likely, a few of you might make an appointment to visit with him, taking along copies of this magazine and calling attention, perhaps, to the General Conference guidelines.

f. If you cannot persuade the pastor, it is not inappropriate to visit the conference president. By no means should one person go alone to see a conference president. The president will undoubtedly ask one of his staff to sit at his side during your visit, if only as a witness, and as a result, you may feel outnumbered from the start. It would be better to have two or three like-minded friends go with you. You will feel more confident, and the president will be the more impressed by your evidence.

Don't assume that your president will necessarily oppose you. Some conference presidents would like to resist the trend toward "celebration" worship but don't know how. If your president wants further help, suggest that Louis Torres and Jim Brackett are available to present seminars on church music.

3. *Music Lessons.* The Winandys (Pierre and Gisela) in their article, "Not All Youth Want Rock!" (ADVENTISTS AFFIRM, Spring 1998, p. 25), recommend encouraging all children to learn to play a musical instrument, especially an instrument that can be used alongside other children in a junior orchestra. In this way a taste for good music can be developed early. We may add, too, that children who become musically involved in their local churches tend to remain loyal when grown.

4. *Patience and Caring.* Keep trying; Rome wasn't built in a day. In Heaven, we are told. God "bore long" with Lucifer's rebellion.

But Suppose Nothing Avails. Suppose you find that you dare not listen any longer to contemporary music for fear that you—or your small children

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with you—will begin perversely to like it. Then what?

a. For starts, you could try taking a walk or, better, greeting latecomers in the foyer, until the main singing part of the service is completed, coming into the sanctuary only in time for the sermon.

b. If this won't work, you could take a group of friends and start up a genuine Branch Sabbath School (not a so-called "house church"), with your pastor's blessing.

c. But if, after trying everything else, you become intelligently and lovingly convinced that you should move your membership to a more faithful Seventh-day Adventist congregation, do be sure that you have taken due care of all your commitments to and responsibilities for your current congregation. And do be sure that you are not neglecting the "sheep" in your congregation who could yet benefit from your shepherding.

But let us hope, and pray, that God will use your efforts to bring about a change for the better.

Chapter 33

SDA Philosophy of Music: Past and Present

Official Church Guidelines

[If our worship is intended to be the worship of God, then a discussion of worship styles would be incomplete unless we offer some practical guidelines on the kind of music that is consistent with the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. During the past three or so decades the Adventist Church has produced two major guidelines on music. The first one was voted at the Annual Council meeting of church leaders in Mexico City, Mexico, October 14-19, 1972. The most recent one was approved on October 12, 2004, at the Annual Council meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A. These two documents provide parameters or directions for those who seek to know the mind of the world church as to what God expects from His people in our choice and use of music.—Editor]

Guidelines Toward an SDA Philosophy of Music (1972)

Voted, That the following guidelines for a Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music be adopted:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has come into existence in fulfillment of prophecy to be God's instrument in a worldwide proclamation of the Good News of salvation through faith in the atoning sacrifice of God's Son and of obedience to His commands in preparation for our Lord's return. The lives of those who accept this responsibility must be as distinctive as their message. This calls for total commitment by each church member to the ideals and objectives of the church. Such commitment will affect every department of church life and will certainly influence the music used by the church in fulfillment of its God-given commission.

Music is one of God's great gifts to man and is one of the most important elements in a spiritual program. It is an avenue of communication with God,

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and "is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth" (*Education*, p. 168). Dealing as it does with matters of eternal consequence, it is essential that music's tremendous power be kept clearly in mind. It has the power to uplift or degrade; it can be used in the service of good or evil. "It has power to subdue rude and uncultivated natures; power to quicken thought and to awaken sympathy, to promote harmony of action, and to banish the gloom and foreboding that destroy courage and weaken effort" (*ibid.*, pp. 167, 168).

Those, therefore, who select music for the distinctive purposes of this church must exercise a high degree of discrimination in its choice and in its use. In their endeavors to meet these ideals, more than human wisdom is needed. Turning then to revelation for guidance, the following general principles are revealed:

The music should

1. Bring glory to God and assist us in acceptably worshipping Him (1 Corinthians 10:31).
2. Ennoble, uplift, and purify the Christian's thoughts (Philippians 4:8; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594).
3. Effectively influence the Christian in the development of Christ's character in his life and in that of others (MS 57, 1906).
4. Have a text (words, lyric, message) that is in harmony with the Scriptural teachings of the church (*Review and Herald*, June 6, 1912).
5. Reveal a compatibility between the message conveyed by the words and the music, avoiding a mixture of the sacred and the profane.
6. Shun theatricality and prideful display (*Evangelism*, p. 137; *Review and Herald*, November 30, 1900).
7. Give precedence to the message of the text, which should not be overpowered by accompanying musical elements (*Gospel Workers*, pp. 357, 358).
8. Maintain a judicious balance of the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual elements (*Review and Herald*, November 14, 1899).
9. Never compromise high principles of dignity and excellence in efforts to reach people just where they are (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 143; *Evangelism*, p. 137).
10. Be appropriate for the occasion, the setting, and the audience for which it is intended (*Evangelism*, pp. 507, 508).

There is much that is spiritually uplifting and religiously valid in the music of the various cultural and ethnic groups; however, the musical tastes and practices of all should conform to the universal value of Christlike character, and all should strive for oneness in the spirit and purpose of the Gospel,

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which calls for unity rather than uniformity. Care must be exercised that worldly values in music which fail to express the high ideals of the Christian faith be avoided.

The above principles will serve as effective guidelines in the choice and use of music for the varied needs of the church. Certain musical forms, such as jazz, rock, and their related hybrid forms, are considered by the church as incompatible with these principles. Responsible persons involved in the church's broad-ranging music activities, either as leaders or performers, will find little trouble in applying these principles in some areas. Certain other areas are much more complex, and a more detailed discussion of the factors involved follows.

I. Church Music

Music in the Worship Service. Worship should be the primary and eternal activity of mankind. Man's highest end is to glorify God. As the worshipper comes to the house of God to offer a sacrifice of praise, let it be with the best possible music. Careful planning of every musical element of the service is essential so that the congregation is led to be a participant and not a spectator.

The hymns used for this service should be directed to God, emphasizing praise and utilizing the great hymns of our heritage. They should have strong, singable melodies and worthy poetry. The pastor should take a keen interest in increasing the quality and fervor of congregational singing. "Singing is seldom to be done by a few" [*Counsels on Health*, pp. 481, 482). Christian experience will be immeasurably enriched by the learning and use of new hymns.

Where there is a choir, meaningful anthems chosen from master composers of the past and present, sung by dedicated and well-prepared musicians, will add much to the service and assist in elevating the quality of worship.

Instrumental music, including organ or piano, should harmonize with the lofty ideals of worship and be chosen carefully from the best materials consistent with the ability and training of the player. The instrumentalist responsible for accompanying congregational singing has an especially great responsibility to set the right standard in all his contributions, be they preludes or postludes, offertories or other voluntaries, or accompaniment of hymns. He is in a unique position to raise the level of worship music in his church. If in the service there should be vocal solos or other special music, preference should be given to material with Scriptural texts and music that is within the singer's range of ability, and be presented to the Lord without display of vocal prowess. The communication of the message should be paramount.

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Music in Evangelism. Music used in evangelism may also include Gospel music, witness music, or testimony music; but there should be no compromise with the high principles of dignity and excellence characteristic of our message to ready the people for the Second Coming of Christ. The music chosen should

1. Direct the hearer to Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
2. Prepare the way for the presentation of the message from God's Word, or continue its appeal, evoking a response from the hearers.
3. Be played and sung by those whose lives are consistent with the message they bear.
4. Be a vehicle for the deep impression of Bible truth, which will inspire a positive change in the life.
5. Be presented in a carefully planned, orderly manner.
6. Be simple and melodic and presented without emphasis on personal display.
7. Give precedence to the preaching of the Word, both in emphasis and in allotment of time.
8. Maintain a balanced appeal to the emotion and intellect and not just charm the senses.
9. Be understandable and meaningful in content and style for the largest possible cross section of the audience.

Music in Youth Evangelism. In the field of youth witnessing, most of the above suggestions apply. Consideration also needs to be given to certain aspects that are unique to this area.

Young people tend to identify closely with the music of the contemporary youth culture. The desire to reach these youth where they are with the Gospel of Christ sometimes leads to the use of certain questionable musical idioms. In all these idioms, the element that brings the most problems is rhythm, or "the beat."

Of all the musical elements, rhythm evokes the strongest physical response. Satan's greatest successes have often come through his appeal to the physical nature. Showing keen awareness of the dangers involved in this approach to youth, Ellen G. White said, "They have a keen ear for music, and Satan knows what organs to excite, to animate, engross, and charm the mind so that Christ is not desired. The spiritual longings of the soul for divine knowledge, for a growth in grace, are wanting [i.e., lacking]" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 497). This is a strong indictment of the way in which music may be put to a use that is in direct opposition to God's plan. The previously mentioned jazz, rock, and related hybrid forms are well known for creating this sensuous response in masses of people.

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On the other hand, we have many traditional folk-music idioms that have been respected as legitimate branches of the musical stream. Some of these are acceptable as vehicles for expressing the Christian witness. Others, which might find acceptance in a Christian secular atmosphere, may be inappropriate for bearing the Saviour's name. Still others may fall completely outside the Christian's experience. It must be clear, then, that any form of "folk" musical expression must be judged by the same general principles as all other types discussed in this document.

"Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children" (*Education*, p. 18). Those who strive for this high ideal and who lead in youth witnessing will find guidance through prayerful study of music by the aid of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to the problem of rhythm, other factors affect the spiritual qualities of the music:

Vocal Treatment. The raucous style common to rock, the suggestive, sentimental, breathy, crooning style of the nightclub performer, and other distortions of the human voice should be avoided.

Harmonic Treatment. Music should be avoided that is saturated with the 7th, 9th, 11th, and 13th chords as well as other lush sonorities. These chords, when used with restraint, produce beauty, but when used to excess distract from the true spiritual quality of the text.

Visual Presentation. Anything which calls undue attention to the performer(s), such as excessive, affected bodily movement or inappropriate dress, should find no place in witnessing.

Amplification. Great care should be exercised to avoid excessive instrumental and vocal amplification. When amplifying music there should be a sensitivity to the spiritual needs of those giving the witness and of those who are to receive it. Careful consideration should be given to the selection of instruments for amplification.

Performances. The primary objective in the performance of all sacred music should be to exalt Christ rather than to exalt the musician or to provide entertainment.

Music in the Home.

1. Music education and appreciation should begin early in the life of the child through (a) The introduction to great hymns and Gospel songs in the informal happy experience of family worship; (b) The establishment of right listening habits through home audio equipment, which includes carefully selected music; (c) Attendance with the family at music concerts with stan-

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dards conforming to those outlined in this document; (d) The proper example and influence of parents.

2. Family singing and participation in family music instrumental ensembles should be encouraged.

3. Experiments in writing poetry and song compositions might be encouraged.

4. A home music library of wisely selected materials should be established.

5. It must be recognized that Satan is engaged in a battle for the mind and that changes may be effected imperceptibly upon the mind to alter perceptions and values for good and evil. Extreme care must therefore be exercised in the type of programming and music listened to on radio and TV, especially avoiding that which is vulgar, enticing, cheap, immoral, theatrical, and identifiable with trends in the counterculture.

Music in the School.

1. In preparing and presenting music for religious functions, school administrators and teachers should work with the students in a way that will uphold the musical standards of the church.

2. Witnessing and folk-music groups going out from campuses should receive sponsorship and guidance from those appointed by the administration, be they music faculty members or others.

3. Directors of radio stations on Seventh-day Adventist campuses and those who are responsible for the selection of music played over institutional public address systems should choose music that is in conformity with the philosophy of music as expressed in this document.

4. Music teachers in school ensembles and in private teaching activities should make positive efforts to teach music literature that may be used in church and in soulwinning activities.

5. Because one of the primary objectives of school music appreciation courses is to teach discrimination in the light of divine revelation, instructors in these classes on all educational levels are urged to include information in the art of making qualitative value judgment in the area of religious music.

6. Efforts should be made by the local church and conference to close the culture gap. To this end the trained music personnel of the schools should be used in musical training and activities so that the lofty ideals of worship be effectively promoted.

7. Musical presentations in Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions should conform to the standards of the church. This applies to local talent as

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well as to visiting artists, ensembles, and music on entertainment films.

II. Secular Music

Music "rightly employed, is a precious gift of God, designed to uplift the thoughts to high and noble themes, to inspire and elevate the soul" (*Education*, p. 167).

The Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle demands that the individual Christian exercise a high degree of discrimination and individual responsibility in the selection of secular music for personal use, solo, or group performance. All such music should be evaluated in the light of the instruction given in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." He will also keep in mind the warning given by Ellen G. White in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 497:

"I was shown that the youth must take a higher stand, and make the Word of God the man of their counsel and their guide. Solemn responsibilities rest upon the young, which they lightly regard. The introduction of music into their homes, instead of inciting to holiness and spirituality, has been the means of diverting their minds from the truth. Frivolous songs and the popular sheet music of the day seem congenial to their taste. The instruments of music have taken time which should have been devoted to prayer. Music, when not abused, is a great blessing; but when put to a wrong use, it is a terrible curse."

The Christian will not sing songs that are incompatible with the ideals of truth, honesty, and purity. He will avoid elements that give the appearance of making evil desirable or goodness appear trivial. He will try to avoid compositions containing trite phrasing, poor poetry, nonsense, sentimentality, or frivolity, which lead away from the counsel and teachings found in Scripture and in the Spirit of Prophecy.

He will consider music such as blues, jazz, the rock idiom, and similar forms as inimical to the development of Christian character, because it opens the mind to impure thoughts and leads to unholy behavior. Such music has a distinct relationship to the permissiveness of contemporary society. The distortion of rhythm, melody, and harmony as employed by these styles and their excessive amplification dulls the sensibilities and eventually destroys the appreciation for that which is good and holy.

Care should be exercised when using a secular tune wedded to sacred

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lyrics, so that the profane connotation of the music will not outweigh the message of the text. Moreover, the discerning Christian, when selecting any secular music for listening or performing which is not included in the above categories [blues, jazz, rock, etc.] will subject such music to the test of the principles given in the general principles outlined in this Philosophy of Music.

The true Christian is able to witness to others by his choice of secular music for social occasions. He will, through diligent search and careful selection, seek out that type of music that will be compatible with his social needs and his Christian principles.

"There must be a living connection with God in prayer, a living connection with God in songs of praise and thanksgiving" (*Evangelism*, p. 498).

[The above guidelines were voted by Official Action of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee, October 14-19, 1972, Mexico City, Mexico. Note: Punctuation slightly altered.]

A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music —Guidelines (2004)

Voted, To approve as guidelines the document, A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music, which reads as follows:

A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music—Guidelines

God has woven music into the very fabric of His Creation. When He made all things "the morning stars sang together and the angels shouted for joy."—Job 38:7. The book of Revelation portrays Heaven as a place of ceaseless praise, with songs of adoration to God and the Lamb resounding from all.—Revelation 4:9-11; 5:9-13; 7:10-12; 12:10-12; 14:1-3; 15:2-4; 19:1-8.

Because God made humans in His image, we share a love and appreciation for music with all His created beings. In fact, music can touch and move us with a power that goes beyond words or most other types of communication.¹ At its purest and best, music lifts our beings into the very presence of God where angels and unfallen beings worship Him in song.

But sin has cast blight over the Creation. The divine image has been marred and well-nigh obliterated; in all aspects this world and God's gifts come to us with a mingling of good and evil. Music is not morally and spiritually neutral. Some may move us to the most exalted human experience; the prince of evil may use some to debase and degrade us, to stir up lust, passion,

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despair, anger, and hatred.

The Lord's messenger, Ellen G. White, continually counsels us to raise our sights in music. She tells us, "Music, when not abused, is a great blessing; but when it is put to a wrong use, it is a terrible curse."² "Rightly employed, . . . [music] is a precious gift of God, designed to uplift the thoughts to high and noble themes, to inspire and elevate the souls."³

Of the power of song, she writes: "It is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth. How often to the soul hard-pressed and ready to despair, memory recalls some word of God's,—the long-forgotten burden of a childhood song,—and temptations lose their power, life takes on new meaning and new purpose, and courage and gladness are imparted to other souls! . . . As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer. . . . As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir round about the throne; and as the echo of the angels' song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven's communion begins on Earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise."⁴

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe and preach that Jesus is coming again soon. In our worldwide proclamation of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 we call all peoples to accept the everlasting Gospel, to worship God the Creator, and to prepare to meet our soon-returning Lord. We challenge all to choose the good and not the bad, to "say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ."—Titus 2:12, 13.

We believe that the Gospel impacts all areas of life. We therefore hold that, given the vast potential of music for good or ill, we cannot be indifferent to it. While realizing that tastes in music vary greatly from individual to individual, we believe that the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White suggest principles that can inform our choices.

In this document the phrase "sacred music"—sometimes referred to as religious music—designates music that focuses on God and on Biblical and Christian themes. In most cases, it is music composed and intended for worship service, evangelistic meetings, or private devotion and may be both vocal and instrumental music. However, not all sacred/religious music may be acceptable for an Adventist. Sacred music should not evoke secular associations or invite conformity to worldly behavioral patterns of thinking or acting.

"Secular music" is music composed for settings other than the worship

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service or private devotion. It speaks to the common issues of life and basic human emotions. It comes out of our very being, expressing the human spirit's reaction to life, love, and the world in which the Lord has placed us. It can be morally uplifting or degrading. Although it does not directly praise and adore God, nevertheless it could have a legitimate place in the life of the Christian. In its selection the principles discussed in this document should be followed.

Principles to Guide the Christian

The music that Christians enjoy should be regulated by the following principles:

1. All music the Christian listens to, performs, or composes, whether sacred or secular, will glorify God: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."—1 Corinthians 10:31. This is the overriding Biblical principle. Anything that cannot meet this high standard will weaken our experience with the Lord.

2. All music the Christian listens to, performs, or composes, whether sacred or secular, should be the noblest and the best: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is right, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."—Philippians 4:8. As followers of Jesus Christ who hope and expect to join the heavenly choirs, we view life on this earth as a preparation for, and foretaste of, the life to come.

On these two foundations—glorifying God in all things and choosing the noblest and the best—depend the other principles listed below for the selection of music by Christians.

3. It is characterized by quality, balance, appropriateness, and authenticity. Music fosters our spiritual, psychological, and social sensitivity, and our intellectual growth.

4. It appeals to both the intellect and the emotions and impacts the body in a positive way. It is holistic.

5. Music reveals creativity in that it draws from quality melodies. If harmonized,⁵ it uses harmonies in an interesting and artistic way, and employs rhythm that complements them.

6. Vocal music employs lyrics that positively stimulate intellectual abilities as well as our emotions and our willpower. Good lyrics are creative, rich in content, and of good composition. They focus on the positive and reflect moral values; they educate and uplift; and they correspond with sound Biblical theology.

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7. Musical and lyrical elements should work together harmoniously to influence thinking and behavior in harmony with Biblical values.

8. It maintains a judicious balance of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional elements.

9. We should recognize and acknowledge the contribution of different cultures in worshipping God. Musical forms and instruments vary greatly in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family, and music drawn from one culture may sound strange to someone from a different culture.

Seventh-day Adventist music-making means to choose the best and above all to draw close to our Creator and Lord and glorify Him. Let us rise to the challenge of a viable alternative musical vision and, as part of our wholistic and prophetic message, make a unique Adventist musical contribution as a witness to the world regarding a people awaiting Christ's soon coming.

[These guidelines were approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Annual Council on October 13, 2004.]

Endnotes

¹ "It [music] is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth" (*Education*, p. 168).

² *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 497. She also states that in the future, "just before the close of probation" "there will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit.

"The Holy Spirit never reveals Himself in such methods, in such a bedlam of noise. This is an invention of Satan to cover up his ingenious methods for making of none effect the pure, sincere, elevating, ennobling, sanctifying truth for this time" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 36).

³ *Education*, p. 167.

⁴ *Education*, p. 168.

⁵ We acknowledge that in some cultures harmonies are not as important as in other cultures.

Chapter 34

Searching for Genuine Adventist Worship

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Worship is the issue in the great controversy between God and Satan. The third angel's message (Revelation 14:9-11) gives the most solemn warning in the Bible, a warning against false worship. The first angel's message (Revelation 14:6,7) is a command to worship God.

But because we have not given worship the attention the first angel's message demands, a vacuum has been created and now we are disturbed by what is filling it. We tend to react to what we do not like in worship, rather than do any serious thinking about what ought to constitute genuine Seventh-day Adventist worship.

Lack of Attention

When I first began ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, preparing people for baptism and membership, I was struck by the fact that none of the Bible studies available for my use contained lessons on worship. To this day I do not know of such a series.

How do pastors prepare people to take their place in the worship life of an Adventist congregation in a meaningful and understanding way? When do they learn the meaning of the various elements in the Sabbath worship service? How do they learn that weddings and funerals for church members are not private affairs but worship services of the church, and that the church has something to say about how such services are planned and conducted? What exactly is genuine Seventh-day Adventist worship? What makes it different from the worship of other Protestant churches? It is incongruous that the church that recognizes the centrality of worship in the great controversy doc-

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trinally, gives it such little attention in membership preparation.

This lack of attention and concern is illustrated by the opinion of many in our ranks that worship is not a relevant issue for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But recent developments regarding "celebration" tell a far different story. It is time to end such neglect by recognizing the relevance and centrality of worship for the Adventist Church, and begin to give it long overdue attention.

In fact, that attention slowly began a decade ago. The October 1991 issue of *Ministry* was devoted to the subject. In addition a number of Andrews University doctor of ministry projects have dealt with worship. Leadership has become concerned, and seminars on worship have been held in a few places.

Perhaps we are on the threshold of a renewal of worship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Let us hope so. If we approach the matter in a balanced and sensible way, perhaps we will manage to avoid extremism.

Norval Pease, frustrated over the lack of attention given to worship by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, published his book *And Worship Him* in 1967 (Southern Publishing Association). The introduction exudes his frustration and concern. He asks: "What is the answer to the problem of worship in our churches?"

"It will not be found by ignoring the problem. If it is true that an enemy is trying to destroy the sacredness of Christian worship, we need to do something about it. Contentment with confusion, meaninglessness, and immaturity will not defeat this enemy. Neither will the answer be found in an uncritical acceptance of the procedures of some other church. We are Adventists and we must approach worship as Adventists____Is it any wonder we haven't developed an Adventist philosophy of worship?"

Pease put his finger right on the real problem. It is still the basic problem, for it has never been fully addressed. Failure to develop a Seventh-day Adventist philosophy (theology) of worship has led to liturgical borrowing from other denominations, either of the highly formal variety or now the charismatic variety. So far the criteria for such borrowing, such as whether the service makes the worshippers feel good or is entertaining, are not sound principles for genuine Adventist worship. Consequently we are able only to react against what we do not like and perhaps instinctively know is not genuinely Adventist, while at the same time not really knowing what "genuinely Adventist" is.

Fundamental Questions

Space does not permit thorough treatment here of an Adventist theology of worship, but we can begin by asking two fundamental questions: Why do

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Adventist Christians worship, and how should genuine Adventist worship begin? Since Seventh-day Adventists seek to base their worship on the Bible, we will focus on a major Bible passage in our quest for the answers.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the Temple. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the Temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:1-8).

This account of Isaiah's dramatic encounter with God reveals his sensitive heart and soul. He was conscious of the infinite distance between the unrepentant sinner and a holy and righteous God, and was not so worldly and irreverent as to ignore that distance. Irreverence is the evil in human beings that effectively hides the holiness of God from our conscious view. Isaiah was certainly not an irreverent person. The God Whom he saw seated high and lifted up upon His throne was not the object of his hero worship, but of his faith.

Holiness and Humility. Proud people worship without awe. For them religion is an easy thing, having nothing to do with penitence, judgment, or confession. This is certainly not the picture we have in Revelation 4-5 (to which we will refer later) where, under divine inspiration, the writer pushes aside the veil a bit so that we can have a little glimpse of how God's people will worship Him in heaven.

Isaiah's congregation is made up of two distinct groups: celestial wor-

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shippers, and earthly worshipers identified as "people of unclean lips." Here is no humanistic self-glorification. In the very presence of God the spotlight of His holiness exposes the reality of the human condition and predicament. Anyone claiming to be Christian, but putting self and human needs at the center of worship, the presence of God exposes as unclean. In the temple the human conscience is awakened and wickedness exposed. When the conscience is awakened, a vision of God as He really is, and also the sinner's own true condition, is possible. "I am ruined!" cried Isaiah.

The purpose of such coming to the temple is to rend the veil of human pride and self-righteousness, and to reveal God's holiness. True worship cannot take place unless and until both of these have occurred.

The setting of Isaiah's description is that of a service of worship. What do the celestial worshippers do? They praise God's holiness—exactly what the "people of unclean lips" do not do. Why not? Because to praise His holiness is contradictory to their perception of Him. Those who do not praise God's holiness perceive Him as a Being Who exists for their sake, instead of the other way around. They think that every concern and activity of God is meant for them. They fail to see Him for what He is in Himself: A holy, righteous, almighty God. A.W. Tozer once perceptively observed that low views of God will rot the religion in which they appear.

Holiness is God's essence, His basic nature. The holiness of God has both negative and positive implications. Because God is morally pure in Himself, He is intolerant of human sin. His whole nature burns with wrath toward sin, consuming it. Hebrews 12:28, 29 invites believers to "worship God with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." Because holiness is His basic nature, He cannot act in any other way toward sin. There is a separation of being between Himself and fallen humanity.

"Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" (1 Samuel 6:20) is the proper question for the sinner to ask after obtaining a Biblically accurate perception of God and self. When this holy God speaks, Hosea tells us. His people hear it as a roar, and they tremble: "They will follow the Lord; He will roar like a lion. When He roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria" (Hosea 11:10,11a). The sinner shudders with the sense of the sublimity of the divine Presence. "Woe to me!" was Isaiah's response.

On the positive side, because He is morally pure in Himself, God's holiness is revealed as love. His holiness requires that He act in love toward His creatures, because holiness is His basic nature. He cannot act in any other way toward the sinner. Even His wrath and judgment are loving manifestations of

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His holiness. His roar is a loving roar, as Hosea hastens to note—for those who hear and come to Him trembling the gracious promise is: "I will settle them in their homes, declares the Lord" (Hosea 11:11b). No wonder the call of the first angel, given in "the hour of His Judgment," is to worship God by both fearing Him and giving glory to Him (Revelation 14:7)!

The focus in Isaiah's story shifts from the throne to the altar, from which comes the celestial fire that cleanses the sinner's lips. The altar represents the cross of Christ; it defines God's grace. Sin often collects at one point of pain. With Isaiah, the prophet/preacher, that point was his lips. Grace is in direct relationship to condition. Lips that sin are touched by burning coals from the altar of grace.

Where is the point at which sin collects in the life of today's worshipper who comes to God's sanctuary on the Sabbath day? Where sin is manifest, there God's laser beam of grace concentrates and burns it away from the truly penitent. If the fire that comes in Adventist Christian worship does not come from God's altar, it is strange fire that does not cleanse.

Call and Response. After God cleanses, then the call comes, as it did for Isaiah: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?" When sin is cleansed away and forgiven, the worshipper is able to hear God's voice and obey His call. The call to discipleship and service comes where holiness and sin touch each other. Those who have been cleansed by the burning coal from Calvary's altar are never the same. They have a new Master and a new cause. If we are to become fit for His kingdom and His service, we too must have such an encounter with the holy God. Like Cain, some people worship by giving only what they possess; but some, like Isaiah, give themselves.

Isaiah's theme is echoed in the book of Revelation. The same Sanctus sung by the celestial worshippers in Isaiah 6:3 is sung by the celestial worshippers in Revelation 4:8. John also heard a roar coming from God's people standing on Mt. Zion "like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne" (Revelation 14:2, 3). God's people, sinners redeemed by grace, stand before that throne and respond to God's roar with a roar of their own. In response to His holiness, they give glory to Him (Revelation 14:7)! Before the same throne Isaiah saw, they sing the same song! "Holy" and "glory" are related realities. Due to His basic nature of holiness, God deserves the ascription of glory by His people. When His people, who have been redeemed from sin by His grace in Christ, recognize the truth of His holiness, they will respond by giving glory to Him.

"Holy, holy, holy," is a totally religious emphasis and awareness. There is

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no confusion here of the divine with the human, no attempt to find the sacred in the secular, for they are incompatible. In worship, sinful human beings come into the presence of the Almighty God, Who is seated on a throne, the symbol of His power to rule and judge.

Grace at the Throne. The power of His forgiving and transforming grace is there at that throne to make holy people out of unholy. It is His will, His expectation. "But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22). But just as He Who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:15). Praises are to be given to Him by His people who have been enabled to "serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days" (Luke 1:74, 75). By grace He is active in the lives of His people to make them holy: "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).

How does one become holy? By worshipping The Holy—not by ceremonies or forms, not by entertainment or excitement. Alluding to 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ellen G. White notes that "it is by beholding that we become changed." One such reference appears in the context of a statement in which she describes the relationship that exists between human indifference to principles of righteousness, genuine revival, and the holiness of God's character:

"It is because the great principles of righteousness as set forth in the law of God are so indifferently regarded by the Christian world that these fruits [conversion and sanctification] are so rarely witnessed. This is why there is manifest so little of the deep, abiding work of the Spirit of God which marked revivals of former years. It is by beholding that we become changed. And as those sacred precepts in which God has opened to men the perfection and holiness of His character are neglected, and the minds of the people are attracted to human teachings and theories, what marvel that there has followed a decline of living piety in the church" (*The Great Controversy*, p.478). Neglect of God's law results in declining piety, lack of the Holy Spirit, and fruitless revivals.

Of the false prophet, false faith, false disciple, Jesus says: "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:16). Does ceremony and ritual make holy people? Does "celebration"? Does clapping and swaying and shouting? Anything done in worship that does not lead to a consciousness of God's holiness and a conviction of human sin is sensual indulgence, a vehicle for meeting the humanistic ends of manipulation or entertainment.

Searching for Genuine Adventist Worship

Beginning of Genuine Worship

How does genuine Seventh-day Adventist worship begin? Isaiah provides a model for us in his own experience, of which we have spoken above. Our suggestions will follow the sequence of his worship encounter.

In the worship service the congregation must first experience entering into God's holy presence (Isaiah 6:1,2). The worship leader may say something like: "Let us enter the heavenly sanctuary by faith, into the presence of our Holy God!" An appropriate Scripture may then be read, such as: "The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; He sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. Great is the Lord in Zion; He is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise Your great and awesome name—he is holy" (Psalm 99:1-3; see also Psalm 29).

Secondly, the congregation should be led to acknowledge God's holiness (Isaiah 6:3, 4), which can be done by the singing of an introit, best sung by the congregation and choir together. It can be the first verse of a hymn, such as 1, 3, 6, 11, 21, 73, or 661 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.

Thirdly, the congregation should be led into some form of confession (Isaiah 6:5). Norval Pease wrote, "Every service of worship should include confession. . . . if the pastor or the elder in his prayer earnestly seeks God's forgiveness and those of his congregation, the effect can be genuine and the experience real" (p. 54). This can be done by first reading a penitential psalm, such as 32:1-5; 38:1-8; or 51:1-7. Then the pastoral prayer follows, which should include adoration, confession, petition, and thanksgiving. A declaration of God's forgiving grace should follow the prayer (Isaiah 6:6, 7), by reading a Scripture lesson such as 1 John 1:8, 9. One advantage of this approach is that much Scripture is used.

This is just the beginning of the worship service; much more will follow in sermon, song, prayers of consecration and dedication, Communion, and stewardship, constituting God's call to faith and service (Isaiah 6:8). For Seventh-day Adventists today, the call "Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?" comes with startling urgency, for it comes from the Most Holy Place of Heaven's sanctuary, where Christ is performing His final work of Judgment and atonement.

The effect of the worship service should be to heighten our perception of Jesus' Day of Atonement ministry for us, and the importance of our accepting His commission to proclaim the three angels' messages to a world now under judgment. If not Seventh-day Adventists, whom will God send to tell the world to worship God as the Creator on the memorial day of His Creation? How will

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the world learn that the Sabbath is a sign of God's abundant provision for our redemption and sanctification (Ezekiel 20:12)—the holiness we need to meet a holy God? Who will tell them that the hour of His Judgment has come, and how they may prepare to meet Him with joy?

Conclusion

Why does the Adventist Christian worship? Because in God's divine presence the veil of human self-righteousness has been torn asunder and God's holiness revealed. When that happens no prayers are needed over the bread and wine of Communion, already consecrated by virtue of Creation and purpose. It is, rather, the congregation, as the body of Christ, that needs to be consecrated so that the members can become broken bread and poured out wine for the sake of the world for which Jesus died: "Here am I! Send me."

How does genuine Adventist worship begin? By entering God's presence, acknowledging His holiness, and confessing human sin. This is the necessary response of a people who believe that Jesus is now completing His high priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary's Most Holy Place. It is the appropriate response of a people whom God has commissioned to proclaim to the world, "Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His Judgment has come; and worship Him" (Revelation 14:7).

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Chapter 35

Redefinition of Marriage?

A Closer Look at the Genesis of Marriage

By **Ronald A.G. du Preez, ThD, DMin**

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Author, *Morals for Mortals*

Introduction

What are the two basic institutions established by God in Eden for the benefit of humanity? If a typical Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) were asked that question, the immediate response would invariably be: "Marriage and the Sabbath." Now, for many decades that response would have been considered sufficient. For instance, the term "the Sabbath" has readily and universally been understood by Adventists to refer specifically to the "seventh-day Sabbath," as set aside by God at the end of the six days of Creation.

What about the word "marriage"? What kind of conjugal relationship spontaneously comes to mind when this term is used? In the past it appeared that Adventists automatically assumed that a "proper" Biblical marriage had to be a monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith union, "till death do us part." However, this historic view has recently been challenged and questioned by some Adventists.

A few examples will serve to illustrate this point. In 1992 an article appeared in *Ministry* magazine on how to share the Adventist message with people of other cultures. In discussing the thorny problem of plural marriage, the writer stated that to refuse to baptize a practicing polygamist into the SDA Church was a "serious example of cross-cultural confusion."² The author, a leading Adventist educator, regarded monogamy as merely one of "the optional variables of Western culture,"³ a practice that actually "hindered church growth."⁴ Is monogamy simply one alternative among many, or is it a universal Biblical standard for all marriages?

A second illustration relates to contra-faith⁵ marriages. For decades the SDA Church has disapproved of marriages between Adventists and non-

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Adventists. In support of this position the 1992 *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* specifically states: "Adventist ministers should not perform the marriage ceremony of Adventists with non-Adventists."⁶

However, new trends are arising. At the 1993 Annual Council in Bangalore, India, an opposing perspective was proposed. A president of one of the divisions of the church pointed out that in his part of the world the women members far outnumber the men in the church. It was stated that "in many cases if a woman wanted to marry she would *have* to marry a non-Adventist."⁷ Another division president added that in some countries only ministers or priests could conduct marriage. Thus, if an SDA minister did not conduct the wedding for an Adventist marrying a non-Adventist, would Adventists be comfortable with a Buddhist priest conducting the marriage service for an Adventist?⁸

As a result of discussions such as these, a new position has been adopted, and appears in the Minister's Manual, starting in 1997. Interestingly, this new statement concerning contra-faith marriages still comes under the subheading "When You Should Not Officiate." However, the former distinct prohibition has been somewhat watered down, and now merely records that the SDA Church "strongly urges Seventh-day Adventist ministers not to perform such weddings."⁹ As can be observed, more and more Adventists are becoming increasingly open to this idea of contra-faith marriages. As one pastor recently put it: To refuse to marry a non-Adventist to an Adventist "is religious bigotry."¹⁰

A third illustration relates to the issue of gender differentiation. A few years ago a vocal SDA feminist edited a book in which Adventist women tell of their lives and faith. A woman who taught in two SDA academies, worked as a Bible instructor, and later went back to school and subsequently graduated in theology writes one chapter. This was all before what she calls her "Martin Luther experience."¹¹ She tells of her "unusual calling" from God, she feels, that came to her in a dream—a dream about being in love with another woman! She became involved with this woman who was studying to become an Adventist, and describes this "love" as something that "felt right in a way that transcends moral argument."¹² Talking about her new lesbian identity, she says:

Many people, mostly Christians of other faiths, have said how providential my meeting my first lover was, coming, as we did, from thousands of miles for a chance weekend. They say God used that experience to open my mind; that that first love had to be that powerful to convince me to break with the last vestiges of tradition cherished as truth. I was so devoted to my previous socialization that it took me years to see that this was God's leading.¹³

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Shocking, disturbing, indeed blasphemous words! Yet, this is an example of some of the thinking that is infiltrating the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This should come as no great surprise when one realizes that in the mid-1980s a leading Adventist ethicist suggested that Adventist Christians should encourage homosexuals who do not believe they can change, to live together in "faithful" homosexual unions.¹⁴

A fourth and final example deals with the contentious issue of divorce and remarriage. Historically, the SDA Church has promoted the permanence of the marital bond. Indeed, in addition to basing our stand on the Genesis model, the overall Scriptural counsel, particularly the words of Jesus (as found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9), we quote the following excellent succinct statement of Ellen White: "In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow."¹⁵

However, for more than a decade now, voices have been heard suggesting and promoting a move away from our historic Biblical position. For example, as far back as 1994, articles were appearing in official Adventist magazines calling for a more accommodating view, in which members would be allowed to divorce and remarry for reasons other than sexual unfaithfulness.¹⁶ Is this compromised divorce/remarriage perspective based upon solid Biblical research, and does it better reflect our loving Creator's purpose for the marriage institution?

These four illustrations of polygamous, contra-faith, homosexual unions, and lax divorce/remarriage standards, being accepted today by some within Adventism make one acutely aware of the need to restudy the Holy Scriptures on the issue of marriage. Now, while there is obviously a tremendous amount to be learned from the Bible on this issue, this essay will be restricted to some reflections on the specific marital structure as established by God in the beginning, as well as the implications that this has for all Bible-believing Christians.

The Pattern Established in Eden

The book of Genesis provides a concrete account of the institution of marriage. The first two chapters of the Bible deal directly with the question of human sexuality. These opening chapters of Scripture are determinative for a Biblical theology of sexuality, since here the pattern is established and pronounced "very good" (Genesis 1:31) by God Himself.¹⁷

J. Kerby Anderson aptly observes: "Foundational to a Christian under-

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standing of sexuality is God's plan in Creation found in Genesis 1 and 2."¹⁸ While some information is to be found in Genesis 1, the primary focus of this section will be on Genesis 2, where most of the data relating to the marital arrangement is located. The passages that specifically relate to the institution of the first marriage are located in Genesis 2:18, 21-24 and 1:27, 28:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place.

And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

And the man said,

"This is now bone of my bones,

And flesh of my flesh;

She shall be called Woman,

Because she was taken out of Man."

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

And God created man in His Own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."¹⁹

Various Biblical scholars have analyzed these passages and have come to several conclusions regarding the essence and meaning of marriage.²⁰ In this study, however, only the factors relating to the actual structure of the marital relationship will be examined from the Biblical record. Before addressing the actual form of the original marriage, the question as to whether marriage is simply a social custom or a fundamental divine institution needs to be briefly considered.

The Originator of Marriage

Some have posited that marriage is merely a societal or secular institution, or one of "the optional variables of Western culture,"²¹ as noted above. For example, J.S. Wright and J.A. Thompson give the following definition: "Marriage is the state in which men and women can live together in sexual

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relationship with the approval of their social group."²² If this is so, then whatever form of marriage a society approves, whether monogamous or polygamous, heterosexual or homosexual, intrafaith or contra-faith, enduring or temporary, must be considered acceptable.

However, beyond being simply a sexual relationship approved by society, marriage in the first chapters of Genesis involves a divine dimension. Genesis 1:27 says that *God* created them, "male and female," and charged them to be "fruitful and multiply" (1:28). This conjugal relationship is explicated further in the following chapter. Genesis 2:18 records the words of God: "I will make him a helper." In other words, it was *God* Who decided to create "a suitable companion" (2:18, TEV) for the man. Then, it was *God* Who "brought her to the man" (2:22) to be his wife. Thus, both passages specifically state that God is the originator of the marriage relationship.

Clearly, as Geoffrey Bromiley states, "God was the Author of this union."²³ He was the One Who instituted marriage in the beginning.²⁴ Samuel Dresner notes that "the Midrash suggests that God Himself performed the first wedding ceremony for Adam and Eve."²⁵ Or, as Ellen White observed, "God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe."²⁶

The Number of Partners

From Genesis 2:21-24 it becomes clear that this marriage took place between one man and one woman. The repeated use of singular nouns and pronouns in this passage is noteworthy: God decides to make "a helper" for "the man" (2:18); He selects "one" rib from "the man" (2:21), and fashions it into "a woman" whom He then takes to "the man" (2:22); "the man" says that "she shall be called Woman" (2:23); thus, "a man" leaves his parents and is joined to "his wife" (2:24).²⁷ In this distinct way the original marital form can be seen to be monogamous. As John Calvin states:

But though here no mention is made of two, yet there is no ambiguity in the sense; for Moses had not said that God has assigned many wives, but only one to one man; and in the general direction given, He had put the wife in the singular number. It remains, therefore, that the conjugal bond subsists between two persons only, whence it easily appears, that nothing is less accordant with the divine institution than polygamy.²⁸

Wright and Thompson correctly note that "monogamy is implicit in the

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story of Adam and Eve, since God created only one wife for Adam."²⁹ O.J. Baab concurs, stating: "The Creation account in Genesis writes of the first marriage in clearly monogamous terms."³⁰ Even Eugene Hillman, who unsuccessfully tries to prove that polygamy was legitimate according to Mosaic Law, admits that "if we accept it as divinely revealed truth that our species started from only one pair of human beings, then certainly the original marriage must have been monogamous."³¹

Based on the fact that God made only one wife for Adam, Robert Hitchens suggests: "Had He intended for man to be polygamous He would have created several wives."³² Similarly, Mavumilusa Makanzu, aware that God "did not create two or more women, but one,"³³ maintains that this divine institution of monogamy has been clearly expressed ever since Creation.³⁴ As Walter Wegner aptly remarks:

If we are correct in viewing the union of Adam and Eve of Genesis 1 and 2 as the family as God wants it to be, then there can be no doubt about the fact that the marriage held up for the emulation of ancient Israel was a *monogamous* one.³⁵

Thus, as Geoffrey Parrinder concludes: "The fact that the first human beings are represented as having been one man, with one wife, clearly sets up monogamy as the original intention of God for the human race."³⁶ In Ellen White's words: "This first marriage is an example of what all marriages should be. God gave the man one wife. Had he deemed it best for man to have more than one wife, He could as easily have given him two; but He sanctioned no such thing."³⁷ Since the first marriage is seen to be unambiguously monogamous, this marital form is thus understood as representative of the "will of God."³⁸

The Gender Issue

From both Genesis 1 and 2 it becomes plain that this marriage took place between two people of the opposite sex. The repeated use of contrasting gender terms illustrates this: God creates a "male" and a "female" and charges them to be fruitful (1:27, 28); He fashions the rib He took from the "man" into a "woman," and then takes "her" to the "man" (2:22); the man calls her "Woman" because she was taken out of "Man" (2:23); thus a "man" leaves his parents and is joined to his "wife" (2:24). In this well-defined manner it can be easily noted that the original marital form was heterosexual.

The obvious complementary anatomical differences serve to further

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illustrate this point. In addition, the fact that the commission to "multiply" (Genesis 1:28) can only be fulfilled by means of people of the opposite gender, additionally supports this view that the original marital pattern as set up by God was decisively heterosexual.³⁹

In commenting on the first Biblical passage concerning the creation of the human species (Genesis 1:27), Samuel Dresner recognizes the fact that "heterosexuality is at once proclaimed to be the order of Creation."⁴⁰ Though not as explicit, Andrew Dearman concurs with this assessment in his article in a book dealing with homosexuality and Biblical ethics, saying: "In the Genesis accounts one finds the theological basis of marriage rooted in the complementary nature of humankind as male and female created in God's image."⁴¹

Greg Bahnsen is much more direct, noting that the Creation account reveals that sex is to take place only within the context of marriage, a marriage which is "exclusively heterosexual in nature."⁴² Thus, since heterosexuality is the "proper Creation order,"⁴³ "homosexuality is precisely a perversion of nature."⁴⁴ Or, as Dresner put it: "Homosexuality is a violation of the order of Creation."⁴⁵

The Faith Factor

Now while the above concepts of monogamy and heterosexuality can be quite plainly seen from the text of Genesis, the issue of the similarity of the religious faith of the marriage partners requires a deeper search.

Genesis 2:18 records God's words: "I will make him a helper suitable for him." The Revised English Bible (REB) states: "I shall make a partner suited to him." Similar to the REB, other versions interpret the crucial phrase as "a suitable companion" (Today's English Version), "one like himself" (Bible in Basic English), and "who is like him" (Smith 8c Goodspeed). These Bible versions better capture the true essence of the Hebrew term *k'negdo*, which means a "counterpart,"⁴⁶ one "corresponding to him."⁴⁷ Obviously, for Eve to be a truly suitable partner to Adam, she had to have the same basic faith perspective as her spouse. Studies by Umberto Cassuto and others appear to bear out this contention that the Bible indicates a compatibility of ethical and religious beliefs as part of the original marital pattern.⁴⁸ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* suggests that the context of Genesis 2:18 shows that the woman is to be a partner with the man in the areas both of family and worship.⁴⁹

A second passage in the Creation story that suggests this indispensable religious concord, is located in Genesis 2:24. The man and woman are to cleave to each other and become "one flesh." This is a covenant partnership, a mutual dependence and a genuine reciprocity in all areas of life,⁵⁰ which is impossible

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for two who hold differing religious convictions.

Ellen White consistently spoke out against marriage between an unbeliever and a believer, the latter of which she defined as one who has "accepted the truth for this time."⁵¹ These marriages are "forbidden by God,"⁵² and are prohibited in the Bible.⁵³ Thus, she admonishes that it is better to remain unmarried than to commit "sin"⁵⁴ by violating God's clearly revealed will.⁵⁵

The Enduring Nature

Admittedly, no statement in Genesis 1 or 2 directly deals with the issue of the permanence of the marital bond. However, a more careful reading of Genesis 2:24 sheds additional light on this aspect. The Hebrew term *dabaq* is translated in various ways, such as, "cleave" (King James Version), "joined" (New King James Version), "hold fast" (English Standard Version), "clings" (New Revised Standard Version), "unites" (New English Translation), etc. This is a strong term, which in the Old Testament "is often used as a technical covenant term for the *permanent bond* of Israel to the Lord."⁵⁶ Gordon Wenham notes that the phrase, "and be joined to his wife," suggests that "*permanence* should characterize marriage."⁵⁷

Interestingly, additional confirmation about the divine intention regarding the enduring nature of marriage comes from Jesus Himself. In His discussion with the Pharisees concerning divorce, Jesus directed His listeners back to the original institution of marriage in Eden, then added: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:6). Commenting on this statement of Jesus, Larry Chouinard observes that "God originally ordained that marriage be an *inseparable bond*."⁵⁸ Or, as William Hendriksen recognized: "Jesus did indeed so regard marriage . . . as an *indissoluble bond*."⁵⁹

Thus, besides the statement of Jesus, "except for sexual immorality" (NKJV), which will be discussed in an article below, Biblical marriage according to Genesis is not to be dissolved, but is of an enduring nature.

Now that it has been reasonably demonstrated that the original marriage in Eden was a monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith, enduring union, the question naturally arises: What significance does this first marital pattern have for believers? Is it merely a desirable, yet optional model? Is it simply an ideal? Or is this first marriage to be viewed as an unchanging standard, a Biblical mandate?

Significance of the First Marriage

The passage in Genesis 2:24 that forms the closing statement about the first marriage, begins with the Hebrew term *'al-ken*. While in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) it is interpreted "for this cause," several

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English Bibles render it "therefore."⁶⁰ An investigation of the Pentateuch indicates that the Bible writer frequently utilized this concept when making explanatory statements about an occurrence. This happened when people or place names were being identified.⁶¹

More importantly, this usage also occurs in passages where the writer explains the reason behind the observance of certain regulations and laws.⁶² In this regard, Angelo Tosato points out the use of *'al-ken* in the fourth commandment of Exodus 20:11: "On the seventh day of Creation He rested; for this reason [*'al-ken*] He ordered that the Sabbath should be observed."⁶³ Tosato recognizes that Genesis 2:24 is similarly structured.⁶⁴ He posits: "The initial *'al-ken* ('therefore'), in fact, certifies beyond any doubt that he [i.e., Moses, the inspired Bible writer] intends here to *explain* something."⁶⁵ Thus, he concludes that this passage "speaks of marriage in a normative way."⁶⁶

Other scholars have likewise noticed the significance of *'al-ken* in Genesis 2:24.⁶⁷ Nahum Sarna states that this term introduces an observation on the part of the writer, in which some "fundamental aspects of the marital relationship are traced to God's original creative act and seen as part of the ordained natural order."⁶⁸ Similarly, Herbert Ryle recognizes that this "sentence beginning with 'therefore' supplies the application, or relation, of the ancient narrative to later times."⁶⁹ Thus, it appears that just as God had instituted the monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith, enduring marriage of the first parents of the human race, He intends that this pattern be normative for marital relationships for the rest of humanity for all time.

The significance of this first marriage is further underscored by the evidence that arises from a more intense investigation of the grammar of Genesis 2:24. The first verb, *ya"zab* ("he will leave"), is in the imperfect tense, followed by two consecutive perfects, as normal. When this type of tense is understood as a frequentative imperfect, it is rendered, as the Revised Standard Version (RSV) has it, as something occurring customarily: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."⁷⁰ However, the Hebrew imperfect can also be interpreted in other ways. It can express actions to be repeated in the future, as the American Standard Version (ASV) puts it:⁷¹ "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

The imperfect tense may also be used to express a command, informing people of what ought or ought not to be done.⁷² Genesis 2:24 could thus be legitimately translated: "Therefore a man should leave his father and mother, and cling to his wife, and they should become one flesh." Robert Lawton concludes that when rendered this way, "the verse can be understood as a descrip-

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tion of divine intention."⁷³ Since this text begins with the introductory term, "therefore," the Hebrew imperfect would be more faithfully translated as expressing a command, thus indicating that here a standard is being set,⁷⁴ a norm established, a mandate given by God Himself.

Even though these words in Genesis 2:24 were physically penned by a human being, since they are the utterance of divine revelation, "Christ could quote them, therefore, as the Word of God (Matthew 19:5)."⁷⁵ Therefore, since it is a clear expression of God's will, this statement is of great import for all.

Gordon Wenham correctly understands this verse as "applying the principles of the first marriage to every subsequent marriage."⁷⁶ According to Sereno Dwight: "This is the Great Original Law of Marriage binding on the whole human family."⁷⁷ Speaking about this first marriage, Ellen White said: "God gave to Adam one wife—showing to all who should live upon the earth, His order and law in that respect."⁷⁸ Thus, this first monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith, enduring marriage becomes the only acceptable Biblical pattern and model for all marital unions.⁷⁹

Summary and Conclusion

By way of summary, the following should be noted: The illustrations mentioned at the start of this article demonstrate that new concepts are currently creeping into the Seventh-day Adventist Church—perspectives that seek to recognize polygamous, homosexual, contra-faith unions, as well as lax divorce/remarriage standards as acceptable forms of Christian marriage. This study of the marital mandate, as established by the Creator God in the book of Genesis, however, radically challenges these opinions.

First, it was seen that it was the Creator God Himself Who originated and established the institution of marriage. Second, the original marriage was divinely set up as unambiguously monogamous. Third, God established marriage as a heterosexual union. Fourth, the Edenic model shows that God-ordained marriage must be an intrafaith relationship. Fifth, this marital bond is intended by Heaven to be an enduring one. And finally, it was demonstrated that Genesis 2:24 establishes this form of conjugal union as the divine design, the only standard and an unchanging Biblical mandate for all marital relationships.

In a family newsletter, talking about what is happening throughout the world, one concerned Christian leader remarked: "There is a highly coordinated international effort to redefine marriage."⁸⁰ In view of this current crisis, it would be well for all Christians, especially Seventh-day Adventists, to promote and

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reemphasize God's original standard and pattern for marriage—that everyone needs to abstain from all polygamous, homosexual, contra-faith, temporary sexual alliances, and to uphold the God-given marital mandate as set up in Eden: monogamous, heterosexual, intrafaith, and enduring conjugal unions.

Ellen White indicated that "Heaven looks with pleasure upon marriage formed with an earnest desire to conform to the direction given in the Scriptures."⁸¹ Referring to the Edenic original, she noted: "When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man's social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature."⁸² If conscientiously adhered to, this plan for marriage will prove to be "one of the greatest blessings ever given to the human family."⁸³

Endnotes

¹ A careful study of Genesis 1 and 2 supports this conclusion. See also Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), pp. 46-48.

² Borge Schantz, "One Message—Many Cultures: How Do We Cope?" *Ministry*, June 1992, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵ The usual term "interfaith" does not convey the gravity of this step of marrying outside one's faith; hence the term "contra-faith" is used here.

⁶ *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* (Silver Spring, Md.: The Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), p. 246.

⁷ See the article by J. David Newman, "Marrying Non-Adventists," *Ministry*, February 1994, p. 5 (emphasis added).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* (Silver Spring, Md.: The Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997), p. 261.

¹⁰ Jack Robinson, "To Wed or Not to Wed . . . That Is the Question," Unpublished Manuscript, February 1994, p. 10.

¹¹ Lin Ennis, "Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality," in *In Our Own Words*, eds. Iris M. Yob, and Patti Hansen Tompkins (Santa Ana, Calif: Adventist Women's Institute, 1993), p. 229.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 236, 237.

¹⁴ David R. Larson, "Sexuality and Christian Ethics," *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984) :16.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press, 1956), p. 63.

¹⁶ See, for example, Robert Johnston, "Divorced Once, Single Forever?" *Signs of the Times*, February 1994, pp. 24-27; Robert M. Johnston, "Unfaithfulness to the Marriage Vow," *Ministry*, November 1994, pp. 14-16.

¹⁷ See Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2,"

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Andrews University Seminary Studies 26 (Spring 1988) :5.

¹⁸ J. Kerby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas: Biblical Perspectives on Contemporary Ethical Issues*, Swindoll Leadership Library, ed. Charles R. Swindoll (Nashville: Word, 1998), p. 165.

¹⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

²⁰ See, for example, Samson Osimbo Obwa, "Polygamy Among the Southern Luo of Kenya: A Critique of Both the Practice of Polygamy and the Reaction of Mission-Founded Churches to It in the Light of Biblical Teaching" (MA thesis, Columbia Graduate School of Bible and Missions, 1978), pp. 50-56; Samuel H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation," *Judaism* 40 (Summer 1991) :309; Davidson.

²¹ Schantz, p. 11.

²² J.S. Wright and J.A. Thompson, *The New Bible Dictionary* (1962), s.v. "Marriage," p. 786.

²³ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 3.

²⁴ Gerhard Jasper, "Polygyny in the Old Testament," *Africa Theological Journal* 2 (February 1969) :50; also, Robert J. Hitchens, *Multiple Marriage: A Study of Polygamy in Light of the Bible* (Elkton, Md.: Doulos, 1987), p. 3.

²⁵ Dresner, p. 316.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press, 1958), p. 46.

²⁷ George Bush comments: "As for polygamy, it is clearly forbidden by the fact that a single pair only were created, and by the terms of the command, that a man shall cleave to his wife (not wives) only," George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Genesis; Designed as a General Help to Biblical Reading and Instruction*, 2 vols. (New York: Newman and Ivison, 1852), vol. 1, p. 69 (emphasis original).

²⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 136.

²⁹ Wright and Thompson, s.v. "Marriage," p. 787.

³⁰ O.J. Baab, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), vol. 3, s.v. "Marriage," p. 281.

³¹ Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1975), p. 151.

³² Hitchens, p. 15.

³³ Mavumilusa Makanzu, *Can the Church Accept Polygamy?* (Accra, Ghana: Asempa, 1983), p. 58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 62. Furthermore, Makanzu notes, additional support for monogamy comes from the fact that the Song of Songs "cannot be understood in the context of a polygamous marriage"; p. 59.

³⁵ Walter Wegner, "God's Pattern for the Family in the Old Testament," in *Family Relationships and the Church: A Sociological, Historical, and Theological Study of Family Structures, Roles, and Relationships*, Marriage and Family Research Series, ed. Oscar E. Feucht (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), p. 29 (emphasis original).

³⁶ Geoffrey Parrinder, *The Bible and Polygamy: A Study of Hebrew and Christian Teaching* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), p. 30.

³⁷ Ellen G. White, "Marriages, Wise and Unwise," *The Youth's Instructor*, August 10, 1899, p. 437.

³⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 182; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), p. 24; cf. Walter Trobisch, who calls monogamy "God's original and final will;" Walter Trobisch, *My Wife Made Me a Polygamist*, "Here Is My Problem," Series 1 (Kehl/Rhein, Germany: Editions Trobisch, 1980), p. 21.

³⁹ See Andrew Dearman, who makes the same point; J. Andrew Dearman, "Marriage in

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the Old Testament," in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), pp. 54, 55.

⁴⁰ Dresner, p. 309.

⁴¹ Dearman, p. 53.

⁴² Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), p. 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Anderson concurs, saying: "Homosexuality is a violation of the natural process God intended for human sexuality;" p. 166.

⁴⁵ Dresner, p. 309. See also Bahnsen, p. 31.

⁴⁶ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958), p. 591.

⁴⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 149. Further support for the corresponding nature of the relationship between man and woman can be seen in the "ring construction" of the entire Creation account of male and female. See Davidson, p. 14.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, part 1, "From Adam to Noah," trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1981), p. 127.

⁴⁹ John H. Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), "Genesis," p. 48.

⁵⁰ Davidson, pp. 21, 22.

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press, 1948), vol. 5, p. 364.

⁵² Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1923), p. 500.

⁵³ See White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 363, 364; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, Calif: Pacific Press, 1962), p. 271.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1952), p. 351.

⁵⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 507.

⁵⁶ Davidson, p. 21 (emphasis added).

⁵⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1987), "Genesis 1-15," p. 71 (emphasis added).

⁵⁸ Larry Chouinard, *Matthew, College Press NIV Commentary* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press), p. 337 (emphasis added).

⁵⁹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 715 (emphasis added).

⁶⁰ See, for example, KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, NKJV, and NRSV.

⁶¹ See, for example, Genesis 19:22; 25:30; 26:33; 29:35; 30:6; 31:48; 33:17; Exodus 15:23.

⁶² See, for example, Exodus 13:15: Because God freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, "therefore" (*'al-ken*), they were to celebrate the Passover. The "therefore" thus establishes the law. Other passages, such as the following, reveal a similar type of structure: Genesis 32:32; Leviticus 17:11, 12; Numbers 18:24; Deuteronomy 15:11.

⁶³ Angelo Tosato, "On Genesis 2:24," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (July 1990) :406.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 398 (emphasis original).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

⁶⁷ See, for example, James Comper Gray and George M. Adams, eds., *The Biblical Encyclopedia*, 5 vols. (Cleveland: F.M. Barton, 1903), vol. 1, p. 18; Robert Davidson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973),

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"Genesis 1-11," pp. 37, 38.

⁶⁸ Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), "Genesis," p. 23.

⁶⁹ Herbert E. Ryle, *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1921), "The Book of Genesis," p. 39. See also Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1987), "Genesis 1-15," p. 70.

⁷⁰ See Robert B. Lawton, "Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986) :97.

⁷¹ See also KJV, NIV, NKJV, NASB.

⁷² S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 43. See, for example, Genesis 2:17; 3:14; Exodus 20:3-17; 21:12; Numbers 15:14.

⁷³ Lawton, p. 98.

⁷⁴ This type of construction can be found in passages such as Exodus 22:30, Deuteronomy 22:3, and 2 Samuel 13:12. For example, in Genesis 34:7 the word *ken* precedes the imperfect, and the phrase is rendered as a prohibition, "for such a thing ought not to be done."

⁷⁵ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 1, p. 90. See also Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1981), vol. 1, p. 14; A. Cohen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash* (Surrey, England: Soncino, 1947), p. 12; Howard F. Vos, *Genesis* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), p. 25; F.D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 7 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976-1980), vol. 1, p. 227. For a more detailed study of Matthew 19:5 see chapter 5 of Ronald A.G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993).

⁷⁶ Wenham, p. 70.

⁷⁷ Sereno Edwards Dwight, *The Hebrew Wife: or, The Law of Marriage Examined in Relation to the Lawfulness of Polygamy and to the Extent of the Law of Incest* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1836), p. 9.

⁷⁸ Ellen G. White, "The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: The Flood," *Signs of the Times*, February 27, 1879, p. 66. See also Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), p. 75.

⁷⁹ Interestingly, there is sufficient evidence to show that God reiterated this Edenic marital structure when dealing with Noah and his family, and the antediluvians. For more on this, see Ron du Preez, "The God-Given Marital Mandate: Monogamous, Heterosexual, Intrafaith," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10 (Spring-Autumn 1999) :23-40; also, see Ellen White's reference to divorce at the time of the Flood, in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), vol. 7, p. 56.

⁸⁰ *Family News From Dr. James Dobson* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, June 1998), p. 4. Though his primary concern was homosexuality, Dobson also addressed polygamy, and noted that American citizens should get their individual states to "define marriage as being between one man and one woman;" p. 6.

⁸¹ White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 70.

⁸² White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

⁸³ "Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!" [a debate between Orson Pratt and J.P. Newman] (Baltimore, Md.: John S. Dye, 1874), p. 15.

Chapter 36

Abandonment: A New Grounds for Divorce?

By Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, PhD

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Historically, Seventh-day Adventists have believed in the permanence of the marriage institution. Basing their belief on the Genesis model of marriage and other passages of Scripture, Adventists find additional support for their position in Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:32) and in His statement that:

"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. . . . Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matthew 19:6, 9; cf. Mark 10:9-12).

The long-standing Adventist position on the permanence of the marital union is confirmed by Ellen G. White who also wrote:

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 63).

On the strength of the above statements, our church has taught that divorce was justifiable only on grounds of adultery (understood to mean sexual infidelity or unfaithfulness to the marriage vow), and that a divorced person could not remarry until after the death of the estranged spouse or unless he or she was the innocent party in an adulterous situation. Believing that divorce(e)s who remarried without Biblical grounds lived in constant adultery, the Adventist Church typically disfellowshipped members who remarried if they were the guilty partners in divorces.

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However, during the past five or more decades, the increase in the divorce rate in society, together with liberalism's weakening of Biblical authority in the church, have produced a mentality in the church that views un-Biblical divorce and remarriage as a viable alternative to the "till death do us part" portion of the marriage vow. Those who have embraced the worldly mindset have argued that the church's long-standing position on divorce and remarriage is too "harsh" or void of "grace," too "judgmental," and practically unworkable in our sinful world. In their opinion divorce(e)s without Biblical justification need "healing" or "redemption," not "punishment" from the church.

Thus, from the 1970s, as an increasing number of pastors have been reluctant to disfellowship offending members, there have been attempts to find a "Biblical" justification (other than sexual infidelity) to accommodate the un-Biblical divorce and remarriage practices that were rampant in some quarters of the church. In other words, instead of bringing our lives in harmony with the teachings of Scripture, we were looking for a methodology that would bring the Bible into accord with our lives.

By the 1990s, as church publications began carrying articles that sought to liberalize the Bible's teaching to accommodate un-Biblical divorce and remarriage,¹ attempts were also underway to revise the wording in the *Church Manual* to make its policy on divorce and remarriage more "redemptive."² The triumph of the new view divorce and remarriage took place at the 2000 Toronto General Conference session when the *Church Manual* was revised to include "abandonment" as a new ground for divorce.

As will become evident in this article, this new justification for divorce—"abandonment"—is ambiguous enough to allow for easy divorce and remarriage. Thus, for the first time in its history, the Seventh-day Adventist Church at a General Conference session went beyond the teachings of the Bible and legislated an un-Biblical ground for divorce.

Toronto General Conference Session

I was a delegate to the 2000 Toronto General Conference session. More than any other issue, this session will be remembered for its controversial vote on divorce and remarriage. To many, this issue has come to symbolize the domestication of liberal ideas in the church. How exactly did this surprising vote come about? And what should the church do with this questionable *Church Manual* policy? This chapter captures my views on the issue.

Immediately after the controversial decision, I was interviewed by a number of Adventist news outlets—spanning a wide spectrum of theological leaning.

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The following interview was conducted by the news editor of *Adventist Today*, a liberal publication based in La Sierra, California. Because we tend to stand on opposite sides of theological issues, this interview, published in its entirety, can be read as a liberal-conservative exchange on the subject.

"The Parliamentary Maneuver" as Coup d'Etat³

Dr. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, a native of Ghana, seemed to be in the middle of every potential conservative-liberal debate during the entire 57th GC conference session. His cries for "theological integrity!" reverberated through the SkyDome on more than one occasion. More than any other individual, it was Pipim that represented the loyal opposition to the recommended divorce and remarriage amendment that was passed in a surprise parliamentary maneuver on Friday morning, July 7, 2000.

Pipim, although now living and working in the United States, was a delegate of the African-Indian Ocean Division [AID], as he has been for every general conference session going back to New Orleans in 1985. He is currently employed by the Michigan Conference, serving as the Director of Public Campus Ministries, whose office is presently located on the campus of The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Pipim's continuing status as AID delegate despite working in the United States is explained by the fact that he has continued to play an active role in the African Division church work. He regularly returns to teach theology and ethics to their students, conduct ministerial workshops, and speak at various camp meetings. Since 1995, he has represented the AID at the GC's Biblical Research Institute Committee (BRICOM).

AT [*Adventist Today*] spotted Sam Pipim late Friday afternoon on July 7 as he was strolling through the exhibit hall near the AT booth in his yellow Ghanaian garb. When approached by AT, he was delighted to talk and in good spirits. When he saw my AT name tag his face actually lit up in a friendly smile, saying he read AT regularly and respected the fact that AT was not afraid to debate and take a stand on controversial issues, though he usually disagreed with its viewpoint. Pipim exudes a charming, radiant mental energy and self-assurance. The discussion we had there was brief but productive. It was agreed that we would continue our discussion via e-mail. The framework for this interview is based on that meeting, supplemented by the subsequent exchange of e-mails that followed from it.

AT: Dr. Pipim, your voice echoed several times in the Toronto SkyDome. Were

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there any specific issues that were of particular concern to you?

SKP: Every issue was important to me, but I was particularly interested in the-ological issues, since they concern the message and mission of the church. Moreover, just as the accountants and treasurers spoke forcefully on the auditing procedures in the church, you should expect a systematic theologian to show keen interest in doctrinal proposals suggested for inclusion in the *Church Manual*. The auditors were seeking to preserve the financial integrity of the church. I was arguing for the theological integrity of the church.

AT: You were obviously keenly interested in the matter that was passed this morning. Will you tell me what your thoughts are concerning what happened?

SKP: Certainly! First of all, I want to make it clear that the General Conference spoke this morning, and I therefore accept that decision and will respect it as such. But I'm confident that when the issue is sufficiently explored, it will be reconsidered at a future GC session. My concern is that as a church, we are slowly legitimizing a process which I describe as "legislate now, find Biblical answers later." This happened with the questionable Annual Council decision on baptizing wives of polygamists (1946)¹⁴¹; then came another questionable decision on ordaining women as elders (1975 and 1984). Each of these Annual Council decisions has caused deep polarization and confusion in churches. Now divorce and remarriage (2000) has been added to the list of controversial decisions.

But this most recent decision in Toronto is worse than the previous ones. For whereas polygamy and women elders were Annual Council actions, the divorce and remarriage decision was made at General Conference session. As such, it is now going to be enshrined in the *Church Manual*! But as I said, the decision this morning is now the church's official position. I will respect it as such, though I reserve the right to question its theological legitimacy. That must be emphasized, and everything else that I say must be taken in that context.

It is no secret that I am not happy about the means by which the Divorce and Remarriage amendment was passed this morning. The thought that went through my mind as it was being passed, was that these developed-country delegates must think that those of us from the so-called third world are awfully dumb. As you must have seen, those from the developing world are generally more conservative and tended to have more reservations concerning this amendment. Well, just because we speak with a different accent, [he does not mention color] does not mean that we cannot think or learn. Some of these del-

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legates from the nonindustrialized world who saw this unfolding are prominent government officials in their own countries. They cherish and seek to uphold the ideals of representative democracy in their home nations. They are very intelligent and godly. I am afraid they will learn the wrong lessons from this.

Remember that the conservatives have numbers on their side. If we wanted to play power politics, we could have forced our views on North America and the world church. But I don't believe in that. Issues involving principles or ideas should be decided on merit, not on politics or parliamentary tricks. That's why I preferred to leave it up to a commission to study the matter dispassionately rather than having things settled on the floor in the heat of debate, as much as I enjoy that process. If the conservatives had tried to use force to get our way, I would have gotten up to oppose it passionately. This should not be about winning. It should be about coming to the right decision.

AT: Does that mean you did not hear Garry Hodgkin get up yesterday afternoon and announce what he was going to do this morning?⁵

SKP: No, I did not. I'm not sure many of our people did. Otherwise they'd have been there in great numbers. You know that the divorce-remarriage issue was a hot potato item. The chairpersons were at times confused.⁶

Delegates offered conflicting suggestions on how to proceed. But it was clear to most of us that the matter had all been settled for this session, and would not come up again until St. Louis. So we were caught completely by surprise. Hardly anybody from our delegation was there. It was Friday, the last working day of the week. Many went to confirm their air tickets for their departure on Sunday. Remember that there were rumors of an Air Canada strike. Others went shopping and packing.

AT: But most of the NAD [North American Division] delegates were also absent.

SKP: Yes, but proportionally, I think our delegations were less represented. There were only about 150 delegates present altogether. How can it be fair for them to overturn a decision that passed with most delegates present?

AT: Do you accept parliamentary procedure as valid rules under which to conduct church business?

SKP: Oh, yes. I want to emphasize that what they did, procedurally or legally,

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was OK. When a church business meeting is called, if you are there, you are there; if not, it is still a valid meeting. Some are questioning whether the decision was valid, given the fact that a quorum was not there. I say that's a waste of time and disagree with those who wish to make that an issue now, though I think it true that if a quorum had been challenged then, that challenge would have been upheld.

But it is possible for things to be legal, while still violating the spirit of fairness. The question before us is not whether the action was legal in a technical sense, but whether the individuals from the industrialized countries act "rightly and fairly" in a more fundamental sense.

Those who are really pushing this new view of divorce and remarriage—most of them from these industrialized countries such as North America, Australia, and Europe; regions that constitute less than 10% of the world Adventist membership—came in and staged their theological coup d'etat by utilizing parliamentary procedures to rescind the previous action, cut off all debate, and overturn a prior decision taken by an overwhelming majority of delegates.

I say it was a coup d'etat, because the proponents decided to do so when the overwhelming majority of delegates from Africa, Inter-America, South America, the Pacific Islands, etc., were not there. Only about 150 people [about 7 or 8% of GC delegates] were present. Do you understand the dynamics? One hundred fifty people from certain segments of the industrialized countries took advantage of the absence of a large segment of the delegates, and overturned a prior decision by an overwhelming majority of delegates. Some may dispute the 150 number, but I believe my criticism would still be valid, even if 50% of the delegates took the decision to overturn the previous actions. [Read this endnote.]

Remember, Dennis, the issue was considered so important that they had to suspend Nominating Committee meetings so its members could be there to speak to this issue. That was Tuesday and Wednesday. And with an almost full house of 2,000 delegates present, we voted that the entire document, bearing in mind our concerns, be referred to the *Church Manual* Committee.

I have spoken to many people, including people who disagree with me theologically; I'm talking about even liberals. And they all concede that the action was really wrong. It didn't show maturity, sensitivity, or a sense of fairness.

Now our people from the developing countries can be faulted for not being there. Perhaps they were too naive or trusting, oblivious to the many ideological undercurrents at GC sessions. Undoubtedly, they have themselves to

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blame for this theologically questionable position now enshrined in the *Church Manual*.

AT: Let's set aside the parliamentary issue for one moment and consider the merits of the amendment that got passed, against what it will replace. I know you object to certain elements in it, but as a package, what do you think of it?

SKP: As a whole, I think there is much to like. There is no doubt that it appears more redemptive than what it replaces. Among its strengths is that, instead of the old *Church Manual* which began with a statement on "divorce and remarriage," the amended document begins with a positive statement on marriage. That chapter in the *Church Manual* now is titled, "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage." I think that is positive. We distort things when we begin discussing a negative ("Divorce and Remarriage"), without first putting it in the context of something that is very positive (Marriage).

Another positive aspect of the document was the attempt to make it a little more user-friendly. For example, instead of talking about "disfellowshipping," it talks about "removal from membership"; it's a change in terminology. Also, instead of talking about "the guilty party" in a marriage situation, it uses the phrase "the spouse who has violated the marriage vow"—a phrase which means the same thing, but doesn't look so judgmental. These were positive changes that I think they brought together, and I am happy about that.

AT: Now tell me about the problems you see in it.

Role Distinctions in Marriage

SKP: Let's start with the issue of role differentiation in marriage. For the first time, this document sets forth a new view of marriage, which I would describe as an "egalitarian" form of marriage. Some call it a "partnership" form of marriage.

AT: But you are not saying that there is something wrong with the idea that both partners in a marriage relationship are in principle equal, are you?

SKP: Of course not. The equality of men and women is not an issue, though liberals and feminists try to portray it that way. God created Adam and Eve as equals with neither superior to the other. They were created as equal but complementary spiritual beings with different roles for male and female to govern the home and the first church. Role distinctions do not imply inequality.

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The document that was initially submitted to the delegates for consideration suggested that male headship and female submission began at the Fall, instead of its inception at the Creation. The subtle implication here is that male headship may have been done away with at the cross.

By taking away role distinctions at Creation, the document set a theological foundation for not only women's ordination, but by logical extension, the condoning of homosexuality and homosexual marriages. After all, if the roles of men and women in their relationship with each other are completely negotiable in God's view, then why not a homosexual relationship?

Many people may not appreciate the full implications of recognizing role differentiation. To them, homosexuality and women's ordination issues were unrelated to the discussion on the floor. In fact, one associate editor of *Adventist Review* expressed "surprise" at my comment. He apparently believes the comment by one delegate that those of us questioning the theological fuzziness of the proposal were appealing to those with "a scare mentality."⁸

I may be wrong. But my guess is that many have not seriously thought through the theological implications of the issues involved in the theologically ambiguous proposal. In fact, I myself at one time was a supporter of women's ordination because I did not recognize the validity of Bible-based role distinctions for men and women. But after much Bible study, I changed my mind, publishing my reasons in my book, *Searching the Scriptures* (1995). I have opposed it since then. For my most recent attempt, see my three chapters in *Prove All Things* (2000).

At Toronto, we succeeded in removing some of the most blatant statements endorsing this egalitarian view before we were prevented from making any further amendments to the document. But some of it's still there in some fuzzy and feminist language. For example, they refer to Paul's teaching on headship and submission (Ephesians 5:21-28) as though it is discussing male superiority and female inferiority.

Abandonment by an Unbelieving Partner

It also introduced another ground for divorce, namely, "abandonment by an unbelieving partner." Historically, Adventists have insisted that the only ground for divorce is adultery and/or fornication. But the document which the *Church Manual* Committee presented before us introduces a new ground; they call it "abandonment by an unbelieving partner." Then they inserted 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 as their proof text that it is another ground for divorce! Now this is extremely problematic in terms of its hermeneutics, logic, internal coherence, as well as its application.

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Hermeneutics

The *Church Manual* committee has injected a reference to 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 into their document, as if that text is talking about divorce. Does it really? By making that assertion, they have raised the issue of hermeneutics—how to interpret the Bible. Responsible scholars and commentators seem to be in agreement that the precise meaning of 1 Corinthians 7:15 is not crystal clear. So why do we build a theological position on an obscure passage? We never got a chance to discuss it.

Questionable Logic

Having read the document all the way through, it is apparent that a logical contradiction has been created that has serious ethical and practical implications. On the "Grounds for Divorce," the document states, "Scripture recognizes adultery and/or fornication (Matthew 5:32) as well as abandonment by an unbelieving partner (1 Corinthians 7:10-15) as Biblical grounds for divorce."

Yet they continue to assert that only adultery and/or fornication by the other partner allows one to remarry. This asymmetry is not logical, and in my opinion betrays the artificial mental gymnastics that were used to create this new ground for divorce in the first place. How can the grounds for remarriage logically be different from the grounds for divorce? The fact that one is not free to remarry implies that one is not really divorced. Shouldn't divorce mean divorce? Give us a break!

If the Scriptures really allow these two grounds for divorce, why shouldn't an abandoned believer who allegedly has Biblical grounds for divorce, not be permitted to remarry? It is this kind of theological ambiguity, fuzziness, and inconsistency that some of us were pointing out. This kind of theological "double-speak" is always a common prelude to liberalism's revisionist theologies.

AT: Following your logic, one might argue that this logical asymmetry also will create practical problems, because it will create a class of single people who are left in limbo to live like nuns and priests.

SKP: Absolutely. If living this life of celibacy were Biblically mandated, there would be no problem. But that case has not yet been made by proponents. I find parallels here with the debate on homosexuality. Some argue that being a homosexual is not a sin. But they proceed to argue illogically that homosexuals cannot get married!

As far as I'm concerned, there are only two logically sound alternatives. If homosexuality is not a sin, we should allow homosexuals to marry and hold

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offices in the church. But if it is a sin (which is my position), the church should not allow homosexual marriage.

In the same way, if the Bible grants divorce on the ground of abandonment, we should allow such divorce(e)s to remarry. Otherwise, we create second-class divorcees in the church. In this respect, the illogical *Church Manual* proposal is neither "compassionate" nor "redemptive."

Internal Coherence

For those people who still believe that Ellen White is an inspired writer, the *Church Manual* proposal also raises some troubling questions. Mrs. White states very clearly that the only ground for divorce is unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, understood by the church to mean adultery, fornication, and various forms of sexual immorality or perversion, including homosexuality and child abuse. Mrs. White wrote:

In the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 5:32; 19:9] Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow. (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 63.)

This statement was quoted in the *Church Manual*. As some of the speakers rightly argued, the "abandonment clause" raises a direct contradiction to this Ellen G. White statement already in the *Church Manual*. So all these questions were raised.

Besides, Ellen White has spoken on this very question of "abandonment of the unbelieving partner," divorce, remarriage (see, for example, *Adventist Home*, pp. 340-352). We cannot adopt the *Church Manual* proposal without a careful discussion of the all these concerns vis-a-vis the writings of Ellen White.

Application

Practically speaking, allowing the abandonment provision for divorce into the *Manual* is like allowing the proverbial camel's head under the tent. The rest of the camel is bound to follow.

What constitutes "abandonment"? Is it ten years? Is it two years? Is it five weeks? The document is silent, but the camel will keep pushing. That's just the beginning. The second phase of the camel's invasion will be to argue for what could be termed "emotional abandonment." For example, I may not physically abandon my wife, but my wife or I (depending on which one of us wants to

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divorce) can say, "You know, even though we live in the same house, he or she has emotionally abandoned me." Then there will be the push for recognition of what may be called "sexual abandonment," when one spouse's sexual needs are not met. This logical extension of the definition of abandonment will eventually create room for anyone, for whatever reason, to seek divorce.

AT: Well, not quite. It has to be abandonment by "an unbelieving partner."

SKP: That phrase is also a problem. Who or what constitutes an "unbelieving partner"? During the debate, they defined an unbelieving partner as "one who has not embraced the three angels' messages." In other words, an unbelieving partner is a non-Adventist.

So, according to this new proposal, if a Seventh-day Adventist who is married to a Baptist or Methodist or Presbyterian, and this non-SDA spouse ("unbelieving partner") abandons the other on say his/her birthday, anniversary, or for two weeks, months, years, etc., the Adventist has grounds to go to the church and say, "See, my Baptist or Methodist husband/wife has abandoned me. Therefore, I have a right to a divorce."

Does this double standard make good theological sense when applied to divorce? Our church will begin to be known as that church which encourages splitting of families, creating some missiological problems.

For example, it wouldn't be too helpful in Utah where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons, score a lot of points with their family emphasis. It would also create problems in Africa, where our people are winning many converts from other churches. Sometimes under very difficult circumstances (e. g., when a wife is being persecuted by the husband for joining the SDA Church), all they want to hear from the pastor is a license to go ahead and divorce the spouse. Under this new questionable *Church Manual* proposal, a person in this kind of situation can divorce the unbelieving partner. In the opinion of several of the delegates who spoke against the proposal, this liberalized position is going to open a can of worms.

AT: Speaking of worms or camels, I suppose one could also argue that since a nonbeliever is defined in terms of a negation of "belief" rather than official membership, an argument could be made that one's officially SDA spouse is not really "a believer" if he or she is a liberal or evangelical SDA.

SKP: Yes, if the terms "liberal" or "evangelical" imply a negation of some Fundamental Beliefs of the SDA Church. And I'm sure some will also argue in

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this way: "My spouse, though officially an Adventist, is actually an unbeliever because he/she does not practice the SDA lifestyle. He/she worships his/her TV, sports, computer, clothing, etc.; hence has violated the second commandment!" My point is that, this "unbelieving partner" provision in the divorce and remarriage package raises the fundamental question of who or what constitutes a true SDA believer? Don't we have a right to debate the issue?

To summarize, the questionable vote on Friday regarding the marriage and divorce proposal was more than a "change of wording." I therefore reject the "spin" that has been put on the issue in some of our official publications and news outlets. The vote was a calculated attempt by proponents to liberalize the church's long-standing position on divorce and remarriage. And I'd hope that some fair-minded Adventist journalists will hold them accountable. It is the right thing to do—regardless of one's theological leaning.

Believing that "it is better to debate an issue without settling it, than settling an issue without debating it," I have always welcomed candid and vigorous debates on theological issues. But to maneuver the parliamentary process to rescind a decision made by an overwhelming majority of delegates, to cut off debate, and to vote into the *Church Manual* a document that is riddled with theological fuzziness, and which is arguably defective in theology, holds the potential of splitting the church. Some conscientious pastors and church members can argue that they cannot accept the *Church Manual* as an authoritative document to govern the church since this provision is contrary to Biblical and Ellen G. White teaching. A rejection of the authority of the *Church Manual* will be a sure recipe for Congregationalism.

Unless such tactics as were employed in the Friday morning coup d'etat are repudiated, this is going to have serious consequences in future sessions, and cause a mistrust to grow that will only deepen the divisions that already exist between the industrialized and developing countries, between liberals and conservatives. This is why I felt compelled this morning to use a "privileged motion" to register my protest.

I knew that nothing would come out of it, but I wanted the world and future generations of Adventists to know that there was at least one person at Toronto who refused to be party to that theologically questionable decision. And of course, one day God will hold all of us accountable for what we did and refused to do on this issue.

AT: Dr. Pipim, it has been a pleasure speaking with you. I truly admire your passion and the purity of your logic, although we may differ in our presuppositions and the underlying logic we employ. Would you be willing to discuss

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the underlying foundational issues sometime in the near future?

SKP: I would love to discuss the foundational issues. Unless our logical foundation is Biblically sound, then everything built upon it becomes questionable. Let's continue to dialogue. Perhaps I will succeed in making you a good, happy conservative. Then we can have another kind of *Adventist Today!*

[Note: Following the publication of this interview, several asked me questions about (a) lessons I learned from Toronto, (b) the validity of the vote by a few members of delegates, and (c) what attitude church members should take now. The following is a summary of my response.]

Lessons From Toronto

1. Those who are called upon to attend General Conference sessions do not go there for sightseeing or their personal agenda. They are there to conduct the business of the church. Therefore delegates have a responsibility to attend all the sessions. To do otherwise is to be negligent in one's obligations.

2. The questionable vote on divorce and remarriage took place on the very last day of the session—when most people thought the issue had been settled already. Delegates must always remember that until a business session is adjourned, anything can happen. Typically, some of the most important issues tend to be brought to the floor during the closing hours of business sessions—when many are tired or not present.

3. As far as possible, delegates should be given copies (or summaries) of the issues that will come up for discussion long before they arrive for the session. It takes extra motivation after long travel hours for a person to comb through hundreds of pages. Some of the materials tend to be written in terse language. This suggestion is especially crucial in matters dealing with *Church Manual* revisions.

4. It costs thousands of dollars to send a delegate to a ten-day session (airfare, hotel, food, etc.). To ensure that God's tithe money is well spent, only knowledgeable individuals who have a burden for the work should be asked to serve as delegates. GC sessions are not designed to reward individuals for faithful service or for being political allies of leaders.

Is the Decision Valid?

Several years ago, Mrs. Ellen G. White stated what our attitude ought to be with respect to GC session decisions: "But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly main-

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tained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 260).

However, Mrs. White also indicated that in order for a GC session decision to have its full force of authority, such decisions should not be surrendered to a "small group of men." She considered it an "error" to accord "the full measure of authority and influence" to the judgment of a small and/or unrepresentative group of delegates. Sister White wrote:

God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority. The error that some are in danger of committing is in giving to the mind and judgment of one man, or of a small group of men, the full measure of authority and influence that God has vested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 261).

In the light of the above statements, one can legitimately argue that the Biblically questionable vote taken at Toronto on divorce and remarriage cannot be accorded the "full measure of authority and influence that God has invested in His church." How can the decision by a "small group of men" represent that of "the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work"? It seems to me that those who attempt to implement this un-Biblical policy can only do so at the peril of the "prosperity and advancement" of God's work (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 260, 261).

Proponents can flatter themselves into believing that they now have a policy on divorce and remarriage that is "compassionate" and "redemptive." The truth, however, is that this questionable policy now enshrined in the *Church Manual* will not solve the divorce problem. It will rather worsen it. More importantly, the policy will compromise the message and witness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a counter-voice in today's world.

What Can We Do?

1. *Remember that there is a judicious procedure.* Let's remember that the SDA Church has a judicious procedure to address this kind of situation. Churches can direct their grievances to the appropriate quarters of the church—from the conference level, through the union and division levels, to

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the General Conference level—requesting that the issue be revisited. When this happens, and when the issue is sufficiently explored, I am confident that this questionable policy will be overturned at a future GC session.

2. *Teach, the dangers of violating Biblical teaching.* Church members, elders, pastors, and leaders should counsel all who are contemplating divorcing and remarrying under the present policy about the dangers of violating Biblical teaching, Jesus is coming soon; this is not the time to lose heart. The Lord Himself understands their painful situations. If we determine to do God's will, He will give us strength to cheerfully bear the cross. In some cases, He Himself will find a way out that does not contravene His teaching.

3. *Be always vigilant.* The church must constantly be alert. We must guard against the ever-present temptation to "legislate now, find Biblical answers later." As we noted in the interview, this happened with the questionable Annual Council decision to baptize wives of polygamists (1946), and to ordain women as elders (1975 and 1984). Each of these Annual Council actions has caused deep polarization and confusion in our churches. Now, divorce and remarriage (2000) has been added to the list of controversial decisions. What will come next? Homosexuality? Drinking alcohol? Eating unclean foods? Rock music and dancing in the churches? Evolution? The enemy will not rest. He will plant his tares when many of us are asleep (Matthew 13). We must remain faithful watchmen over Zion. We must demand an immediate freeze or moratorium in the implementation of the questionable policies that have been slipped into the church.

4. *Pray for our leaders.* We must pray daily for our church leaders. They face constant pressures from different quarters. It is not always easy to be courageous. Send them words of encouragement from time to time, and let them know that you are counting on them to hold high the banner.

5. *Be faithful no matter what.* Finally, determine that when all choose to go the path of rebellion against God's truth, by God's grace you'll remain faithful—regardless of cost.

Endnotes

¹ See, for example, Robert Johnston, "Divorced Once, Single Forever?" *Signs of the Times* (February 1994), pp. 24-27; Robert M. Johnston, "Unfaithfulness to the Marriage Vow," *Ministry* (November 1994), pp. 14-16.

² For a summary discussion of the issue of divorce and remarriage from a historian's perspective, see Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000), pp. 470-473.

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³ The interview that follows was originally published in my book *Must We Be Silent?* I am grateful to Dennis Hokoma, news editor of *Adventist Today*, for granting me permission to reproduce the entire interview in the book. For another interview from a conservative perspective, see the Great Controversy Web site: www.greatcontroversy.org/documents/papers/pip-interview10july2000.html. This latter interview covers a broad range of issues.

⁴ For more on this, see the introductory chapter in Ronald A.G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993).

⁵ Eld. Garry Hodgkin, President of the South New Zealand Conference and a delegate of the South Pacific Division, was at the epicenter of the great divorce-remarriage controversy in Toronto. He was the architect of the parliamentary process that led to the dramatic reversal.

⁶ In a subsequent e-mail exchange with Eld. Garry Hodgkin, he explained that: (1) He sought nothing but fairness in the proceedings. This is indicated by the fact that a day before his motion, he expressed a wish to move to rescind the prior action. Though some of us did not hear it, he apparently gave notice of when he would like to make such a motion; (2) He himself did not expect his motion to pass, given the strong opposition to the document on the previous days; (3) He did not anticipate that all debates would be terminated after his motion passed; in fact he expressed his "surprise" and regret that it turned out that way; (4) He identified the "two sticking points" in the theological debate to be (a) the proposed document's "lack of an understanding of role differentiation," and (b) the proposal's assertion that "abandonment" (1 Corinthians 7:10-15) was a valid Scriptural basis for divorce. On the above points, Hodgkin and I can agree. I also agree with him that the authority that resides within a delegation can be a rather unpredictable thing, yet it is something we have chosen to respect. We, however, disagree on the following: (i) Was the event on that Friday morning carefully orchestrated by certain delegates from the industrialized world or was it wholly spontaneous? (ii) How many people were actually present that morning when the vote was taken (was it 150 or some 500+)? (iii) What reason motivated those who engineered and those who opposed the dramatic reversal?

⁷ Some have taken issue with my 150-figure estimate for those present at that Friday morning session. I base my figure on my own personal estimate. When I saw what was going on that Friday morning, I asked myself in surprise: "But how many people are actually here? And what right do they have to attempt overthrowing a decision by a majority of delegates?" This led me to do a quick approximation (it was not a very difficult estimate, considering the handful of people who were present in the places earmarked for delegates from developing countries). Apparently, I don't seem to stand alone in my rough estimate of 150. A friend of mine in the United States, who followed the GC session proceedings on the Internet audio feed, has also confirmed that number to me. After he read claims that there were 300, 500, or even 600 people present, my friend sent me this e-mail: "I plainly heard, on the Internet audio feed, a delegate during the Friday business session state the number 150 and I plainly heard the chairman [of the afternoon session] confirm that it had appeared that 150 had been present. If an audio recording of the Friday business meeting exists, that would concretely prove it." But regardless of the exact number estimated, very few can question the fact that the total number of people present that morning was (i) a substantially smaller figure than those present on Tuesday and Wednesday, and that (ii) of the delegates present, an overwhelming majority of them were from the industrialized countries in North America, Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. Therefore, rather than quibble over the 150 estimate I gave, I want to reiterate the point I stated in my interview: "Some may dispute the 150 number, but I believe my criticism would still be valid, even if 50% of the delegates took the decision to overturn the previous action." Let's therefore not waste time on this peripheral issue. Though I believe the number was around 150, this is not my main concern. It could have been 200, 300, even 500. That will not change my basic point that a very small number of people from the industrialized regions of the world church overturned a decision that a larger body of delegates took.

⁸ See Roy Adams, "Fireworks in the Dome," *Adventist Review*, July 5, 2000, pp. 2, 3.

Chapter 37

Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Matthew 19

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Recently, while traveling to Europe, my wife found an interesting article in a magazine, describing the behavior of modern women. Fortunately, a lady wrote the article. She illustrated her point by describing the breaking apart of a marriage. A former gold medalist and world recorder holder, who is still active in pursuing her career in sports, left her husband, a twofold world finalist and now a homemaker, including her two sons, in favor of a lover, who is also a well-known sportsman. The writer of the article states that behavior that was considered male, namely leaving spouse and children to live with a new partner, has become common with women. Eva Kohlrusch remarks sarcastically: "Women can congratulate each other. Equality progresses. Women do more and more often what in the past was considered a typical male behavior. They get out of their marriage and leave their children with their father.... She behaves as he has done in the past. . . . We need to invent a totally new concept to protect children from feelings of abandonment."

Divorce and remarriage has become a challenge for societies and churches. Ideas of the postmodern age are also influencing Christians. Some abandon the concept of absolute truth. Pluralism is partially accepted. The human has become the ultimate goal. Abundant life is defined as feeling well and being well only. Pain and suffering have become unacceptable. Although there are very difficult circumstances in some marriages, we must recognize that sometimes people may get out of their marriages too easily.

Jesus addressed the issue of divorce, and his statements are found in Matthew 5 and 19, Mark 10, and Luke 16. In this article, we will focus on Matthew 19, when the Pharisees asked Jesus about grounds for divorce (19:1-12).

Jesus again and again stressed the indissolubility of marriage. He upheld God's ideal as instituted in the Garden of Eden. And I believe He wants us to see the beauty of marriage and forget about dwelling on problems. This may

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be indicated by the context in which the account of Matthew 19:1-12 is found.

I. Jesus' Statements on Marriage and Divorce and Their Interpretation

Christians have accepted Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. They have decided to follow His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21). His life, death, and resurrection have saved them. His priestly ministry in Heaven supports them. His teachings are normative for them. Therefore, when it comes to minor as well as to important decisions in life, Christians ask what Jesus has to say about the issues involved. This is especially true in the case of divorce and remarriage. In four places of the Synoptic Gospels Jesus addressed this question: Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; and Luke 16:18.

Chronologically, Matthew 5:31, 32 comes first. This text belongs to the Sermon on the Mount. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus addressed this difficult and tricky issue. The place is Galilee. Matthew 19 and its parallels in Mark and Luke belong to Jesus' Perea ministry. According to Matthew 19 and Mark 10 the Pharisees forced Jesus to discuss the topic, but He did not avoid it and came across very clearly.

In the time of Jesus, divorce was taken lightly. Basically, the school of Hillel allowed as a reason for divorce whatever a husband did not like about his wife. To burn a meal may have been such a reason.

On the other hand, the school of Shammai allowed a husband to divorce his wife only if she had committed some kind of sexual offense. Yet, what was considered a sexual offense? It included a wife being seen in public with open hair or with bare arms. According to Rabbi Meir, it also included an outgoing attitude toward slaves and neighbors, spinning on the street, drinking eagerly on the street, and bathing with men. It was more or less an offense of the current customs by his wife that allowed a husband to get a divorce.² In addition, divorce was seen as a privilege that God had given to Israel. "According to rabbinic tradition Yahweh has said: 'In Israel I have given divorce, not have I given divorce among the Gentiles.' Only in Israel 'God has connected His name with divorce.'"³ Instead of following God's plan and accepting the indissolubility of marriage, divorce was regarded as a privilege. "Thus even a dissolution of a marriage without any reason was considered valid... ."⁴

Jesus' words about divorce and remarriage have been understood quite differently. Here are some of the views that are maintained:

(1) Divorce is impossible even in the case of adultery; otherwise Jesus would not differ from Moses and would have taken a position more liberal than

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the Mosaic Law that—in the case of adultery—required the death penalty. Remarriage is unthinkable.⁵

(2) Divorce is not possible except in the case of adultery. However, even if one partner commits adultery and the spouses are divorced, remarriage is excluded. This is the position of the church fathers and is found even in our day.⁶

(3) Divorce is not possible except for sexual unfaithfulness during the engagement period. If it is found that one spouse was unfaithful during the time of engagement, divorce is permissible, as well as remarriage.⁷

(4) Divorce is not possible except in the case of adultery. If one spouse commits adultery and the spouses are divorced, the partner who did not commit adultery may remarry. However, reconciliation is preferable. This is the position of Erasmus of Rotterdam, the major Reformers, many evangelicals, and the Adventist Church.⁸

(5) Scripture is opposed to divorce. Yet it is possible to get a divorce. Reasons are not only adultery but also abandonment by a spouse, abuse, violence, etc. Remarriage is possible.⁹ Some suggest that the question of who is guilty should not be discussed. Others suggest that remarriage is always possible, at least under the condition that the former spouses manifest a spirit of forgiveness.¹⁰

(6) It is claimed that Jesus' original words did not contain the exception clause. These original words are found in Mark and Luke. The exception clause occurs in Matthew and is an addition of the early church, which under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the post-Easter Christ has actualized the Biblical text. Another application and actualization is found with Paul (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Therefore, the Christian church has the right not only to interpret but also to reinterpret Scripture. There is an openness to deal with other cases not mentioned in Scripture. Why should the Holy Spirit not lead the modern church in finding other reasons for a legitimate divorce as He has led the church of old?¹¹

(7) It is claimed that when Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount dealt with the issue of divorce and remarriage this was not a commandment. Because verse 30 of Matthew 5 has to be understood figuratively, verse 32 and the entire passage should also be understood figuratively. Although Jesus' intention is clear that marriages should be permanent, divorce and remarriage are possible.

(8) The exception clause refers to incest only. Divorce is possible only if a "marriage" exists, that according to Leviticus 18 never should have been instituted, and if a believer and an unbeliever are married and the unbeliever wants to get a divorce. However, spouses who abuse their partners verbally or physi-

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cally, who are alcohol or drug addicts, who are blasphemers, who love pleasures more than God, etc., are hardly believers, even if they are baptized Christians. They are to be avoided.¹²

We now turn to Matthew 19 and take a closer look.

II. The Context of Matthew 19a

1. Jesus' Position on Divorce in the Context of Matthew 19 and 20a

Matthew 19:1-20:16 is a passage describing Jesus' ministry. Its segments¹³ are connected to each other by common vocabulary.¹⁴ We also detect that Jesus talks to the Pharisees first (19:3-9). Then He turns to the disciples (19:10-15). After the dialogue with the rich young ruler (19:16-22), as this man is called, Jesus teaches His disciples again (19:27-20:16).

a. Father and Mother

"Father and mother" is one of those literary connections. In 19:5 Jesus talks about leaving father and mother as soon as a man marries. In 19:19 He mentions the fifth commandment, namely to honor father and mother, and in 19:29 He states that His disciples may sometimes be forced to leave father and mother for Jesus' sake. To leave father and mother in order to marry does not violate the fifth commandment, neither does leaving father and mother for Jesus' sake.

Thus, indirectly marriage may be compared with the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. The famous passage in Ephesians 5 may be foreshadowed here. If marriage is similar to our connection with Jesus, how important and uplifting must marriage be, how beautiful and blessed, and also how enduring! Whoever has tasted the goodness of our Lord and the pleasantness of His fellowship, may also enjoy His tremendous gift of marriage.

b. Whom to Leave and Whom Not to Leave

Matthew 19:29 is very interesting: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life." It almost strikes us that Jesus talks about leaving siblings, parents, and even children, but He does not talk about leaving one's spouse.¹⁵ In omitting a reference to the spouse here, the message for us seems to be: Even for Jesus' sake we are not asked to leave our husband or wife, to be separated from him or her, or to divorce our partner. Marriage is indissoluble. Marriage is good. Jesus does not break apart marriages when He asks people to follow Him.

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c. The Seventh Commandment

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus discusses divorce, remarriage, and adultery. In Matthew 19:18 He quotes the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." The two texts use a verb with a common root. Again marriage is very important for Jesus. Obviously, His statements in Matthew 19:9 and 5:27-32 are related to the seventh commandment and therefore to the Decalogue. Jesus argues against the Pharisees in going back to the Creation account and by indirectly referring to the Ten Commandments.

Jesus' position is what the Law is all about. This Law is still the same. In Jesus' time it was still as binding as it was when God pronounced it on Mount Sinai. It is also valid today. It is independent of changing cultures and value systems. This Law is good. God's gift of marriage and His protection of this gift are good.

d. The Hard Heart

The most important connection between the different parts of Matthew 19 and 20a, and therefore the most important topic in Jesus' Perea ministry is, it seems, the theme of the hard heart and the related motif of the evil eye.¹⁶ Jesus Himself has introduced the phrase "hardness of heart" in 19:8. The Pharisees show clear evidence of hard hearts, because they look for reasons that would allow them to get out of marriage. They do not understand God's marvelous gift of marriage, and they spoil it because of their attitude and behavior (19:3, 7). When they think about marriage, only divorce comes into their mind.

But even Jesus' disciples have a hard time accepting His teaching on marriage. They suggest staying single and not marrying, if marriage is indissoluble (19:10). They clearly understand Jesus' claim, and yet they decide to take sides with the Pharisees. They too cannot think of marriage in other terms than divorce. They have hard hearts. This hardness of heart is manifested a little later when they encounter the children brought to Jesus in order to be blessed, and they scold them (19:13).

The rich young ruler is not willing to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Because of their hardness of heart it is difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God (19:21-23). Again the disciples seem to favor those who do not make it into the Kingdom of God. (19:25), and Peter's question about the reward of following Jesus may point to hardness of heart (19:27).

Finally, in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, those who have worked all day long are not content with their wages. They complain about the

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generosity of the landowner. The problem is not that the lord did not pay them fair wages. The problem is that those who did not have the chance to be employed all day long received the same amount of money. They compare themselves with their fellow workers, and instead of being moved by gratitude for what has happened to those, they concentrate on themselves and the alleged injustice done to them. The landowner responds: "Or is your eye evil because I am generous?" Instead of rejoicing with their fellow workers and praising the generosity of the lord, they grumble and complain. They have an evil eye. Their hardness of heart does not allow them to see the goodness of God.

Thus, the entire section on Jesus' Perea ministry challenges the readers to appreciate the extraordinary gifts of God, and especially the gift of marriage, and to turn away from any consideration of divorce.

e. Summary

In summarizing we can say:

(1) To a certain degree Jesus' relationship with His disciples may be compared to the relationship between husband and wife. For the sake of this relationship, one may need to leave other persons and possessions. The benefits are immeasurable.

(2) To follow Jesus does not mean to separate from or divorce a spouse. Marriage is indissoluble.

(3) Jesus' statement on divorce is connected to the seventh commandment. This commandment is binding and is independent of changing times and cultures.

(4) Matthew in quoting Jesus challenges readers and hearers to repent of their hardness of heart and their evil eye, to turn away from any toying with the idea of divorce, and to treasure the fantastic gift of marriage.

2. Jesus' Position on Divorce in the Context of Matthew 18

Matthew 19 is preceded by a conversation between Jesus and His disciples in Capernaum. In spite of the different geographical locales, there are strong connections between Matthew 18 and 19. These include the terms "disciples," "kingdom," "children," and "heart."¹⁷ At the beginning of chapter 18, the disciples ask the question "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" (18:1). Jesus' answer makes mention of a child, the little ones, and the sin of a brother (18:2-20). After His response, Peter asks another question, dealing with the issue of forgiveness of sins (18:21). Jesus replies with a short statement and the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:22-35).

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a. The Hard Heart

Although the disciples have been warned not to despise the little ones and not to scandalize them (18:6, 10), they have not learned their lesson, as their behavior in 19:13 demonstrates. Instead of welcoming the children in the name of Jesus, they have rejected them. While warned against hardness of heart in Matthew 18, the disciples have exhibited precisely that behavior. Chapter 18 ends with the warning that the Heavenly Father will hand over to torture those who do not forgive their neighbors from their heart (18:34, 35). The motif of a hard heart is already present in chapter 18, although the exact phrase will appear in 19:8 only. The unforgiving servant is an example of a hardhearted person par excellence, and it is interesting that this motif is developed in the following pericope dealing with divorce and remarriage.

Instead of forgiving their spouses, there are people such as the Pharisees, who only look for loopholes and possibilities to get out of their marriages and rid of their partners. They do not care for their wives or their husbands. They are not interested in them. They forget the incalculable debt God has forgiven them, and they count all mistakes of their spouses against them. Forgiveness is not practiced, not even considered. Claiming to fulfill the Law, they are judged by the Law. Their hardness may reach even so far that they want to get out of marriage, even though their spouses may not have sinned against them at all.

b. Cutting Off a Hand and Plucking Out an Eye

Matthew 18:8, 9 symbolically talks about self-mutilation. Cutting off a hand and plucking out an eye in order to prevent being led astray is found almost identically in Matthew 5:29, 30, a passage which is alluded to in Matthew 19:1-12. Matthew 18:8 adds the cutting off of a foot. Since these verses in Matthew 5 are found in the context of adultery and fornication, the respective parallel verses in Matthew 18 may also refer to sexual sins.

We are called to fight against sin, including sexual sins. We are called to fight for our marriages and make them work. Church members are called to help those who are in danger of being seduced and led astray. Sometimes church discipline is necessary in order to win them back. In any case, after repentance forgiveness must be granted. Our marriages live off forgiveness. We live off forgiveness. Therefore, we extend our forgiveness to our spouses. The issue is not divorce. The issue is to forgive each other and let go of the hard heart.

c. Summary

Again we summarize:

(1) Matthew 18, with its parallels in Matthew 5:29, 30 prepares the way

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for the discussion on divorce and adultery in chapter 19. Although Jesus' statements in Matthew 19:4-6, 8, 9 and 11, 12 are based on the Creation account, they also contain an exposition of the seventh commandment. Jesus affirms that by remarrying, one may commit adultery. Marriage by its very nature is indissoluble. God's commandments are still valid.

(2) Again readers are challenged to turn away from hardness of heart and to freely and graciously forgive each other (18:35; 19:8).

(3) Instead of seeking divorce and enjoying the thought of being "free" again, we are challenged to grant forgiveness and stop counting the mistakes of our spouses. Forgiveness is limitless.

(4) In some cases of marital breakdown, church discipline is necessary. Its goal is to prevent those involved from becoming "lost sheep" (Matthew 18:12-14). Following Matthew 18:15-20 and the subsequent parable, church members are called to forgive their erring fellow believers.

III. Exegesis of Matthew 19

1. The Structure of the Passage

The passage of Matthew 19:1-12 can be outlined in the following way:

1. *Local Frame and Narrative Frame (1, 2)*
2. *Jesus' Dialogue With the Pharisees (3-9)*
 - a. First question of the Pharisees (3)
 - Scene 1
 - b. First answer of Jesus (4-6)A
 - c. Second question of the Pharisees (7)
 - Scene 2
 - d. Second answer of Jesus (8, 9)A
3. *Jesus' Dialogue with the Disciples (10-12)*
 - a. First question of the disciples (10)
 - Scene 3
 - b. Third answer of Jesus (11, 12)A

Of special interest are verses 3-9. However, the second scene has also strong verbal connections to the third scene.¹⁸

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2. Interpretation

a. Verse 3

The conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees starts with the Pharisees asking Jesus a question about divorce. Probably, they wanted to draw Jesus into the controversy between the more liberal school of Hillel and the more conservative school of Shammai. Maybe they even hoped Jesus would touch on the case of Herod being married to Herodias, thus making Herod His enemy (14:3,4). This was a highly political issue and had cost John the Baptist his life.

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" In Matthew 19:1-12 the issue of divorce and remarriage is addressed from the male perspective. The husband can get a divorce. The female perspective in addition to the male side is presented in the parallel text in Mark 10.

An important term in 19:3 is *apولو*, which in this context means "to send away" or "to divorce." It is also found in verses 7-9. The Pharisees twice use the term and Jesus twice uses it, however only in His second answer. In His first answer Jesus uses the term *chorizo* (v.6) to express the concept of divorce.¹⁹ Jesus clearly says No to divorce. In verse 6 no exception is listed; in verse 12 a single possible exception is mentioned.

The phrase "for any and every reason" can also be translated "for any reason at all." The first option reflects the position of Hillel and seems to be preferable in this context. Obviously, the Pharisees espoused Hillel's position.²⁰ Their question is already aiming at Deuteronomy 24:1, although it is only later that they openly mention that text in trying to counter Jesus' arguments.

b. Verses 4-6

Starting with verse 4, Jesus answers the question of the Pharisees. It is important to notice that Jesus answers with Scripture as He did when Satan tempted Him in Matthew 4. Jesus avoids taking sides with one of the rabbinical schools. He uses a higher authority than the interpretation of famous rabbis.²¹

"Have you not read that He Who created them from the beginning made them male and female?" This answer may contain some sort of rebuke. The Pharisees should not have asked such a question. Scripture has already answered it. However, by concentrating on what is allowed and what is forbidden, and how to get rid of one's wife, tragically Jesus' adversaries do not recognize God's wonderful gift of and ideal for marriage.²²

Yet Jesus addresses this very issue. In Matthew 19:4-6 He develops God's perspective on marriage, an institution that together with the rest of Creation was very good. Jesus proves His point by Scripture, going back to the Creation

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account. Indirectly He declares this account to be authentic and normative. His answer begins with the One Who has created, namely God, and it also ends with the Creator God Who has joined together man and woman in marriage. Jesus' first answer to the Pharisees (19:4-6) begins with a question. Inserted in this question are two OT quotations. Then a statement follows, and finally an imperative is employed:

- (1) Question: Have you not read? (v. 4a)
 - (a) Quotation from Genesis 1:27. (v. 4b)
 - (b) Quotation from Genesis 2:24. (v. 5)
- (2) Statement: The two are one flesh.....(v. 6a)
- (3) Imperative: Do not divorce. (v. 6b)

The first quotation is short, consisting of five words only (in the Greek); the second has twenty-one words; altogether twenty-six words. According to Matthew's account, Jesus Himself uses only twenty-four words in His answers to the Pharisees, while in verse 6a He even repeats the last words of the second quotation. Therefore, we hear twice about "two" humans who have "become one" (vv. 5b and 6a). Jesus allows Scripture to address burning questions and bring about a decision when being asked by the Pharisees about divorce. What is a reason for divorce? Answer: The Creation order does not allow for any reason.

The expression "in the beginning" in Matthew 19:4 can refer to God Who created or to the creation of "male and female." In the first case one would translate "He Who created from the beginning . . ." whereas in the second case the idea would be "He created *them* from the beginning male and female." The second option is preferred by many translations. Because of the repetition of the same phrase in verse 8, Grundmann accepts the second option and states: "From the beginning God wanted humans to be sexual beings."²³ This reference then prepares the way for the second important statement: The two genders are dependent on each other. One man and one woman would be joined together in marriage and thus become one, inseparably connected.

Matthew 19:5 begins with the phrase "and said." According to the previous verse, this phrase refers to God. It was God Who spoke. Jesus claims that God said: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." However, in reading Genesis 2:24, whence this quotation was taken, and by reading its context, one gains the impression that this statement was a commentary made by the author of Genesis,²⁴ Moses, not by God Himself. But Jesus informs us that Genesis 2:24 is a direct word of God the Father. It rests on the highest possible Authority. God Himself has ordained that a man leaves his parents and together with his wife

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forms a new union.

The phrase "one flesh" points in a special way to the physical union of the spouses. However, the term "flesh" stands for the entire personality and cannot be limited to the physical sphere.²⁵ Therefore, adultery is very traumatic. It ruptures the wonderful union between husband and wife, and in Scripture it is compared to idolatry by which the people of God make a decision against their Creator God and Saviour.

The term "one" stresses union and unity. Two beings, a man and a woman, become one. By making this statement, Jesus rejects homosexuality as well as polygamy. The Hebrew text of Genesis 2:24 does not contain the numeral "two." However, by adding this term, which is also found in the Septuagint (LXX), monogamy is stressed even more. According to God's will, two different persons, one man and one woman, become one. To achieve this, it is necessary to leave the parents in order to be free for a new union. Only then can a man "cling" or "cleave" to his wife. Jesus emphasizes the idea of oneness by repeating it at the beginning of verse 6. Then He comes to the conclusion: "What therefore God has joined together, let no one separate." There is no question: God's intention is to join together, not to separate.

In Matthew 19:5,6 the term *anthropos* is found twice, namely at the beginning and the end. The term normally designates the human being and is not used for one gender only. However, in verse 5a it refers to the male, whereas in verse 6b it may encompass everyone. The statement is a general one that applies to all couples.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| A | The action of man (<i>anthropos</i>): | Separation from the parents and cleaving to his wife |
| B | Becoming one flesh (twice) | |
| A | The action of God and the prohibition for man/human being (<i>anthropos</i>): | God has joined; no separation |

To leave one's parents, to live together, and to become one flesh are human actions which in a hidden way form the joining together by God. The second OT quotation (Genesis 2:24) states what humans are doing. Jesus' explanation, however, stresses that this is the will of God. Although humans take action, it is God Who brings together husband and wife. Therefore, they do not have the authority to get a divorce. The creation of humanity consists of the creation of the male and the female. God has joined the two together. Therefore, we are not allowed to separate what God actually has brought

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together. Jesus' first answer consists of an imperative, which forms a prohibition. The message is: Marriage is indissoluble. Divorce is not an option.

We summarize Jesus' first answer:

(1) Jesus points to Scripture. His question, "Have you not read . . . ?" may contain a rebuke for not having considered the implications of Scripture carefully enough.

(2) According to Jesus, Scripture is normative. Therefore He uses it. His response is based on the Creation account. Interestingly enough, He quotes texts from Genesis 1 and 2 without seeing a contradiction between them. It is true that the social conditions of the first century A.D. were different from those in Paradise. Undoubtedly, Jesus is aware of that fact. Although the time He lived on Earth cannot be compared to the situation described in Genesis 1-2, Jesus still applied the original principles established in Eden to a world fallen prey to sin. Therefore, different cultures do not necessarily change the Biblical message and Biblical principles.

(3) Jesus clearly takes a position against divorce. God has instituted marriage. Humans are not allowed to get a divorce. With His imperative, Jesus makes a categorical statement.

(4) Obviously, Jesus addresses marriage in general. The direct context should not be disregarded as soon as verse 6b is investigated. God has created male and female and has joined them in marriage. Every legitimate marriage is therefore a joining together by God,²⁶ Whose plan it is that old relationships are left behind and a new union, one flesh, be established. Therefore, one should not use the excuse that God has not joined together one's own marriage and that therefore it is legitimate to divorce one's spouse.

c. Verse 7

The climax of the conversation is reached in verses 7-9. This becomes evident when we look at the speech formulas being used. Verse 3: "The Pharisees came . . . tempting Him and asking . . ." Verse 4: "Jesus said . . ." Verse 7 switches to the present tense: "They tell Him . . ." Verse 8: He (Jesus) says to them . . ." This switch to the present tense indicates heightened tension.

The Pharisees respond to Jesus' speech by asking why Moses has given the certificate of divorce, if divorce is not possible. Like Jesus they also use Scripture. By referring to Deuteronomy 24:1, they may have wished to undo Genesis 1 and 2 and support a lax practice of divorce.²⁷ But Jesus explains how the Biblical passages relate to each other. In verse 9 we hear His conclusion: In divorce humans destroy God's work.²⁸ Grundmann calls Jesus' statement in v. 9 "authoritative Halacha of Jesus."²⁹

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In their second question the Pharisees point to the authority of Moses. They understand very well that Jesus has argued against divorce and that by referring to the Creation order He has surpassed Deuteronomy 24:1, the only reference in the OT in which Moses mentions the certificate of divorce. Now they try to create a conflict between Jesus and Moses.³⁰ An important difference between them and Jesus is the respective interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, 2. Jesus must have foreseen that argument and may therefore have shown that Genesis 2:24 is an original word of God Himself. In any case, the Pharisees claim that Moses has commanded (*enteilato*) (1) to give ones wife a bill of divorce, and (2) to divorce her.

d. Verses 8,9

Jesus is much more precise in His interpretation than the Pharisees are. In His second answer he replaces the word "commanded" with the term "permitted" (*epetrepse*). Moses has permitted divorce but has not commanded it. Indeed, Moses seems to mention the certificate of divorce only in passing. The passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 clarifies whether or not a woman who has been divorced from her first husband may return to him. There is no imperative that would demand a divorce and the writing of a certificate of divorce. A certificate of divorce and divorce itself are limited to one reason only, namely "some indecency."³¹ This phrase has been interpreted differently, as can be seen of the schools of Hillel and Shammai, but it seems to imply some kinds of sexual offense. Remarriage is regulated.

Jesus' second answer consists of a defense of Moses. At the same time, Jesus surpasses Moses in verse 8 with His authoritative statement, "I tell you." Jesus defends Moses when He clarifies that Moses has not given a command. In addition, He mentions the human hardness of heart as a reason for the concession Moses made. Divorce was practiced. Moses could not prevent such inhumane behavior in his generation and the subsequent generations to take place. He only could try to keep the damage to a minimum. So he allowed for divorce under certain circumstances but did not command it.³² His intentions were similar to those portrayed in the Creation account, although a certain openness to divorce was given.

Jesus continues: ". . . but from the beginning it has not been this way." Divorce is not part of God's plan. Jesus had already used the phrase "from the beginning" (*ap' arches*) a moment ago in His first response to the Pharisees (v. 4). There it was connected to Creation, as it is here. The topic of Creation connects Jesus' two answers to the Pharisees. Jesus' entire argument rests on the Creation account. Whatever marriage meant right from the beginning is still

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valid and binding, especially in view of the coming of the Kingdom of God in the Person of Jesus Christ, and it does not allow for divorce.³³ Already in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus went beyond the certificate of divorce, and replaced the permission for a divorce by His Own authoritative word, closing the door to the option of divorce except in the case of adultery.

The Mosaic legislation in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was thus not normative but only secondary and temporary, an allowance dependent on the sinfulness of the people. In that context it served as a control against abuse and excess... . The implication is that the new era of the present Kingdom of God involves a return to the idealism of the pre-Fall Genesis narrative.³⁴

The *Adventist Bible Commentary* maintains:

However, Christ's teaching here makes it clear that the provisions of Moses' law with respect to divorce are quite invalid for Christians.. . . The law of Genesis 1:27; 2:24 preceded the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and is superior to it. . . . God has never repealed the law of marriage He enunciated in the beginning.³⁵

The second scene ends with the statement "I tell you." Jesus assures His audience that whoever divorces his wife—He now employs the word for divorce (*apoluo*) used by the Pharisees—commits adultery if the following exception does not apply. This means that in its character, marriage is indeed permanent. In verse 6 Jesus categorically denies divorce. In verse 9 He adds: Even if someone gets a divorce, but it is against the clear testimony of Scripture, he or she is not free. Such a divorce and remarriage are adultery, because the first marriage is still valid in spite of the divorce.³⁶ Matthew 19 here adds a new dimension not found in Matthew 5. Whereas in Matthew 5:32 the wife commits adultery if she remarries, in Matthew 19:9 it is the husband.³⁷

Whereas in Matthew 5:32 a divorced woman marrying again commits adultery—obviously she is still considered to be married—in Matthew 19:9 a husband marrying another woman commits adultery—he is still married, if the exception does not apply. Husband and wife are treated the same way. At the same time we notice that a comprehensive picture emerges if we allow all Biblical texts on a given topic to speak to us.

Matthew 19:9 contains almost the same exception clause as already mentioned in Matthew 5:32. Jesus allows one single reason only for which divorce is possible. This reason is *porneia*. But even in such a case the context urges us to forgive our partner and let go of our hardness of heart and stiff-neckedness.

Thus, the introductory question of the Pharisees is answered. Divorce for

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any reason? No. Divorce contradicts the plan of Creation and the will of God, Who has joined together husband and wife. The only exception is *porneia*. The different aspects of *porneia* are found in both Testaments. They include prostitution, premarital sexual relations, adultery, incest, and homosexuality; in short, sexual relations outside of the marriage.³⁸

In Matthew 19:9 the primary meaning of *porneia* may be adultery.³⁹ And indeed most of the important shades of meaning of *porneia* can be subsumed under the term adultery.

Mark and Luke do not use the exception clause in their passages dealing with divorce and remarriage (Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18). Luke's statement is very short and consists of one verse only. Mark is different. There we find a passage comparable to the one in Matthew 19. However, the argument runs vice versa. In Matthew 19 Jesus refers to the Creation account first, and thus states the basic principle guiding us in matters of marriage and divorce before the specifics of the certificate of divorce are introduced. In Mark 10 Jesus begins with the specifics, namely the certificate of divorce, and inductively moves toward the general principle found in the Creation story. Once having reached the basic principle, specifics such as the exception clause hardly have a place. Therefore, Mark may have omitted it, although he may have known it. Hill states:

Most commentators regard these words as having been added by Matthew.... This is not necessary; if *porneia* means "adultery," then Jewish law *required* a man to divorce his wife if she committed that act. Indeed, this fact may be assumed in the other Gospels . . . but is spelled out only in Matthew. An adulterous relationship violated the order of Creation, with its monogamous ideal. Therefore if Jesus upheld the indissolubility of marriage on the basis of Genesis, He must have permitted divorce for that, and that alone, which necessarily contravened the created order.⁴⁰

However, the most crucial issue is not the exception clause itself but the question of whether or not the exception clause refers to divorce only or does also permit remarriage.⁴¹ There are slight differences between the exception clauses in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, although the basic message is the same. In some sense the two exception clauses are even complementary. In any case, the exception clauses do not require divorce, but allow for it.

- (1) Whoever divorces his wife, *except for the reason of porneia*, makes her commit adultery;

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- (2) and whoever marries a divorced woman
commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

According to Matthew 5:32, a man commits adultery by marrying a divorced woman. In case she has not committed adultery, her marriage seems still to be valid. Therefore, a new union with her is adultery. According to Matthew 19:9, however, a divorced man commits adultery by marrying any woman, if the exception does not apply. His marriage is still valid and would be harmed by a new union. Therefore, men have to take into account that they may not only damage a woman's still-existing marriage when they remarry; they may also harm their own marriage and must be concerned about what they are doing. They are not at liberty to do what they want.

- (1) Whoever divorces his wife, *except for porneia*,
(2) and marries another,
commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9)

The main clause of the sentence is "he commits adultery." Dependent on this main clause is a subordinate clause with two verbs and two objects, "whoever divorces his wife" and "and marries another." Divorce (1) and remarriage (2) are adultery (fourth line).⁴² Therefore it can be assumed that the exception clause found right between (1) and (2) refers to both divorce and remarriage. Since the discussion with the Pharisees dealt primarily with divorce, it is understandable that the exception clause directly follows the phrase "divorces his wife" instead of coming at the end of the subordinate clause. Furthermore, the question must be raised, how else could Matthew have expressed this concept? Would it have been clearer if the exception clause had followed the phrase "and marries another"? Should he have repeated the exception clause? Would that have confused his audience?

The exception clause makes little sense if the spouse not having been involved in *porneia* would not have the right to remarry. A legitimate divorce allows for a legitimate remarriage. Because in the time of Jesus, as well as during OT times, remarriage after a divorce was possible, one would expect a similar situation for the NT⁴³. Otherwise, the NT would need to state clearly that a new order had been established.

Sometimes those who are opposed to remarriage of the spouse not involved in *porneia* point to the understanding and practice of the church fathers, who maintained the same position. However, one has to keep in mind that in Biblical questions the church fathers were not always more faithful to

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Scripture than are Christians today. Problems with keeping Sunday arose already in the second century A.D. Many accepted the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul. The concept of ecclesiastical offices, especially the importance and power of bishops, was hammered out, and the church was elevated to a level superior to Scripture. Some recommended asceticism.⁴⁴

Although with His exception clause, Jesus allows for divorce and remarriage in one specific case, the point of His message is the indissolubility of marriage. Therefore, we find statements without exceptions next to those that allow for an exception in the case of *porneia*. Still, the thrust of Jesus' statements is clear enough. For that very reason, the disciples react very strangely and seem to be offended (verse 10). This brings us to the last scene.

e. Verse 10

The disciples state: "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." The term "relationship," "cause," "reason" (*aitia*) occurred already in verse 3. The disciples may be referring back to the question of the Pharisees who had asked if it is possible to divorce one's wife for any reason (*aitia*). In spite of the exception clause, they understand the radical nature of Jesus' demand and feel restricted and boxed in. They take sides with the Pharisees, who because of their hardness of heart, were looking for ways to get out of marriage. And they make a radical suggestion: If there is no way out of marriage, then it is better not to get married at all. It is not worth it. They cannot think about marriage without thinking also about divorce, and they do not see and do not understand the tremendous gift of marriage offered to them by God.

f. Verses 11,12

Once again Jesus responds. It is His third answer: "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given." The question is, What is the antecedent of "this statement" (literally, "word")? Again, scholarly opinion differs. Either it refers to the answers Jesus gave to the Pharisees⁴⁵ or it refers to the statement that the disciples had made a moment ago.⁴⁶

If "this statement" should refer back to Jesus' Own words, it would destroy what Jesus tried to establish. It would mean that Jesus' claims with regard to marriage, and His prohibition of divorce (with the exception of *porneia*) could be observed by those only to whom it is given. This would mean that any obligation to follow divine principles would be done away with, and all who should violate God's will would have the excuse that it was not given to them to follow God's plan, will, and ideal. Ethics would break down. The suggestion that France makes, that Jesus' demands would be binding for those

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only whom God has called to a Christian marriage, is not helpful, either.⁴⁷ Since when are God's commandments binding for Christians only? Certainly, non-Christians may trample upon God's Law. But do they have the right to do so? Will God not judge them?⁴⁸

It is better to understand Jesus as referring to the statement of the disciples. Surprisingly He does not reject it, but declares that indeed it is given to some—though not all—not to marry. For the majority of the people, God's plan is marriage and not celibacy. In verse 12 Jesus enumerates three groups of eunuchs: (1) eunuchs who were born that way, (2) eunuchs who were made eunuchs by others, and (3) those who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. It seems that not all three groups are eunuchs in the literal sense. Obviously, the first group should be understood literally. The second group may also represent real eunuchs, men who by force have been made unfit for marriage. Cornes, however, suggests understanding the term figuratively, referring to divorced persons.⁴⁹ The last group may comprise people such as John the Baptist, who remain unmarried for the sake of the Kingdom of God. It is important to recognize one's calling and to accept it, no matter to which group one belongs, and no matter whether or not one has to suffer injustice. What is crucial is to agree with God's will, plan, or permissive will for our life.⁵⁰

It is God's gift to humans to understand the mystery of marriage as well as the mystery of celibacy.... Whereas the mystery of marriage is founded on God's will with regard to Creation, the mystery of celibacy is founded on God's will with regard to the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven."⁵¹

In Matthew 19:1-12 Jesus allows for two alternatives. Humans may marry and receive God's good gift of marriage. This is part of God's order of Creation. Humans may also choose to remain single for the sake of the Kingdom of God, if they have received a respective calling. However, the possibility of getting a divorce is not given except in the case of adultery.⁵² The emphasis is on the indissolubility of marriage and not its exception. This is where our focus must also be. Those who constantly concentrate on the exception and consider that normal, have misunderstood Jesus and have a hard heart.

IV. Implications for Us

When God constituted marriage, it was thought of to be a lifelong union

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between one man and one woman in which the two would complement each other and would contribute to the well-being of each other. The ideal of marriage allows for the comparison of marriage with Jesus and His church.

Jesus has reinforced the indissolubility of marriage. Mark and Luke emphasize this fact without mentioning an exception. Matthew lists exception clauses in chapters 5 and 19. Divorce destroys what God has joined together and is against God's will. In case a divorce takes place anyway—except for *porneia*—there are only the possibilities of staying single or being reconciled to the spouse. Remarriage, then, is no alternative. Obviously, the first marriage stays intact despite even divorce. A person who gets a divorce for any reason other than fornication and then remarries, commits adultery and violates God's laws, which are valid for all time. This is also true for someone who marries a divorced person, if this person is not divorced by the spouse on grounds of *porneia*.

If a spouse commits fornication, i.e., is guilty of sexual unfaithfulness, the other spouse who was not involved in such an act may get a divorce. However, even in this case the ideal is reconciliation.

The two exceptions for divorce, *porneia* and divorce by an unbelieving spouse, as discussed in 1 Corinthians 7, are different. Only in the first case can the spouse who was not involved in adultery request a divorce. In the other case, the believing partner is passive and does not take the initiative to get a divorce. Therefore, the only reason for which a church member can divorce his or her spouse is fornication.

In the two exceptional cases just mentioned, not only is divorce possible—as tragic as that is—but also the faithful partner or the believing partner who is divorced by the unbeliever may remarry.

When a marriage falls apart, the church is always affected. Therefore, the church must apply preventive care in order to prevent spouses from getting divorced, and it must react in a balanced and Biblical way if a marriage is threatened or a couple has been divorced. Not to react at all may be irresponsible. The goal of the church's involvement must be to help, to bring about healing, and to assist those who otherwise may become lost. In some cases, this may include church discipline and removing a person from church membership.

All believers are called to turn away from hardness of heart, to work on their marriages, to grant forgiveness and new beginnings, and to set an example of what a Christian marriage is all about. Where conditions are unhealthy, the Christian solution is to change the conditions, but not the partner. Even in cases that seem to be hopeless, we remember that the Lord Who has risen from

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the dead can also resurrect our marriages to new life.

Endnotes

¹ Eva Kohlrusch, "Seitensprung in ein neues Leben" in *Bunte*, no. 28/2000, pp. 88, 89 (translated).

² For the historical background see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Mattheus erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Band 1 (München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986), pp. 304,315-320.

³ Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1984), p. 270 (translated).

⁴ Hermann L. Strack and Billerbeck), pp. 304, 315-320.

⁵ Cf. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1991), p. 183.

⁶ Cf. Gordon J. Wenham and William E. Heth, *Jesus and Divorce* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1984), pp. 19-44. This also seems to be the position of A. Schlatter. Cf. Adolf Schlatter, *Das Evangelium nach Mattheus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1947), pp. 73, 74. See also Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1984), p. 324; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Mattheus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990), pp. 163,428.

⁷ Cf. Bacchiocchi, p. 182.

⁸ See Wenham and Heth, who discuss this interpretation on pp. 73-99. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *... and Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991) and the *Adventist Church Manual* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000). Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1952), pp. 341, 342: "Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow.... God gave only one cause why a wife should leave her husband, or the husband leave his wife, which was adultery." Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), p. 454: "Here and in Jesus' parallel discussion in Matthew 5:32 it seems to be implied, even though not specifically stated, that the innocent party to a divorce is at liberty to marry again. This has been the understanding of the great majority of commentators through the years."

⁹ See "Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission Report, 22.6.99," pp. 5, 10.

¹⁰ Lothar Wilhelm, "... das soll der Mensch nicht scheiden"? Fragen zu den Aussagen der Evangelien über Ehescheidung und Wiederverheiratung", in *Glauben heute, Jahrespräsent 1999*, edited by Eli Diez (Lüneburg: Advent-Verlag, 1999), pp. 16-33.

¹¹ Cf. Robert M. Johnston, "Divorce and Remarriage: What the Bible Teaches" (paper prepared for the World Ministers Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1990).

¹² Bacchiocchi, pp. 183-189,215,216. On p. 216 he writes: "How should a Christian relate to a spouse who persists in his or her perverse lifestyle? Paul's admonition is straightforward, Avoid such people' (2 Timothy 3:5). Living with and loving a person who blatantly and obstinately violates the moral principles of Christianity, means condoning such an immoral lifestyle."

¹³ (1) Marriage, divorce, and staying single (19:1-12), (2) blessing of the children (19:13-15), (3) "the rich young ruler" (19:16-26), (4) rewards of discipleship (19:27-30), and (5) parable of the laborers in the vineyard (20:1-16).

¹⁴ E.g., "disciple" (19:10, 13, 25), "the Kingdom of Heaven" (19:12, 14, 23; 20:1), "father

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and mother" (19:5, 19, 29), "word" (19:1, 11,22) and "adultery" (19:9, 18).

¹⁵ Some manuscripts contain the term "wife," others do not. Modern Greek New Testaments such as *Novum Testamentum Graece* by Nestle-Aland, and *The Greek New Testament* by the United Bible Societies, omit the word. The parallel passage in Mark 10:28-30 does not mention the wife, either (in a good number of important manuscripts), however, Luke 18:29 does. Yet Luke 18:29 and the text on divorce in Luke 16:18 are not found in the same immediate context. It is true that the disciples temporarily left their wives and followed Jesus. But later it is reported that Peter was traveling with his wife (1 Corinthians 9:5). The specific contexts of Matthew and Mark that contain the passage on divorce and remarriage may have caused the omission of the term "wife" from the list of those whom a disciple may have to leave for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. People could have drawn the wrong conclusions that were opposed to Jesus' intention. In the context of Matthew 19 and Mark 10, it was necessary to stress that discipleship does not lead to a divorce and does not allow for a divorce. Even in Luke the term "to leave" may have intended a temporary separation only. In 1 Corinthians 7:12, 13 Paul seems to address the same or a similar issue, stating that the believer should not divorce the unbeliever.

¹⁶ See Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 261-280.

¹⁷ (1) 18:1-35—Jesus' dialogue with the disciples (children, Kingdom of Heaven); (2) 19:1-9—Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees; (3) 19:10-15—Jesus' dialogue with the disciples (children, Kingdom of Heaven).

¹⁸ Literary connections between scenes 2 and 3 are, for example, "to marry" (19:9, 10); "man" and "woman" (19:3,5, 8,9,10); "mother" (19:5,12); and "reason/relationship" (19:3,10).

¹⁹ This is the same term used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11.

²⁰ Vgl. Strack und Billerbeck, p. 801.

²¹ Cf. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of Matthew*, reprint of the 6th ed. of 1884 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), p. 337.

²² Cf. Patte, p. 264. On p. 265 he states: "Why then would one want to ask whether it is permitted to divorce? .. The only reason for this attitude is that one does not perceive of marriage as a good gift from God and that consequently one views as good the possibility of separating oneself from one's wife...."

²³ Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthaus*, p. 427 (translated).

²⁴ Cf. Alexander Sand, *Das Evangelium nach Matthaus*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1989), p. 390.

²⁵ Cf. Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels*, The Expositor's Greek Testament, reprint (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 245, 246.

²⁶ Cf. Nichol, vol. 5, pp. 338, 454.

²⁷ Patte, p. 265, writes: "According to the Pharisees, Jesus contradicts Moses' *commandment* regarding divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1; Matthew 19:7)." They "deliberately challenge the authority of the Scripture quoted by Jesus...."

²⁸ Cf. R.T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, reprint of the ed. of 1985 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 280.

²⁹ Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthaus*, p. 426.

³⁰ See v. 3 and the motif of testing.

³¹ The phrase has been translated "anything indecent" or "indecenty," and consists of two words (*erwat dabar*). The second term (*dabar*) means "word," "saying," "matter," or "affair." The first term (*erwat*) is rendered "nakedness" or "pudenda" and refers, for instance, to shameful exposure or sexual transgressions. Most frequently it appears in the context of sexual sins listed in Leviticus 18 and 20 and in Ezekiel 16 and 23. The Ezekiel texts are found in the context of for-

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nication. Together the two terms (*'erwat dabar*) occur in Deuteronomy 23:14 and 24:1 only. Deuteronomy 23:13-15 deals with human excrements, whereas Deuteronomy 24:1 implies some sort of sexual misconduct. Some argue that *'erwat dabar* does not include adultery. They state that adultery required the death penalty through stoning (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22), but did not allow for the possibility of writing a certificate of divorce. It is correct that a man who had sexual relations with a married or engaged woman should die, the adulterer together with the adulteress. However, the death penalty in the case of adultery was not always executed. In the time of Jesus, Herod and Herodias (Matthew 14:3, 4) were not punished. This was not only the case if influential persons committed adultery. Hosea's adulterous wife was not executed (Hosea 3:1). Joseph originally planned to dismiss Mary, because he believed that she had an affair with another man. He did not attempt to have the death penalty inflicted upon her. Jesus prevented the Jewish leadership from executing the woman caught in adultery (John 8:5). In Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8 the certificate of divorce is mentioned in a metaphorical way. Israel, presented as Yahweh's wife, received the certificate of divorce from God because of her adultery. A literal or metaphorical bill of divorce was written in the OT for "sexual" offenses only. Therefore, the indecency in Deuteronomy 24:1 may refer to smaller sexual offenses, but at times it may also include adultery.

³² Cf. Bruce, p. 110; Sand, p. 389; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible Commentary*, reprint of the ed. of 1972 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 280.

³³ Cf. Sand, p. 391.

³⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1995), pp. 548, 549.

³⁵ Nichol, vol. 5, p. 454. Cf. also p. 337.

³⁶ Cf. Meyer, p. 339.

³⁷ Cf. Horst Reisser, "*Moicheuo*," in *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*, ed. by Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, vol. 1, pp. 199, 200 (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag R. Brockhaus, 1977), p. 200. Cf. Patte, p. 266.

³⁸ Cf. Ekkehardt Mueller, "Fornication," <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>.

³⁹ Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthaus*, p. 428.

⁴⁰ Hill, pp. 280, 281.

⁴¹ Against remarriage of a spouse who has not been involved in adultery argue, for instance, Bruce, p. 110; Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthaus*, p. 428; and Hagner, p. 549; whereas remarriage in the same case is supported, e.g., by France, pp. 281, 282; Keener, pp. 43, 44; Lillie, pp. 199, 120; David K. Lowery, "A Theology of Matthew," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. by Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 59; and Nichol, vol. 5, p. 454.

⁴² One might argue: The husband who does not divorce his wife but marries again does not commit adultery. However, such reasoning is untenable. The passage in Matthew 19 discusses the problem of divorce and not the issue of polygamy. However, as pointed out above, by His strong emphasis on the Creation order (Matthew 19:4-6, 8), Jesus clearly rejects polygamy.

⁴³ Cf. William Lillie, *Studies in New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), pp. 119, 120: "Jewish divorce made the remarriage of the wife possible____This was subject to the two limitations that a priest could not marry a divorced woman (Leviticus 21:7, 14), and that a man could not marry his own former wife, if in the meantime she had been married to another (Deuteronomy 24:4)____In view of contemporary Jewish practice, it is extremely unlikely that early Christian teaching permitted divorce but forbade remarriage, as some have imagined."

⁴⁴ Cf. Keener, pp. 43, 44.

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⁴⁵ E.g. Patte, p. 267.

⁴⁶ E.g. Hagner, pp. 549, 550; Hill, p. 281; Lillie, p. 125; Meyer, p. 340; Nichol, vol. 5, p. 455.

⁴⁷ Vgl. France, p. 282.

⁴⁸ Andrew Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), p. 90, writes: "To what does the phrase 'this word' (11) refer? Much the most likely answer is that it refers to what has just been said: the disciples' view that if remarriage after divorce (at least in many, perhaps in all, circumstances) is out for the follower of Christ (cf. 9) then the wise course of action is not to marry (10). Jesus—perhaps to their surprise—does not dismiss this view out of hand. On the contrary, for some people this is precisely what God has 'given' (11). . . . The alternative view—that 'this word' means Christ's prohibition of divorce except for marital unfaithfulness (3-9) or His prohibition of remarriage (9)—is unsustainable. It seems impossible that, having introduced His conclusion with the solemn words: 'I tell you' (9), He would then go on to say that some may legitimately refuse His teaching because it hasn't been given to them. . . .' Nor can He be saying in 11: 'Not all [people] accept His teaching, but only those [i.e., all Christians] to whom it has been given,' stating the rather obvious fact that while Christians will observe His teaching on divorce and remarriage, those who are not Christians will not. This would make a strange, unconnected response to their outcry in 10; it also makes 12 (with its connection 'for') a strange, unconnected follow-on remark."

⁴⁹ Vgl. Cornes, p. 92.

⁵⁰ Cf. Cornes, p. 93.

⁵¹ Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Mattheus*, p. 429 (translated).

⁵² Cf. Hagner, p. 550.

Chapter 38

Homosexuality and the Church

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All manner of sin can be forgiven, provided we admit our wrongdoing, repent, and turn away from it. But there can be no forgiveness when sinners are in denial—when they insist that their lustful desires and practices are not sinful, when they reinterpret Scripture to justify their sins, and when they defiantly maintain that they will not turn from their sinful ways.

Such is the case today with a sin called homosexuality.

Almost two dozen years ago, a former dean of the Theological Seminary at Andrews University perceptively noted: "The gay crisis has come to church. Some homosexuals are coming to church not only for forgiveness and mercy but to say to the church, as they have to the world, 'Homosexuality is not sinful; it is natural to me. God made me this way. He accepts me and my homosexuality as good. Therefore the time has come for the church to accept me as I am and join me in saying that gayness is good.'"

The above statement aptly captures the essence of the born-a-gay gospel and its varied "ministries" or support groups. Though advocates of this gospel employ the term ministry to describe their "outreach" to gay and lesbians, such ministries for the most part do not teach homosexuals to repent of their particular sin. Instead, they suggest that the church itself must be "educated" to own up to its alleged "immoral" past, when it failed to understand or recognize homosexuality as a morally legitimate lifestyle. Regrettably, an increasing number of Christians are uncritically embracing this new gospel!

Even in our own Seventh-day Adventist Church the attitudes of some are changing on the issue of homosexuality. We may find evidence for this change in Adventist discussions on the Internet, in written declarations by some scholars, in discussions at annual professional meetings of the church's Bible teachers, in some carefully written, yet troubling, articles that have been published in our

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church publications, and in the mumblings, if not deafening silence, from our pulpits.²

In this article, I will address two major issues: (1) Why are some within our ranks embracing the born-a-gay gospel as a morally legitimate part of the Christian lifestyle? (2) What are the three contending positions regarding what the church's attitude ought to be towards homosexuality?

What Is New About the Born-a-Gay Gospel?

The practice of homosexuality is not a new phenomenon of sexual behavior that has suddenly burst upon our modern culture; the practice has been present in almost every human society. Not unexpectedly, the Bible also deals with the subject in such texts as Genesis 19 (cf. Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6-10); Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-11).

If there is anything new about the practice of homosexuality, the newness lies in the fact that unlike the past centuries of Christian history, many churches in our day are accepting homosexuality as a morally legitimate lifestyle. Advocates of gay theology have employed two major methods to silence or challenge the Bible's negative valuation of homosexuality.

First, they argue that the Bible texts that have been understood historically as condemning homosexuality are either obscure or refer to the *abuse* of homosexuality. By this they mean certain kinds of homosexual practices, notably gang rape, idolatry, promiscuity, and prostitution, but not genuine homosexual orientation as we know it today.

Second, they put forward some Bible characters as examples of allegedly healthy and loving homosexual relationships. For example, the friendship love (*philia*) between Biblical characters like Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1-4) and David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18-20) they interpret to mean sexual love (*eros*). Consequently, they present these Bible characters as Christian models of lesbian and gay relationships. Advocates often argue that Ruth and Naomi exchanged their lesbian marriage vows when Ruth said to Naomi: "Wherever you go, I will go with you, wherever you stay I will stay with you; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. . . . *Till death do us part*" (Ruth 1:16, 17, my translation).

Regarding David and Jonathan, advocates of gay theology string together the following interesting argument to suggest that they were two "male lovers": The Bible itself says Jonathan "loved" David (1 Samuel 18:3); David declared publicly that Jonathan's love was "wonderful"—surpassing even "the

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love of women" (2 Samuel 1:23); Jonathan allegedly "stripped" in David's presence (1 Samuel 18:4); the two "kissed" each other (1 Samuel 20:41), subsequently "wept together," and (David) "exceeded" (1 Samuel 20:41)—terms advocates take to mean a sexual encounter! (Readers may wish to read the Scriptural account of the relationship between David and Jonathan to ascertain for themselves what the Bible actually says.)

Other proponents of gay theology also consider Joseph and Potiphar (Genesis 39), Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel (Daniel 2, 4), as well as Jesus and John ("the disciple whom Jesus loved" —John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2) as genuine models of loving and committed homosexual relationships. Some even consider the virgin Mary a lesbian, describing her as "one courageous woman who did not need a man to have a child."

Even though we may easily dismiss the above examples of allegedly healthy gay and lesbian relationships in the Bible as frivolous inventions, not all the arguments of pro-gay theology can be so rebuffed so handily. Some of the arguments are quite sophisticated, often invoking scientific, philosophical, or logical arguments to show that (1) people are born homosexual (i.e., homosexuality is genetic or inborn); (2) the sexual orientation of people born gay should be viewed as a natural or normal trait of their identity, like the color of the skin, eyes, or hair, or as a God-given gift; (3) a person's so-called God-given homosexual orientation is morally neutral and unchangeable; and (4) the Bible is silent, or does not condemn, homosexuality as such, but only its abuse.

Sincere, Bible-believing Christians are often caught off guard by the subtle and plausible-sounding arguments in favor of homosexuality today. In an effort to clear away the smokescreen that often clouds this issue, the next chapter of this volume will list some of the arguments in circulation. Following each is a response that I hope will make clear the fundamental issue at stake for the Christian. I believe that the reader will find in Scripture a clear and consistent guide to God's will in this highly charged matter.

However, as I indicated earlier, this chapter will identify some major reasons why Christian attitudes are changing on the question of homosexuality and the three contending positions regarding what the church's attitude ought to be towards homosexuality.

Reasons for the Changing Attitudes

The favorable disposition of some towards the practice of homosexuality may be attributed to a number of factors. The following are some of the major reasons:

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1. Campaigns by Pro-Homosexual Groups. The successful campaigns by various homosexual lobbying and civil rights organizations to end not only discrimination against homosexuals generally, but also to decriminalize homosexual practices between consenting adults, and to liberalize public opinion, attitudes, laws, and policies on homosexuality have contributed to the favorable attitude of some on homosexuality.

For example, in 1973 the American Bar Association called for the repeal of laws that in the past had placed homosexuality in the category of *crime*. That same year, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official list of mental *illnesses*, and the American Psychological Association also decided that homosexuality was no longer an *abnormal* behavior. With such influential actions to remove homosexuality from the categories of crime, illness, and abnormal behavior, it did not take long before Christian churches began to hear calls from pro-gay advocates, urging the church to remove homosexuality from the category of *sin*.

In the effort to remove homosexuality from the category of sin, advocates of gay theology have often presented testimonies of homosexuals and the latest research findings (scientific and Biblical) in such a manner as to silence or challenge the Bible's negative valuation of homosexuality. They portray those who do not embrace the revisionist interpretations of Scripture as being hopelessly uninformed or judgmental. Worse still, those opposed to the homosexual agenda are portrayed as cherishing the mean spirit of some right-wing fundamentalists, the kind of spirit that encourages gay bashing and gay hate crimes.³

Gay activists also employ specific strategies to turn the public against the church, and the church against itself. In an insightful expose of how they silence conservative churches' opposition to the gay lifestyle, one researcher quotes the following from a 1987 *Guide Magazine*, a non-Adventist publication for gays:

When conservative churches condemn gays . . . we can use talk to muddy the moral waters. This means publicizing support for gays by more moderate churches. . . . We can undermine the moral authority of homophobic churches by portraying them as antiquated backwaters, badly out of step with the times and with the latest findings of psychology. Against the mighty pull of institutional Religion one must set the mightier draw of Science and Public Opinion. Such an unholy alliance has worked well against churches before, on such topics as divorce and abortion . . . that alliance can work again here.⁴

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By removing homosexuality from the category of sin, and by employing strategies such as outlined above, pro-gay advocates have been successful in splitting major churches over gay clergy and gay marriage. The ultimate goal is not simply toleration, but total approval of the homosexual lifestyle.

2. Departure from Biblical Revelation to Empirical Research. The changing attitude toward homosexuality may also be attributed to the skepticism in certain quarters of the church about the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible. Under the influence of contemporary higher criticism, the Bible's sole authority is being replaced by other sources: reason, tradition, and experience. If the Bible is not authoritative in matters dealing with science, history, psychology, etc., why should it be relied upon on questions dealing with homosexuality?⁵

Thus, those who seek to neutralize the Biblical witness against homosexuality often do so on the basis of alleged research findings (scientific, statistical, etc.), or on the basis of testimonies by homosexuals of their happy, healthy, and fulfilling relationships, instead of on Scripture.

For example, on the basis of a highly questionable study showing that homosexuals in the San Francisco Bay area who are involved in reciprocal, permanent, and sexually exclusive relationships tended to be the happiest, healthiest, and most well-adjusted people of the entire group being analyzed, an Adventist ethicist concluded: "Christians therefore have every reason to encourage homosexuals who are honestly convinced that they should neither attempt to function heterosexually nor remain celibate to form closed-coupled homosexual unions."⁶

Notice that the reason given for endorsing closed-couple homosexual unions is not Biblical revelation, but rather an empirical finding regarding the experience of homosexuals. This new way of knowing truth (what scholars refer to as epistemology) is also illustrated in the testimony of one lesbian, who describes herself as an "Adventist-connected" theologian, Bible instructor/academy teacher-turned-minister.

She speaks about her naivete in blindly following the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that "told me that my own nature was sinful, so looking to myself would be my downfall. . . . It did not tell me to look at the rest of the natural world and discover that same-gender nesting occurs in many species." She explains, however, that following "an unusual calling" or "Martin Luther experience" (the "ecstasy and torment" of her lesbian encounter), she came to value the importance of "inner knowing"—listening to "the voice of God within me."

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The above examples illustrate the increasing departure from Biblical revelation towards empirical experience as an authority base on religious issues. Not only does this trend raise questions for Bible-believing Christians regarding the starting point for discussions on homosexuality—Should it be *observation*, *introspection*, or Biblical *revelation*?—but it also explains why some will jettison Biblical teaching for the "latest research findings."

3. Impact of Behaviorist Philosophy on Recent Research Findings.

Another factor that is shaping the homosexual debate is the impact of behavioristic philosophy. This philosophy, which has adherents among biologists, zoologists, physicists, and other social scientists, simply states that individuals have practically no choice in their moral actions, and therefore may not be held morally accountable for their actions. Human behavior, it is said, is largely, if not exclusively, predetermined by one's environment and one's genetic code.⁸

Given the impact of behavioristic philosophy, it is not coincidental that researchers are discovering that some are "born gay," that is to say they hold their homosexual orientation or identity from birth.⁹ Although the findings of genetic research are at the present time inconclusive, and although the studies often cited have been compellingly challenged,¹⁰ already some Adventist writers are making the following deductions from the new light of scientific research: (a) homosexuals are born gay, (b) homosexuality is a normal or natural condition, (c) what is natural cannot be immoral, and (d) "blaming the homosexual for his or her sexual orientation is both wrong-spirited and wrong."¹¹

Observe that while perceptive critics, including some homosexuals, have questioned the value of these "born-a-gay" discoveries, and while others have exposed the intellectual and psychological inconsistency in this "outmoded version of natural law,"¹² for some Adventist advocates of homosexual theology, these research findings validate their new understanding of "the truth about homosexuality." They argue that "whatever may cause a homosexual orientation, it is not something a person *chooses*."¹³

Another writer approvingly explains the born-a-gay argument using the words of an Adventist homosexual (notice her emphases):

As God is in His Heaven I did not choose this orientation, this lifestyle. Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that's kept me from following my choice of profession? Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that's kept me from marrying any of several girls who offered me a "normal" lifestyle with a home and family? Why would I *choose* to live in a world that thinks I am disgusting, repulsive, and totally unaccept-

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able? Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that can lead to loss of employment, friends, family, and love? If I would *choose* this, then I truly need to be put away!... What I am saying is that I did not *choose* this lifestyle. God allowed it, though He did not give it to me. I cannot change, because I have tried.¹⁴

The belief that homosexual orientation, like the color of the skin, eyes, or hair, is inborn—i.e., the homosexual was born gay, and has no choice over his/her homosexual condition—is one of the main reasons for the changing attitudes within Adventism on the question of homosexuality. Some go so far as to say that if God has allowed some people to be born gay, why should we not accept the person's sexual orientation?

More, probably, see homosexuality as an unfortunate birth defect, like a harelip, crossed eyes, or Down syndrome, to be corrected if possible. My contention, however, is that if we accept homosexual orientation as something inherited or acquired rather than *chosen*, it is *inevitable* that we will soon be called to see it as natural, then normal, then acceptable, and finally laudable. (Consider, for example, how those with AIDS are now valorized for their courage.)

4. New Sexual Paradigms. The acceptance of homosexuality as a morally legitimate sexual expression in certain quarters of the Adventist Church should also be seen as a reflection of the growing challenge to traditional Adventist views on human sexuality. In what is emerging in the church as a "new sexual paradigm," permissible sex is no longer limited to sex within the Biblically prescribed monogamous, heterosexual, marriage relationship. Instead, it is one that is engaged in by consenting individuals, according to their own self-imposed boundaries. Accordingly, premarital sex, masturbation (also known as solo sex, self-sex, or partnerless sex), and homosexuality are all viewed as morally justifiable.

For example, one Adventist university chaplain and teacher who argues for premarital sex and masturbation writes that "sexual exploration and experimentation before marriage" is acceptable as long as a person does not put his or her unmarried partner "in the position of feeling guilty or sinful."¹⁵

Another Adventist, a professor of psychology, defines sexual sin as "*behaving* in a way that *harms* yourself or others." Among the "radical reforms of the Adventist sexual paradigm" that he recommends to the church is this: "The pleasures of occasional guilt-free orgasm ought to be available to all post-pubescent parishioners." The "guilt-free" sex includes sex with "myself" (mas-

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turbation), with "a person of the same gender" (homosexuality), and with "someone ['not-yet-married'] of the opposite gender" (premarital sex).¹⁶

5. Climate of "Enlightened" Ethical Sensitivity. Our generation is painfully aware of the existence in our world of injustice and bigotry—slavery, racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia¹⁷ (fear, hysteria, disgust and/or hatred of the homosexual), etc. Because ignorance and religious bigotry have often played a part in these oppressive acts, it has become potentially harmful to quote the Bible when questioning anyone's sexual conduct—however objectionable it may be. Thus, the condemnation of any of today's new sexual paradigms is perceived as a judgmental act that may hurt the ethical feelings of sexual minorities—individuals with alternative sexual preferences or orientations.

In the desire to appear more informed and compassionate, those who have adopted this posture of enlightened ethical sensitivity are treating Biblical prohibitions of certain sexual deviations as culturally conditioned or offensive relics of a prescientific (or puritanical) morality.¹⁸ Additionally, Biblical virtues such as love, compassion, and acceptance are emphasized in such a way as to counter any efforts not to accept the new sexual paradigms. Bible-believing Christians who speak against homosexuality are accused of being *judgmental* (as in the case of Christ's disciples, who condemned a congenitally blind person as a sinner [John 9]) and un-Christlike. (Didn't Jesus say, "Judge not, lest ye be judged?" And didn't He also say to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn thee?")

To digress for a moment, it would seem that Jesus' statement, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11), has been abused by all classes of Christians in their attitude to homosexuality. On one hand, strong advocates of pro-gay theology would read the statement as: "*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin....*" On the other hand, some strong opponents of gay theology would adopt the attitude: " . . . *I condemn thee: go!*" A true Adventist position does not condemn the sinner: "neither do I condemn thee"; it does condemn the sin: "Go, and sin no more."

In any case, given today's climate of enlightened ethical sensitivity, anyone who does not accept homosexuality as morally justifiable is looked upon as being legalistic, insensitive, hypocritical, bigoted, or homophobic—characteristics that are incompatible with acceptable Christian behavior. This strategy exerts powerful psychological pressure on Christians either to endorse the homosexual lifestyle or, at a minimum, remain silent on the issue.

6. The AIDS Crisis. During the early phases of the AIDS epidemic, when

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it was discovered that AIDS is largely a sexually transmitted disease, the disease came to be perceived as a judgment from God against all forms of sexual perversion—of which homosexuality was the chief. Since many Adventists viewed homosexuality as *the* unpardonable sin of sexual immorality—the one sin that sealed the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, and which would signal the end of time, AIDS became associated with homosexuality and the disease came to be seen as a gay disease.¹⁹

But as heterosexuals and nonpromiscuous individuals started coming down with AIDS, Christians were forced not only to rethink their judgmental stance towards victims of AIDS, but also to reconsider their negative valuation of homosexuality. The reasoning was: If both homosexuals and heterosexuals fall to AIDS, perhaps homosexuality is not as sinful as it was traditionally pictured.

Also, when compassion for victims of the AIDS disease soon turned into compassion for homosexuals, it was not long before compassion for the struggling homosexual turned into an acceptance of the sin of homosexuality. This seems to be the unspoken message in an article in *Adventist View*, titled "I'm Homosexual, I'm Adventist, and I Have AIDS."²⁰

7. Kinship's Pro-Gay Theology. Another major reason for Adventism's changing attitude toward homosexuality is the influence of the work by the pro-homosexual organization known as Kinship. Billing itself as "a support group for gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists," Kinship has been quite successful in converting some Adventists to its belief that "God can bless a committed homosexual relationship." As a result, an increasing number of homosexuals are coming out of the closet and demanding that their homosexuality be accepted as either natural or a "gift from God."²¹

This may explain why in the 1993 Adventist Women's Institute's book referred to earlier, an "Adventist-connected" theologian, Bible instructor/academy teacher-turned-minister, writes that her lesbianism is "an unusual calling" from the Lord and why her lesbian partner also felt that the lesbian relationship was "God's gift for her conversion."²²

A year earlier, the November 4, 1992 issue of the Andrews University student newspaper (*Student Movement*) created a sensation on campus when it published a letter from an Andrews University homosexual couple pleading for acceptance.²³ In the center page article of that issue, some anonymous staff members and students discussed their homosexual and lesbian relationships. Among them was "Ann," a 28-year-old lesbian who was seeking the transfer of her church membership to the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews

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University. Speaking about her committed homosexual relationship in which God plays an important role, Ann summed up the basic belief of Kinship: "I am a lesbian because God knows that that's the best thing for me. My homosexuality has actually brought me a lot closer to God than if I was a heterosexual."²⁴

It is this kind of view that was actively promoted at the 2000 Toronto General Conference session by "Someone to Talk To," an organization claiming to be for "Adventist Families and Friends of Gays and Lesbians" and which has apparently been recognized by the North American Division Family Ministries Department. Even some Adventist Gay/Lesbian "ministries" (such as the one at the San Francisco Central SDA Church) and "outreach" groups like God's Rainbow and GLOW, while distancing themselves from Kinship, nonetheless argue that homosexuality is not sin, but rather morally neutral.

As a result of the campaigns by these organizations, groups, and individuals, many Adventists are no longer very sure of the nature and morality of homosexuality.

8. 1980 Declaration by Some Scholars. Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the most significant event that signaled the changing attitudes towards homosexuality occurred when, in August 1980, the church commissioned six well-known representatives to attend a camp meeting (or "*kamp* meeting") organized by the pro-homosexual group Kinship.²⁵

Although the church representatives consisted of six influential Bible scholars and pastors, to the surprise of many, the Biblical and theological scholars at the Kinship camp meeting concluded that the teaching of Scripture on the subject of homosexuality is not sufficiently clear to settle the question of the morality of homosexual acts or relationships in our world.²⁶

The three scholars, all of whom were then teaching at the church's leading theological seminary at Andrews University, declared: "A simplistic English reading of the few Scriptural references to homosexual acts would not suffice to determine the Lord's will for homosexual persons today."²⁷

Given the ensuing civil war between liberals and conservatives over the legitimacy of contemporary higher criticism in Biblical interpretation, the declaration by the church's authorized scholars at the Kinship camp meeting has been understood by some as another indication of the flourishing of liberal methodology in the church.²⁸

In any case, declarations such as the one above, and the official opposition to such a position by the church in the volume *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (1988)²⁹ and in the GC's Biblical Research Institute's book *Homosexuality in History and Scriptures* (1988),³⁰ have made the issue of

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homosexuality a hot potato item within Adventist scholarship.

9. Troubling Views in Church Publications. Despite the clamor for the church's acceptance of homosexuality, and despite the fact that the church's Bible scholars have been quietly debating the issue, very few Adventists were aware of the campaign for homosexuality in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But in recent times the homosexual issue has come out of its ideological and academic closets into the mainstream Adventist view. This has taken the form of carefully written yet troubling articles in such church publications as *Ministry*, *Adventist Review*, *Insight*, *Women of Spirit*, *Adventist View*, *Collegiate Quarterly*, and *Guide*. These articles, sometimes by anonymous authors, have called for new "awareness and understanding on the subject of homosexuality." A careful reading of some of these works reveals a subtle shift from the church's categorical rejection of homosexuality to its qualified acceptance.³¹

As I will show in the next section, there are three contending positions on homosexuality that are competing in Christian churches today: (a) the *nonacceptance* view, which maintains that homosexuality is not compatible with Biblical Christianity (this is the long-standing SDA position); (b) the *qualified acceptance* view, which argues that homosexuality can be compatible with Christianity (this is the new view being promoted in the articles being put out in church publications); (c) the *full acceptance* view, which asserts that homosexuality is fully compatible with the Christian faith (this is the position held by pro-gay organizations like Kinship).

The vexing questions raised by the troubling articles appearing in our church publications can best be illustrated by calling attention to the December 5, 1992, issue of *Insight*, a publication for Seventh-day Adventist teenagers. This particular issue of *Insight* is devoted entirely to the subject of homosexuality. While the then editor of the magazine maintains that "there is no Scriptural support for practicing homosexuality," he nevertheless endorses the pro-gay theology when he asserts that: "There's a difference between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality"; "Nobody *chooses* to be homosexual"; "Changing one's homosexual orientation is difficult and rare"; "Homosexuals can be genuine, model Christians"; and "Being a homosexual is not a sin."³²

Perceptive readers will recognize that the above position was rejected in the 1990 and 1995 *Church Manual* editions when the church officially condemned "homosexual practices and lesbian practices" as examples of "the obvious perversions of God's original plan," and made these practices a basis for church discipline." It is significant that the 1990 and 1995 editions of the *Church*

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Manual made the practice of homosexuality a basis for church discipline. For, since the 1985 GC session, pro-gay advocates have subtly sought to modify the language in the *Church Manual* towards a qualified acceptance view of homosexuality (see the note below for an insightful account of how this happened).³⁴

10. Obliteration of Gender Role Distinctions. One overlooked reason for Adventism's changing attitude towards homosexuality is the impact of feminist theology on sexual role distinctions. This fact is evident in the liberal (radical feminist) and conservative (egalitarian or equalitarian) reasoning for ordaining women as elders or pastors. Though employing different sets of arguments, both liberal and conservative proponents of women's ordination are united in their denial of male headship and gender role differentiation at *Creation*. They reject the Biblical teaching of sexual role distinctions before the Fall of Adam and Eve because of their belief that such a teaching suggests the absence of "full equality" and the existence of superiority/inferiority among the first pair.³⁵

We should not miss the connection between the above arguments and those used to promote homosexuality. Just as feminists seek "full equality" by getting rid of *gender* or *sex roles* in marriage and the church, gay theology also seeks to bring about "full equality" between homosexuals and heterosexuals by obliterating *sexual identity*. Thus, when radical proponents impose their gender-inclusive reconstructions upon the Bible and suggest that Adam was "an androgynous being" (i.e., bisexual),³⁶ it is only a few steps from seeing homosexuality as a Creation ordinance.

Similarly, when conservative proponents of women's ordination claim that at Creation Adam and Eve were "fully equal," enjoying "total egalitarianism in marriage," and when they argue that prior to the Fall there was no role differentiation between male and female, whether these conservatives are aware of it or not, they also are building a theological nest for advocates of homosexual theology to lay and hatch their gay eggs.³⁷

To speak of "full equality" without seriously coming to terms with the nature and extent of this equality and without stating unambiguously that to act as "equal and joint partners" does not mean to act identically, allows advocates of gay theology to build upon the shaky foundation constructed by liberal and conservative advocates of women's ordination. At a time of increasing homosexual demands for marital rights, the failure by proponents of women's ordination to say unambiguously that men are not equal with women personally or even physically *as candidates to be spouses of men* has opened a welcome door for those who seek to nullify the Biblical case for divinely instituted role differences and a monogamous heterosexual relationship. This fact has not

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been lost on proponents of gay theology within Adventism.³⁸

For example, speaking at the annual meeting of Seventh-day Adventist college and university Bible teachers in San Francisco, California, in 1992, the "liaison" from the pro-homosexual group Kinship, correctly remarked that the push for women's ordination, when successful, will eventually open the door for the church to embrace homosexuality, since both causes are waging a similar battle of "discrimination" and share the same basic approach to Biblical interpretation.

One Adventist homosexual, a member of the "Adventist Gay/Lesbian" Ministry at San Francisco Central SDA Church, makes an insightful observation regarding the similarities of the pro-gay and pro-women's ordination arguments. He expresses his amusement that proponents of women's ordination "use a set of arguments to validate women being ordained, almost exactly the same as us gays used to approve of 'monogamous gay relationships.' Junia and Phoebe rank right in there with David and Jonathan, and Ruth and Naomi. In this [Internet Web site] thread, I have even seen the Bible translated by first setting aside references to gender because of some women being just as capable of certain tasks as a man is. Well, let me tell you something, honey, except for childbirth I have been just as capable as any woman in all of the tasks normally performed by the woman-so I guess I can also set aside all the Biblical statements I don't like? To my knowledge, 'Ordination Credentials' are a man-made set of requirements to fill a Biblical role, but they are in no way capable of changing the gender to which the role applies."³⁹

Despite the objections by some Adventist proponents of women's ordination, the experience of other Christian denominations confirms the above observations that openness towards homosexuality inescapably follows once we jettison the Bible's teaching on sexual role differentiation for an "egalitarian" model.

This is why some delegates at the 2000 Toronto GC session objected to the insertion of a theologically fuzzy feminist language in the "divorce and remarriage" document presented to them at the session. The reason is simple: Whether proponents were aware of it or not, by taking away role distinctions at Creation, the divorce and remarriage document that was presented to delegates at the Toronto GC session set a theological foundation not just for women's ordination but also for homosexuality.⁴⁰

11. The Public Clamor for Denominational Acceptance. Today "Adventist" homosexuals are coming out of the closet and clamoring for acceptance. And in response, some of our churches are embracing homosexuals who still cling to that lifestyle. A Winter 1999 issue of *Scanner*, a newsletter published by the Glendale City SDA Church in California, includes an interview

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with Donald, a "gay Adventist" who is apparently very active in the church. He is quoted as saying that "going by conservative estimations, there are at least 5,000 gay Adventists in Southern California."⁴¹ The November 18, 2000, church bulletin of that church even carries an announcement of a homosexual couple "who are celebrating their 14-year anniversary."

As mentioned earlier, pro-gay views were actively promoted in booth #1109 at the 2000 Toronto General Conference (GC) session. The booth was listed as "Someone to Talk To" in the General Conference Exhibition book given to all delegates to the session. The "Someone to Talk To" organization claims to be for "Adventist Families and Friends of Gays and Lesbians." Its organizers placed a two-page advertisement in the GC Exhibition book in which they mentioned that the North American Division Family Ministries Department has recognized their organization.⁴²

In an attempt to convince the church to embrace homosexuality as morally acceptable, the above organization passed out hundreds of brochures to the Toronto GC session delegates and visitors. One of their brochures explains why:

I hope the church will no longer take an ostrich-in-the-sand approach, but face the reality that its gay brothers and sisters are everywhere in the church: from congregational laity to college faculty, church pastors and General Conference workers. We are hurting and isolated, and as much in need of denominational acceptance and the forgiving grace of Christ as anyone else. Please don't continue to ignore us.⁴³

The above facts confirm that whether we recognize it or not, homosexuals "are everywhere in the church" and are calling for "denominational acceptance." The crucial question therefore is, How should we respond to their calls? Does the church have an official position on the issue?

Summary. The above reasons—(1) campaign by pro-homosexual groups, (2) departure from Biblical revelation to empirical research, (3) the impact of the behavioristic philosophy on recent research findings, (4) new sexual paradigms, (5) the climate of "enlightened" ethical sensitivity, (6) the AIDS crisis, (7) the impact of Kinship's pro-gay theology, (8) the 1980 declaration by some scholars, (9) troubling views in church publications, (10) the obliteration of gender role distinctions, (11) the public clamor for denominational acceptance—may help explain why attitudes are changing within the Adventist Church on the issue of homosexuality.

As a result of these reasons (and perhaps others), there is uncertainty in

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the minds of many church members over the nature and morality of homosexuality. Some pro-gay advocates within our ranks are slowly moving the church towards a full, or qualified, acceptance view of homosexuality. Before evaluating the arguments being used to domesticate homosexuality in the Adventist Church, it may first be necessary to summarize the three major positions pleading for audience in the Christian church.

Three Major Views in the Church

As in other denominations, there are three contending positions in our own church regarding what the church's attitude ought to be towards homosexuality: (a) the *nonacceptance* view, which maintains that homosexuality is not compatible with Biblical Christianity; (b) the *qualified acceptance* view, which argues that homosexuality can be compatible with Christianity; and (c) the *full acceptance* view, which asserts that homosexuality is fully compatible with the Christian faith.

Seventh-day Adventists historically have adopted the *nonacceptance* view. But as pro-homosexual groups (like Kinship) continue their campaign for the *full acceptance* view, some segments within contemporary Adventism are moving towards the *qualified acceptance* view. Since all three views are represented in contemporary Seventh-day Adventism, and since each is based on a set of theological and ethical assumptions, I will briefly summarize the respective views. In the next chapter, I will raise some critical questions for those seeking to move the church towards qualified acceptance and full acceptance of homosexuality.

Nonacceptance View

Historically embraced by the Christian church, this position maintains that homosexuality is incompatible with Biblical Christianity.⁴⁴ Despite the efforts by some thought leaders within our ranks, the nonacceptance view remains the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁴⁵ The following are some of its basic tenets:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: This view holds that homosexuality is a post-Fall distortion of human sexuality. Whether constitutional (i.e., belief in being born gay) or situational (i.e., forced by single-sex environments, e.g., prisons, military camps, monasteries), homosexuality is no different from other depraved sexual deviations (such as bisexuality, bestiality, adultery, fornication etc.). The popular statement, "If God had intended homosexuality to

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be a legitimate expression of human sexuality, He would have created Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve," aptly summarizes the nonacceptance position.

(b) **Morality of Homosexuality:** According to the nonacceptance position, homosexuality is both sinful (like pride, adultery, and murder) and evil (like sickness and death). Like all other morally corrupt tendencies, homosexual orientation or disposition does not excuse the sin of homosexuality. All people are tempted to act upon their besetting sexual desires, cravings, or tendencies (homosexual and heterosexual). The temptation is not sin, but yielding to it is morally wrong.

(c) **Way Out of Homosexuality:** Believing that there is no sin that is outside the scope of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, the nonacceptance position maintains that the Creator of human sexuality can fix every sexual problem. Homosexuality and homosexual lifestyle can, therefore, be overcome by God's transforming power (in the conversion/new birth experience) and by God's enabling or sustaining grace (in the gradual work of sanctification). God is able to deliver a homosexual from his/her sin and keep such a person from falling. Therefore, the nonacceptance view denies the claim that homosexuality is incurable.

(d) **Response to Homosexuality:** The church should accord all homosexuals their full rights as human beings created in the image of God, show compassion, kindness, and Christian love to all those struggling with sexual sins, and point them to Jesus Christ as the answer to all their needs. Homosexuals should be urged to repent and accept God's forgiveness.

Homosexuals who acknowledge the sinfulness of homosexuality, who accept Christ's offer of forgiveness, who cut themselves loose from homosexual relationships, and who, by faith, commit themselves to a life of sexual purity, should be accepted into church fellowship. But those who do not acknowledge homosexuality as sin and/or those who are engaged in homosexual relationships or practices should not be accepted into church membership.⁴⁶

The *nonacceptance* view, therefore, *rejects* the view of "once a homosexual, always a homosexual."

Qualified Acceptance View

Currently gaining currency in certain quarters of the Adventist Church, this accommodating view argues that homosexuality *can* be compatible with

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Christianity.⁴⁷ The following are some of its essential teachings:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: Unlike the nonacceptance position which holds that homosexuality is post-Fall distortion, the qualified acceptance position maintains that homosexuality is a post-Fall *aberration* of human sexuality. Homosexual condition/orientation (constitutional homosexuality or inversion), according to this view, is a nonideal condition of human sexuality (just as poor eyesight, asthma, or allergies). "God didn't create homosexuality, as He didn't create loneliness or disabilities." Homosexuality is not God's ideal plan for people, and therefore must be removed *wherever possible*.

(b) Morality of Homosexuality: The qualified acceptance position argues that the homosexual condition is not sin but a condition of sinfulness. What advocates mean is that homosexual condition or orientation is one evidence of the brokenness and fallenness of our present world. The condition may be classified with disease (such as alcoholism or allergies), with handicap (such as congenital blindness), and eccentricity (such as left-handedness). It may even be evil (like sickness or death), but not necessarily sinful (like pride, blasphemy, or murder).

Because homosexuals presumably did not choose to be born gay, "we shouldn't hold a person responsible for her or his sexual *orientation* any more than we hold a person responsible for skin color (nature)."⁴⁸ Being a homosexual is not sin,⁵⁰ but lustful and inappropriate homosexual activity is sin, and therefore must be avoided.⁵¹

(c) Way Out of Homosexuality: In very rare situations, God may deliver some homosexuals from their condition/orientation. Generally, however, since genuine homosexuals did not choose their orientation, and since in most cases there is no possibility of change in orientation, homosexuals must aim at controlling (i.e., putting in subjection) their homosexual drives. One Adventist scholar writes:

We must teach them to live with their condition. In a sense it is like being born left-handed. . . . However, it does not give license to practice homosexual acts, which violate Christian moral standards. In this situation we must consider the homosexual on the same basis as the heterosexual.... The homosexual may not be able to do anything about his attraction for his own sex, but by God's grace he can control his impulses. He may not have had any real choice

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regarding his condition, but he has choice about his actions.

Cure or deliverance may not always be possible for those with homosexual orientations. But through prayer, counseling, human therapy, and other methods of behavior modification (skills of self-discipline or self-control), homosexuals can cope with their sexual predicament.

(d) Response to Homosexuality: While accepting their condition as a "thorn in the flesh," and while controlling their desires, homosexuals should accept God's unconditional love and acceptance. On the other hand, the church should treat people with homosexual orientation as one would treat heterosexuals—i.e., as real human beings, of equal value in God's sight and having the same rights as all others. It should show understanding, compassion, and love to them "neither condemning them for an orientation over which they have no control, nor encouraging them to accept something less than God's best for their lives,"⁵³ as homosexuals are led to accept Jesus as their Saviour.

Homosexuals who renounce homosexual practices and make a commitment to remain celibates, must be accepted as members in good and regular standing in the church. They can hold church offices and can be ordained as ministers. "If an alcoholic who never drinks alcohol can hold any church office, a homosexual who never practices homosexuality can hold any church office."⁵⁴

The *qualified acceptance* view, therefore, assumes that "once a homosexual, (almost) always a homosexual."

Full Acceptance View

Historically rejected by the church, this revisionist view of morality asserts that homosexuality is *fully compatible* with Christianity.⁵⁵ In the Adventist Church, this view is actively promoted by Kinship, an organization that claims to be "a support group for gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists." The following are some of its primary precepts:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: The full acceptance position sees homosexuality as part of the *pre-Fall natural order*. In its view, genuine (constitutional) homosexuality is not a distortion of human sexuality (as held by the nonacceptance position), nor an aberration (as argued by the qualified acceptance position.) Instead, homosexuality is an immutable sexual orientation

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given or created by God as a gift to some people—just as is heterosexuality. It is an eccentricity (a characteristic of a minority) or a mark of one's individual identity (just like possessing a particular color of the skin, eyes, or hair).

(b) Morality of Homosexuality: Homosexuality is morally neutral; it is neither evil nor sinful. An article in the *Newsletter* of SDA Kinship states this position well:

Homosexuality and heterosexuality are two aspects of sexuality, neither being the counterfeit of the other, both being right or wrong depending upon the context of their expression_____Both the homosexual and the heterosexual are capable of lusting or loving, worshipping the creature or the Creator, and of seeking salvation by works or accepting it as a gift of God.⁵⁶

Homosexuality may be eccentric, but it definitely is not sinful (like murder or pride) or evil (like congenital blindness or the sickness of alcoholism). The *abuse* of homosexuality (e.g., promiscuity, rape, or prostitution) is wrong, but not its legitimate expression (as in loving, consensual, monogamous, homosexual relationships).

(c) Way Out of Homosexuality: According to the full acceptance view, to insist that homosexuals should change their orientation is equivalent to asking an Ethiopian to change his skin, or asking a person five feet tall to become six feet. Homosexuals do not have to be transformed into heterosexuals, nor should they just control themselves until they become heterosexualized. Because of the long years during which they have been victimized as "sexual minorities," homosexuals must claim the assurance of God's acceptance and leading in their homosexual lifestyle.

(d) Response to Homosexuality: Homosexuals should not be condemned, despised, or singled out as the embodiment of sexual perversion. They, like all others, deserve love, dignity, and respect. Effort must be expended to present the living Christ to the homosexual who is not yet a Christian (i.e., the person who was born a gay but has not yet been born again). But whether converted or unconverted, all homosexuals should celebrate God's "gift" (homosexual orientation), and *practice* homosexuality within a permanent relationship of love and fidelity or within the Biblical guidelines for sexual morality.

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Homosexuals who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour must be considered as full and regular members of the church, and if they choose, they must be encouraged to date other homosexuals—as long as the relationship is kept pure. In other words, homosexuals should be affirmed in their same-sex relationships, be allowed to "marry" or to form "closed-couple homosexual unions,"⁵⁸ and whenever necessary, be permitted to adopt children. The rules of marriage should apply in homosexual marriages just as in heterosexual marriage. Converted homosexuals who have a calling or the requisite spiritual gifts should be ordained as pastors.

The full acceptance view, therefore, maintains that "once a homosexual, always a homosexual."

Summary

All three views—nonacceptance, qualified acceptance, and full acceptance—are competing for converts within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The hot potato issue is whether to regard homosexuality as: (a) a morally sinful practice to be renounced, (b) a morally neutral condition to be controlled, or (c) a morally acceptable gift to be celebrated.

Each of the three views raises crucial theological, ethical, and hermeneutical issues. Of the three views, only nonacceptance and full acceptance are consistent. Of these two, only the nonacceptance view is Biblical. The qualified acceptance view is neither consistent nor Biblical. In other words, it is my contention that whereas the nonacceptance position is consistent *and* Biblical, and while the full acceptance view is consistent but not Biblical, the qualified acceptance position is neither consistent nor Biblical.

Yet it appears that the qualified acceptance view is that which is being widely promoted in church publications. Before the Adventist Church renounces its traditional nonacceptance position in favor of the qualified acceptance position, or even the full acceptance view, the church should demand Biblically consistent answers from advocates of these versions of pro-gay theology.

The next chapter will concern itself with these issues, evaluating some of the common arguments often put forth in defense of these views of homosexuality.

Endnotes

¹ Raoul Dederen, "Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective," *Ministry*, September 1988, p. 14.

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² At my last count, no less than 250 published works (articles and letters) on the subject of homosexuality have appeared in Adventist publications during the past 25 years (1980-2005). For a detailed discussion of published Adventist views on the subject from the early '50s to the mid-'80s, see Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 240-265.

³ Mel White's *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994) also captures this spirit of vindictiveness. A former evangelical, he is now openly homosexual and has served as dean of Dallas's Cathedral of Hope, an affiliate of the gay Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. He dismisses those who do not embrace his attempt to reconcile homosexuality with the Biblical faith as being ignorant of "the new Biblical, pastoral, psychological, and scientific data about homosexuality." In his view, such individuals evidence the spirit of the so-called religious right, a spirit perceived as intolerance and that ultimately leads to the suffering of God's homosexual children. White presents an agenda to "keep the religious right from doing more wrong": "Start your own version of a local 'to prevent a gay/lesbian' holocaust museum. Demonstrate the similarity between Hitler's Third Reich and the current tactics of the religious right." He advocates censorship: "Organize your new coalitions to call radio and television stations quoting the offenders, suggesting they be taken off the air. Follow up with public or even legal pressure when the inflammatory rhetoric continues. Write letters to the editors against the columnists of the religious right" (Mel White, *Stranger at the Gate*, pp. 320, 321). For a Biblical response to White's revisionist interpretation of the Biblical data, see Donald J. Wold, *Our of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

⁴ See Lynn Vincent, "How Homosexuals Fight," *World*, April 10, 1999, p. 19.

⁵ In *Receiving the Word*, I have attempted to show how higher critical assumptions and conclusions are shaping discussions on homosexuality, the use of alcohol, Creation, etc. See chapter 5 of the book, pp. 101-194.

⁶ David R. Larson, "Sexuality and Christian Ethics," *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984) :16. For a detailed challenge to the dubious research of Kinsey, see, for example, Judith Reisman and Edward W. Eichel, *Kinsey, Sex, and Fraud: The Indoctrination of a People* (Lafayette, La.: Lochinvar-Huntington House, 1990).

⁷ Lin Ennis, "Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality," in *In Our Own Words: Women Tell of Their Lives and Faith*, ed. Iris M. Yob and Patti Hansen Tompkins (Santa Ana, Calif.: Adventist Women's Institute, 1993), pp. 237, 238, 230-235. She explains: "I was so naive about God, so blind to the real needs of human beings, so willing to be led as a sheep, mindlessly following, not thinking for myself, except just enough to afford me the illusion of independence of thought. Far more than I cared to admit, I did what the church said, what the *Church Manual* said, what the ministers and evangelists I had worked with said" (ibid., p. 234). But after she discovered the truth about God by looking at herself (apparently, the "inner knowing" of listening to God "within me" (p. 234) and "the rest of the natural world," and rightly understood "the Bible," "I realized that to continue to be active in the Adventist Church in the way I had always been before would not work for me" (ibid., p. 237).

⁸ *Time* magazine (August 1, 1977), pp. 54-63, alerted the world to the growing impact of another version of this behavioristic philosophy when it devoted its cover article—"Why You Do What You Do"—to *sociobiology*, a new theory which maintains that social behavior has a biological basis. One leading sociobiologist at Harvard University is quoted in the *Time* article as making this prediction: "Sooner or later, political science, law, economics, psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology will all be branches of sociobiology." In partial fulfillment of this kind of prediction by the prophets of sociobiology, "discoveries" are being made in recent times by researchers that what in the past were considered as habitual sins are actually of biological origin. Thus, it is said

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that some individuals are "born to smoke," "born alcoholics," and even "born murderers," and are therefore not to be held accountable for their moral actions. According to a *Time* magazine cover story, even infidelity may be due to our genes. (See Robert Wright, "Our Cheating Hearts," August 15, 1994, pp. 44-52.)

⁹ The studies often cited as evidence that homosexuality is inborn include: (1) the 1991 study of neuroscientist Dr. Simon LeVay on the brain structures of 41 cadavers; (2) the 1991 research by Northwestern University psychologist Michael Bailey (a gay rights advocate) and Boston University School of Medicine psychiatrist Richard Pillard (who is openly homosexual) on homosexual twins; and (3) the 1993 study by Dr. Dean Hamer of the National Cancer Institute on the genetic markers of 40 nonidentical gay brothers. But as I will later show, these oft-quoted research findings have been shown to be misleading and exaggerated (at best inconclusive). For a succinct review and evaluation of the findings of the above-cited researchers and supporting references, see Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow. Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 137-142; Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), pp. 107-131.

¹⁰ See for example, Neil and Briar Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It! A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation* (Lafayette, La: Huntington House Publishers, 1999), who offer a compelling refutation of the arguments often cited in support of the claim that people are born gay.

¹¹ According to the then editor of *Insight*, a homosexual orientation (or inclination, inversion, desires, or outlook) is "a way of *being* and *feeling*—whether or not those feelings are ever translated into sexual acts." It is a mark of one's identity, "a natural part" of a person—just as possessing green eyes. He approvingly quotes one homosexual as saying: "Oh, I could cover them up for a while, wear blue or brown contacts, but that wouldn't change the reality. My eyes *are* green, and my sexual orientation *is* gay." Thus, for this Adventist scholar, "blaming the homosexual for his or her sexual orientation is both wrong-spirited and wrong." "Being a homosexual is not a sin," he asserts. See Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, pp. 6,7,11.

¹² Perceptive critics, including some homosexuals, reject this born-a-gay discovery because they fear that other research findings showing some unacceptable conditions (like alcoholism, schizophrenia, cerebral palsy, etc.) as genetically related will soon make homosexuals look like they are abnormal or less than human (cf. *World6* [September 14, 1991] :11). J.B. Nelson exposes the intellectual and psychological inconsistency in this "outmoded version of natural law" that seeks to make a fine distinction between homosexual orientation and behavior. Responding to the view that "while homosexuality as an *orientation* is contrary to God's created intention, the homosexual *person* ought not to be adversely judged or rejected by the church," Nelson counters that while some may deem such a position a more tolerant and compassionate view than outright condemnation, "it places gay men and lesbians in at least two impossible binds." He writes: "One, of course, is the individual's recognition that her or his own sexual orientation is as natural and as fundamental to identity as is the color of the skin. It is both naive and cruel to tell a lesbian or gay man, 'Your sexual orientation is still unnatural and a perversion, but this is no judgment upon you as a person.' The individual knows otherwise. The other bind concerns churchly pressure toward celibacy. When the church presumes to be nonjudgmental toward orientation but then draws the line against genital expression, it is difficult to understand how the sense of guilt—even in the celibate—will be significantly alleviated." See J.B. Nelson, "Religious and Moral Issues in Working with Homosexual Clients," in *Homosexuality and Psychotherapy, a Practitioner's Handbook of Affirmative Models. Journal of Homosexuality* 7, nos. 2, 3, ed. J.C. Gonsiorek (New York: Haworth Press, 1982) T68-69.

¹³ Kate McLaughlin (pseudonym), "Are Homosexuals God's Children?" *Adventist Review*,

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April 3, 1997, p. 26 (emphasis hers); cf. idem, "A Homosexual in My Congregation?" *Ministry*, November 1996, pp. 10, 11, 29.

¹⁴ Suzanne Ryan, "When Love Wasn't Enough," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, p. 3 (emphasis hers). Christopher Blake agrees: "Nobody chooses to be homosexual. . . . Whether a person is born with the orientation or it develops as a result of his or her upbringing, or it's a complex combination of both (which is most likely), it is nor a matter of choice. A child chooses neither how she is born nor how he is raised. We shouldn't hold a person responsible for her or his sexual *orientation* any more than we hold a person responsible for skin color (nature) or how a preschooler is dressed (nurture)" (Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," pp. 6, 7; emphasis his).

¹⁵ Steven G. Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland/Clackamas, Ore.: Better Living Publishers, 1993), p. 298. According to Daily, the Seventh-day Adventist Church's negative valuation of premarital sex and masturbation arises from "our Victorian heritage, which has been well preserved through the work of Ellen White. Most Adventists are not aware of what bizarre and extreme views of sexuality were commonly held by our nineteenth century ancestors. Books like *Messages to Young People* have served to perpetuate such baggage throughout much of the twentieth century as well" (ibid., pp. 296, 297).

¹⁶ John Berecz, "About Orgasms and Other Things," *Student Movement* [Andrews University Newspaper], February 26, 1997, pp. 9, 11, emphasis mine. A few weeks later Berecz published another article in the *Student Movement* in which he offered "suggested boundaries to Christian solo sex [masturbation]." See his "An Essay on a Sensitive Subject," *Student Movement*, April 2, 1997, p. 5.

¹⁷ "Homophobia" is an irrational fear of homosexuality that leads to hostility towards homosexuals and others who seek to give help to them.

¹⁸ Thus, morally neutral expressions are now being employed for once forbidden sins: fornication is now premarital or nonmarital sex; adultery is referred to as an extramarital or comarital affair; permissiveness is euphemized as sexual variation; the promiscuous is multi-friended; and homosexuality and sodomy are now alternate lifestyles (see, for example, John Leo, "Cleansing the Mother Tongue," *Time*, December 27, 1982, p. 78). In this politically correct age, sin is no longer perceived as sin but rather as sickness, and habitual sin is now regarded as an addictive or compulsive behavior. Thus, not too long ago, a newspaper had an article about a 34-bed clinic that had just opened in Southern California to treat "Christian sex addicts." See, Nicole Brodeur, "Center Aids Christian SexAddicts," *Orange County Register*, February 13, 1989, p. 1.

¹⁹ This prevalent understanding is reflected in a 1977 Sabbath School lesson: "Jesus said that one of the signs of His near return would be a condition of morality similar to that among the antediluvians and Sodomites. Not only have the same deviant sexual patterns become prominent in our times, being pursued with open boldness, but some professed ministers now defend such practices, organize churches for persons of this lifestyle, and ordain some to the ministry. Such sinful brazenness indicates again the eroding morality of our times and the approaching end of the age" (*Sabbath School Lessons*, October 1977, p. 48 [British edition, p. 330]; cf. Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 232).

²⁰ See the story of Jim Miller (as told to Celeste Ryan), "I'm Homosexual, I'm Adventist, and I have AIDS: The Jim Miller Story," *Adventist View* (Winter 1993), pp. 9, 15. Cf. Bruce Moyer's interview with Ron (pseudonym), "A Cry from the Valley of Death," *Ministry* (November 1996), pp. 23-25, 29; Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, p. 5; Beth Schaefer, "Homosexual Warfare," *View* (Special 1999 issue), pp. 18-21 (*View* is a quarterly publication by the Young Adult Ministries of the North American Division of SDA; this special 1999 issue has the theme, "Is There Room for Me in Your

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Church?").

²¹ According to Elvin Benton, "In early January 1977, a handful who had responded to a newspaper ad placed by a gay Adventist met in Palm Desert, California. It was the beginning of Kinship, and by April there were 75 members, a temporary chairman, and four committees: membership, educational, social, and spiritual.... The organization was incorporated in March 1981 as Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Incorporated. Its mailing list in 10 countries now approaches 500 and includes a broad spectrum of occupations. The ratio of professional people is disproportionately high. A significant number are denominational employees, most of whom, understandably, use pseudonyms in their relationship to Kinship. Almost all are or have been Seventh-day Adventist Church members. Several are friends of Adventists and would become church members except for what they perceive to be the church's negative attitude toward their homosexuality" (Elvin Benton, "Adventists Face Homosexuality," *Spectrum* 12/3 [April 1982] :33). Because the pro-gay stance of Kinship is at variance with the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the SDA Church has dissociated itself from Kinship. For a discussion of the relationship between Kinship and the SDA Church, see Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge; N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 256-265.

²² Lin Ennis, "Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality," in *In Our Own Words*, pp. 227-239, esp. p. 232.

²³ The entire issue of the November 4, 1992 *Student Movement* was devoted to homosexuality. The letter from the homosexual couple is found on page 15 of that issue.

²⁴ Yoonah Kim, "The Love that Dares Not Speak Its Name," *Student Movement*, November 4, 1992, p. 9.

²⁵ The idea of having a special camp meeting (or *kamp* meeting) for homosexual Adventists was born at an early 1980 Kinship board meeting. According to Benton, the August 1980 camp meeting "was a major event in the long story of Adventist homosexuals" (Benton, "Adventists Face Homosexuality," pp. 32, 33).

²⁶ The six scholars and pastors consisted of three Biblical and theological scholars (James J.C. Cox, Lawrence Geraty, and Fritz Guy), two representing pastoral concerns (James Londis and Josephine Benton), and one, an outspoken opponent of Kinship, who had run a recovery ministry for homosexuals for many years, disagreed with the majority conclusion (Colin Cook). For a summary of the meeting, see Elvin Benton, "Adventists Face Homosexuality," *Spectrum* 12/3 (April 1982) :32-38.

²⁷ Elvin Benton, "Adventists Face Homosexuality," *Spectrum* 12/3 (1982) :35. At the time of the 1980 Kinship camp meeting, James J.C. Cox was professor of New Testament at the Andrews University Theological Seminary; he has since served as president of Avondale College in Australia. Old Testament scholar Lawrence T. Geraty was professor of archeology and history of antiquity at the Seminary at Andrews University; he has since served as president of Atlantic Union College, and currently serves as president of La Sierra University. Fritz Guy was professor of systematic theology at the seminary; he currently teaches theology and philosophy at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

²⁸ See my *Receiving the Word*, chapters 4 and 5 (part 1), pp. 75-113.

²⁹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. 303. Produced by some 194 SDA thought leaders around the world, this "carefully researched" volume is to be received "as representative of . . . [what] Seventh-day Adventists around the globe cherish and proclaim," and as furnishing "reliable information on the beliefs of our [SDA] church" (*ibid.*, pp. vii, iv, v).

³⁰ The Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference articulated the official church

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position on homosexuality. See Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1988).

³¹ See, for example, Kate McLaughlin (pseudonym), "A Homosexual in My Congregation?" *Ministry*, November 1996, pp. 10, 11, 29; idem, "Are Homosexuals God's Children?" *Adventist Review*, April 3, 1997, pp. 26-29; *Insight*, December 5, 1992, pp. 1-16; Phillip Whidden, "Gays, Gabriel, and Dynamo Truth," in the *Collegiate Quarterly* (January-March 2000), p. 97; Jim Miller (as told to Celeste Ryan), "I'm Homosexual, I'm Adventist, and I have AIDS: The Jim Miller Story," *Adventist View*, Winter 1993, pp. 9, 15; Beth Schaefer, "Homosexual Warfare," *View*, Special 1999 issue, pp. 18-21; Tessa Willow (pseudonym), "Still Our Son," *Women of Spirit*, May-June 2000; Katie Tonn-Oliver, "Virginia Cason: More Than a Daughter," *Women of Spirit*, Winter 1996; Kate McLaughlin, "When Your Child Doesn't Choose Your Lifestyle," *Women of Spirit*, Spring 1995; *Guide*, September 4, 2004, pp. 29-31 (originally published in *Real-Time Faith* quarterly from the General Conference Sabbath School Department, September 4, 2004, pp. 1, 2). Occasionally, the published works take the form of well-crafted "interviews" with Adventist homosexuals. See, for example, Bruce Moyer's interview with Ron (pseudonym), "A Cry from the Valley of Death," *Ministry*, November 1996, pp. 23-25, 29; Reni Dupertuis' interview with Donald J. Freeman, "To Every Nation, Tongue, and People (Including Sexual Orientation?)," *Scanner* [a publication of the Glendale City, California, SDA Church], Winter 1999, pp. 9-11. These eye-opening interviews may reveal as much about the views of the interviewees as that of the interviewers.

³² Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation: A Christian Response to the Question of Homosexuality," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, pp. 4-16. Similar views are presented in articles carried in the July-August 1999 issue of *Adventist Today*. The cover title of that issue of *Adventist Today* is "Adventism and Homosexuality Today: What's in the Closet?" The troubling articles include Kate McLaughlin's (pseudonym) "Mom, Dad, I'm Gay," pp. 10, 11; Norman Brown's (pseudonym) "Reluctant Homosexual, Forgiving Marriage," pp. 13-15; [Anonymous SDA Pastor's] "Adventist Pastor, Husband, Homosexual," p. 16; Jim Miller's "The Bible on Homosexuality," pp. 17-19. Though it is not an official publication of the church, many of its writers hold membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

³³ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (1995), pp. 154, 169; emphasis mine. The wording in the current (1995) *Church Manual* is based on the revisions made at the 1990 GC session in Indianapolis (see, 1990 *Church Manual*, pp. 147, 160, 173). It may be argued that the *Church Manual* editions of both 1990 and 1995 do not explicitly condemn "homosexuality and lesbianism" (which would have implied an adherence to the *nonacceptance* position), but merely condemn "homosexual practices and lesbian practices" (which implies a tacit endorsement of the *qualified acceptance* position). Christopher Blake makes this argument (see his "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," p. 11). However, by making the practice of homosexuality a basis for church discipline, the delegates at the 1990 and 1995 GC sessions made it clear that they still adhered to a "nonacceptance" position on homosexuality.

³⁴ Ronald Lawson, the "liaison" between the SDA Kinship organization and the SDA Church, maintains that the attempted subtle shift in the position of the SDA Church is attributed to the role of an SDA Kinship "kamp meeting graduate" who was on the committee drafting changes in the *Church Manual*. The original drafted document had explicitly condemned "homosexuality and lesbianism." The "kamp meeting graduate," Lawson explains, "feeling that the presence of large numbers of conservative Third World delegates would make it impossible to liberalize the statement once it reached the floor [1985 General Conference session], got together with friends, including several other veterans of kamp meetings, to try to modify the draft in advance. As they read the situation, it was impossible at that stage to avert the change totally. Consequently, they focused their efforts on changing language which would have con-

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demned 'homosexuality and lesbianism,' a sweeping rejection of their very being, to a somewhat more limited condemnation of 'homosexual and lesbian practices.' They were successful in this. Nevertheless, the new statement, which replaced much vaguer language, for the first time labeled this 'practice' as unacceptable and a basis for discipline." See Ronald Lawson, "The Caring Church?: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Its Homosexual Members," a paper prepared for the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (Washington, D.C., November 1992), p. 7; the same paper was presented at the meeting of the Andrews Society for Religious Study at San Francisco, November 1992. Some perceptive Adventists have argued that the attempt made at the 1995 GC session to modify the relevant sections on homosexuality was yet another attempt by advocates of pro-gay theology to chip away the church's nonacceptance position.

³⁵ In the Seventh-day Adventist Church the two influential books endorsing women's ordination are: Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart, eds., *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women* (Langley Park, Md.: TEAMPRESS, 1995); and Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998). While the former often employs the arguments of liberal feminism, the latter adopts the egalitarian arguments of evangelical feminism. Whereas my response to the former volume is found in *Receiving the Word*, pp. 119-129, my detailed critique of the latter appears in *Must We Be Silent?* See also Mercedes H. Dyer, ed., *Prove All Things: A Response to WOMEN IN MINISTRY* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: ADVENTISTS AFFIRM, 2000).

³⁶ Jeane Haerich, "Genesis Revisited," in *The Welcome Table*, pp. 101,100. The obliteration of gender differentiation in Genesis 2 is only a few steps away from positing homosexuality or bisexuality in the first created pair. And since human beings were created in God's image, if Adam was "an androgynous being," does it not mean that God also is androgynous? One wonders what is really behind the gender-inclusive reconstructions of the Bible: "Son of God" becomes "Child of God"; "Son of Man" becomes "Human One"; "our Heavenly Father" becomes "our Heavenly Parent." Is this also the reason an Adventist author promotes the Holy Spirit as the female member of the Godhead and repeatedly refers to the Creator as "He/She"? See Steve Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland/Clackamas, Ore.: Better Living Publishers, 1993), pp. 88, 105, 113.

³⁷ This basic argument underlies *Women in Ministry*, the pro-ordination book by some faculty of Andrews University. The clearest articulation of this view in the book is Richard M. Davidson's article "Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture," pp. 259-295. Denying that God made man the head of the home at Creation, the article argues that God's original plan for the home was "total equality in marriage" (p. 267), or "total egalitarianism in the marriage relationship" (p. 269), or "headship among equals" (p. 270), expressions understood to mean the absence of role differentiation before the Fall (pp. 264, 267, 269). For him the Biblical teaching of male headship and female submission implies "functional superiority/inferiority" (p. 260). Though he believes that "headship" was instituted *after the Fall*, it is his view that God's original plan of "total egalitarianism in the marriage relationship" is still the same in the post-Fall situation "as it was for Adam and Eve in the beginning" (p. 269). In other words, today, as at the beginning, there should be no "ontological or functional" role distinctions. Rather, Christians should aspire for the "ideal" of "full equality" in their homes (p. 284). Cf. Peter M. Van Bemmelen, "Equality, Headship, and Submission in the Writings of Ellen G. White," in *Women in Ministry*, pp. 297-311.

³⁸ For a devastating critique of the egalitarian, full equality argument, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture," in *Prove All Things*, pp. 65-110.

³⁹ Howard 'duke' Holtz, "Re: Women's Ordination," October 29, 2000: <http://www.sdanet.org/archive/2000/Oct32000/0313.html>. As I will show in the next section of

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this book, indeed, the so-called Biblical arguments for women's ordination are as flimsy as those being used to support homosexuality.

⁴⁰ I raised that point on the GC session floor in Toronto, but I'm not sure how many people fully understood the theological implications of my point. To them, homosexuality and women's ordination issues were unrelated to the divorce and remarriage discussion on the floor. In fact, one associate editor of the *Adventist Review* expressed "surprise" at my comment. He apparently believed the comment by one delegate that those of us questioning the theological fuzziness of the divorce and remarriage proposal were appealing to those with "a scare mentality." See Roy Adams, "Fireworks in the Dome," *Adventist Review*, July 5, 2000, pp. 2, 3.

⁴¹ Reni Dupertuis, "To Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue, and People (Including Sexual Orientation?)," An Interview with Donald J. Freeman, *Scanner*, Winter 1999, pp. 9-11.

⁴² In his comments on "the inappropriate presentations made in booth 1109 at the 2000 Toronto GC session" Howard 'duke' Holtz, a member of the Adventist Gay/Lesbian Ministry at the San Francisco Central SDA Church, and "originator" of God's Rainbow, gives some background on how the pro-gay organization managed to get a booth at the GC session. He indicates that the booth was obtained by Carrol Grady, one who appears "to drift towards the Kinship philosophy. . . . Carrol then went and knowingly allowed *Kinship* members to work the booth for her. This resulted in *Kinship* having access to a booth to promote their non-Adventist beliefs at the GC session. When Carrol asked me to send her some of our *God's Rainbow* brochures to hand out, I also expressed my feelings that her actions were not in line with the goals and standards of our ministry. I have no idea how Carrol could obtain a booth without adhering to SDA principles, and I believe that this is an issue which should be investigated and corrected because incidents like this set back the sincere SDA efforts of such ministries as ours and GLOW's." See Howard Holtz's Internet comments, "Endtime Issues No. 55: Homosexuality & SDA Church," October 30, 2000: <http://www.sdanet.org/archive/2000/Oct32000/0323.html>. While distancing itself from *Kinship*, both Holtz's own *God's Rainbow* and the GLOW organization he highly recommends maintain that homosexuality is morally neutral. In fact GLOW holds that homosexuality is not sin, and that homosexuals cannot be "cured" of their homosexuality.

⁴³ Mark Edwards (pseudonym), "My World," 2, document distributed in booth #1109 at the 2000 Toronto GC session. The booth was listed in the GC Exhibition book as "Someone to Talk To," an organization claiming to be for "Adventist Families and Friends of Gays and Lesbians."

⁴⁴ Representatives include Westmont College New Testament scholar Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995); Louisville Seminary New Testament professor Marion Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church* (Westminster, Pa.: John Knox, 1995); Gordon-Conwell Seminary church historian Richard Lovelace, *The Church and Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1978); and Don Williams (Biblical scholar at Claremont Men's College), *The Bond That Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church?* (Los Angeles: BIM Publications, 1978). In their theological discussions, Schmidt, Soards, Lovelace, and Williams pay greater attention to church history and Biblical theology than to contemporary scientific findings on homosexuality.

⁴⁵ The official Seventh-day Adventist position on homosexuality is reflected in Fundamental Belief #22, as well as the "Official SDA Statement on Homosexuality." The former reads in part: "Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship." The church's detailed statement on homosexuality was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday, October 3, 1999, in Silver Spring, Maryland. It reads in its entirety:

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the

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sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

"Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at Creation. The Scriptures declare: 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Leviticus 20:7-21; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine Creation intent: 'Haven't you read,' He replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one' (Matthew 19:4-6, NIV). For these reasons Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

"Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the instruction and example of Jesus. He affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices." See the Seventh-day Adventist Church Web site: http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat46.html.

⁴⁶ Ronald M. Springett concludes his study on homosexuality: "The church must accept the individual of homosexual orientation who needs help and support and [who] struggles against same-sex tendencies. But those who insist on and promote the active homosexual lifestyle as normal, natural, or even superior to heterosexual relations by that very act disregard and undermine the sole authority upon which the church's very existence and mission is based, namely, the Scriptures" (Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures*, p. 164).

⁴⁷ Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), and Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) adopt this view. While the latter is a more popular version than the former, they both seek to deal pastorally with the tragedy of "an ethically upright, mature homosexual who is struggling with his condition" (Thielicke, p. 271). They seem to accept, as equal partners, both the Bible and the testimonies of homosexuals and research by social scientists in their theological discussion of the issue.

⁴⁸ Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation: A Christian Response to the Question of Homosexuality," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, p. 11.

⁴⁹ Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Insight* (December 5, 1992), p. 7.

⁵⁰ "I don't deny the *evil* of the thing, for evil it certainly is, but I do deny the *sinfulness* of it. The homosexual condition is to be classified with disease, weakness, death, as an evil; not with gluttony, blasphemy, murder, as a sin. Both sin and evil are the work of Satan, were brought into the world at the Fall, and will one day be destroyed by Christ, but they are not identical. Sin, which we must avoid and need never commit, is represented in our situation by homosexual lust and the activity to which it leads. Evil is different. We pray to be delivered from it, but may nevertheless find ourselves left in it, and then have to aim at using and transforming it. In our situation that means a homosexual nature. I'm sure that in this sense it is morally neutral..." (Alex Davidson, *The Returns of Love: Letters of a Christian Homosexual* [London: Intervarsity Press, 1970], p. 80).

⁵¹ Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Insight* (December 5, 1992), p. 11, equates homosexual *orientation* with temptation, and states: "We cannot condone homosexual activity. Homosexual sexual activity is sinful—it is apart from God's will. Yet a difference exists between the person who fights against homosexual tendencies and the one who experi-

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ments with or revels in them. It's a sin to cave in to temptation. It's not a sin to be tempted."

⁵² Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), p. 83.

⁵³ Kate McLaughlin, "Are Homosexuals God's Children?" p. 29.

⁵⁴ Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Insight* (December 5, 1992), p. 16. Blake, who wrote this long before reading my response in the next chapter, insists that the difference between our positions is primarily semantic and that his use of terms is in line with the *Church Manual*. I would say that an alcoholic who never drinks alcohol is no longer an alcoholic, and a person who does not practice homosexuality is no longer a homosexual. That individual may have been born gay, but once converted (i.e., once *reborn* as a Christian), he cannot claim to be a homosexual. He may be tempted to go back to his former ways of homosexuality (it is not a sin to be tempted). But unless he acts upon the temptation, it is incorrect to refer to the former homosexual by the label homosexual.

⁵⁵ Representing this position are Norman Pittenger, *Time for Consent: A Christian's Approach to Homosexuality* (London: SCM Press, 1970); Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?—Another Christian View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), a work that draws heavily on findings of social scientists. The same position is advocated by SDA Kinship International, Inc., "a support group for gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists"—and a group which maintains that "God can bless a committed homosexual relationship."

⁵⁶ See J. Stuart, "Counterfeits," *SDA Kinship Newsletter* (May 1980), p. 4 (cited by Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas*, p. 257).

⁵⁷ In 1973, *Trends*, a publication of the United Presbyterian Church, devoted a full issue to the topic: "Homosexuality: Neither Sin Nor Sickness" (see *Trends* 5 [July-August 1973]).

⁵⁸ For example, Scanzoni and Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, pp. 111, 71, 72, argue for "the possibility of a permanent, committed relationship of love between homosexuals analogous to heterosexual marriage." Adventist ethicist David R. Larson, "Sexuality and Christian Ethics," *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984) :16, also writes: "Christians therefore have every reason to encourage homosexuals who are honestly convinced that they should neither attempt to function heterosexually nor remain celibate to form closed-coupled homosexual unions."

Chapter 39

The Bible and Homosexuality

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Author, *Must We Be Silent?* and *Receiving the Word*

In order to silence or challenge the Bible's negative valuation of homosexuality, advocates of pro-gay theology often put forward several arguments. Sincere, Bible-believing Christians are often caught off guard by these subtle and plausible sounding arguments presented in favor of homosexuality. There are two major kinds of arguments that are often employed, namely, (a) non-Biblical arguments and (b) Biblical arguments.

In an effort to clear away the smokescreen that often clouds this issue, this chapter will list and respond to some of the key arguments in circulation.

Non-Biblical Arguments for Homosexuality

Although the non-Biblical arguments often invoked in defense of the qualified acceptance and full acceptance views on homosexuality tend to be scientific, philosophical, or logical, they also have theological or ethical implications. Their basic thrust is to show that: people are born homosexual—i.e., conclusive evidence exists to prove that homosexuality is genetic or inborn; and since homosexuals are born gay, their sexual orientation is a natural or normal trait of their identity (like the color of the skin or hair), and the orientation is allowed or given by God; a person's homosexual orientation is morally neutral and unchangeable.

In this section, I will state and respond to the myths often advanced in support of homosexuality. The next section of this chapter will address specific "Biblical" arguments that are often presented to cast doubt on the Bible's teaching. I believe that the reader will find in Scripture a clear and consistent guide to God's will in this highly charged matter.¹

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1. "To learn the truth about homosexuality, talk to real homosexuals."

For many advocates of gay theology, it is not sufficient to trust the Bible writers as the dependable source of truth on this matter. They argue that in order to learn the truth about homosexuality, we must update our knowledge by actually listening to homosexuals themselves. This seems to be the point in some recent Adventist publications.

For example, one Adventist mother wrote that after she had spent "years of reading, observing, and eventually talking to people," her homosexual son finally confirmed to her that indeed, "homosexuality is a condition, not a behavior. Whatever may cause a homosexual orientation, it is not something a person chooses." Her son "told us that from his earliest memories he knew he was 'different.'" She also reported learning that God may change a person's sexual orientation only "on rare occasions," and that one can be a homosexual and be "deeply spiritual."²

A non-Adventist scholar has explained why we supposedly need to go to homosexuals themselves to learn the truth about homosexuality. In his article entitled, "A Newly Revealed Christian Experience," a self-avowed gay Christian on the Presbyterian task force studying homosexuality, explains that gay Christians are "the best source" for the church to understand homosexuality.³ Similarly, a United Church of Christ minister states this new approach to knowing (epistemology):

Rather than looking to the psychologists and the psychiatrists and the sociologists, and even to the theologians, to find out about gay people, there is a need to listen to gay people within our churches and within the society, to begin to understand what we perceive to be the problems, and then together to work on those problems.⁴

A Princeton Theological Seminary professor of Old Testament Language and Literature, an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), best articulated why we supposedly need to go to homosexuals themselves to learn the truth about homosexuality. He wrote:

I used to believe that homosexual acts are always wrong. Listening to gay and lesbian students and friends, however, I have had to rethink my position and reread the Scriptures.... I have no choice but to take the testimonies of gays and lesbians seriously. I do so with some comfort, however, for the Scriptures themselves give me the warrant to trust that human beings can know truths apart from

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divine revelation.⁵

Response to Argument #1. We must offer a sympathetic ear to the pains and genuine struggles of homosexuals. But Bible-believing Adventists need to ask whether the testimonies and claims of homosexuals are an adequate basis to learn the truth about homosexuality. Are homosexuals, by virtue of their experience, more qualified than the Bible writers to speak on homosexuality? The inspired writers of the Bible served as dependable spokespersons for the Creator of human sexuality. Is the attempt to justify homosexuality on the grounds of personal experience or empirical studies, rather than Biblical revelation, a legitimate starting point for any investigation regarding sexual morality? Are the testimonies and claims of homosexuals necessarily true?

We are dealing with the fundamental question of how to know truth, a study philosophers call *epistemology*. I will restate my response: Does one really have to be a homosexual in order to fully understand the truth about homosexuality? Must we experience a particular kind of sinful tendency in order to understand that sinful reality? Assuming even that homosexual orientation is part of a person's constitutional makeup (just as a person's color or gender is), can true knowledge about that condition be accurately obtained by only persons with that kind of sexual identity? If so, does this mean, for example, that one has to be black, African, and a woman in order to fully understand and accurately address the pains of people in that category? By analogy, could Jesus, a single Jewish male, have understood the experience of, say, Maria, a single parent Hispanic woman?

Could it be that in a desire to appear more "informed" and perhaps more "compassionate," some Christians are giving the impression that they are ethically and religiously more knowledgeable and "sensitive" than the inspired Bible writers who condemned the practice of homosexuality? How can pro-homosexual advocates be wiser than the One Who has given His written Word and His moral laws as the basis of true human joy and self-fulfillment? How can they be more compassionate than the One Who has given His life for all humanity? Is it, perhaps, that they do not view the Bible and its God as did the Bible writers—the pioneers of Biblical Christianity?

2. "People are born homosexual."

When advocates of pro-gay theology assert that people are born gay, they actually go beyond the generally accepted view that genetics and environmental factors *influence* a person's behavior. They suggest that homosexuality is largely *caused* by a person's genes.⁶

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This belief, which is itself based on the deterministic philosophy of behaviorism, is designed to suggest that what is inborn is (a) natural or normal, (b) unchangeable, (c) allowed or created by God—as with a congenital defect or one's eye color, and that it is (d) morally legitimate.

The logic and implications of this view are as follows: If a person is homosexual because of an inbred homosexual condition, there is no hope or possibility for change. And because the homosexual cannot change, all aspects of society must change, including education, religion, and law. Not only must homosexuality be accepted as socially legal for homosexuals, it must also be promoted as a normal lifestyle option and, if necessary, the church must be pressured to abandon its alleged immoral discrimination against homosexuals seeking church membership.

Response to Argument #2. Even if one could prove that homosexuality is of genetic or hormonal origin, would this make homosexuality morally legitimate? I am aware that scientists, such as the authors of *My Genes Made Me Do It!* have compellingly challenged the claim that homosexuality is biologically fated.⁷ But even if true, does being born alcoholic, pedophile, or gay make alcoholism, pedophilia, or homosexuality normal? Moreover, does the fact that something is normal make it morally right?

Is behaviorism or biological determinism compatible with Biblical anthropology, which teaches that human beings are created in the image of God and endowed with freedom of choice? Can we correlate this naturalistic philosophy with the Biblical doctrine that we are accountable to God for our conduct (doctrine of judgment)? Does not this "I did not choose, I cannot change" philosophy raise serious questions about Christ's power to help us "overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to sin"?

Does not this behavioristic philosophy lead to a "once a sinner, always a sinner" doctrine? In other words, would it be Biblically correct to maintain that even after conversion, an alcoholic/drug addict or a habitual/compulsive liar or sexual pervert will always remain an alcoholic/drug addict or habitual/compulsive liar or a sexual pervert? Is not this born-a-gay philosophy in conflict with the born-again promise of the living Christ?

To clarify the issue further, we will look at other aspects of this born-a-gay theory. For example: (1) Do studies show that homosexuality is inborn? (2) Is homosexual orientation natural or normal? (3) Is homosexual orientation God-given? (4) Is homosexual orientation morally neutral? (5) Is homosexual orientation unchangeable? (6) Does God want homosexuals to give up who they are? (7) Is it true that "once a homosexual, (almost) always a homosexual"?

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3. "Studies show that homosexuality is inborn."

Like every other sinful practice, one's genes, environment, and many other factors may greatly influence a person's predisposition to a particular sin. But pro-gay advocates go further, claiming that scientific studies offer conclusive proof that people are born gay.

Response to Argument #3. Although some future studies may one day bear this out, the research findings often cited as evidence of the born-a-gay condition are, at best, inconclusive; they are questionable at worst.⁹ Two of these deserve mention because of the prominence often given them in Adventist publications.

(a) *Neurobiologist Simon LeVay's 1991 Study on the Brains of 41 Cadavers.* The cadavers consisted of nineteen allegedly homosexual men, sixteen allegedly heterosexual men, and six allegedly heterosexual women. He reported that a cluster of neurons in a distinct section of the brain (called the interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus, or the INAH3) were generally smaller in the homosexual men as compared to the heterosexual men. As a result, he hypothesized that the size of these neurons may cause a person to be either heterosexual or homosexual.¹⁰ This study is often cited as proof that people are born gay.

As others have shown, LeVay's study is exaggerated, misleading, and fraught with major weaknesses. (1) In order for his theory to be valid, studies would have to show that the difference in size of that section of the brain occurred 100% of the time. But LeVay's own study showed 17% of his total study group contradicted his theory. Three of the nineteen allegedly homosexual men actually had larger neurons than their heterosexual counterparts, and three of the heterosexual men had smaller neurons than did the homosexual men. (2) There is no proof that the section of the brain he measured actually has anything to do with sexual preference. (3) The study did not show whether the size of the neurons caused the sexual preference or whether the sexual preference caused the size. (4) The scientific community has not by any means unanimously accepted LeVay's finding. (5) LeVay's own objectivity in the research is in question, since he admitted in a September 9, 1991, *Newsweek* magazine that after the death of his homosexual lover, he was determined to find a genetic cause for homosexuality, or he would abandon science altogether.

(b) *J. Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard's 1991 Study of Twins.* Bailey and Pillard investigated how widespread homosexuality is among identical

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twins (whose genetic makeups are the same) and fraternal twins (whose genetic ties are less close). Among other things, they discovered that 52% of the identical twins studied were both homosexual. Bailey and Pillard hypothesized that the higher incidence of homosexuality among the identical twins implies that homosexuality is genetic in origin.

Bailey and Pillard's theory is also misleading and exaggerated. For their theory to be a fact, the following should hold: (1) There should never be a case when one identical twin is heterosexual and the other homosexual, since both identical twins share 100% of the same genes. If sexual orientation is genetic, then both identical twins will in 100% of cases always be either homosexual or heterosexual. Bailey and Pillard's finding of only 52% challenges their own hypothesis. On the contrary, their research confirms that nongenetic factors play a significant role in shaping sexual preference. (2) The twins should be raised in different homes to eliminate the possible effect of environmental factors in their sexual preferences. But all twins studied by Bailey and Pillard were raised in the same homes. (3) A later study on twins by other scholars yielded different results. (4) Bailey and Pillard, like LeVay, may not have approached their study objectively, given their personal feelings about homosexuality. Because Bailey is a gay rights advocate and Pillard is openly homosexual, their objectivity in the research may be questioned. (5) There are also questions about whether the sample was representative, since Bailey and Pillard requested subjects by solicitation through homosexual organizations and publications.

Other studies have been done. However, to date, we know of no study that supports the claim by pro-gay advocates that conclusive evidence exists showing people are born gay or that homosexuality is inborn or of genetic origin. We are not suggesting that genetics does not influence one's homosexual predisposition. Our contention is simply that the studies usually cited for the claim that people are born gay are not as conclusive as proponents would have us believe. It seems that the studies are put forth to intimate that homosexuality is not a sin to be repented of but a mark of one's identity to be celebrated.

4. "Homosexuality is not a sin but a condition of sinfulness."

This variation of the born gay argument is perhaps the most popular in Christian circles. Unlike the previous argument that sees homosexuality as normal or natural, proponents of the current argument suggest that homosexuality is an abnormal or unnatural condition, or even an illness brought about by a number of factors beyond the control of the individual. The causes include biological/genetic defect, gender confusion (a female mind in a male body and vice versa), or prenatal hormonal irregularities (e.g., endocrine-mimicking chemicals

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or chemical toxicity in the brains of homosexuals during the formative period of their embryos or fetuses). Based on these alleged causes, some pro-gay advocates maintain that homosexuals have no choice in the matter of their sexual predisposition towards persons of the same gender.

The homosexual condition or orientation, it is argued, is an evidence of the brokenness and fallenness of our present world. The condition may be classified with disease (such as alcoholism or allergies), with handicap (such as congenital blindness), and eccentricity (such as left-handedness). It may even be evil (like sickness or death), but not necessarily sinful (like pride, blasphemy, or murder). Because homosexuals did not choose to be born gay, "we shouldn't hold a person responsible for her or his sexual *orientation* any more than we hold a person responsible for skin color (nature)."¹¹ Being a homosexual is not sin,¹² but lustful and inappropriate homosexual activity is sin and therefore, must be avoided.¹³ Since it is believed that homosexuals did not choose to be gay but were born that way, God deserves the credit (or blame) for who or what they are. And since homosexuality is presumably not a sin but a sinful condition, homosexuals need compassion and acceptance from the church.

One ex-homosexual explains why he "accepted" his homosexuality:

I was not responsible for who and what I was. I was God's creation, and if He had not wanted me to be gay (homosexual), then He wouldn't have made me this way. If being gay was a choice, I would never have made that choice, for with it came the consequences of hurting those I loved, the breakup of my home, the loss of my children, alienation from my family and friends and church, the scorn and ridicule of the general public. It was all God's fault. As far as choices were concerned, I had made all the right choices. I had chosen a Christian education for myself. I had chosen to be a student missionary for two years in the Far East. I had chosen to study theology and pre-med preparatory to becoming a medical missionary some day. I had chosen to marry a Christian girl, and to have little Christian children. But eventually, no longer able to deny to myself who and what I really was inside, I had "accepted" being homosexual, and, in extreme frustration, turned my back on family, friends, God, and everything I had worked for, and entered into the gay life "rightfully" giving God all the credit (or blame).¹⁴

Response to Argument #4: While not denying the possibility that homosexuality *may* be caused by many combinations of variables, including

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biological/genetic or hormonal irregularities, there are serious problems with the argument that homosexuals are somewhat sick or abnormal, or that homosexuality is not a sin but a condition of sinfulness.

First, perceptive critics, including advocates of the Gay Right Movement, are moving away from the theories of genetic defect and hormonal irregularities for fear that other research findings showing some unacceptable conditions (like alcoholism, schizophrenia, cerebral palsy, etc.) as genetically or biologically related will soon make homosexuals look like they are abnormal, sick, or less than human. Such a perception, in their opinion, will be a reversal of the gains they made when the gay rights movement successfully lobbied to have the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association remove homosexuality from the categories of abnormal behavior and mental illness.

For example, one scholar exposes the intellectual and psychological inconsistency in this "outmoded version of natural law" which seeks to make a fine distinction between homosexual orientation and behavior. Responding to the view that "while homosexuality as an orientation is contrary to God's created intention, the homosexual person ought not to be adversely judged or rejected by the church," this researcher counters that while some may deem such a position a more tolerant and compassionate view than outright condemnation, "it places gay men and lesbians in at least two impossible binds." He continues:

One, of course, is the individual's recognition that her or his own sexual orientation is as natural and as fundamental to identity as is the color of the skin. It is both naive and cruel to tell a lesbian or gay man, "Your sexual orientation is still unnatural and a perversion, but this is no judgment upon you as a person." The individual knows otherwise. The other bind concerns churchly pressure toward celibacy. When the church presumes to be nonjudgmental toward orientation but then draws the line against genital expression, it is difficult to understand how the sense of guilt—even in the celibate—will be significantly alleviated.¹⁵

The point is that many homosexuals don't want to be perceived as abnormal or sick. They see themselves as normal people with full control over their choices. They don't consider themselves driven by some defective genes to do things contrary to their choice. When they describe themselves as born gays, they don't understand their condition to be the result of genetic defect

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or gender confusion, or hormonal/chemical accident. Instead, they argue that their homosexuality is an alternative expression of human sexuality, created by God Himself, and therefore not a sin. This is why they prefer to see their homosexual orientation as normal, natural, morally neutral, and a gift from God.

Second, assuming even that homosexuality is of biological/genetic origin, does that make it right? For example, is stealing right just because a person was born a kleptomaniac? Is alcoholism right, just because a person was born alcoholic (i.e., born with a strong genetic predisposition towards alcoholism)? Undoubtedly, the kleptomaniac/alcoholic is sick and needs help. But stealing/drunkenness, regardless of its cause, is never right. Thus, a person who is born gay (either because of genetic defect, hormonal problem, gender confusion, etc.) is at best abnormal or sick. That person may be suffering from a compulsive immoral tendency. But would the cause of that compulsive or uncontrollable homosexual lust or behavior make the tendency or behavior morally right?

Adulterers, or pedophiles, or pornographers, will gain little sympathy from the claim that their genes made them do it. Why should the homosexual be considered in a different genetic light? No, however fascinating or apparently comforting it may be to explore how the patterns of genetic structure and social surroundings combine to create for each of us a moral context, we must nevertheless also recognize our responsibility to act obediently within that context. As moral agents we say yes or no to each potential sexual encounter.¹⁶

Third, even if a biological/genetic link were found, would that prove that God created homosexuality? Jesus dismissed the suggestion that God is responsible for genetic deficiencies with which people are born. When asked why a man was born blind, Christ did not say, "Because God made him this way." "Rather, He said that God was to be glorified through healing the man of the effects of his faulty genes (John 9:1-7). So it is with homosexuals who *might* have a genetic predisposition. (Notice I said 'might.' The verdict is still out.) God didn't make them this way. It [homosexuality] is the result of the degeneration of humankind by thousands of years of sin. God doesn't create any of the aberrations sin causes. However He can be glorified in genetically challenged people. Jesus will provide victory over what genetics might influence."¹⁷

5. "Homosexual orientation is natural or normal."

Based on the assumption that homosexuality is inborn, i.e., of genetic origin, advocates argue that homosexuality should be accepted as a natural or normal human condition.

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Response to Argument #5. This argument is also flawed. Leaving aside the important issues of the manner in which the scientific research is conducted and the kind of interpretation given to the research findings,¹⁸ even proving that homosexual orientation is inborn (i.e., of genetic origin) will not make homosexuality normal or desirable. Many defects or handicaps today are inborn, but hardly anyone would call them normal for that reason alone. Why should homosexuality be considered natural or normal, just because it may be inborn?

When we say that something is natural, we refer to what happens repeatedly in the world of nature—in which case we do not assign moral judgment to it. For example, spiders kill and eat other spiders, including their mates. "But as a moral category natural refers to something that is in accord with God's intention. Actions are good or bad: for example, people sometimes kill and eat other people. But the fact that cannibalism happens in the world—perhaps in satisfaction of deeply held religious beliefs or peculiar culinary tastes—does not make it *natural* in the sense that it conforms to God's will. In summary: that which is *natural* to human experience or human desire is not necessarily *natural* in God's moral design."¹⁹

6. "Homosexual orientation is God-given."

The argument here is that because many homosexuals claim that since their childhood they have *always* had homosexual feelings, their "natural" homosexual tendencies are from God.

Response to Argument #6. Scripture nowhere suggests that if a thing seems natural it is inevitably God-given. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that many "natural" states and desires are not of God and are contrary to His will.

For example, "The natural man does not receive the things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Before conversion, we "were by nature the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). Scripture teaches that we are a fallen race, born in sin: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity" (Psalm 51:5; cf. Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 5:12). Sin has marred our physical and our spiritual nature (1 Corinthians 15:1-54; John 3:5, 6). We cannot therefore assume that because something is natural or inborn, it must be God-ordained.

7. "Homosexual orientation is morally neutral."

From the assumption that people are born gay, proponents argue that homosexuality should be viewed as a neutral expression of human sexuality. Like heterosexuality, homosexuality can be rightly used or abused. The abuse

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is wrong. But its use within a loving, consensual, and monogamous relationship is morally right.

Response to Argument #7. As to the assumption that because homosexuality may be natural or inborn (an unproven assertion) it is morally neutral or legitimate, we may ask: If we would demonstrate conclusively that adultery, incest, pedophilia, violence, and lying are inherited, would we be justified in considering them legitimate or neutral? Should the standard for morality be determined by what is inborn?

Contrary to this view, homosexuality is still immoral, whether inborn or acquired. "And immoral behavior cannot be legitimized by a quick baptism in the gene pool."²⁰

Morality is not determined by what is inborn. Those wishing to discover God's moral standards must look to the Bible. The Ten Commandments and God's pre-Fall order, rather than the latest discoveries of science regarding the post-Fall sinful condition, provide the moral guidelines on whether homosexuality is moral and immoral. The leap from *what is* (alleged facts of the homosexual condition) to *what ought to be* (the morality of homosexuality) is too large to make.

If some men and women are born with homosexual or lesbian genes, then the rest of us are born with adulterous and lying genes. Will God excuse adultery and lying because we were supposedly born with those genes? We are counseled: "Never should we lower the standard of righteousness in order to accommodate inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrongdoing" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 330).

8. "Changing the homosexual orientation is difficult and rare."

It is claimed that because homosexuality is an inbred condition, the homosexual has no (or very little) hope of ever changing.

Response to Argument #8. The oft-repeated claim that "changing one's homosexual orientation is difficult and rare" is not supported by Scripture or Ellen G. White. In fact, the Bible itself says that sinners such as fornicators, adulterers, thieves, and *homosexuals* were actually able to overcome their sinful practice through the transforming power of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Similarly, Ellen G. White states unequivocally that "a genuine conversion changes hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong."²¹

But even when we suppose, for the sake of argument, that the homosexual condition is unchangeable—i.e., that no amount of prayer, counseling, and

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effort of any kind can make a homosexual change his orientation—do these facts make homosexuality less sinful? Definitely not. One former homosexual's statement is worth quoting:

There is no contingency factor in any Scriptural reference to any kind of sin, in either the Old or the New Testament. We never read anything like: "Thou shalt not do thus and so!" (Unless, of course, you tried hard to change, went for prayer and counseling, and found you just couldn't stop wanting to do thus and so. If that's the case, then thus and so is no longer sin. It's an inborn, immutable gift and you can [very] well [feel free to] indulge in it!)"²³

The truth, however, is that "whether the homosexual is in denial, latent, 'in the closet,' openly gay, 'married,' militant, or even a 'flaming queen'; whether he believes to have been born 'gay' or conditioned to be gay, . . . it does not really matter. If someone is drowning, it matters not whether he *fell* into the water, *fell asleep* in the water, *jumped* into the water, or was *thrown* into the water. The bottom line is that he needs a lifeguard, a savior."²³ Jesus is that Lifeguard. He is mighty to save every sinner, both heterosexual and homosexual, provided they admit that they are sinners, repent, and turn from their sinful ways.

9. "Once a homosexual, (almost) always a homosexual."

This is where the logic of biological predestination eventually leads: People are born gay; they cannot change their condition; they will always remain gay. If anyone has to change, it must be the institutions of society and the church, not the homosexual. The laws of society and the Bible must change to accommodate the homosexual who, once gay, will always be gay.

Response to Argument #9. Perhaps the most important question raised by the issue of homosexuality is whether Christ has power to help people overcome sin in their lives. This is of course an important question if homosexuality is sin. For if homosexuality is just a sickness or addictive/compulsive behavior, then homosexuals need therapy, not repentance; they need medical cure and not moral correction. And if homosexuality is simply a morally neutral part of a person's identity, then "once a homosexual, (almost) always a homosexual."

The latter claim has been made by the editor of a leading Adventist church paper:

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You attempt to make a point that neither the Bible nor human experience can support—that a person's sexual orientation is itself sinful and must and can be overcome by the new birth. As Jesus and our common sense tell us, no amount of praying or piety can turn a person five feet tall into one six feet tall; and a person who is an alcoholic is an alcoholic for life. The only question is whether the alcoholic will *practice* on the basis of her [sic] or her orientation.²⁴

The above quotation summarizes the issues raised in this chapter. Not only does it raise questions about the normative source of one's religious authority (Bible? human experience? Jesus? common sense?), but also it raises the question about whether or not (a) we can distinguish between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality; (b) whether or not the experience of conversion—the new birth—can help a person to overcome his/her sinful sexual orientation (whether homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual); and whether (c) a person who is an alcoholic or homosexual can overcome all these sinful tendencies and cease to be an alcoholic and homosexual.

If the Bible's diagnosis of homosexuality as sin can be established Scripturally, then the Bible's prescription is the same for homosexuals as it is for all other sinners: a call to conversion and an invitation to participate in the process of Biblical sanctification. If this is true, then the Bible's approach cannot be disdained as naive, simplistic, or inadequate; nor belittled as pat answers that are incomplete for people struggling with sexual addiction. It forces us to answer the question of whether the transforming power of God is more effective than the impotent power of psychological therapy.²⁵

The testimony of Scripture exposes the lie of "once a homosexual, always a homosexual." Homosexuals can be, and have actually been, changed through the transforming power of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Those who deny this fact not only deny the veracity of Scripture on this issue, but they also unwittingly portray God as impotent, rather than omnipotent. Jesus can save to the uttermost any sinner. This includes the homosexual.

10. "There's a difference between being a homosexual and practicing homosexuality."

Discussions on homosexuality often define it in two ways: (a) homosexual *orientation* or *inclination* or *tendency*—an inborn sexual attraction, predisposition, or desire toward a member of one's own sex, and (b) homosexual *behavior* or *practice*—an erotic activity with a member of one's own sex, an activity that may or may not be morally right.²⁶

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On the basis of this distinction some Adventist writers argue that homosexual *orientation/condition* (also referred to as ontological or constitutional homosexuality or inversion) is a permanent and unchangeable part of the individual's constitutional makeup.²⁷ It is like the color of a person's skin—a nonbehavioral trait that is to be viewed as morally neutral, and a condition from which no one can change. On the other hand, homosexual *practice/activity* must be judged according to morally acceptable norms. "Being a homosexual is not sin," it is argued, but "homosexual sexual activity is sinful—it is apart from God's will."²⁸

Response to Argument #10: This argument is meaningless, if not misleading. Is homosexuality something you are, like being black or elderly or handicapped or female, or is it something you do, like adultery or incest or lying? This question goes to the heart of the pro-homosexual statement that "there is a difference between being a homosexual and practicing homosexuality." In order for the pro-gay argument to be valid, one must assume that homosexuality is not a sin. On the other hand, if homosexuality is a sin, as the Bible teaches, then the distinction between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality is artificial and invalid.

Let's think a little more carefully: Can a person really be a homosexual without practicing homosexuality? If this is so, can a person be an adulterer without practicing adultery? Can a person be a kleptomaniac without stealing? Can an individual be a liar without practicing lying? Also, if a person repents of his besetting sin, and through the enabling grace of God gains victory over, say, stealing, lying, immorality, etc., would it be theologically appropriate to continue viewing the person as though he were still in bondage to that particular sin, even though he may still be tempted?

Rather than distinguishing between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality, perhaps it is more theologically sound to distinguish between the temptation to act upon one's sinful homosexual tendency (which is not wrong) and actually choosing to cherish and act upon that temptation (a wrongful choice).

If allowed to stand unchallenged, the distinction made between being homosexual and practicing homosexuality would raise a number of Biblical and theological questions. First, does the Bible make such a distinction between homosexual *orientation/condition* and homosexual *practice/behavior*?—between inversion (constitutional homosexuality) and perversion (the abuse of homosexuality)? Adventist scholars disagree on this issue.

For example, one New Testament scholar admits that, "Such a distinction

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[between *inverts* and *perverts*] does not appear in Scripture, nor does the Bible reflect the understanding of homosexuality that we have today." But he seems to negate this categorical statement when, in the very next sentence, he writes: "Nevertheless, Paul must have had reference to the perverted sexual practices common in the degenerate pagan society of his time. Obviously he is referring to perverts, not inverts who do not participate in homosexual practices."²⁹

If the Bible makes no such distinction, how is it "obvious" for Paul to be referring to a nonexistent distinction? In other words, if Scripture does not make the contemporary distinction between homosexual orientation (inversion) and homosexual practice (perversion), how is it possible that "the New Testament statements directed themselves primarily if not exclusively to perverts, not inverts"?³⁰ In order not to be accused of forcing the Bible into the mold of today's sociological dichotomy between perversion and inversion, Adventist exegetes would need to establish whether the Bible makes such a distinction or not. The Bible condemns sin in thought and deed. It teaches that we all have sinful natures but offers victory through rebirth.

Second, the distinction between orientation and practice—the former being morally neutral and the latter morally wrong—also raises theological and ethical questions. Does the universal sinfulness of all humanity and the fact that they are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil (Psalms 51:5; 143:2; cf. 14:3; 1 Kings 8:46; Proverbs 20:9; Romans 3:23; 7:14-24; 1 John 1:8) allow one to suggest that this sinful tendency or propensity is morally neutral, and therefore, not a sin to be repented of or overcome by the power of Christ (Romans 7:25; 8:1; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 1:13; 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17)?

Third, if Adventists adopt the social scientists' distinction between homosexual *orientation* and homosexual *practice*, would not such a dichotomy be a Biblically questionable rendering of actions and attitudes? In other words, how can the *practice* of homosexuality be wrong, and yet, the inclination toward or the longing for that action be neutral (cf. Matthew 5:27, 28; 1 John 3:15)?

Is it Scriptural to argue that a homosexual *orientation* is morally neutral (and hence, not a sin) but the *action* itself is that which is sinful? If there exists an *orientation* toward a wrong act, does not a person need as much help to overcome that inclination as the individual who has succumbed to that wrong desire—whether it be lying, stealing, adultery, or killing, etc.? The Bible teaches that all sinful acts, including deceit, adultery, murder, etc., proceed from the sinful human heart (Proverbs 12:20; Matthew 5:27, 28; 1 John 3:15; Mark 7:21-27).

Instead of referring to homosexuality as a morally neutral orientation, is it not more Biblical to say that a homosexual orientation is nothing more than an almost helpless sinful tendency or propensity (such as kleptomania,

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nymphomania, inveterate adultery), a condition that makes temptation to sin almost irresistible? And if homosexual orientation, like kleptomania and nymphomania, is a sinful human condition, does not this diagnosis suggest that the cure for this problem has to be divine?

Could it be that the failure to recognize homosexuality as sin is one reason why it cannot be overcome? If homosexual orientation excuses the sin of homosexual desires, does it not imply that other sinful orientations (such as compulsive lying, compulsive adultery, compulsive racism, compulsive stealing, compulsive disobedience to authority, etc.) should all be excused as irreversible sinful conditions? Wherein then, lies the power of God's transforming grace?

11. "Being a homosexual is not a sin."

Another variation of the previous pro-gay argument is the belief that being a homosexual is not a sin. In the view of proponents, the *condition* of homosexuality is not a sin. Therefore, in the words of one Adventist scholar, "homosexuals can be genuine, model Christians."³¹ They do not consider it an oxymoron to speak about a gay Christian or a gay Adventist. For in their view, individuals can be nonpracticing homosexuals when they choose to be "celibate homosexuals."³²

Response to Argument #11. The above statement is based on the questionable argument that a person can be a homosexual without practicing homosexuality. It also wrongly assumes that homosexuality is a morally neutral condition or mark of a person's identity (like being black, White, Italian, a woman, etc.). For the statement ("being a homosexual is not a sin") to be valid, we have to show from the Scriptures that homosexuality itself is not a sin. As we shall later see, this cannot be established from Scripture.

A person is no more a nonpracticing homosexual than a nonpracticing adulterer or a nonpracticing polygamist. Once individuals cease to practice adultery or polygamy, they can no longer be referred to as adulterers or polygamists. They are ex-adulterers and ex-polygamists. Therefore homosexuals who do not practice (or cherish or lust after) homosexuality are ex-homosexuals.

The apostle Paul did not refer to the converted believers in Corinth as nonpracticing fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, or homosexuals. That they were ex-fornicators, ex-idolaters, ex-adulterers and ex-homosexuals is indicated by his statement, "such *were* some of you" [past tense] (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

12. "God does not want homosexuals to give up 'who they are.'"

Based on the assumption that people are born gay, and on the basis of

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texts like Psalm 139:13 ("For You created my inmost parts") and Psalm 100:3 ("It is He That hath made us and not we ourselves"), pro-gay advocates maintain that people's homosexual *orientation/condition* is part of their identity, defining who they are as sexual human beings. Consequently, it is argued: "Since God made me the way I am, and since I have had my orientation from my earliest memories, why shouldn't I express my God-given sexuality? Why would God ask me to change something which He Himself has given me?"³³

Response to Argument #12. The fact is that God wants every one of us, including homosexuals, to give up something we have had all our lives—*our selves*, our sinful selves. The Bible condemns all forms of self-love or self-indulgence as expressions of idolatry, and presents *self-denial* as the hallmark of Christian discipleship (Luke 14:26,27; cf. Revelation 12:11). The only way really to find one's *self* is by losing it (Mark 8:34-37). We cannot change ourselves, but Christ can change us if we truly want to be changed from our besetting sexual tendencies.

Biblical Arguments for Homosexuality

On the basis of Scripture, Seventh-day Adventists historically have rejected homosexuality as morally unacceptable. Today, however, some are reinterpreting the Bible to allow for the practice. Proponents claim that Scriptural references to homosexual acts are culturally conditioned, and thus do not suffice to determine God's will for homosexuals today.

Because of space limitations I can only summarize and respond to some of the major Scriptural arguments justifying pro-gay theology. Those who seek more information may want to consult the in-depth analysis and evaluation provided in some other excellent works.³⁴ We will take up numbering of the arguments where the list in the previous section left off.

13. "Scriptural references to homosexual acts do not suffice to determine God's will for homosexuals today. They are 'culturally conditioned.'"

Probably the major reason why Christian churches accept homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle is the sophisticated Scriptural arguments many employ to justify the practice.

Proponents either maintain that the Bible is "silent" on the issue or that Scriptural passages that condemn homosexuality (Genesis 19 [cf. Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6-10]; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11;

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1 Timothy 1:8-11), if "rightly" understood, are either ambiguous, irrelevant to contemporary homosexual practice, or refer to pederasty or cultic prostitution.³⁵

In short, advocates of gay theology argue that because Bible passages on homosexuality only deal with specific historical situations, they are "culturally conditioned" and no longer relevant for Christian sexual ethics today.

Response to Argument #13. Undergirding these new reformulations of Biblical teaching on homosexuality is liberalism's un-Scriptural view of Biblical inspiration, interpretation, and authority. One writer has correctly noted: "There are only two ways one can neutralize the Biblical witness against homosexual behavior: by gross misinterpretation or by moving away from a high view of Scripture."³⁶ Indeed, many of the homosexuals' Biblical arguments are "strained, speculative, and implausible, the product of wishful thinking and special pleading."³⁷

Jesus refuted the culturally conditioned argument when He stated unequivocally that God's will for our moral life is the original ideal He instituted in the Garden of Eden. He asked the Pharisees, "Have ye not read, that He Which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Matthew 19:4, 5; cf. Mark 10:6-8).

With the expression "at the beginning" or "from the beginning" (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:6), Christ teaches that *all cultures* must bow before the unchangeable standard He instituted at Creation. That standard is that only "male and female" can legitimately "cleave" and become "one flesh." Indeed, if Christ intended a homosexual relationship He would have created "Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve."

14. "Jesus said nothing about homosexuality in any of the Gospels."

The argument is that as followers of Christ, Christians should base their beliefs on the teachings of Christ. If Jesus Christ, the Founder of Biblical Christianity, was silent on the issue of homosexuality, why should we go beyond our Master by condemning the practice?

Response to Argument #14: The lack of record in the Gospels of a statement from Christ on homosexuality does not mean that He never addressed it during His earthly ministry. According to John, if the Gospel writers had attempted to record all the works of Christ, the world could not contain all the books (John 21:25).

Moreover, the recorded teachings of Christ in the Gospels are not the

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Christian's only source of authority. "All Scripture"—from Genesis to Revelation—constitutes the normative authority (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The fact that one section of the Bible says nothing explicitly on a subject does not mean the other sections are silent.

Furthermore, it is incorrect to say that Jesus is silent on homosexuality. As we pointed out earlier, Christ's statement in Matthew 19:3-8 and Mark 10:2-9 ("Have ye not read, that He Which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?") reveals that God's intention at Creation regarding human sexuality—namely, a monogamous, heterosexual relationship—is the only context for the expression of human sexuality.³⁸

15. "The Bible writers did not know about homosexuality as we know it today."

Some argue that the kind of homosexuality the Bible writers condemned was that which was connected with rape, prostitution, or idolatry. They claim that even if the Bible writers did condemn homosexuality as we know it today (i.e., the so-called loving, committed, and faithful homosexual relationships), this is not the first time Bible writers have been wrong. They were wrong on many things, including the practice of slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women. These practices were later allegedly corrected by the Spirit's leading. If the Bible writers were wrong on these issues, they argue, why can't they be wrong on homosexuality? And if under the Spirit's leading the church came to embrace slave emancipation, monogamy, and women's equal rights, why should not the church, led by the same Spirit, accept homosexuality?

Response to Argument #15: First, if we believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word and not simply the personal opinions of ancient writers, and if we believe that the Bible is the all-sufficient guide in doctrine and practice for all people living at all times (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; cf. 2 Peter 1:20, 21), then "it is unthinkable that God—Who is no respecter of persons—would be so careless as to offer no guidance in His revealed Word to the thousands of homosexuals He knew would exist throughout time, if indeed their relationships were legitimate in His sight."³⁹

Second, it is without foundation to argue that the Bible writers (Moses and Paul) were ignorant of today's more "enlightened" scientific and theological view of homosexuality. These men were erudite in their intellectual training and discerning in their calling as God's prophets. They never made the fine

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distinctions cited by today's pro-homosexual advocates because there is no validity to recent distinctions between the homosexual act and the condition, the latter being something about which homosexuals allegedly have no choice. The Bible writers condemned homosexuality itself. They also offered God's miraculous transformation as the cure for this sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Third, the suggestion that the Bible writers were wrong on a number of issues arises from contemporary higher criticism (the so-called historical-critical method). In an earlier work I have challenged this discredited method of liberal interpretation as incompatible with the tenets of Biblical Christianity.⁴⁰

Moreover, the claim that the Bible writers accommodated or tolerated (some say encouraged) slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women, practices later allegedly corrected by the Spirit's leading, is a scholarly *myth* that has been challenged by responsible Bible scholars.⁴¹ The Bible writers never once *commended* the practice of slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women. But they did repeatedly condemn the practice of homosexuality (see, for example, Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26 ff. 1 Corinthians 6; 1 Timothy 1:8 ff.).

16. "The Bible does not speak directly to the issue of behavior by consenting adults of homosexual orientation."

This argument, though similar to the previous one, deals with the matter of choice, i.e., consent and orientation. The suggestion here is that because of one's homosexual orientation (believed to be caused by one's genes or other biological and environmental factors), one has no choice and, therefore, should not be held morally responsible for acting it out.

Response to Argument #16. It is a mistake to think that the Bible does not speak directly to the matter of consensual (or choice) sex between persons of the same gender. The Scriptures make it plain that homosexual conduct, like other sexual deviations, is a *deliberate* action against God's expressed law. The fact that the Bible warns against it, and imposes punishment upon those who engage in the practice (Leviticus 18:22, 29; 20:13), shows that a homosexual is culpable. The sanctions for same-gender sex would be meaningless if homosexuality were not a matter of choice.

Moreover, the Bible does not support the use of the term *orientation* as a shelter to escape the consequences of a deliberate choice. In the context of today's discussion of homosexuality, the word orientation is used to denote a person's sexual bent, proclivity, tendency, inclination, attraction, frame of mind, or desires believed to have been caused by genetic, biological, or envi-

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ronmental causes. The Hebrew word that comes closest in meaning to the modern nuances of *orientation* is the term *yetser*.

This word is frequently used for "that which is formed in the mind, e.g., plans and purposes (Genesis 6:5; 8:21); Deuteronomy 31:21) or even the state of mind (Isaiah 26:31)." ⁴² For example, in reference to the orientation of humanity in the days of Noah, the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible translates the word as the "imagination" of the heart (Genesis 6:5 and 8:21). The KJV marginal reference correctly explains that the word *yetser* describes "the whole imagination, with the *purposes and desires of the heart*" (emphasis mine).

The sin condition (*yetser*) is the foundation for homosexual conduct (as it is for all sin). The individual is morally responsible for this inclination, which can be directed toward either good or evil, toward the Spirit or the flesh (Romans 8). Thus, whereas pro-gay advocates use the term orientation as a justification to escape moral the responsibility of a homosexual's conduct, Scripture always attaches intentionality or choice to a person's conduct. Rightly understood, homosexual orientation refers to one's mindset, not an inherited trait over which a person has no choice:

In the Bible, the cause for all violations against the divine standard is ultimately traceable to the mindset of the individual: is it subordinated to the will of God? Thus not some but *all* of the passages relating to same-gender sexual intercourse are categorically against it. There are no seams in the Biblical view. No concession is made to semantic labels. A bottle of poison labeled with anything but the customary skull and bones is *more* dangerous to society, not less so. . . . No reference to causes, apart from the one located in the mindset of the individual, can be found in the Biblical text. ⁴³

17. "Sodom was destroyed because of pride, inhospitality, and/or gang rape, not because of homosexuality."

When the men of Sodom demanded of Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them" (Genesis 19:5), pro-gay advocates argue that the men of Sodom were only violating the ancient rules of hospitality. Some assert that the Hebrew word *yadah*, which is translated "have sex with" (or "know" in the KJV), appears 943 times in the Old Testament, and carries sexual meaning only about ten times. They thus argue that the men of Sodom had no sexual intentions towards Lot's visitors; they only wanted to get acquainted with them or interrogate them, fearing that they were foreign spies being harbored by Lot, himself a foreigner.

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Furthermore, even if they had sexual intentions, the condemnation of their action would be the condemnation of homosexual gang rape, not of a consensual homosexuality as such.

Response to Argument #17: Indeed, Sodom was destroyed because of pride and inhospitality (cf. Ezekiel 16:49, 50; Jeremiah 23:14; Luke 17:28, 29). But it is a false distinction to separate inhospitality from sexual sin. What the men of Sodom sought to do was another form of inhospitality. Also, inhospitality and pride were not the only reasons for Sodom's destruction. The city was punished also because of its abominations (Ezekiel 16:50), a veiled reference to its sexual deviations. The Bible describes various things as abomination, a word of strong disapproval, meaning literally something detestable and hated by God. But since the word is used in the so-called inhospitality passages of Ezekiel 16 to describe sexual sin (vv. 22, 58), and since the word refers to same-sex acts in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, the abominations of Sodom are not exclusive of sexual deviations.

Two New Testament passages make this point explicitly. The apostle Peter indicates that, among other things, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their "filthy conversation," "unlawful deeds," and their "walk after the *lust of the flesh*" (2 Peter 2:6-10), a reference that includes adultery, fornication, and other sexual perversions (cf. Galatians 5:19-21). Jude specifically linked the destruction of these wicked cities to their sexual deviations: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to *fornication, and going after strange flesh* are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7, emphasis supplied). The "fornication and going after strange flesh" are obvious references to sexual perversions (so NIV, RSV, NRSV, Phillips, TEV).

Pro-gay advocates incorrectly assert that the Hebrew word *yadah* as used in Genesis 19 means "to get acquainted with," not "to have sex with." They base this on the fact that, out of some 943 occurrences in the Old Testament, *yadah* clearly refers to sexual intercourse in only twelve instances. The problem with this argument is that mere word counting is no criterion of meaning; the usage of a word in its specific context is the decisive consideration. Thus, Lot's reply to the men of Sodom shows that he understood their demand in sexual terms: "No, my friends. Don't do this *wicked thing*" (Genesis 19:7). In fact, in the very next verse the word *yadah* is translated "slept with." Lot, acting out of sheer desperation and hopelessness proposed: "Look, I have two daughters who have never *slept with (yadah)* a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them" (v. 8). Lot definitely had no reason to think that the

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men of Sodom merely wanted to question or get acquainted with his daughters. One Bible commentary puts it neatly: "It would be grotesquely inconsequent that Lot should reply to a demand for credentials by an offer of daughters."⁴⁴ The fact that Lot refers to his daughters' virgin status also indicates that he understood the *sexual* content of the request. Clearly, then, *yadah* in this passage refers to sexual intercourse.

This much can be said: The men of Sodom were not interested in Lot's desperate offer of his virgin daughters. They were proposing a homosexual rape. But for such rape to have involved "all the men of the city, both young and old" (Genesis 19:4), homosexual activity must have been commonly practiced—one reason why Jude records that their "fornication, and going after strange flesh are set forth [in Scripture] for an example [and warning unto us]" (Jude 7). As we will see, other Bible passages condemn all homosexual activity, not just homosexual rape.

18. "The Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 passages, condemning homosexual activity as sinful, do not condemn homosexuality as we know it today."

In these passages, God forbids a man to "lie with" another man "as with a woman." Doing so is an "abomination." Advocates of gay theology, however, argue that the practices condemned as "abomination" (Hebrew *to'evah*) in these passages of Leviticus have to do with the kind of homosexuality associated with pagan religious practices. In the view of pro-gay writers, God was not prohibiting the kind of homosexuality practiced today by Christians, but only the kind connected with idolatry.

Some also argue that, even if the passages condemn homosexuality in general, these passages in Leviticus are part of the ceremonial holiness code that has no permanent binding obligation on Christians. They reason that the prohibition of sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstrual flow (Leviticus 18:19) shows that the prohibition against homosexual intercourse, which closely follows it in the text (18:22) was ceremonial in nature. It was a temporary obligation upon the Jews, not a universal law.

Response to Argument #18: First, if these passages condemn homosexuality only because of its association with idolatry, then it would logically follow that other practices mentioned in these passages—incest, adultery, polygamy, bestiality, and child sacrifice—are also condemned as sinful only because of their association with idolatry. Conversely, if incest, adultery, polygamy, bestiality, etc., are morally objectionable regardless of their connection with pagan practices, then homosexuality is also morally wrong, regardless of the context

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in which it is practiced.

Second, in context, both Leviticus 18 and 20 deal primarily with morality, not idolatrous worship. When God wants specifically to mention the practices of cultic or idolatrous prostitutes, He does so, as in Deuteronomy 23:17: "No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute." The lack of such mention in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 indicates that God is dealing with homosexuality per se, not with any alleged specific form of Canaanite religious practice.

As for the contention that Scripture always connects the word "abomination" (Hebrew *to'evah*) with idolatry or pagan ceremonies, one Biblical example will discredit the claim. Proverbs 6:16-19 describes God as hating such abominations as a proud look, a lying tongue, murder, etc. Are we to believe that pride, lying, and murder are morally acceptable as long as they are not carried out in idolatrous pagan contexts? Certainly not.

Pro-gay advocates also argue that because Leviticus 18 prohibits intercourse during a woman's menstrual flow (v. 19) and proceeds in the same text to prohibit homosexual intercourse (v. 22), the condemnation of homosexuality should be viewed as a temporary ceremonial obligation, not a universal moral injunction. But this argument is also untenable in that the prohibitions appear with others of a clearly moral nature—namely, prohibitions against various types of unlawful sexual relations including incest (18:6-17), polygamy (18:18), adultery (18:20), child sacrifice (18:21), and bestiality (18:23).⁴⁵ The fact that child sacrifice violated two provisions in the moral law, namely prohibitions against idolatry and killing (cf. Exodus 20:3, 13), and the fact that the list of unlawful behaviors in Leviticus 18 is condemned in the strongest terms (vv. 24 ff.) suggests that these moral concerns are universal in nature, and thus, still relevant today.⁴⁶

Also, since the New Testament again denounces these sexual deviations, we may conclude that the moral content of these Leviticus passages is permanently normative, not part of the ceremonial holiness code.⁴⁷

19. "In Romans 1:26, 27, Paul does not condemn individuals who are homosexuals by nature; rather, he refers to idolatrous heterosexuals who have 'changed their nature' by committing homosexual acts."

According to this argument, the real sin condemned by Paul is twofold: (1) the changing of what is natural to a person into what is unnatural, and (2) homosexuality committed by people who worship images, not God.

Response to Argument #19: Advocates of pro-gay theology often argue that if a person is homosexual, he or she can never become truly heterosexual.

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And yet they often quote the Romans 1 passage as an example of truly *heterosexual* people committing a sin by becoming truly *homosexual*. We may therefore ask: If a person who is a heterosexual can change and become a homosexual, why cannot a person who is a homosexual be changed and become a heterosexual? It appears, however, that advocates of the pro-gay viewpoint do not see the inconsistency of their position.

For a number of reasons, it seems inconceivable that Paul could be describing predominantly heterosexual people indulging in homosexual acts. First, he describes the men and women committing these homosexual acts as "burning in lust" for each other. Are we to understand this as heterosexuals who are simply experimenting with an alternate lifestyle?

Also, if verses 26 and 27 condemn only homosexual actions by people to whom they did not come naturally (i.e., heterosexuals who are practicing homosexual acts), but don't apply to individuals to whom those same actions allegedly do come naturally (so-called true homosexuals), then consistency and intellectual integrity demand that the sinful practices mentioned in verses 29 and 30—fornication, backbiting, deceit, etc.—are permissible as long as the people who commit them are people to whom they come naturally.

Is Paul's use of "natural" purely subjective (what is "natural for me" in my orientation) or is it objective (what is "natural for everyone" regardless of orientation)? The context of Romans 1 suggests that Paul is describing homosexual behavior and other sinful practices as objectively unnatural. They are part of the practices that result when men "exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator." "He was talking about an objective condition of depravity experienced by people who rejected God's will."⁴⁸

In other words, it is the very nature of the sexual conduct itself that Paul considers unnatural. Homosexuality is unnatural to the man as a male (*arsen*) and to the woman as a female (*gune*), not because of what may or may not be natural to their personality, but because of what is unnatural according to God's design when he created male and female.

Finally, if we are to accept pro-gay arguments that Romans 1 condemns only homosexuality committed by people who worship idols, then consistency and honesty demand that we also argue that the other sins listed in that chapter—fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, pride, etc. (vv. 28-32)—are sinful only because they are committed by idol worshippers. I don't believe that even the most strident advocates of homosexuality will embrace this logic. The point is thus obvious: Homosexuality is unnatural, whether idolaters or those who worship the true God commit it.⁴⁹

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20. "Paul's *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* statements in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and 1 Timothy 1:9, 10, denouncing the 'effeminate and them that defile themselves with mankind' are actually a condemnation of an 'offensive kind of homosexuality,' not the 'offense of homosexuality.'"

In both passages, Paul lists those who engage in homosexual behavior among such lawless people as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, kidnappers, etc. According to pro-gay advocates, the Greek terms *arsenokoitai* (translated in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 as "them that defile themselves with mankind") and *malakoi* (translated "effeminate" or "soft" in 1 Corinthians 6), which the apostle uses to denounce homosexual activity, refer to homosexual abuse, not its right use. Thus, these passages do not condemn today's loving and committed homosexual relationships, but rather offensive kinds of homosexual activity, such as homosexual prostitution.

Response to Argument #20: For good reason the terms *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* have been understood traditionally as a reference to the active and passive partners in a homosexual relationship. The first term (*arsenokoitai*) literally means "male bedders" (reference to a man who "beds" another) and the second term (*malakoi*) refers to "soft" or "effeminate" men, specifically males who play female sexual roles with the "male bedder." There is no hint in these words that Paul was condemning only a certain kind of homosexual abuse, as in prostitution, rape, or pagan ceremonies. He condemns homosexuality itself as sin.

Further, note that *arsenokoitai* is derived from two words—*arsen* (referring to man as male) and *koite* (a term that appears only twice in the New Testament, and literally means "bed" or "couch." In Romans 13:13, it appears in "Let us walk honestly, . . . not in chambering [*koite*]"); and in Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is honorable . . . and the bed [*koite*] undefiled"). The combination of the two terms *arsen* (male) and *koite* (bed) does not even suggest prostitution, rape, or idolatry—only sexual contact between two men. In other words, homosexuality is wrong, regardless of the reason why it is practiced.

Note also that when Paul used the term *arsenokoitai* to condemn the sinful practice of homosexuality, he apparently derived it directly from the Greek translation of two verses in Leviticus 18, which reads in part:

" . . . *kai meta arsenos ou koimethese koiten gynaikos*" ("and you shall not sleep in bed with a man as with a woman"; Leviticus 18:22);

" . . . *kai hos an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gynaikos*" ("and whoever may lie in bed with a man as with a woman"; Leviticus 20:13).

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Therefore, Paul's condemnation of homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and 1 Timothy 1:9, 10 presupposes Leviticus's condemnation of homosexual acts. Is it any wonder that Paul lists homosexuality among lawless deeds that would bar a person from the kingdom of God?⁵⁰ Homosexuality in any form is sinful. To attempt to sanitize a sinful practice by describing it as loving and committed and to attempt to silence the Bible's categorical condemnation of the practice is an irresponsible exercise in Biblical gamesmanship.

In summary, the Bible is not morally neutral on homosexuality. Paul's statements in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1,⁵¹ along with the Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 passages, clearly show that homosexuality in all of its various forms is a sinful practice. Homosexual behavior, like heterosexual fornication, is sin, whether it results from one's orientation or from conscious choice. In other words, the Bible condemns all homosexual lust and behavior, including today's so-called loving and consensual homosexual relationships. *It is not wrong to be tempted either homosexually or heterosexually, but it is wrong to yield to one's sexual temptation.*

21. "Homosexuality cannot be cured; therefore the church must welcome gays and lesbians into full membership and embrace their homosexual lifestyle."

Based on the mistaken notion that homosexuality is not a sin, but a trait of one's identity; and based on the apparent failure of prayer, counseling, human therapy, and other methods of behavior modification (skills of self-discipline or self-control), advocates of pro-gay theology argue that cure or deliverance may not always be possible for those with homosexual orientations. Consequently they urge the church to be mature enough to welcome homosexuals into membership and leadership. When proponents employ the terms "outreach" or "ministries" for gays and lesbians, they simply mean an affirmation of homosexuals in their homosexuality.

Response to Argument #21. I have argued in this chapter and the preceding one that homosexuality is a sin, no less or worse than other sins condemned in the Bible: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor *homosexual offenders* nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

The good news, however, is that there is a cure for all manner of sin—including homosexual sin—provided sinners admit their wrongdoing, repent,

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and turn away from it. It is significant that the steps to overcome homosexuality are clearly outlined by the apostle Paul in the verse immediately following the above: "*And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

The change described in this verse is specific with respect to a list of violations, including homosexual conduct. In other words, the cure for homosexuality is the same as for all other sins. Also, the use of the past tense in verse 11 emphasizes that what the Corinthians were in the past is not what they are in the present, because they have been changed.

According to Paul it is possible for one to be freed from homosexual bondage. The transformation of the homosexual does not come through the sinner's struggle or from some humanistic methods of behavior modification. Since homosexuality is a problem of the heart, and not simply genetic or environmental, the only way out is through a transformation of the heart. It comes through Christ and His Spirit. The process by which this change takes place is defined by three terms: cleansing, sanctification, and justification.

In the Greek, each verb is introduced by the strong adversative conjunction *alla*, a word that is normally translated in English as "but." Thus, the KJV states: "*but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified. . . .*" The force of the word "but" (*alia*) is that it expresses a sharp contrast to what has come before. It also has a confirming or emphatic nuance. In other words, there was a radical difference between what the Corinthians were in the past and what they currently became when they were converted.

Given the completeness of the transformation, the apostle would therefore reject any suggestion that a person can be gay and Christian or Adventist at the same time. The two don't mix. You are either gay or a Christian. It is an oxymoron to refer to a person as a "gay Adventist." "In choosing the aorist [past tense] for these three verbs ['washed,' 'sanctified,' and 'justified'], Paul emphasizes that the actions of cleansing, sanctifying, and justifying have been accomplished. They have completed a change in the condition and orientation of those who were practicing homosexuality and the other vices listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10."⁵²

The Bible also challenges the pro-gay suggestion that the church must welcome unrepentant homosexuals into church membership. When the Old Testament urged that those who engaged in adultery, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, etc. should be "cut off from among their people," and even imposed the death penalty upon these sexual offenders (cf. Leviticus 18:7-30), it indicates clearly that homosexuals were not to be entertained in the community of faith.

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In the New Testament, Paul apparently applies this Old Testament principle to disfellowshipping people from the church. Concerning the sexual immorality of incest and other blatant sins, he exhorted the Corinthian church "not to associate with sexually immoral people. . . . I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. With such a man do not even eat. . . . Expel the wicked man from among you" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 11, 13, NIV).

The Bible's position is clear. Homosexuals who acknowledge the sinfulness of homosexuality, who accept Christ's offer of forgiveness, who cut themselves loose from homosexual relationships, and who, by faith, commit themselves to a life of sexual purity, should be accepted into church fellowship. But those who do not acknowledge homosexuality as sin, who reinterpret Scripture to justify their sins, who defiantly maintain that they will not turn from their sinful ways, and/or those who are engaged in homosexual relationships or practices, should not be accepted into church membership. Accordingly, the church must not endorse any so-called outreaches or ministries for gays and lesbians that teach that homosexuality is morally neutral or not a sin, that affirm homosexuals in their homosexuality, and that seek to make homosexuality compatible with the Christian faith.

Conclusion

The questions that have been raised in this chapter are some of the major issues confronting Bible-believing Seventh-day Adventists as they respond to the attempts by some within our ranks to reconcile the homosexual lifestyle with Biblical Christianity. Unless Biblically consistent answers are given to the questions, one cannot but conclude that the qualified acceptance position on homosexuality, just like the full acceptance position, cannot be a Biblically defensible option for Seventh-day Adventists.

What then should we say in response to homosexuals who are coming to church "not only for forgiveness and mercy but to say to the church, as they have to the world, 'Homosexuality is not sinful; it is natural to me. God made me this way. He accepts me and my homosexuality as good. Therefore the time has come for the church to accept me as I am and join me in saying that gayness is good'"? Should the born-a-gay lifestyle be baptized?

In the light of our discussion in the preceding pages, we cannot but borrow the following words to respond to attempts at domesticating homosexuality and lesbianism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

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The church cannot condone homosexual activity without betraying its Biblical, historical, and spiritual heritage. Its conscious acceptance of the authority and inspiration of Scripture would need to undergo such a radical, liberalizing change that the fundamental teachings of the church would be left without foundation.

The consequences of such change with its ramifications for theological, ethical, and moral teaching might be labeled by some as progressive, calculated to enlighten the church and produce a more compassionate laity accommodated to the modern society in which it lives. But in reality such a move would be a giant step toward repaganization of the church. The resulting religion would not be a Bible religion or that of the prophets, the Lord, or the apostles, not Christianity except in name.⁵³

In today's climate of enlightened ethical sensitivity, the above words and the theological position adopted in this chapter may seem judgmental or uncompassionate to some. If so, we must make it absolutely clear that God's grace covers every kind of sin for any believer in Jesus who contritely turns toward God and makes a decisive commitment to turn away from sin. "God can forgive homosexual sin as well as heterosexual sin, sin which is socially acceptable as sin and sin which is not. But the first step in receiving forgiveness is to recognize our wrongdoing as sin."⁵⁴

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Biblical worldview presents a loving Father Who is interested in all aspects of our being and our lifestyle (3 John 2). His written Word is the surest and most trustworthy guide for every human thought and conduct (2 Timothy 3:16-19). It tells of a compassionate and powerful God Who is abundantly able and willing to assist us in overcoming our human weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15, 16; Jude 24; Ephesians 3:20). And the Bible introduces us to a faithful Saviour and His dependable promises. Writes Ellen G. White:

Are you tempted? He will deliver. Are you weak? He will strengthen. Are you ignorant? He will enlighten. Are you wounded? He will heal.... "Come unto Me," is His invitation. Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be opened for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and

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more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the Burden Bearer (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 329).

We all can receive help if we are willing to believe that whatever God commands we may accomplish in His strength. The apostle Paul, a few verses after his condemnation of sinful practices such as homosexuality, declared that though he was "the chief of sinners," Christ's enabling grace was able to turn his life around (1 Timothy 1:9-16). If Jesus can change "the chief of sinners," certainly, He can change you and me (1 John 1:9). But this is possible if, and only if: (1) we accept that the homosexual lifestyle is morally wrong and resolve to change, and if (2) we are willing to accept Christ's abiding offer of pardon and cleansing (Matthew 11:28-30; 1 John 1:9; Isaiah 1:18). The choice is ours.

Endnotes

¹ Because of space limitations I can only summarize and respond to some of the major arguments put forth by those attempting to reconcile the "born-a-gay" ideology with the Bible's "born again" theology. Those seeking a fuller discussion and documentation, including how to overcome the sin of homosexuality should consult my book, *Must We Be Silent?: Issues Dividing Our Church* (Ann Arbor: Berean Books, 2001). This chapter is a reprint of two chapters from *Must We Be Silent?*

² Kate McLaughlin, "Are Homosexuals God's Children?" *Adventist Review*, April 3, 1997, pp. 26-29. Cf. Suzanne Ryan, "When Love Wasn't Enough," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, pp. 2, 3; Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, pp. 4-6.

³ Chris Glaser, "A Newly Revealed Christian Experience," *Church and Society* 67 (May-June 1977):5.

⁴ William Muehl and William Johnson, "Issues Raised by Homosexuality," *Raising the Issues* (materials distributed as Packet 1, Task Force to Study Homosexuality, United Presbyterian Church), p. 4, cited in Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), pp. 116, 117.

⁵ Choon-Leong Seouw, "A Heterotextual Perspective," in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Choon-Leong Seouw (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 25.

⁶ This argument has to do with the causes of homosexuality and the possibility of change. If the root cause of the homosexual orientation is strictly genetic, then the chances of change are very slim. If, on the other hand, homosexual orientation has to do with one's environment or choice, then changing one's environment or exercising the power of choice can effect a change in a homosexual's condition.

⁷ Neil and Briar Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It! A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House Publishers, 1999).

⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671; cf. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 175, 176.

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⁹ For a more detailed discussion, with supporting references, see Neil and Briar Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It!*, pp. 125-169; William Byne, "The Biological Evidence Challenged," *Scientific American* 270/5 (1994) :50-55; Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 137-142; Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), pp. 107-131. What follows is a brief summary from these works.

¹⁰ Simon LeVay's findings were published as "A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men," *Science*, August 30, 1991, pp. 1034-1037.

¹¹ Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation: A Christian Response to the Question of Homosexuality," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, p. 7.

¹² "I don't deny the *evil* of the thing, for evil it certainly is, but I do deny the *sinfulness* of it. The homosexual condition is to be classified with disease, weakness, death, as an evil; not with gluttony, blasphemy, murder, as a sin. Both sin and evil are the work of Satan, were brought into the world at the Fall, and will one day be destroyed by Christ, but they are not identical. Sin, which we must avoid and need never commit, is represented in our situation by homosexual lust and the activity to which it leads. Evil is different. We pray to be delivered from it, but may nevertheless find ourselves left in it, and then have to aim at using and transforming it. In our situation that means a homosexual nature. I'm sure that in this sense it is morally neutral..." (Alex Davidson, *The Returns of Love: Letters of a Christian Homosexual* [London: Intervarsity Press, 1970], p. 80).

¹³ Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," p. 11, equates homosexual orientation with temptation, and states: "We cannot condone homosexual activity. Homosexual sexual activity is sinful—it is apart from God's will. Yet a difference exists between the person who fights against homosexual tendencies and the one who experiments with or revels in them. It's a sin to cave in to temptation. It's not a sin to be tempted."

¹⁴ Victor J. Adamson, "*That Kind Can Never Change!*" *Can They...?: One Man's Struggle with His Homosexuality* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House Publishers, 2000), pp. 18, 19. Adamson no longer holds this view. In chapters 7 and 8 of *Must We Be Silent?* he explains why.

¹⁵ J.B. Nelson, "Religious and Moral Issues in Working with Homosexual Clients," in *Homosexuality and Psychotherapy, a Practitioner's Handbook of Affirmative Models. Journal of Homosexuality* 7, nos. 2, 3, ed. J.C. Gonsiorek (New York: Haworth Press, 1982) :168, 169. Cf. *World* 6 (September 14, 1991) :11.

¹⁶ Thomas E. Schmidt, "Homosexuality: Establishing a Christian Backdrop for Pastoral Care," *Ministry*, November 1996, p. 14.

¹⁷ Garry Gibbs, *Homosexuality: Return to Sodom* (Roseville, Calif.: Amazing Facts, 1996), pp. 16, 17.

¹⁸ For more on this, see Joe Dallas, "Born Gay?" *Christianity Today*, June 22, 1992, pp. 20-23.

¹⁹ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?*, p. 133.

²⁰ Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian Movement"* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), p. 117.

²¹ Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed., Francis D. Nichol, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), vol. 6, p. 1101.

²² Dallas, *A Strong Delusion*, p. 121.

²³ Victor J. Adamson, "*That Kind Can Never Change!*" *Can They...?: One Man's Struggle with His Homosexuality* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House Publishers, 2000), p. ix.

²⁴ Official letter, dated May 28, 1993, from New Testament scholar William G. Johnsson, editor, *Adventist Review*, to Samuel Koranteng-Pipim. In this letter, Johnsson was responding to an article I had submitted for publication. The above quotation presents the first of three rea-

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sons given why my article—titled then as "'Born a Gay' or 'Born Again?'"—was "not acceptable" for publication in the *Adventist Review*. The editor suggested that the article should be reworked "to bring it in line with the general thinking of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in this matter [of homosexuality]," if it should be considered for publication. The "general thinking" that the editor endorses seems to be the *qualified acceptance position*. In addition to the above reason, the editor also suggested that the article should (1) deal with the pro-gay reconstructions of the Biblical texts that challenge homosexual lifestyle and (2) be "shaped within the framework of a greater compassion." I am indebted to Dr. Johnsson for the suggestion. This section of the chapter is a partial response to his invitation.

²⁵ See Andrews University psychology professor John Berez's, "How I Treat Gay and Lesbian Persons," *Student Movement*, November 11, 1992, p. 7, where he asserts that seeking help in the complex area of homosexuality from "untrained nonprofessionals," such as a local pastor, "is a bit like asking your mailman to remove your gall bladder. If you're seeking sexual reorientation therapy, a competent professional trained in sex therapy is your best hope."

²⁶ Writes Anglican theologian D.S. Bailey: "It is important to understand that the genuine homosexual condition, or *inversion*, as it is often termed, is something for which the subject can in no way be held responsible; in itself, it is morally neutral. Like the normal condition of heterosexuality, however, it may find expression in specific sexual acts; and such acts are subject to moral judgment no less than those which may take place between man and woman. It must be made quite clear that the genuine invert is not necessarily given to homosexual practices, and may exercise as careful a control over his or her physical impulses as the heterosexual." D.S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* [London/New York: Longmans, Green, 1955], p. xi).

²⁷ As I pointed out earlier, in the literature on homosexuality, a distinction is often made between constitutional and situational homosexuals. Constitutional or true homosexuals (also referred to as inverts or ontological homosexuals) are those who are believed to have been born gay, and therefore, are considered to be the genuine homosexuals. Because their *condition/orientation* is said to be a permanent part of their constitutional makeup (and not a transitory phase of life nor an accommodation to situational pressure), it is maintained that those who are ontological homosexuals should not be held morally responsible for their condition. In and of itself, homosexual *orientation* is morally neutral, like the normal condition of heterosexuality. On the other hand, situational homosexuals (also referred to as perverts) are not true homosexuals but are heterosexuals who are forced by circumstances (e. g., restrictions on their sexual expression, such as is the case in prison, military camps, boarding schools, monasteries, and other single-sex environments) to resort to homosexual practices to gratify their sexual needs. Because situational homosexuality is believed to be a transitory phase in their lives (i.e., they are forced to engage in homosexual practices merely to accommodate situational pressure), their homosexuality is regarded as a perversion of true sexuality; those who engage in these practices are culpable for their actions. See D.S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London/New York: Longmans, Green, 1955), p. xi; H.K. Jones, *A Christian Understanding of the Homosexual* (New York: Association Press, 1966), pp. 20-23.

²⁸ Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," p. 11. To be fair, I should make it very clear that though Blake argues that "being a homosexual is not sin," he does believe that homosexual *practice* is sin. He is not preaching that "it's okay to be gay." Instead he is calling for an end to persecution of those who face homosexual temptation so they can be brought to Christ rather than driven from Him. He is right to argue that name-calling, ostracism, and violence against homosexuals are not Christian.

²⁹ Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), p. 75. It appears that in the Old Testament, the assumption is that everyone will marry, if possi-

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ble. Not only is there no allowance for an inverted homosexual, but there is no suggestion that some might choose not to marry but to remain single. Not until the New Testament do we find Jesus calling disciples to be willing to forsake their families and follow Him, and Paul urging disciples to forego marriage if possible and devote themselves to God's work.

³⁰ Writes Kubo: "Thus in treating the New Testament evidence we must keep two things in mind. Scripture does not reflect the understanding of homosexuality that we have today. The contemporary practices indicate that the New Testament statements directed themselves primarily if not exclusively to perverts, not inverts" (Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex*, p. 76).

³¹ Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," pp. 10, 11.

³² See Reni Dupertuis' interview with a 51-year-old businessman who describes himself as a "gay Adventist." (Reni Dupertuis, "To Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue, and People," *Scanner* [a newsletter published by the Glendale City, California, SDA Church], Winter 1999, p. 9). The article claims that there are "at least 5,000 gay Adventists in Southern California" (ibid.).

³³ The Andrews University student newspaper carried an article by David Rodgers (pseudonym), a denominationally employed Andrews University campus outreach coordinator for the gay group, Kinship. Rodgers states that his homosexuality "certainly wasn't a choice. . . . God made me this way and it's not something I should change. Or can change" (Yoonah Kim, "The Love That Dares Not Speak Its Name," *Student Movement*, November 4, 1992, p. 9). The same article refers to Ann, a 28-year-old lesbian who seeks to transfer her church membership to the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University. Ann speaks about her committed homosexual relationship in which God plays an important role: "I am a lesbian because God knows that that's the best thing for me. My homosexuality has actually brought me a lot closer to God than if I was a heterosexual" (ibid.).

³⁴ See, for example, Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Thomas E. Schmidt's *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995); and Marion L. Soards' *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995). To date, the most detailed Adventist response to Scriptural arguments of pro-gay advocates is the GC Biblical Research Institute's commissioned work by Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1988); cf. Raoul Dederen, "Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective," *Ministry*, September 1988, p. 1416. I am indebted to the following works for their excellent readable review and evaluation of the Scriptural arguments by pro-gay advocates: Carl Bridges, Jr. "The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality," in *Gay Rights or Wrongs: A Christian's Guide to Homosexual Issues and Ministry*, ed. Michael Mazzalongo (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1995), pp. 147-169; Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement*, pp. 185-202; John R.W. Stott, *Homosexual Partnerships?: Why Same-Sex Relationships Are Not a Christian Option* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1985).

³⁵ These pro-gay arguments are best articulated by former Yale University professor of history John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and Anglican theologian Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955). John R.W. Stott describes Bailey as "the first Christian theologian to reevaluate the traditional understanding of the Biblical prohibitions regarding homosexuality" (Stott, "Homosexual Marriage," *Christianity Today*, November 22, 1985, p. 22).

³⁶ Stanton L. Jones, "The Loving Opposition," *Christianity Today*, July 19, 1993, p. 13.

³⁷ Richard Lovelace, *The Church and Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1978), p. 113.

³⁸ "While Jesus is not reported to have spoken on homosexuality or homosexual behav-

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ior, His one recorded statement [in Matthew 19:38 and Mark 10:29] about human sexuality reveals that He understood males and females to be created by God for mutual relations that unite and fulfill both male and female in a (permanent) complementary union. There is no room here for an argument from silence concerning what Jesus 'might have' or 'must have' thought about homosexuality. But from Jesus' Own words we see that He understood human sexuality to be God's Own creation for the purpose of male and female uniting in a complementary relationship" (Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995], p. 28).

³⁹ Joe Dallas, *Desires in Conflict: Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity* (Eugene Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), p. 276.

⁴⁰ See my *Receiving the Word*, pp. 241-249, esp. pp. 279-321. Cf. my unpublished article, "A Bug in Adventist Hermeneutic," 1999, a summary version of which is to be published in a future issue of *Ministry* under the title, "Questions in the Quest for a Unifying Hermeneutic."

⁴¹ Readers will benefit from the following works that challenge the above "accommodation" hypotheses: Ronald A.G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993); Theodore D. Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery; or, An Inquiry into the Genius of the Mosaic System, and the Teachings of the Old Testament on the Subject of Human Rights* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864); cf. Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). These works offer Biblical evidence showing that God at no time tolerated polygamy and slavery as morally legitimate practices for His people. On the issue of the subjugation of women or "patriarchy," George W. Knight III, *Role Relationships of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), and Guenther Haas, "Patriarchy as an Evil That God Tolerated: Analysis and Implications for the Authority of Scripture," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, September 1995, pp. 321-326, have challenged the notion that male headship (in the home and church) is an evil practice that God tolerated.

⁴² R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press), p. 396.

⁴³ Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 22, 23 (emphasis his).

⁴⁴ Derek Kidner, "Additional Note on the Sin of Sodom," in *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1967), pp. 136, 137.

⁴⁵ For an insightful discussion of Leviticus 18, see Ronald A.G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society, 1993), pp. 70-81.

⁴⁶ Based on the repeated references to "aliens" in Leviticus 17 and 18, Gerhard F. Hasel concludes that these laws are not ceremonial, ritual, or cultic, "cannot be restricted to Israelites," but "are universal in nature" (see Hasel, "Clean and Unclean Meats in Leviticus 11: Still Relevant?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2 [Autumn 1991] :103, 104. Richard M. Davidson concurs. He maintains that the practices outlawed in Leviticus 18 "are not just destructive for Israel. They are universal abominations." See, Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Model," in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society, 1992), p. 121. Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 117-119, 196, 197.

⁴⁷ For an argument supporting the permanently binding nature of these passages, see Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality and the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140/3 (July-September 1983) :259-266, especially p. 264 ff. on "The Relevance of the Law."

⁴⁸ Carl Bridges, Jr., "The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality," in *Gay Rights or Wrongs: A Christians Guide to Homosexual Issues and Ministry*, ed. Michael Mazzalongo

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(Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1995), p. 160.

⁴⁹ A detailed exegetical study of Romans 1:26, 27 appears in Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?*, pp. 64-85.

⁵⁰ For more on this, see D.F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *Arsenokoitai* (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984) :125-153, esp. pp. 126-129. Cf. Zaas, "1 Corinthians 6:9 ff.: Was Homosexuality Condoned in the Corinthian Church?" *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 17 (1979): 205-212.

⁵¹ For more on this, see Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140/4 (October-December 1983) :350-358; David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150/3 (July-September 1993) :327-340; and "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150/4 (October-December 1993) :479-492.

⁵² Donald Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, p. 198.

⁵³ Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures*, pp. 163, 164.

⁵⁴ Bridges, Jr., "The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality," in *Gay Rights or Wrongs*, p. 169. Noel Weeks states it well: "It may seem kind to say that a person is not responsible for his sin. But it has the harsh and cruel consequence that sin is therefore outside the scope of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. The homosexual is doomed to live with the misery of sin. Make no mistake. Sin and misery go together. When we deny the homosexual the Gospel we tell him to expect a continuance of his misery. The point is often made that the church should show compassion to the homosexual. So it should. The first item of that compassion is telling him how escape is possible. Why should he seek the church that tells him that nothing can be done for him? He may like such a church to ease the burden of his guilty conscience, but such a church has nothing to offer him" (Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* [Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988], p. 172).

Chapter 40

Does the Bible Really Support Polygamy?¹

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Introduction

Even though polygamy is often thought of as an African issue, this custom is a universal marriage form practiced among many of the societies of the world. For example, the world religion of Islam, with more than one billion adherents, does not limit the male partner in marriage to a single spouse—a practice that has resulted in difficulties for Christian missionaries. As one researcher of Islam put it: "Throughout the history of Muslim-Christian interaction, polygamy has been a point of deep division between the two groups."²

The many documents produced concerning the Bible and polygamy show that over the centuries three different principal views have been held. One view is that the Bible does not condemn polygamy, even though it might restrict it carefully. A second position is that the Old Testament at times required polygamy, while the New Testament completely ruled it out. A third perspective is that monogamy is promoted throughout the Bible, while polygamy is condemned.

The research study on which this article is based undertook a contextual investigation of the Biblical passages related to plural marriage. Two crucial questions were considered: First, what do the Old and New Testaments teach about polygamy? And second, what theological principles emerge from this study that can provide the basis for a Biblically sound policy on polygamy?

The Genesis of Marital Form

The book of Genesis provides a concrete account of the institution of marriage. Genesis 1:27, 28 and 2:18, 21-24 specifically state that God is the

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originator of the marriage relationship.

From Genesis 2:21-24 it becomes clear that this marriage took place between one man and one woman. The repeated use of singular nouns and pronouns in this passage is noteworthy. J.S. Wright and J.A. Thompson correctly state that "monogamy is implicit in the story of Adam and Eve, since God created only one wife for Adam."³

Genesis 2:18 records God's words: "I will make him a helper suitable for him." The Hebrew term *k'negdo* means a "counterpart,"⁴ one "corresponding to him."⁵ This stress on equal partnership indicates that, for a marital relationship to be genuinely reciprocal, it would need to be monogamous.

Scholars have noticed the significance of the Hebrew term *'al-ken* ("therefore") in Genesis 2:24,⁶ which begins the closing statement about the first marriage. Herbert Ryle recognizes that this "sentence beginning with 'therefore' supplies the application, or relation, of the ancient narrative to later times."⁷ Even though these words in Genesis 2:24 were physically penned by a human being, i.e., Moses, the inspired Bible writer, since they are the utterance of divine revelation, "Christ could quote them, therefore, as the Word of God (Matthew 19:5)."⁸ Thus, Gordon Wenham correctly understands Genesis 2:24 as "applying the principles of the first marriage to every subsequent marriage."⁹ As the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* aptly states: "These words express the deepest physical and spiritual unity of man and woman, and hold up monogamy before the world as the form of marriage ordained by God."¹⁰

Though a considerable amount of Genesis (chapters 6-9) is devoted to the story of the global Flood,¹¹ it is apparent that not much is recorded about the marital status of those involved in the narrative. However, the Genesis record is clear, not only that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8), but that Noah and his three sons were married to one wife each. As Tryggve Kronholm observed: "Noah himself as well as his three sons are described in an unambiguous way as monogamous."¹² Missiologist Clifton Maberly is thus correct when he recognizes that the monogamy of Noah and his sons "is very significant to an understanding of God's will and dealing with the polygamous marriage variant."¹³

The identical charge that God gave to the world's first couple, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28),¹⁴ He now repeated to Noah and his sons (9:1), all of whom were monogamous. Samuel Dresner posits that, "in this, the pattern of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is replicated."¹⁵ God was in a sense repeating history.¹⁶ As Dresner so fittingly concludes: "The message seems clear: human society is meant to be composed of families, of monogamous families."¹⁷

Does the Bible Really Support Polygamy?

Polygamy in Old Testament Passages

Many questions have been raised about the issue of concubinage in the Bible. The Mosaic laws make no mention of concubines. However, the narrative portions of Scripture indicate that the terms "wife" and "concubine" were sometimes used to describe distinct categories, while at other times they were used interchangeably. The difference relates primarily to the more formal aspects of the marriage,¹⁸ while the legal status of a concubine and her children was the same as that of the wife and her children.¹⁹ In fact, these terms are so similar that at times they are linked together to form a "wife-concubine." Only the original wife is never called a concubine in the Bible. Thus, both wives and concubines formed part of the polygamous homes of certain characters of Scripture.

Certain texts in the Bible are sometimes interpreted as permitting or even promoting the practice of polygamy. These are briefly addressed here.

The Law Concerning the Female Slave

Several scholars have concluded that the Mosaic stipulation of Exodus 21:7-11 supported and legalized the practice of polygamy.²⁰ The specific texts that are most disputed are the first part of v. 8 and v. 10, which read: "If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master, who designated her for *himself*, then he shall let her be redeemed.... If he takes *another woman*, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her *conjugal rights*" (emphasis added). Each of the emphasized phrases will be briefly discussed below.

A careful reading of the text in the original Hebrew shows that the slave master did not marry or espouse/designate the woman for himself (v. 8), contrary to the way in which most English Bibles have misinterpreted the passage, as Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser correctly points out.²¹ In addition to Young's Literal Translation,²² the Amplified Bible has rightly rendered the Hebrew as follows: "If she does not please her master, who has *not espoused* her to himself, he shall let her be redeemed."²³ Once this point is recognized, then it becomes clear that the phrase "if he takes *another woman*" does not mean "an additional wife," but rather it refers to a woman distinct and different from the first.²⁴

The Hebrew term translated *conjugal rights* appears only once in the entire Bible. Thus, while most versions have concluded that it must refer to "sexual relations," as the New Century Version has it, there is no linguistic support for this assumption. However, as various scholars have noted, there is linguistic support for rendering this unique Hebrew word as shelter, or dwelling, or habitation.²⁵ In simple terms, the master was required to provide food,

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clothing, and shelter for the female servant whom he did not marry. As Young's Literal Translation has put it: "Her food, her covering, and her *habitation*, he doth not withdraw." When interpreted according to the actual Hebrew text, and the clear weight of linguistic evidence, this law does not contradict the Edenic model of monogamy.

Law of the Firstborn and His Rights

Since the law in Deuteronomy 21:15-17 begins with the phrase, "If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved," some have referred to this passage as an indication that polygamy was regarded as a normal and licit practice in Israel.²⁶ However, Kaiser notes that the Hebrew language "is notoriously disinterested in our Western preoccupation with the tense of the verb and time in general. . . . [Thus,] it definitely is wrong to insist that both wives are living, for that would be asking the imperfect verb form (future or continuous action of the verb) to bear a load it was not meant to carry."²⁷

Since Deuteronomy 24:1-4 recognizes the issue of divorce, another possibility is that this could be a case relating to a man who marries again after the divorce of the first wife. This nonpolygamous understanding of the regulation is not merely a modern notion, since the Samaritan Version, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate rendered the passage as concerned with a man who had two wives in succession and not simultaneously.²⁸ Based on an understanding of Hebrew grammar, and on v. 17 which notes that the father "shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved" as deserving of the birthright privileges, Kaiser aptly notes that the concern of this law is "inheritance rights, not polygamy,"²⁹ and maintains that this Mosaic stipulation does not suggest even a "tacit approval of polygamy."³⁰

Laws on Sexual Relations With an Unengaged Woman

Since Deuteronomy 22:28,29 requires the man committing a sexual crime against an unengaged virgin to marry the woman, some have concluded that this law would require polygamy in the case of a man already married. However, a very similar law is found in Exodus 22:16, 17. As various careful Bible scholars have noted, this Deuteronomic legislation is a repetition and expansion of the one in Exodus, where the guilty man is not required to wed the woman.³¹ In brief, when these regulations regarding sexual offenses are properly seen as parallel, they do not condone or command the practice of polygamy.

Levirate Law and Practice

In the discussion of polygamy in the Old Testament, perhaps the most

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frequently mentioned issue is the "levirate"³³ law as found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

Various writers concur with Eugene Hillman, who posits that in the Bible, polygamy "is dictated by the levirate law."³³

Pentateuchal Legislation. Deuteronomy 25:5 states: "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her."

Based on this verse it has been conjectured that this was a compulsory law that would cause a man to become polygamous, if he were already married. However, Deuteronomy 25:5-10 shows that the stipulation is divided into two parts: one-third lays down the expectation, while two-thirds explain what to do if the brother-in-law declines to marry his deceased brother's wife. This shows that this law "allows the brother the option of refusing."³⁴ Moreover, as Old Testament exegete Herbert Leupold observed, the levirate system implied that "the brother of the deceased, *if unmarried*, would take the widow to wife."³⁵ Thus, this law would not require polygamous unions.

The Levirate in Patriarchal Times. According to the Biblical account, the levirate custom was practiced as early as the time of the sons of Jacob, centuries prior to the time the formal legislation was recorded. No evidence of polygamy occurs in this entire narrative in Genesis 38. As Samuel Wishard stated: "There is no polygamy here. It was the first marriage of each son."³⁶

Practice in the Time of the Judges. There has been some debate as to whether the book of Ruth deals with the levirate custom or not. The peculiarities are probably due to the fact that three institutions are exemplified in this one marriage, namely: the levirate, redemption (*go'el*), and inheritance.³⁷ Nevertheless, in the book of Ruth this optional practice seems to be similarly carried out monogamously.

In short, there is actually no evidence in the Biblical text that the levirate required or resulted in polygamy. W. White concurs, noting that the Biblical levirate marriages "appear to have been monogamous."³⁸

Symbolism and Marital Forms

In the latter part of the Old Testament, God's relationship to His people is often described in terms of family ties. Polygamous marriage symbolism appears in Ezekiel 23, and some have suggested that this shows that God is not against plural marriages. Roland de Vaux, cautions that this comparison "is merely to adapt the allegory of chapter 16 to the historical conditions which

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prevailed after the political schism."³⁹ In fact, if these two kingdoms were to return in faithfulness to the Lord, they would come back as one united people. Thus the illustration would end with God in a monogamous relationship with His chosen nation, just as at the first. Clearly, it is inappropriate to conclude that the use of this allegory implies that God condones or sanctions polygamy in any manner.⁴⁰

In addition to the above passages, there are two additional regulations that address the issue of polygamy more directly, both located in the Pentateuch.

The Regulation on Marriage to Two "Sisters"

Leviticus 18:18 reads: "And you shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness." This text "has given occasion for much dispute."⁴¹ As one scholar alleged: "The command that a man must not have two sisters as wives at the same time (Leviticus 18:18) implies that he may have two wives who are not sisters."⁴²

Most frequently Leviticus 18:18 has been classified as a law against incest. However, as Angelo Tosato has correctly indicated, from v. 7 through v. 17 only, every verse begins with the identical term, *'erwat* (meaning "nakedness of"), and culminates in *lo' t'galleh* (rendered "you are not to uncover"), showing that these laws belong together as anti-incestuous regulations,⁴³ due to "the homogeneity and peculiarity of its formation and content."⁴⁴

In contradistinction to the above, vv. 18-23 open with the conjunction *waw* and close with various permanent prohibitions regularly introduced by the negative *lo'*. Tosato again rightly notes that the two distinct and formally unifying elements of this new list suggest that the second series of laws, although not identical, are to be considered as a unit.⁴⁵ Many scholars recognize this.⁴⁶ Thus, since v. 18 belongs to the more general set of regulations, the interpretation of the crucial phrase, "a woman to her sister," must likewise be open to its broader sense, and not be restricted to only a literal, blood relative.⁴⁷

The very term "sister" (*'ahot*) is used in the Old Testament in a variety of ways:⁴⁸ from a blood sister (e.g., Genesis 4:22), to a female fellow citizen (Numbers 25:18; Hosea 2:1). Thus, Tosato concludes that "*'iss'ah 'el-'hotah* should be interpreted here according to its more proper meaning (the broader one),"⁴⁹ i.e., "two women (fellow citizens) in general."⁵⁰

Interestingly, this was the very manner in which the ancient Qumran community viewed Leviticus 18:18—as a law against "taking two wives during their lifetime."⁵¹ Yigael Yadin, in his study of the Qumran Temple Scroll 57:17-19, observed that "the scroll interprets the Bible's 'her sister' to mean not a

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blood sister but 'another woman,' the 'sister' simply serving as a term to define the gender."⁵²

Furthermore, several scholars have recognized that the linking of words together in the phrase 'issah 'el-'hotah (literally, "a woman to her sister")⁵³ may require an idiomatic interpretation, as this phrase or its equivalents are rendered in Scripture. In fact, Christopher Wordsworth observes that these phrases are *never* used to "designate *blood* relationships of *two sisters* or *two brothers*, but simply the addition of one person or thing to another of the same kind."⁵⁴ Therefore, from simply a point of translational consistency Leviticus 18:18 should likewise be rendered in a figurative manner as "one in addition to another."⁵⁵

The laws in this section "are not just destructive for Israel. They are universal abominations."⁵⁶ As Gerhard Hasel noted: These laws are not ceremonial, ritual, or cultic, "cannot be restricted to Israelites," but "are universal in nature."⁵⁷ Thus, the prohibition of polygamy in Leviticus 18:18 can be seen as a universal law applicable to all.

On the basis of the evidence presented here, Leviticus 18:18 should read as the New American Standard Bible alternative rendering puts it: "And you shall not take *a wife in addition to another* to be a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness."⁵⁸ This translation, as John Murray notes, is an "express condemnation" of polygamy.⁵⁹ The weight of evidence thus shows that this Levitical legislation is clearly in harmony with, and supportive of, the monogamous model set up originally by God.⁶⁰

Legislation on the Marital Status of the King

The law concerning royal polygamy is found in Deuteronomy 17:16, 17: "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way'. Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself."

Many have concluded that, as Disani Senyonjo put it: "This is not a verse against polygyny"⁶¹ but simply a warning against the abuse of an acceptable practice. Others disagree, such as A.O. Nkwoka, who says: "If God forbade the king who had the command of his nation's resources from going into polygyny, then most of the reasons for justifying polygyny cannot hold."⁶² Which view is more faithful to the Biblical text?

First, the language and content of the law in v. 17 shows that this prohibition is not against possessing silver and gold per se, but rather against hoarding *great* amounts of wealth.⁶³ Second, the prohibition concerning the accumulation of animals needs analysis. Other passages, such as Isaiah 31:1, shed light on this

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prohibition: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, ... but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord!"⁶⁴ The issue here was reliance on others rather than on God.⁶⁵

Third, Deuteronomy 17:17 states: "Neither shall he *rabah* wives for himself, lest his heart turn away." Since linguistic study indicates that *rabah* ("increase" or "multiply") covers a range from twice as much on upwards, it appears evident that this law prohibits the king from becoming polygamous.⁶⁶

Interestingly, the expectations of the king, outlined in Deuteronomy, were essentially the same for the common people.⁶⁷ Based on this Biblical evidence, Patrick Miller has concluded that Deuteronomy 17:17 places upon the king "the obligations incumbent upon every Israelite. In that sense, Deuteronomy's primary concern was that the king *be the model Israelite*."⁶⁸ Such a broader understanding of the Deuteronomic prohibition of polygamy is also evident in the understanding of Ellen White. Commenting on Solomon who "fell into the sinful practice of other kings, of having many wives,"⁶⁹ she observed: "God commanded Moses to warn *the people* against having a plurality of wives. 'Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away.'⁷⁰ In short, then, the legislation found in Deuteronomy 17:16, 17 forbade kings to marry more than one spouse; and since the king is a model, this law, in its broader application, also outlawed the practice of polygamy for the entire community.

Summary of Old Testament Passages on Polygamy

When the crucial Old Testament passages on marital forms are contextually examined and analyzed, none of them can be seen to command or condone the practice of polygamy. On the contrary, the Pentateuch records explicit laws forbidding the practice of polygamy. Both the prohibitions of polygamy as well as the other passages relating to marriage reveal an underlying harmony and basic accord with the monogamous marriage institution as originally set up by God Himself in Eden.

New Testament Passages Relating to Polygamy

In view of the absence of any direct reference to polygamy in the New Testament, this section considers the materials dealing with marital relationships that have clear implications for polygamy.

Jesus' Statements on Marriage

Use of the Term "One Flesh." The discussion of Jesus with the Pharisees

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concerning divorce is found in Matthew 19:3-9. He appealed specifically to the passage in Genesis 2:24 as God's word concerning marriage.⁷¹ However, in referring to this passage, Jesus did not quote from the Hebrew text. In the words of R.C.H. Lenski: "Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, using the LXX [Septuagint] which reproduces the Hebrew exactly save that *hoi duo*, 'the two,' is added in order to bring out the sense of the original."⁷² Robert Hitchens comments that the word "two" makes it plain that "'one flesh' can in no way include polygamous marriages. It is not 'three, four, five, or six' that become 'one flesh' but 'two.'"⁷³ Several scholars have therefore appropriately concluded that this phrase not only approves monogamy, but it "also excludes polygamy."⁷⁴

The Practice of the Levirate Custom. The only clear New Testament reference to this custom is recorded in Matthew 22:23-28 in a dialogue between Jesus and the Sadducees.⁷⁵ G.K. Falusi recognizes that "we are not told whether or not the seven brothers were previously married and therefore became polygamous at the time each inherited the woman."⁷⁶ A solution to this problem may come from the final question posed by the Sadducees: "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife" (Luke 20:33). If the six brothers who inherited the woman had already been married, the Sadducees' question would have been moot, since it would have been obvious that the wife would have belonged to the first brother only. Thus, crucial to the argument is the assumption that this case involved "seven men with only one wife."⁷⁷

The later interpretation by the Babylonian Talmud, which indicates that the levirate was not to be practiced polygamously, provides additional support for a monogamous levirate system.⁷⁸ As Geoffrey Parrinder noted, the teaching of the rabbis was against a married man's taking a widow as a second wife.⁷⁹ Thus, as in the Old Testament, the weight of evidence in the New suggests that the levirate was practiced monogamously.

The Meaning of *Porneia* in Acts 15

In a letter sent to the churches by the Jerusalem Council, which met around A.D. 49,⁸⁰ the apostles and elders provided instruction for the new Gentile believers. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28) these early church leaders informed the new believers that, while they did not have to be circumcised, they needed to "abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication [*porneia*]" (Acts 15:29). If these four prohibitions are compared with those recorded in Leviticus, it becomes evident that, "when the Council formulated its decision,

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the restrictions were recorded in their correct order according to Leviticus 17-18."⁸¹ Recognizing the correspondence between Acts 15 and the Levitical laws, Hans Conzelmann concludes: "These are the prohibitions of Leviticus 17-18 (in v. 29 they are even in the same order)."⁸²

Conzelmann and other scholars have noted that these forbidden sexual relationships of Acts 15:29 cover both the incestuous alliances as well as the various sexual relationships in Leviticus 18.⁸³ These include adultery (v. 20), bestiality (v. 23), homosexuality (v. 22), incest (vv. 7-17), and polygamy (v. 18).⁸⁴

The restrictions of the laws of Leviticus 17-18 were not only for the Israelites. The concept of inclusiveness, "whether he is a native or an alien" (Leviticus 17:15), is repeated several times in this Levitical legislation,⁸⁵ indicating that these "are universal abominations"⁸⁶ that apply to both Israelite and non-Israelite.⁸⁷ Thus, just as these specific laws in Leviticus were universally applicable moral requirements,⁸⁸ so the apostles and elders, under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28),⁸⁹ instructed the new Gentile believers that, among other things, all Christians were required to *apechomai*, i.e., "abstain from" and "give up" *porneia* in all its forms, including the practice of polygamy.

Paul's Instruction Concerning Marriage

Marital Form in 1 Corinthians 7:1-4. While other passages in the New Testament discuss marriage,⁹⁰ 1 Corinthians 7 appears to be the only chapter that deals virtually exclusively with the matter of marriage.

After giving the reason for his instruction, Paul says: "Let *each man* have *his own wife*-, and let *each woman* have *her own husband*" (v. 2, emphasis added). The distributive concepts, "each man" (*hekastos*) and "each woman" (*hekaste*), point strongly to the fact that there is a single individual on each side of the marital relationship.⁹¹ Talking about the word "each," Paul Hamar comments that "this [term] was applied first to the man, then to the woman. There is to be one mate."⁹² Or, as Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer state more directly: "This forbids polygamy."⁹³

Various Biblical scholars recognize that "the use of the possessive reflexive pronoun *heautou* [of himself] and the adjective *idion* [own] imply monogamy."⁹⁴ As Lenski observed: "The two accusatives 'his own wife' and 'her own husband' clearly point to monogamy and accord with the original divine institution of marriage."⁹⁵ Moreover, as F.W. Grosheide noted, the words "*let have* implies that monogamous marriage is a commandment."⁹⁶ Adam Clarke commented: "Here, plurality of wives and husbands is most strictly forbidden."⁹⁷

Commenting on verse 3, Curtis Morrill aptly states: "The Greek word,

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homoios (likewise), between the obligation of the man to the woman and of the woman to the man, stands as an equal sign. Such could never be true in a polygamous family."⁹⁸

Verse 4 states that just as the husband has authority over the wife's body, so the wife has authority over the husband's body. Christian Kling notes that "this is a reciprocity whereby alone marriage receives and maintains its monogamous character."⁹⁹ On this, Morrill observes: "This gave the woman the same rights and privileges as her husband had in the sexual relation. Such a thought would be utterly impossible in a polygamous marriage."¹⁰⁰

In brief then, verse 2 can be seen as a monogamous command that excludes all polygamy. The equal rights to sexual relations between husband and wife, mentioned in verse 3, likewise appears to forbid polygamy. Furthermore, true reciprocity of authority over each other's body (v. 4) is apparently only possible in a monogamous marital relationship. Thus, it can be said that 1 Corinthians 7:1-4 "contains an accumulative and overwhelming argument in favor of monogamous marriage."¹⁰¹

The "Pauline Privilege"¹⁰² and Polygamy. In the discussion of the treatment of newly converted polygamists, some have referred to Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:20: "Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called."

Based on that verse, David Gitari alleges that if practicing polygamists were to hear the Gospel, and approached the apostle Paul, "he might have said, 'everyone should remain in the state in which he was called' (1 Corinthians 7:20)."¹⁰³ In simple terms, it is claimed that one can become a Christian believer and continue to practice polygamy. However, as pointed out above, the first four verses of this very chapter set forth monogamous marriage as the standard for marriages for Christians. It is clear that Paul's inspired counsel in the latter part of the chapter would not conflict with these earlier statements.

A second factor that needs to be taken into account relates to verse 19: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God." Thus, when it is recognized that polygamy is prohibited and monogamy enjoined in God's "law,"¹⁰⁴ the summons of verse 19 for the convert to keep God's commandments becomes the Biblical basis for dissolving all polygamous unions.

Robertson and Plummer rightly point out: "What is laid down is that, unless one's external condition of life is a sinful one, no violent change in it should be made, simply because one has become a Christian."¹⁰⁵ As John Calvin observed, this "condition" in which one is called "means a lawful mode

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of life,"¹⁰⁶ which would obviously exclude polygamy.

When all the salient aspects of 1 Corinthians 7 are taken into account, it becomes plain that the inspired apostle Paul teaches faithful monogamy for all believers.

Meaning of "Husband of One Wife." In the Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, the apostle Paul gave specific counsel regarding the kind of people to be chosen as leaders in the church. This includes the fact that a leader must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).

It is well recognized that this phrase, which "has been debated from ancient times,"¹⁰⁷ has "caused much controversy."¹⁰⁸ Various scholars and Bible commentators have suggested a variety of interpretations and explanations.¹⁰⁹

The investigation of the phrase "husband of one wife" has brought to light several facts. It has been viewed as prohibiting only church leaders from polygamy while permitting laity this practice. Also, it has been interpreted as suggesting that the bishop is married to the church and therefore must remain celibate, that a church leader must be married in order to serve, and that no remarried divorce(e)s or remarried widowers can hold leadership posts in the church. Since each of these views contradicts the context and the text itself, none can be considered acceptable.

However, valid linguistic support can be shown for understanding the "husband of one wife" to refer to monogamous fidelity. This idea comes out in the New English Bible rendition, that the leader must be "faithful to his one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2). As Ralph Earle put it: "It means monogamy—only one wife at one time—and that the overseer must be completely faithful to his wife."¹¹⁰ Nothing in the text or context limits this requirement to only church leaders. In brief, then, the Pauline writings on marital structures indicate a consistent position concerning the form of marriage acceptable for Christians. Polygamy is incompatible with Scripture. Monogamy is enjoined.

Synopsis of Principles From This Research

From the study of the original institution of marriage, the Old Testament regulations related to polygamy, and the New Testament statements related to marital structures, several factors significant for the issue of polygamy have been observed.

The Form of Marriage Instituted in Eden

From a Scriptural point of view, marriage cannot be considered merely a

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societal convention. According to the Genesis account of the first human couple, God Himself instituted marriage as a special relationship between one man and one woman. Marriage has God as its divine originator and author. Therefore, the fundamental nature and structure of marriage must derive from a consideration of the divine will.

The record of the first marriage shows that it was unquestionably monogamous. One man and one woman were joined into a reciprocal relationship in which the two became "one flesh." Not only was this monogamous union the prototype or pattern, but it was in reality set up by God as the "order and law"¹¹¹ for all future marriages. This divine design was in essence reinstated at the time of the worldwide Deluge through the monogamous marriages of Noah and his three sons. Thus, the new world began just as the original one had in Eden, with monogamy as God's standard.

The New Testament materials confirm this Old Testament view of marital structure. In discussing marriage, Jesus pointed His listeners back to the norm established by God. By His choice of words, He indicated that monogamy is the divine requirement. This emphasis on monogamy becomes very clear in the writings of the apostle Paul. In a chapter devoted to marital issues, he specifically and repeatedly indicates that true marriage can only be monogamous. His use of language indicates that monogamy is not merely a choice among other types of marital forms. Rather, like the Genesis statement, Paul prescribes monogamy with the force of a command.

This evidence suggests that, in its consideration of how to deal with polygamists, the church needs to recognize the sanctity of the marital standard established by the Creator. Monogamy thus appears in the Biblical materials not just as an ideal to be followed when convenient, but rather as the only permissible form of marriage.

Laws and Regulations Regarding Polygamy

An extended study of Leviticus 18:18 indicated that, according to the structural and linguistic contexts, plural marriage was the specific target of this regulation. The weight of evidence showed that Leviticus 18:18 is a universal law that distinctly and deliberately prohibits polygamy for believer and nonbeliever alike. A similar legislation is located in Deuteronomy 17:17, among the specific commands for future rulers of the people. Since these rulers were to be the role models for the people, it is evident that this law also forbade all from practicing polygamy.

While in the New Testament nothing is directly stated about polygamy, Acts 15 and the writings of Paul deal with this practice. Among other things,

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the instructions in Acts 15 indicate that all new Gentile converts must abstain from and give up *porneia*, i.e., all forbidden sexual relationships. In outlawing this *porneia*, which included polygamy, the Jerusalem Council in essence prohibited plural marriage. Similarly, the discussion of 1 Corinthians 7, which maintains that monogamy is the standard for all, calls upon new believers to bring their lives into conformity with God's moral standards. In delineating the qualifications for church leaders, Paul noted that the leader had to be the "husband of one wife." Just as with the rulers of Israel, these leaders were to be the role models for the people. Thus, this exclusion of polygamy applies to all members.

Conclusion

In both the Old and New Testaments, therefore, there is clear evidence forbidding the practice of polygamy. These regulations confirm and support the monogamous law as originally set up. The conclusions of this study concur with Ellen White that "the Gospel condemns the practice of polygamy,"¹¹² which is "a violation of the law of God."¹¹³ In brief then, as Mavumilusa Makanzu states: "The whole of God's Word condemns polygamy."¹¹⁴

Endnotes

¹ For an in-depth analysis of the issue of plural marriage in Scripture, see the doctoral research, published in its edited and expanded form: Ronald A.G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993). This article is an abbreviated, revised, and edited form of part of that larger study.

² Diane D'Souza, "The Muslim Practice of Polygamy," *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 8 (July-September 1985) :68. Hinduism also accepts polygamy; see Arvind Sharma, "Marriage in the Hindu Religious Tradition," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22 (1985):71.

³ J.S. Wright and J.A. Thompson, *The New Bible Dictionary* (1962), s.v. "Marriage," p. 787.

⁴ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958), p. 591.

⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 149. Further support for the corresponding nature of the relationship between man and woman can be seen in the "ring construction" of the entire Creation account of male and female. See Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 26 (Spring 1988) :14.

⁶ See, for example, James Comper Gray, and George M. Adams, eds., *The Biblical Encyclopedia*, 5 vols. (Cleveland: F.M. Barton, 1903), vol. 1, p. 18; Robert Davidson, Cambridge

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Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), "Genesis 1-11," pp. 37, 38.

⁷ Herbert E. Ryle, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1921), "The Book of Genesis," p. 39.

⁸ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 1, p. 90.

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1987), "Genesis 1-15," p. 70.

¹⁰ F.D. Nichol, ed., *SDA Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 7 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976-1980), vol. 1, p. 227. See also Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1, p. 90.

¹¹ See Genesis 6-9.

¹² Tryggve Kronholm, "Polygami och Monogami i Gamla Testamentet: Med en Utblick över den Antika Judendomen och Nya Testamentet," *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok* 47 (1982) :66.

¹³ Clifton R. Maberly, "The Polygamous Variant: The Policy and Practice of a Church," 1975, TMs [photocopy], p. 5, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

¹⁵ Samuel H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation," *Judaism* 40 (Summer 1991) :313.

¹⁶ "Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!" [a Debate Between Orson Pratt and J.P. Newman]. Baltimore, Md.: J.S. Dye, 1874), p. 15.

¹⁷ Dresner, p. 313.

¹⁸ It appears that generally a "marriage" was a public affair, which sometimes included celebrations, as in the cases of Jacob (Genesis 29:21-28) and Samson (Judges 14). Also, the marriage was formalized by the dowry, as in the cases of Isaac (Genesis 24:53), Jacob (Genesis 29:18-20), David (1 Samuel 18:20-27), and Solomon (1 Kings 9:16). Regarding "concubines," none of these events is noted in relation to taking on these additional secondary spouses.

¹⁹ Cf. Douglas E. Welch, "A Biblical Perspective on Polygamy" (MA thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1977), p. 47; Louis M. Epstein, "The Institution of Concubinage Among the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 6 (1934-1935), p. 168.

²⁰ See, for example, Hillman, who says: "In the Mosaic law polygamy is clearly regarded as a normal and licit practice (cf. Exodus 21:10; Leviticus 18:18; Deuteronomy 21:15-17);" Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1975), p. 145. See also Pamela S. Mann, "Toward a Biblical Understanding of Polygamy," *Missiology: An International Review* 17 (January 1989) :17; David R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study* (London: Epworth, 1953), p. 132; cf. David Michael Hall, "Polygamy in the Bible and the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study" (MTh thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), p. 25.

²¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 184.

²² "If evil in the eyes of her lord, so that he hath *not betrothed* her ..." (emphasis added).

²³ This rendition is similar to George Lamsa's translation of the Aramaic of the Peshitta: "If her master hates her, so that he will *not take her to himself as a wife*, then let her be redeemed" (emphasis added).

²⁴ Besides this passage, the Hebrew term for "another" appears 12 times in Scripture, five of which refer to another *in addition to*, and seven of which mean another as *distinct and different*. Clearly, the immediate and broader contexts must determine the meaning.

²⁵ See, for example, Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1964), p. 269; Nahum M. Sarna, *The*

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JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), "Exodus," p. 121; Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1906), pp. 732, 733; Robert Jamieson, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), "Genesis-Deuteronomy," p. 364.

²⁶ Hillman, p. 145. See also Mann, p. 17; Hall, p. 25.

²⁷ Kaiser, p. 187 (emphasis original).

²⁸ See Kaiser, p. 187; Jamieson, p. 670.

²⁹ See Kaiser, p. 187.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See G.R. Driver and John C. Miles, eds., *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935), p. 53.

³² The word "levirate" comes from the Latin *levir*, meaning "husband's brother," or "brother-in-law." See *Webster's New World Dictionary*, (1988), s.v. "Levirate."

³³ Hillman, p. 158. See also Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 5th ed., 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1921), vol. 3, pp. 41, 42; Norman L. Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p. 206.

³⁴ Wright and Thompson, p. 789.

³⁵ Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), p. 980 (emphasis added).

³⁶ Samuel Ellis Wishard, *The Divine Law of Marriage, or, The Bible Against Polygamy* (New York: American Tract Society, 1816), p. 50. See also "Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!" p. 34.

³⁷ E. Neufeld, *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1944), p. 38. See also Kaiser, p. 191.

³⁸ W. White, Jr., "Family," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), vol. 2, p. 498. Wishard says that always "the kinsman who took in marriage the widow of the deceased kinsman was unmarried;" p. 50.

³⁹ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Times*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), p. 26.

⁴⁰ Note that the allegory used by Jesus in Luke 16:19-31 faces similar dangers if taken literally and interpreted without a recognition of its contextual usage.

⁴¹ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 251.

⁴² M.M. Kalisch, "Leviticus," part 2, *A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament with a New Translation* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1872), p. 373.

⁴³ See Angelo Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984) :199-214.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 203.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 205, 206.

⁴⁶ See, for example, J.P. Porter, "Leviticus," *Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 148; S.H. Kellogg, "The Book of Leviticus," *The Expositor's Bible* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1908), vol. 2, p. 383.

⁴⁷ The temporary nature of this law further differentiates it from those on incest, which are implicitly of perpetual duration.

⁴⁸ See *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (1979), s.v. "Sister"; K.E. Corley, "Sister," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (1988), vol. 4, p. 534.

⁴⁹ Tosato, p. 208.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 203.

⁵¹ Louis Ginzberg, *An Unknown Jewish Sect* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of

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America, 1976), p. 19.

⁵² Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect* (New York: Random, 1985), p. 200.

⁵³ See, for example, Kaiser, pp. 116, 117, 185, 186; Jamieson, *Genesis-Deuteronomy*, p. 486; Murray, pp. 250-256; Tosato; H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 2, "Leviticus, Numbers" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 274, 275.

⁵⁴ Christopher Wordsworth, *The Five Books of Moses, 3rd ed., vol. 1, part 2, The Holy Bible, in the Authorized Version; with Notes and Introductions* (London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place, 1871), p. 58.

⁵⁵ Kalisch notes that after the Protestant Reformation this nonreciprocal, Old Testament translators Franciscus Junius and Emmanuel Tremellius again suggested idiomatic translation in 1575 (see Kalisch, p. 397).

⁵⁶ Richard M. Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Model," in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers, eds. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), p. 121.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104. See also Kaiser on the issue of universal law in connection with sexual matters; pp. 117-119, 196, 197.

⁵⁸ Emphasis added. Or "a woman unto another;" Young's Literal Translation. The alternate rendering in the KJV similarly states, "Neither shalt thou take one wife to another."

⁵⁹ Murray, p. 253.

⁶⁰ See Murray, who notes that this "interpretation would hark back to the original ordinance of monogamy"; p. 253.

⁶¹ Disani Christopher Senyonjo, "Polygamy, Monogamy and Divorce (DMin project report, Hartford Seminary, 1983), p. 58.

⁶² A.O. Nkwoka, "The Church and Polygamy in Africa: The 1988 Lambeth Conference Resolution." *Africa Theological Journal* 19 (1990) :147.

⁶³ See David Hyrum Smith, *The Bible Versus Polygamy* (Piano, Ill.: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, True Latter Day Saints' Herald Office, 1983), p. 9; Lewis Grout, *A Reply to Bishop Colenso's Remarks on the Proper Treatment of Cases of Polygamy as Found Already Existing in Converts from Heathenism* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: May 8c Davis, 1855), p. 16.

⁶⁴ See also Psalm 20:8; Isaiah 2:7-9; 30:1-7; Amos 2:15; 4:10; Micah 5:10-15.

⁶⁵ See also Psalm 33:17: "A horse is a false hope for victory."

⁶⁶ As Smith put it: "Twice one are two, and this is multiplication;" p. 9. Note, however, that the root meaning of *rabah* is "increase," and not necessarily "multiply" in the mathematical sense.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Deuteronomy 17:19; cf. 6:7; 8:1; 11:1; also, Deuteronomy 17:20; cf. 8:14; also, Deuteronomy 17:17; cf. 8:13-17.

⁶⁸ Patrick D. Miller, "Deuteronomy," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), pp. 148, 149 (emphasis original).

⁶⁹ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945), vol. 4a, p. 100.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, (emphasis added).

⁷¹ See Murray, p. 29; Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1, p. 90; R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 729.

⁷² Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 729.

⁷³ Robert J. Hitchens, *Multiple Marriage: A Study of Polygamy in Light of the Bible* (Elkton,

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Md.: Doulos, 1987), p. 15.

⁷⁴ E. Earle Ellis, "Adultery," *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (1973), p. 10. See also Nkwoka, p. 149.

⁷⁵ For the parallel accounts, see Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-33.

⁷⁶ G.K. Falusi, "African Levirate and Christianity," *African Ecclesial Review* 24 (October 1982) :302, 303.

⁷⁷ Stanley M. Horton, "Matthew," *New Testament Study Bible*, Complete Biblical Library (Springfield, Mo.: Complete Biblical Library, 1986), p. 479.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Babylonian Talmud *Yebamoth* 44a, 50a and b.

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Parrinder, *The Bible and Polygamy: A Study of Hebrew and Christian Teaching* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), p. 26.

⁸⁰ See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 304; Lenski notes that "Zahn dates the council in the spring of 52; others place it earlier;" R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 592.

⁸¹ J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1981), p. 73.

⁸² Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), p. 118.

⁸³ See Conzelmann, p. 119; Colin Brown, "Separate, Divide: Divorce, Separation and Remarriage," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (1978), vol. 3, p. 538; Jerome Crowe, "The Acts," *New Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1979), p. 117. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, recognizing the connection between *porneia* in Acts 15 and the entire chapter of Leviticus 18, notes: "In regard to fornication, the Levitical law against every form of unchastity was rightly strict (Leviticus 18; 20:10-21);" vol. 6, p. 312.

⁸⁴ That Leviticus 18:18 is a law against polygamy was shown in chapter 3 of *Polygamy in the Bible*.

⁸⁵ See Leviticus 17:8, 10, 13, 15; 18:24, 25.

⁸⁶ Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Model," p. 121.

⁸⁷ Gerhard F. Hasel, "Clean and Unclean Meats in Leviticus 11: Still Relevant?," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2 (Autumn 1991) :103,104.

⁸⁸ Just as *porneia* is obviously a moral issue, so Dwight has shown from Scripture that the other three requirements of the Jerusalem Council are not merely ceremonial, but "sinful under all circumstances;" Sereno Edwards Dwight, *The Hebrew Wife: or, The Law of Marriage Examined in Relation to the Lawfulness of Polygamy and to the Extent of the Law of Incest* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1836), p. 137.

⁸⁹ See F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 298; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 314.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:1-16.

⁹¹ See Curtis G. Morrill, "The Arguments for Christian Monogamy in First Corinthians 7:2-5" (BDiv monograph, Grace Theological Seminary, 1942), p. 34.

⁹² Paul A. Hamar, "1 Corinthians," *New Testament Study Bible*, Complete Biblical Library (Springfield, Mo.: Complete Biblical Library, 1986), p. 329.

⁹³ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), p. 133.

⁹⁴ William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, "1 Corinthians," *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1976), p. 206. See also F.W. Grosheide, "Commentary on the First Epistle

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to the Corinthians," *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 155; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 706.

⁹⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), p. 274.

⁹⁶ Grosheide, p. 155. See also Hamar, p. 329.

⁹⁷ Adam Clarke, vol. 6, comment on 1 Corinthians 7:2. See the following, who also maintain that this passage excludes polygamy: John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 225; Albert Barnes, "1 Corinthians," *Notes on the New Testament, Explanatory and Practical* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), p. 112; G.G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), vol. 2, p. 822; John Albert Bengel, *Bengel's New Testament Commentary*, 2 vols., trans. Charlton T. Lewis and Marvin R. Vincent (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), vol. 2, p. 199.

⁹⁸ Curtis G. Morrill, "The Argument for Christian Monogamy in First Corinthians 7:2-5" (BDiv monograph, Grace Theological Seminary, 1942), p. 40.

⁹⁹ Christian Friedrich Kling, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. Daniel W. Poor, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 141.

¹⁰⁰ Morrill, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁰² Generally, the term "Pauline privilege" has been understood as referring to Paul's statement that divorce is permissible when an unbelieving spouse chooses to dissolve a marriage. See, for example, the following writers who point this out: W.J. O'Shea, "Marriage and Divorce: The Biblical Evidence," *Australian Catholic Record* 47 (April 1970) :105, 106; Bruce Vawter, "Divorce and the New Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (October 1977) :536,537. However, since the term "Pauline privilege" has also been used in connection with polygamy, it is considered below in this framework.

¹⁰³ David Gitari, "The Church and Polygamy," *Transformation* 1 (January-March) :7.

¹⁰⁴ White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 63. It should be noted that certain things such as rape, fornication, bestiality, and incest are not directly mentioned in the Decalogue. Yet they are understood as part of the moral law. It is this broader sense of "moral law" that is referred to here.

¹⁰⁵ Robertson and Plummer, p. 145. Other Bible scholars agree; see Barnes, "1 Corinthians," p. 122; Kling, p. 152.

¹⁰⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, p. 248. Paul discusses what kinds of activities are lawful and which are not lawful for the Christian. See, for example, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 13; Galatians 5:19-26; Ephesians 5, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Gealy, "Introduction and Exegesis of the First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus," *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), vol. 11, p. 410.

¹⁰⁸ E.K. Simpson, *The Pastoral Epistles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 50. See also Charles R. Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), p. 39.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, the views listed by the following: *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 297, 298; C.H. Dodd, "New Testament Translation Problems II," *The Bible Translator* 28 (January 1977) :112-116; Robert Pearson, "A Historical and Grammatical Analysis of the Phrase 'Husband of One Wife'" (ThM thesis, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1972), pp. 38-87; Walter Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), pp. 36-38.

¹¹⁰ Ralph Earle, "1, 2 Timothy," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids:

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Zondervan, 1978), vol. 11, p. 364.

¹¹¹ Ellen G. White, "The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: The Flood," *Signs of the Times*, February 27, 1879, p. 66.

¹¹² Ellen G. White, "The Work of a Peace-Maker," *Signs of the Times*, October 26, 1888, p. 642.

¹¹³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1958), p. 145.

¹¹⁴ Mavumilusa Makanzu, *Can the Church Accept Polygamy?* (Accra, Ghana: Asempa, 1983), p. 65.

Chapter 41

Must Polygamists Divorce?

What Should the Church Do With Polygamous Families?

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Introduction

Ever since 1863 when the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church was officially organized, there has been a growing realization of the need to respond to the great commission that Jesus Christ gave to all of His followers:¹ "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).² However, it was only in 1874 that the SDA Church sent its first official missionary, John Nevins Andrews, overseas.³ Within seven years the issue of "how those who were polygamists before their conversion to Christianity were to be treated"⁴ was raised in the official church press.

SDA Church Policies, 1926-2005

Russell Staples rightly notes that "polygamy is probably the most complex issue with which Adventism has had to deal in its missionary enterprise."⁵ In order to seek a solution to the issue, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists set up various committees over the past years, which have produced three basically different policies.⁶

The 1926 resolution stated that "in no case should a man living in polygamy be admitted into the fellowship of the church."⁷ In a dramatic reversal of this absolutist position, the 1930 Fall Council unconstitutionally overruled the General Conference policy and adopted a stand that, upon recommendation of responsible field committees, permitted polygamists to be baptized into the church as probationary members, yet be allowed to continue living in polygamy.⁸

Just over a decade later, the 1941 General Conference session moved away

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from the more accommodating approach of 1930 to the following somewhat ambivalent policy: A man living in polygamy who wishes to join the church is required to become monogamous by putting away all but one of his wives.⁹ Alternately, "wives who upon accepting Christianity are still not permitted to leave their husbands because of tribal custom, may upon approval of the local and union committees become baptized members of the church."¹⁰ This policy superseded all previous resolutions on polygamy.¹¹ Without substantial change, this has remained the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹²

In the previous article, "Does the Bible Really Support Polygamy?" we discussed the various texts frequently mentioned in connection with the matter of polygamy in the Bible. Besides the misapplication of these passages, another major reason used in the argument in favor of baptizing practicing polygamists, is the belief that in Old Testament times God accepted or at least overlooked the plural marriages of Bible characters.

Selected Case Studies of Polygamists in the Bible

Thus, any attempt to understand the phenomenon of polygamy in the Bible must of necessity take into account the cases of polygamy in the Old Testament, especially where there is sufficient story line. This is particularly so concerning men who were called by God for a specific purpose.

Douglas Welsh correctly notes that an adequate approach to the Scriptures must emphasize that any passage be understood in the light of its total context. This approach recognizes that God spoke to a specific people at a specific point in time, using "a language and other cultural symbols that carried maximum impact for communication."¹³ Moreover, God had a specific theological purpose in mind related to the spiritual needs of the recipients of His communication. Thus, "He used linguistic forms with which the receptors felt at home."¹⁴ Based on careful analysis, as shown in the book *Polygamy in the Bible*,¹⁵ the following conclusions have been drawn.

Abraham: The Friend of God¹⁶

Several facts can be learned from the study of the polygamy of Abraham (Genesis 16-22). First, Abraham was monogamous when God selected him to be the head of a special people (Genesis 12-15). Second, he was apparently aware of God's requirements concerning marriage, but due to a lack of trust in divine power he violated God's law by marrying a second wife.¹⁷ Third, the result of this union was discord and strife in the family (Genesis 16:4-6; 21:9-11). Fourth, God did not accept this union as a marriage, but insisted that

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Sarah was Abraham's first and only true wife.¹⁸ Fifth, God's call for the dissolution of this polygamous alliance by sending away the second wife and her son was not equal to divorce, but rather the disintegration of an illicit union.¹⁹

This method of resolving a polygamous union was to be more than merely of local application. As Ellen White states, it was of worldwide scope, and was to provide timeless guidance for all ages and all peoples as to how to resolve the issue of polygamy.²⁰ Sixth, only after Abraham forsook polygamy and returned to monogamy did God call on him to sacrifice and worship at the site of the future Temple, on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22). Seventh, for the rest of his life Abraham appears to have refrained from polygamy, even arranging for Isaac to marry only one wife (Genesis 24). And eighth, as a loving father, Abraham made sure that all of his children were properly cared for (Genesis 25:6).

Jacob: Patriarch of the Twelve Tribes

By way of summary, many things could be said about the marital life of Jacob. To begin with, it must be observed that when he was a single man, and years before he became a polygamist, God called him to fulfill a special role (Genesis 28). In accord with the Scriptural account, Ellen White notes that Jacob "formed the marriage contract with Laban for his daughter Rachel."²¹ However, Jacob acquiesced to the pressure of custom and became polygamous (Genesis 29:18-30). The consequences of this plural marriage were strife between the wives, grief for Jacob, and discord and hatred among the children.

After God's summons to return to his ancestral home, he underwent a character transformation at the Jabbok River. Meticulous examination of the chronological sections of the Jacob story show that there are various lines of evidence of a radical change in marital status for Jacob at this point in time. First, whereas prior to this life-changing event, Scripture repeatedly mentions that Jacob had slept with all four women, after this change there is no evidence of sexual relations with anyone but Rachel (Genesis 35:16-19). Second, during the next decade or so after the Jabbok experience, the only woman who gave birth was Rachel (Genesis 35:18). Third, whereas before his reconversion, Jacob referred to both Rachel and Leah as "my wives" (Genesis 30:26), afterwards the only one he is reported to have called "my wife" is Rachel (Genesis 44:27), while he omitted classifying Leah as "my wife" when talking about her (Genesis 49:31). And fourth, whereas prior to this encounter, Moses identifies Rachel and Leah as Jacob's "two wives" (Genesis 32:22), later on only Rachel is categorized as "Jacob's wife" (Genesis 46:19), while the other women are merely referred to as women who bore children to Jacob.

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The above data of Jacob's termination of his polygamous practices appears to be corroborated from statements made by Ellen White. Repeatedly asserting that polygamy is a sin,²² she notes that at this point in life Jacob forsook every sin, and that God graciously forgave him for his wayward past.²³ Only when he had become monogamous did God invite him to worship at Bethel, the "house of God." When Jacob ended his polygamy, then only did God renew the covenant with him. Apparently, Jacob never again practiced polygamy. Nevertheless, until the day of his death he did properly care for and look after the mothers and all of his children.

Moses: Great Deliverer of the Israelites

After he fled from Egypt, Moses married Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian (Exodus 2:16-3:1). Later, mention is made of "the Cushite woman whom he had married" (Numbers 12:1). Thus, some have concluded, as William Summers put it, "that Moses was a polygamist. That one of his wives was a Midianitess, the daughter of a priest, and that the other was an Ethiopian [or Cushite] woman."²⁴ However, there is some Biblical indication of a close link between these two terms. James Hoffmeier notes that in Habakkuk 3:7 the place names "Cushan" and "Midian" occur in synonymous parallelism, suggesting that the terms referred to the same place.²⁵ Similarly, Ellen White noted: "Though called a 'Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1, RV), the wife of Moses was a Midianite, and thus a descendant of Abraham."²⁶ Put simply, Moses was not a polygamist.

David: "A Man After God's Own Heart"

God called David a man after His Own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). This phrase was applied to him when he was a single young man living in accordance with the will of God (1 Samuel 16:7-23). At this point in his life, clearly prior to his polygamy, he was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel as the future king of Israel. When David departed from God's moral standards and began to practice polygamy, "he was no longer a man after God's Own heart,"²⁷ Ellen White appropriately concludes.

By the time David became king in Jerusalem, he had at least six wives (2 Samuel 3:1-5). As he became more and more successful he drifted further from God and married more women (2 Samuel 5:6-13). When David committed adultery and then killed Bathsheba's husband in order to cover up his crime, he remained unpunished for some time (2 Samuel 11).

However, when David married Bathsheba, God sent the prophet Nathan with a message of reproof and judgment. Careful investigation of the message

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of God as recorded in 2 Samuel 12:7, 8 gives no evidence of divine approval for David's polygamy. The clear pronouncement of divine displeasure in 2 Samuel 12:9-12 reveals several elements essential to a proper understanding of God's perspective on polygamy. The judgment of God was in accordance with the three sins David had committed: adultery, murder, and polygamy. For the crime of murder, David was to lose four of his sons; because of his adultery, another would sleep with his wives; and because of his marrying Bathsheba, he would lose all his other wives.

When Absalom appropriated David's spouses during his attempted takeover of the kingdom, David recognized the direct and complete fulfillment of the prophetic judgment.²⁸ Thus, when he returned to power after the suppression of the rebellion, as a repentant and reconverted man,²⁹ David now set aside his other spouses (2 Samuel 20:3), retaining only Bathsheba as a wife. Though he no longer cohabited with these other women, he provided for their care and protection throughout the rest of their lives.

According to the Biblical record, David remained monogamously married to Bathsheba for the rest of his life. Even when a beautiful virgin was brought in to keep him warm, he did not become involved in polygamy again (1 Kings 1:4). Thus, the man who started out as a "man after God's Own heart," spent the last decade or so of his life living more closely in accordance with God's commands, including His marital regulations. The above conclusions concur with the basic thrust of the comments of Ellen White regarding David's final years. Recognizing that polygamy is a sin,³⁰ she notes that "he mourned over his sins,"³¹ and that the "closing years of David's life were marked with faithful devotion to God."³²

Solomon: "Loved by the Lord"³³

The life of Solomon can be summarized as follows. During the first approximately twenty-five years of his forty-year reign, it appears as though Solomon was a God-fearing person who lived in accordance with the monogamous marital standard set up in Eden (1 Kings 2:39-3:1). During this time God twice appeared to Solomon in a dream, promising blessings if he would follow His requirements (1 Kings 3, 9). Also during this period Solomon built and dedicated the Temple (1 Kings 6-8). The record shows, however, that he drifted away from God, and violated the specific Deuteronomic prohibitions concerning the excessive accumulation of wealth, the obtaining of horses from Egypt, and polygamy (1 Kings 10:14-11:3; cf. Deuteronomy 17:16, 17), as well as marriage with nonbelievers. When this happened, God reprovved him and brought judgments upon him (1 Kings 11:9-13).

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Ellen White explains that the judgment pronounced against Solomon awakened him to his folly.³⁴ As a result, "in penitence he began to retrace his steps toward the exalted plane of purity and holiness from whence he had fallen so far."³⁵ His "repentance was sincere," and he confessed his sin.³⁶ Since, as Ellen White correctly indicates, "repentance includes sorrow for sin, and a turning away from it,"³⁷ it would be legitimate to conclude that at this point in his life Solomon forsook this "sinful practice."³⁸ The above conclusion concurs with what is implied in Solomon's statement that things such as "the pleasures of men—many concubines" (Ecclesiastes 2:8), were all "ultimately profitless" (Ecclesiastes 2:11, NET); and that, "the conclusion of the whole matter" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NKJV), is to "respect and obey God" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, CEV), "for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV).

Summary of the Assessment of Polygamists in Scripture

Since, according to the Biblical record, Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon are all identified as having been set aside by God for a specific purpose, their cases are considered together. God called all these men before they became polygamous. Abraham and Solomon were monogamous when God spoke to them, while Jacob and David were divinely set aside when they were still single men. It was only after God selected them that each one drifted away from God's will and became polygamous.

None of these accounts of polygamy is placed in an attractive light. In Abraham's case, he took a second wife because he did not trust God to fulfill His promises. Jacob became polygamous due to the deceit and persuasion of others, and not at God's command. In the life of David, as he drifted from God, he got involved in polygamy. The structure of the story of Solomon indicates that his polygamy appears during the time when he violated other commands of God and slipped into apostasy.

The results of the polygamy of these four characters are extensively documented in Scripture. Both in Abraham's and Jacob's cases there was jealousy and disharmony between the wives. Furthermore, strife and tension arose among the children of Jacob and David. Solomon's wives turned his heart away from God and into idolatry.

At some point in the polygamy of each one of these men, God interposed either directly or indirectly with some form of judgment, punishment, direction, or impression to break up the polygamous unions. In Abraham's case, God recognized only Sarah as his wife, and sanctioned the sending away of Hagar as the way to resolve their family problems. Jacob's encounter with the divine being (Christ, "the Angel of the covenant") at the Jabbok resulted in his

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forsaking plural marriage and returning to a monogamous relationship with his original wife, Rachel. David seems to have accepted the predicted loss of his spouses and set them aside when he returned to power as a transformed man. Solomon, upon recognizing God's judgments, repented and apparently ceased his practice of polygamy as well.

Significantly, it appears that only while these men were not polygamous were they directly connected with the "house of the Lord." God summoned first Abraham and later Jacob to worship Him at a special meeting place only after each had ended his polygamy. Both David and Solomon appear to have been involved in temple work only while they were monogamous.

In almost every one of these cases it appears that after the dissolution of the polygamous relationships, the mothers and children were properly looked after. Abraham provided for his children who were sent away. Jacob apparently kept the members of his family together and cared for them all of his life. While nothing is said about Solomon, the record states that David provided for his former spouses for the rest of their lives.

This brief analysis of the lives of the major polygamists of the Old Testament reveals that in no case is there even implicit sanction of the practice of polygamy. On the contrary, God seems to have indicated His support of monogamy by never summoning a polygamous man to a special task. When those who were called became polygamous, God interposed and instigated the cessation of this marital form. By the language of the story, as well as by various kinds of judgments, God conveyed His disapproval of polygamy. That His blessing and sanction rests only on monogamy as a marital form is the fundamental message conveyed in the chronicles of those who practiced polygamy in Bible times.

Contextualizing the Gospel in Different Cultures

The conclusions from my doctoral research study, as summarized above (as well as in the previous article) indicate that, from beginning to end the Bible maintains that monogamy is the only permissible and legitimate form of marriage. Furthermore, the practice of polygamy is repeatedly prohibited, both in the legislation as well as in the chronicles of Scripture. Thus the question remains: How is one to share the Gospel with a practicing polygamist?

Admittedly, because missionaries carry a message that often requires radical change, they have at times been perceived as agents of destruction.³⁹ Therefore, all Christians should recognize that only changes essential to Christianity should be undertaken, and these should be done as constructively

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as possible.

In order to know how best to deal with polygamists who desire admission into the church, it would be well to gain an understanding of the reasons for this form of marriage. For example, polygamy provides a large pool of laborers to provide for the needs of the family. Also, John Mbiti notes that "it is instilled in the minds of African peoples that a big family earns its head great respect in the eyes of the community."⁴⁰

In ancient times people felt that their safety lay in joining forces with others.⁴¹ Chiefs or kings would marry the women of other tribes or nations and thus form bonds of friendship, solidarity, and interclan loyalty.⁴² This type of political alliance appears to be the reason behind some of the marriages of king Solomon (1 Kings 11:1).⁴³

Mavumilusa Makanzu states that "polygamy ensures that every woman will be married."⁴⁴ Even the unwed mother, who, as David Gitari notes, is a disgrace to the family in most African cultures,⁴⁵ is taken in as a polygamous wife. Polygamy helps to resolve the problem of the so-called surplus of women. To care for war widows and orphans the Qur'an allows a Muslim man to marry up to four women.⁴⁶ Generally, the women have the responsibility of "tilling the ground, planting and harvesting crops, and caring for the needs of the husband; thus, they welcome cowives who will relieve some of the burden."⁴⁷

Since, in many of these societies, divorce proceedings are very complicated and usually discouraged, polygamy is often seen as a better method of handling the problem of an unloved wife.⁴⁸ In some instances the first wife puts pressure on the husband to get a second wife.⁴⁹ Eugene Hillman notes that "a wife may provoke her husband to take another wife by ridiculing him and calling him 'a poor man.'"⁵⁰ Being the senior wife increases her own status and authority, and gives her power to control the household and to dictate work to the other wife or wives.⁵¹ The desire to have many offspring may also relate to the African belief that "the dead continue to live through their children."⁵²

In societies where children are highly valued, the barrenness of a wife could be a powerful factor motivating a husband to take another wife.⁵³ In some societies where sons are preferred, a man may seek an additional wife hoping she will give birth to a son who will be his heir.⁵⁴ In certain cultures sexual relations between a husband and his wife are taboo during pregnancy and lactation.⁵⁵ This period of abstinence from sexual relations may "last from two to six years."⁵⁶ During this time of waiting a husband may feel the need to take a second wife. A husband may feel a similar concern during his wife's prolonged visits to her faraway relatives.⁵⁷ Among some peoples women refuse to cohabit once they reach menopause.⁵⁸ Makanzu maintains that polygamy,

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which provides husbands for all women, is also a deterrent for women to practice prostitution: "With all the women married, there can be no professional prostitution."⁵⁹ Additionally, Chidawa Kaburuk contends: "One of the reasons for practicing polygyny is the lust of the flesh and selfishness. A man who is lustful is not satisfied with one wife. When he sees another woman, especially a beautiful one, he is stimulated sexually and determines to have her."⁶⁰

In brief, then, a large variety of factors contribute to the practice of polygamy. Economic and sociopolitical factors, a concern for women and children, personal and religious motivations, and sexual and reproductive reasons—all form a network of relationships that contribute to making polygamy desirable. Only within this context of the system of social values can one begin to understand polygamy.⁶¹

The Call of the Gospel for Transformation

The great commission of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 28:19,20, challenges Christians to go and make disciples of all nations, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." This, in itself, is a radical call for change.

This summons is for change to take place on more than just the intellectual level. It often requires a modification of lifestyle, habits, customs, and traditional practices. As Willem Saayman remarks: "Evangelisation, because it involves such a thoroughgoing reorientation of the whole person, also involves culture change."⁶² The only power that can successfully accomplish this transformation in a truly effective manner is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All Christians are to participate in this change since each person forms a vital part of the church, which is "God's catalyst for transforming culture through the impact of the Gospel."⁶³

Universal Validity of Moral Norms. Samson Obwa notes that "a marriage that is socially or legally acceptable to a state or nation may not necessarily be according to God's pattern."⁶⁴ Thus, the Biblical concept of marriage is the only norm against which the practice of polygamy is to be evaluated.⁶⁵ Indeed, as Walter Trobisch aptly observed, "monogamy is not a Western concept of marriage pertaining only to one culture. It is a Biblical concept, presenting a challenge to all cultures."⁶⁶ As indicated in the previous essay, the Bible reveals that monogamy is the "law"⁶⁷ that God established. On the other hand, He clearly prohibited polygamy. Ellen White concurs with the Scriptures by pointing out that "the Gospel condemns the practice of polygamy,"⁶⁸ which is "directly opposed to the law of Jehovah,"⁶⁹ "a violation of the law of God,"⁷⁰ and "contrary to His will."⁷¹

Recognizing that polygamy is "incompatible with the content of genuine

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Christian marriage,"⁷² Joseph Tomko maintains that the Gospel cannot be inculcated in this regard. Rather, there must be a profound and radical conversion of peoples and cultures to Christ and to His teachings.⁷³ Just as the idolater or the murderer is required to discard his former way of life when accepting Christianity, so the polygamist is to be called upon to terminate his "sinful practice"⁷⁴ and thus live in conformity to God's universal moral norms.

Ways of Changing Cultural Practices. In connection with polygamy, appropriate change can be brought about only when the reasons contributing to its practice are properly understood and suitable functional substitutes can be provided.⁷⁵

In view of the basic functions of polygamy, Saayman notes that "the people themselves, in consultation with missionaries, can indicate how their culture might have to change in the light of the Gospel."⁷⁶

One of the ways of bringing people to a sense of their need is by helping them to recognize the areas in which their traditional belief and practice have not adequately lived up to their desires and hopes. For example, one could point out the many problems associated with polygamy. Mbiti mentions the frequent quarrels and fights among wives and among children, the neglect of some wives while favoring others, the great burden of educating, disciplining, and caring for the children.⁷⁷ For example, Daniel Denga's study of delinquents in Nigeria has demonstrated that the incidence of juvenile delinquency is greater among polygamous than monogamous families.⁷⁸ Makanzu lists additional problems related to polygamy. He states that it causes financial difficulties, does not satisfy the woman's sexual desires, and fosters social injustice in that the rich marry most of the women while the poor are forced to remain single.⁷⁹

When people are more acutely conscious of the inadequacy of a custom, as concluded from their own observations and based on their own proverbs, they will be more open to considering a new and different practice. At this point in time, one of the primary tasks of the Christian worker will be to demonstrate that Christianity can best fulfill the true needs of the individual.

While all of the factors mentioned above are useful in facilitating the transformation of a deeply ingrained cultural practice, the most essential ingredient needed is the power of the Gospel itself. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV), "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." By means of this new relationship with Christ, it is possible to "do all things" through Him (Philippians 4:13). As Ellen White noted: "Whatever is to be done at His command, may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings."⁸⁰ The polygamist who desires to become a Christian should thus recognize that the God of the Bible

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will provide the power to obey all of His monogamous requirements.

Methods and Procedures for Implementation

Helmut Thielicke maintains that those who are already Christians are obligated to not become polygamous.⁸¹ However, Thielicke postulates that "the only possible general rule would seem to be that *existing polygamous marriages* may be allowed to continue when a person is baptized."⁸² Responding to this view, the African evangelist, Mavumilusa Makanzu comments: "You can't preach against polygamy and at the same time accept polygamists into your midst. It is a contradiction. You can't be for and against at the same time. Neither do I believe a temporary attitude of tolerance will lead to the disappearance of polygamy. Such a policy would, on the contrary, serve to perpetuate it. . . . The church can no longer make exceptions and special cases. If it does, Christians and non-Christians alike will be confused."⁸³

Relevancy of Guidelines for Different Societies

No two societies are identical. There is a large divergence of habits and marital practices, even between societies that permit polygamy.⁸⁴ Recognizing this, it is clear that any policy that attempts to establish all the details of how to deal with polygamists requesting baptism is bound to result in misapplication and difficulty. William Blum suggests that "each particular Church or diocese must examine its own situation prior to forming a relevant policy."⁸⁵

Understandably, these church policies need to be based on Biblical norms. Previous sections of this essay have already outlined these basic principles. Thus, in line with the findings that monogamy is the only acceptable form of marriage and that polygamy is a violation of God's law, this section will provide a few suggestions.

In deciding what approaches to take, the local people need to be involved. With guidance and support, they can decide how to put Biblical principles into effect.⁸⁶ Darrell Wise notes that "in this way the policies will be their policies,"⁸⁷ not some foreign outsider's requirement. Because the local people better understand the true meaning and significance of polygamy, they will be more able to suggest appropriate functional substitutes for plural marriage.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, it is possible for the cross-cultural Christian worker to make a meaningful contribution to this issue.

Spiritual Transformation and Mental Reeducation

William Reyburn indicates that the deep-seated emotion that lies behind

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polygamy is the desire for power.⁸⁹ Thus, the Christian worker should "communicate a Gospel that speaks to the roots of his real need and show him that Christ is the ultimate answer to the power problem of his heart."⁹⁰ As Samson Obwa indicates, "the Scriptures also teach that for the Christian, the matter of heir and inheritance have a higher perspective than gaining earthly inheritance or leaving an heir to continue one's lineage."⁹¹

In essence, every one of the functions fulfilled by polygamy needs to be appropriately replaced so that those coming out of this marital practice may be able to continue as normal a life as possible. These elements, for which proper substitutes need to be found, include prestige, certain religious beliefs, inheritance customs, family defense, widow security, the status of women, an adequate workforce, sexual practices, and sex taboo adjustments. For this task a well-trained marriage counselor, who is acquainted with the customs, needs, and desires of the people, is a necessity.⁹²

Closely allied to the concern for wealth are the issues of power, prestige, and pride. Based on his conclusion that polygamy "is a desire for power,"⁹³ Reyburn suggests that the Gospel message should communicate the "power of service for others."⁹⁴ Similarly, Obwa proposes as one of his functional substitutes for polygamy, that "all Christians, including polygamists, need to be taught that true greatness lies in humility and service to others."⁹⁵ Moreover, the matter of prestige can be resolved, as James Karibwije notes, by recognizing that "to be called a child of God and a friend of Jesus Christ is more than the prestige one can get in this world."⁹⁶ In this way the fulfillment provided by polygamy will be satisfied in helping others, and in acknowledging that "the prestige in Christianity is eternal while other prestige is temporary."⁹⁷

Attitudes toward sexual relations and reproduction need readjustment. First, the issue of childlessness must be addressed. While barrenness can be a problem in marriage, Karibwije notes that "it is also true that a childless marriage can be a true and good one."⁹⁸ Tied in with this concern is the matter of who will carry on the family name and inherit the property. Obwa suggests that the believer focus on God's promise of eternal inheritance, and on the fact that each Christian is an heir of God's kingdom.⁹⁹

A Few Proposed Practical Procedures

Francis Arinze correctly observes that "while strict compliance with the demands of monogamy should be a condition for full communion with the Church, due consideration in charity and justice should be given to all members of the polygamous family unit that has already been built up."¹⁰⁰ First, the ex-wives need to be cared for.¹⁰¹ One writer mentions a case of a "polygamist

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(with three wives), who, having applied for baptism, promptly arranged for the livelihood (food, housing, clothes) of the two wives he was leaving."¹⁰² Another notes that one denomination provided homes at every mission station where these women could go and support themselves.¹⁰³

As a result, "Christianity will not be regarded as a religion which breaks up families when people see that the divorced women and their children are well treated."¹⁰⁴ A better solution is for the dismissed wives to find new husbands. According to Willard Burce, "this not only tends to prevent relapses, but helps to assure the care, support, and social integration of the wives and their children."¹⁰⁵ Apparently, in some societies remarriage for these women is not difficult, on condition that the dowry is returned in good and regular order.¹⁰⁶ Such marriages will also reduce the chances of these women becoming prostitutes.¹⁰⁷

Addressing the issue of childlessness, Obwa maintains that this "should not be the occasion either for divorce or to procure an additional wife."¹⁰⁸ Rather, if no medical help can solve the problem, "then the couple could be advised to adopt children of their choice."¹⁰⁹ This practice has already succeeded in some situations.¹¹⁰ On this issue of adoption, Diane D'Souza notes that polygamy is virtually unknown among Muslims in China because "infertile couples commonly adopt children to build a family."¹¹¹

In connection with the need for an adequate workforce, Obwa comments: "To acquire a wife for her labor obviously is not a good ground for marriage. She will be no more than a slave."¹¹² Rather, if a man is wealthy enough to get another wife, Obwa notes that he should then hire laborers to work for him.¹¹³

Finally, the church itself needs to provide as much support as possible through specially trained workers. Marriage counselors who sufficiently understand the particular problems attending dissolved polygamous unions need to be available in every polygamous society where evangelism is being carried out. Pastors and chaplains ought to be instructed on how to deal with these issues. Legal specialists should also be available where necessary. Perhaps most importantly, the entire congregation should be instructed and encouraged to assist in loving and caring ways as each new convert seeks to adjust to a new way of living. In practical ways, every member of the converted, former polygamous family should be properly cared for.

Conclusion

Admittedly, this proposed view that no polygamists who continue living in plural marriage be baptized, could result in fewer accessions to the church. However, as W.T. Bartlett stated in connection with polygamy: "We aim to follow

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the Word of God in all respects, and even though that should hinder our work and keep many people out of the church, we would rather have only a few people who are loyal to the Word of God in all respects than a multitude who have come in at a compromise. At all costs we should hold to the Word of God."¹⁴

In the final analysis, the true measure of any Gospel worker's success must be the way the local Christians apply Biblical principles sensitively and intelligently to their own problem.¹⁵ This is the goal toward which all indigenous and cross-cultural Christian workers should diligently strive, for God's glory.

Endnotes

¹ See P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 285, 286.

² Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

³ Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1979), pp. 144-147.

⁴ See "Polygamy and the Old Testament," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 15, 1881, p. 309.

⁵ Russell L. Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?", *Spectrum* 13 (September 1982) :44. Confirmation of this statement can be seen in the writings of missionaries. See, for example, William McClements, who indicates that polygamy was the greatest hindrance to church growth in the early years of mission work in Nigeria: William McClements, "Nigeria," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 25, 1924, p. 9. Cf. Joseph Adebisi Ola, "Training for Evangelism Among the Yorubas of Nigeria" (DMin project report, Andrews University, 1989), pp. 99, 100. Barry Oliver states that "polygamy has been a consistent obstacle to evangelization in Papua New Guinea": Barry David Oliver, "Polygamy and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Papua New Guinea," 1986, TMs [photocopy], p. 4, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich, (hereafter designated as AHC).

⁶ For more detail on these policies, including an earlier non-binding recommendation, see Jean-Jacques Bouit, "A Christian Consideration of Polygamy" (DMin project report, Andrews University, 1981), pp. 118-149; Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?", pp. 47-49.

⁷ The rest of the recommendation stated that "preceding his entrance into the church a sufficient time of probation be given him to test out his sincerity in separating himself from this practice." Interestingly, this policy made no mention of the wives. See Minutes of the General Conference Committee, Milwaukee, June 13, 1926, p. 13, AHC.

⁸ Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee, Omaha, October 28 to November 3, 1930, p. 74, AHC. Part of the resolution noted that these polygamists may "be admitted to baptism and the ordinances of the church, and may be recognized as probationary members. They shall not, however, be admitted to full membership unless or until circumstances change so as to leave them with only one companion."

⁹ "Proceedings of the General Conference," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 10, 1941, p. 235.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

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¹² General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Working Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1995-1996), pp. 90, 91.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See Ronald A.G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993). In *Polygamy in the Bible* this is by far the longest chapter, covering over a hundred pages (138-246). Since Lamech, the first polygamist, was a murderer and part of Cain's rebellious lineage, his marital situation is not considered here in this short essay. Likewise, since Esau is classed as a godless person, his marital situation is not discussed here. Interestingly, the context of the mentioning of Gideon's polygamy implies a negative assessment on his practice of plural marriage. Similarly, the cultural context in the time of the judges, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes, does not provide a positive view of Elkanah's polygamy. Likewise, the Biblical context of the Joash story (as seen in 2 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles 24) shows that he did not always follow the Lord. Those wanting to read about the above characters, and those desiring the Biblical evidence for the conclusions provided in this section, need to read this entire chapter 4 of the book *Polygamy in the Bible*.

¹⁶ See James 2:23; cf. 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1958), pp. 125, 145.

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), p. 80.

¹⁹ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 146, 147.

²⁰ White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 80; White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 76; cf. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 338.

²³ See White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 197-203.

²⁴ William D. Summers, *Marriage: or, The Bible and Polygamy* (N.p.: n.p., 1886), p. 24. This view is also held by others, such as Gunnar Helander, *Must We Introduce Monogamy? A Study of Polygamy as a Mission Problem in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Shuter & Shooter, 1958), p. 24; Harry Boer, "Polygamy," *Frontier* 11 (Spring 1968) :25; Moyenda Nosakhere, *The Path Toward Liberation: Understanding the Need for Polygamy in the African-American Christian Community* (Nashville: Imani Publications, 1991), pp. 25, 26.

²⁵ James K. Hoffmeier, "Zipporah," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (1988), vol. 4, p. 1201. See also John Joseph Owen, "Numbers," *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), vol. 2, p. 118; N.H. Snaith, "Leviticus and Numbers," *The New Century Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967), p. 234. Although this parallel usage of Cush and Midian appears in Habakkuk, several centuries after Moses, it is possible that these terms were already synonymous in Moses' day.

²⁶ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 383; see also Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945), vol. 4a, pp. 19, 20.

²⁷ White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 87.

²⁸ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 727, 732, 748.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 731, 732; 2 Samuel 15:30.

³⁰ White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 76; White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 145.

³¹ White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 94, cf. pp. 86, 87, 90.

³² *Ibid.*, vol. 4a, p. 94.

³³ 2 Samuel 12:25 (NIV) reads: "And because the Lord loved him [i.e., Solomon], He sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah," (which means "loved by the Lord").

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1943), p. 77.

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- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 78.
- ³⁶ Ibid., pp. 84, 85.
- ³⁷ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1946), p. 17.
- ³⁸ White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 100.
- ³⁹ See Oliver, p. 35.
- ⁴⁰ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Frederick A Praeger, 1969), p. 142.
- ⁴¹ S. Ananda Kumar, "Culture in the Old Testament," in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, ed. Robert T. Coote and John Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 46.
- ⁴² See Norman A. Horner, "Polygyny Among the Bantu of French Cameroon," *International Review of Missions* 43 (1954) :176; Darrell Lee Wise, "African Polygamy Reexamined" (MTh thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), p. 34.
- ⁴³ See Wise, p. 34.
- ⁴⁴ Mavumilusa Makanzu, *Can the Church Accept Polygamy?* (Accra, Ghana: Asempa Publishers, 1983), p. 16. See also Horner, p. 174.
- ⁴⁵ David Gitari, "The Church and Polygamy," *Transformation* 1 (January-March 1984) :7. See also James E. Karibwije, "Polygamy and the Church in Nigeria: A Study of Various Christian Positions" (MA thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1986), p. 10.
- ⁴⁶ Qur'an 4:3. See also Tabish Noori, "A Comparative Study of Polygamy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam," *Review of Religions* 80 (April 1985) :27; Ismat Mahdi, "Sanctity of Marriage in Islam," *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 8 (July-September 1985) :62; Asghar Ali Engineer, "Women Under the Authority of Islam," *Religion and Society* 32 (June 1985) :30.
- ⁴⁷ Robert J. Hitchens, *Multiple Marriage: A Study of Polygamy in Light of the Bible* (Elkton, Md.: Doulos Publishers, 1987), p. 110. See also Samson Osimbo Obwa, "Polygamy Among the Southern Luo of Kenya: A Critique of Both the Practice of Polygamy and the Reaction of Mission-Funded Churches to It in the Light of Biblical Teaching" (MA thesis, Columbia Graduate School of Bible and Missions, 1978), p. 16.
- ⁴⁸ See Gitari, pp. 8, 9; Hitchens, p. 113.
- ⁴⁹ Hitchens, p. 111; Wise, p. 27.
- ⁵⁰ Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1975), p. 120. See also Walter A. Trobisch, "Congregational Responsibility and the Christian Individual," *Practical Anthropology* 13 (September-October 1966) :205-207; William D. Reyburn, "Polygamy, Economy, and Christianity in the Eastern Cameroun," in *Readings in Missionary Anthropology II*, enlarged edition, ed. William A. Smalley (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1978), p. 256.
- ⁵¹ Wise, p. 27; Hitchens, p. 111; Reyburn, p. 259.
- ⁵² Hitchens, p. 112.
- ⁵³ See Mbiti, p. 143; Karibwije, p. 11; Wise, p. 21; Hitchens, pp. 105, 106; Kumar, p. 45; Gitari, p. 8; Hillman, p. 115.
- ⁵⁴ See Obwa, p. 15.
- ⁵⁵ See, for example, Chidawa B. Kaburuk, "Polygyny in the Old Testament and the Church in Africa" (STM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), p. 27; Karibwije, p. 9; Makanzu, p. 14; Reyburn, p. 258.
- ⁵⁶ Hitchens, p. 108.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 112. See also Reyburn, p. 258.
- ⁵⁸ See Gitari, p. 8; Obwa, p. 18.
- ⁵⁹ Makanzu, p. 17.

Must Polygamists Divorce?

⁶⁰ Kaburuk, pp. 20, 21.

⁶¹ See Masamba ma Mpolo, *Polygamy and the Status of Women in African Churches: A Psycho-Social Approach to Pastoral Theology* (N.p.: n.p., 1975), p. 21.

⁶² Willem A. Saayman, "Intercultural Evangelism," *Missionalia* 18 (November 1990) :310.

⁶³ Morris A. Inch, *Doing Theology Across Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 93.

⁶⁴ Obwa, pp. 57, 58.

⁶⁵ Bouit, pp. 26, 27.

⁶⁶ Walter A. Trobisch, *My Wife Made Me a Polygamist*, "Here Is My Problem," series 1 (Kehl/Rheim, Germany: Editions Trobisch, 1980), p. 25.

⁶⁷ Ellen G. White, "The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: The Flood," *Signs of the Times*, February 27, 1879, p. 66.

⁶⁸ Ellen G. White, "The Work of a Peace-Maker," *Signs of the Times*, October 26, 1888, p. 642.

⁶⁹ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 21 vols. (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981-1990), vol. 7, p. 74.

⁷⁰ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 145.

⁷¹ White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 76.

⁷² Joseph Tomko, "Inculturation and African Marriage," *African Ecclesial Review* 28 (June/August 1986) :163.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁷⁴ White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 100.

⁷⁵ Obwa, p. 61.

⁷⁶ Saayman, p. 315. See also Willard Burce, "Polygamy and the Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 34 (April 1963) :231.

⁷⁷ Mbiti, pp. 143, 144.

⁷⁸ Daniel I. Denga, "Juvenile Delinquency Among Polygynous Families in Nigeria," *Journal of Social Psychology* 114 (1981) :3.

⁷⁹ Makanzu, pp. 49-52.

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), p. 333.

⁸¹ Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 3, Sex, trans. John W. Doberstein (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 181.

⁸² *Ibid.*, (emphasis added).

⁸³ Makanzu, p. 74.

⁸⁴ See George Peter Murdock, *Ethnographic Atlas* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967), pp. 47, 48, 62-122.

⁸⁵ William G. Blum, *Forms of Marriage: Monogamy Reconsidered* (Nairobi: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1989), p. 278.

⁸⁶ Wise, p. 119. See also Saayman, p. 315.

⁸⁷ Wise, p. 119.

⁸⁸ Obwa, p. 62.

⁸⁹ Reyburn, p. 272.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255 (editorial introduction, emphasis original).

⁹¹ Obwa, p. 66.

⁹² See Trobisch, *My Wife Made Me a Polygamist*, p. 40. See also Karibwije, p. 67.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁹⁵ Obwa, p. 68.

⁹⁶ Karibwije, p. 66.

New Issues on Marriage

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Karibwije, p. 66.

⁹⁹ Obwa, p. 66. See Romans 8:16, 17; Hebrews 9:15; James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:3, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Francis A. Arinze, "Polygamy and Childlessness," *African Ecclesial Review* 23 (February- March 1981) :98.

¹⁰¹ Ian M. Hay, "A Discussion of the Problem of Polygamy in Relation to the Church in Nigeria" (MA thesis, Columbia School of Missions, Columbia Bible College, 1951), p. 45; Karibwije, p. 62.

¹⁰² Domus, "An African Problem: Polygamy," *African Ecclesial Review* 25 (April 1983) :124. De la Haye records a similar case where, before baptism the polygamist stopped having sexual relations with his two additional spouses, "set them up in separate quarters; maintained them, meeting all their needs, but living only with his first wife;" Sophie de la Haye, *Tread Upon the Lion: The Story of Tommie Titcombe* (Ontario, Canada: Sudan Interior Mission, 1973), pp. 62,63.

¹⁰³ Gunnar Helander, *Must We Introduce Monogamy? A Study of Polygamy as a Mission Problem in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Shuter & Shooter, 1958), p. 64.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰⁵ Burce, p. 231.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Horner, p. 178.

¹⁰⁷ While it is true that some women might turn to prostitution, this is not always so, especially in societies where women return to their relatives. See, for example, Helander, p. 15; cf. Trobisch, *My Wife Made Me a Polygamist*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁸ Obwa, p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Bernard Haring, *Evangelization Today* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publications, 1974), p. 158.

¹¹¹ Diane D'Souza, "The Muslim Practice of Polygamy," *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 8 (July-September 1985) :78 (n. 1).

¹¹² Obwa, p. 67.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ "Missions Round Table," General Conference Session, Milwaukee, May 27 to June 12, 1926, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich., p. 2.

¹¹⁵ See Charles R. Taber, "The Missionary: Wrecker, Builder, or Catalyst?" *Practical Anthropology* 17 (July-August 1970) :152.

Section 6
**New Changes in Local
Church Leadership**

42. Have Adventists Abandoned the
Biblical Model of Leadership for the
Local Church? *P. Gerard Damsteegt*

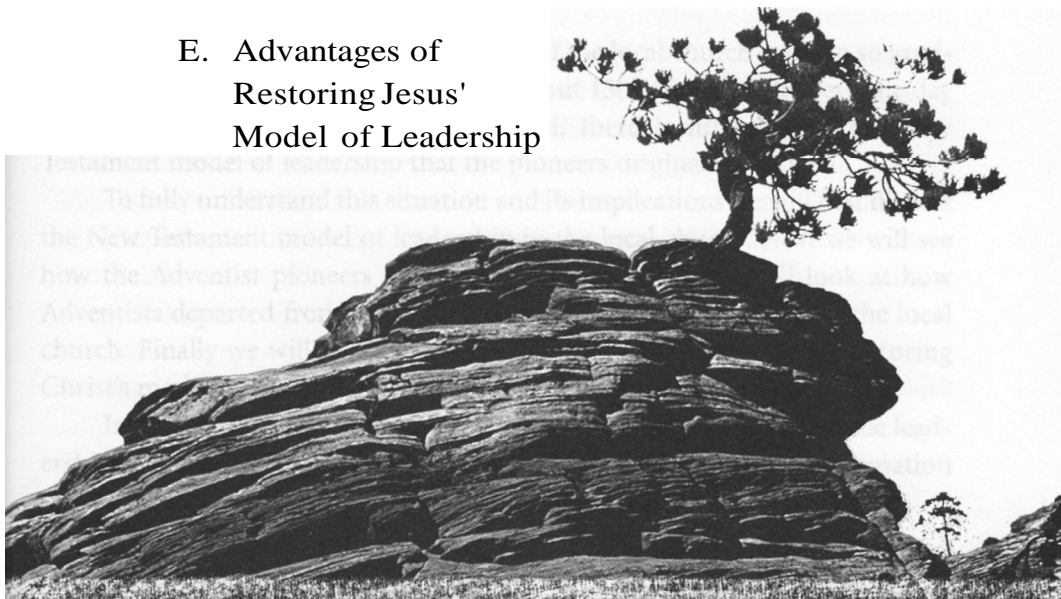
A. The New Testament Model of Leadership

B. Adventist Pioneers Adopt the
New Testament Model

C. Adventists Abandon the New Testament
Model of Leadership

D. Challenges of Returning to the
Biblical Model

E. Advantages of
Restoring Jesus'
Model of Leadership



Chapter 42

Have Adventists Abandoned the Biblical Model of Leadership for the Local Church?

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Have you wondered how major changes seem to occur overnight in a church? How has it been possible that worship styles, music, and Congregationalism have affected so many churches so quickly? Over the years I have reflected on this question and, having had the opportunity to study the rise and development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I have come to the conclusion that one of the major reasons for the recent changes in local congregations is due to significant changes that occurred in the leadership structure of the local church during the twentieth century.

Changes in the operational structure of the local church came in so gradually that few took note of them. Today, about 150 years after the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially organized, there is little left of the New Testament model of leadership that the pioneers originally adopted.

To fully understand this situation and its implications we will first discuss the New Testament model of leadership in the local church. Next we will see how the Adventist pioneers adopted this model. Then we will look at how Adventists departed from this model, and its consequent impact on the local church. Finally we will consider the possibilities and advantages of restoring Christ's model of leadership to the local Adventist congregation.

In this chapter we will limit our study to the local church, not to the leadership structure of conferences, unions, and General Conference. Information

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on that aspect of church organization can be found in literature on the 1901 General Conference that reveals the providential leadings of the Holy Spirit in the development of an organizational structure that harmoniously unites the community of Seventh-day Adventist churches worldwide.

A. The New Testament Model of Leadership

Church Organization in the New Testament

The New Testament provides us the information about the leadership structure of the Christian church. During His ministry on Earth, Jesus Christ established the organization and authority of His church. He ordained twelve of His followers to accompany Him on His travels and to prepare them to preach the Gospel and heal the sick (Mark 3: 14, 15). He also called these twelve men apostles (Luke 6:13).

This event was the first step in "the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to be His representative on Earth." The calling of these twelve men was of enormous significance. "Their office was the most important to which human beings had ever been called, and was second only to that of Christ Himself. . . . As in the Old Testament the twelve patriarchs stand as representatives of Israel, so the twelve apostles were to stand as representatives of the Gospel church."²

The Jerusalem Church a Model for Future Churches

The book of Acts reveals the next phase in the organization of the church—the establishment of the New Testament model of church leadership. Soon after Christ's ascension the apostles became overwhelmed by the demands of the fast-growing church in Jerusalem. To cope with the challenges confronting them, the apostles divided the leadership responsibilities in the local church into two major areas. Seven men were chosen to "serve tables" while the apostles confined themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:2,4). Both "the seven" and the apostles were involved in serving or ministering, but the manner of their respected involvement differed significantly. What each of these two areas of service entailed has been the subject of much speculation.

Ellen G. White's commentary on these events is very enlightening. She commented that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles began "to outline a plan for the better organization of all the working forces of the church."³

What was this better plan of church organization? This plan established

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a twofold division of labor between those serving as the spiritual leaders and those taking care of specialized lines of work and the finances of the church. The apostles announced that the time had come "when the spiritual leaders having the oversight of the church should be relieved from the task of distributing to the poor and from similar burdens, so that they might be free to carry forward the work of preaching the Gospel."⁴ The church accepted this counsel and ordained seven men as deacons. Mrs. White wrote that "by prayer and the laying on of hands, seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties as deacons."⁵ This action was an "important step in the perfecting of Gospel order in the church."⁶

The designation "deacons" for these men perfectly fitted their work, to "serve tables." To them, Ellen White wrote, was delegated "the oversight of special lines of work" which included taking care of "individual needs," the "general financial interest of the church,"⁷ and "looking after the needs of the poor."⁸ This work, however, did not exclude them from "teaching the faith." The deacons "were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success."⁹

After stoning the deacon Stephen, the first great persecution of the Christian church broke out and believers were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). From this time onward the Gospel was proclaimed beyond the confines of Jerusalem.

In harmony with the leadership model of the Jerusalem church, the apostles appointed elders as spiritual leaders in every church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). This practice explains why the apostles, when they left Jerusalem to preach the Gospel and evangelize the world, appointed elders in Jerusalem to fill their places instead of leaving a vacuum in this major center of the church at that time. It also explains the presence of elders in the Jerusalem church several years later to whom Barnabas and Saul handed their relief contributions for the needy believers in Judea (Acts 11:29, 30).

Mrs. White considered the Jerusalem church's leadership structure, with its twofold division of labor, a model for the Christian church. She testified, "The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the Gospel."¹⁰

Spiritual Gifts

The next development of church organization took place after the church had rapidly expanded into many regions. Now the Holy Spirit bestowed special spiritual gifts on some of God's people to improve the effective operation

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of the church. Said Ellen White,

Later in the history of the early church, when in various parts of the world many groups of believers had been formed into churches, the organization of the church was further perfected, so that order and harmonious action might be maintained. Every member was exhorted to act well his part. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to him. Some were endowed by the Holy Spirit with special gifts—"first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:28). But all these classes of workers were to labor in harmony.¹¹

Persons who received these gifts were not to replace the previously elected leadership of elders and deacons, but to work in cooperation with them so that the church would be more successful than ever.

Qualifications of Local Church Officers

Shortly before his death Paul, under divine inspiration, gave important instructions to safeguard the leadership structure of the local church.

In a letter to Timothy, Paul endorsed the application of the organizational model of the Jerusalem church to other churches in the world. He carefully spelled out the qualifications for those serving as spiritual leaders (elders) as well as those attending to the other church affairs (deacons) (1 Timothy 3:1-13). In a similar manner Paul instructed Titus to establish order in the churches by appointing to the office of elder or bishop men who met the required qualifications (Titus 1:5-9).

In the New Testament, the terms "elder" and "bishop" were used interchangeably (Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Timothy 3:1, 2). *Elder* expressed the title and dignity of the office, while *bishop* indicated the officer's function as "overseer" to feed, shepherd, or pastor the church (Acts 20:17, 28).¹²

The qualifications outlined by Paul to Timothy for the office of an elder (bishop) were as follows: He must be

"blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church

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of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the Devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the Devil" (1 Timothy 3:2-7, NKJV).

These requirements make it plain that the Lord, as Head of the church (Ephesians 5:30), is interested in having His church under the leadership of elders or ministers who have high spiritual and ethical standards, a record of successfully governing their own home, and a good reputation among unbelievers. If the elder or minister is not successful as leader of his own family he is not qualified to lead a congregation. Said Paul, "If a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5, NKJV).

Relations Between Apostles and Elders

Were apostles and elders to have the same function? If not, how did they differ? One major difference was that apostles were itinerant spiritual leaders while elders were spiritual leaders of the local church. Apostles traveled from church to church, established new churches, and oversaw the operation of the churches. Elders, however, were connected to a local church and had no authority over other churches. Yet apostles and elders worked closely together in giving leadership to the church.

Their close cooperation was seen in a major controversy as to whether new Gentile believers must be circumcised. A council was called in Jerusalem to settle the conflict. Those deciding the issue were the spiritual leaders of the churches—both apostles and elders (Acts 15:2, 6).

The intimate relationship between apostles and elders was also seen in the word used to describe the office of an apostle and that of an elder. When, for instance, after the death of Judas the apostles discussed a suitable replacement, Peter made an appeal, "Let another take his office" (Acts 1:20). The nature of the type of work this new apostle was to fulfill became clear from the Greek word translated in some Bible versions as "office" or *episkope*, referring to the role of "overseer." For this reason the King James Version translated the word as "bishoprick."

It is clear that from the very beginning the apostles served as overseers of the church. The apostle Paul implemented the Jerusalem leadership model in the newly established churches. He described the elder as "a bishop" (Greek *episkopos*) (Titus 1:5, 7). In his counsel to Timothy, Paul described the same position as the "office of a bishop" (*episkope*), which in this context refers to the role of overseeing the church (1 Timothy 3:1, KJV).

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When Paul addressed the elders of the church in Ephesus, he again called them "overseers" whose task it was "to shepherd the church of God," to protect it against all kind of heresies that would come into the church to destroy it (Acts 20:28-30). This indicates that an important part of the role of the elders as pastors is to fortify the faith of the church members through the ministry of the Word. Paul gave Titus similar counsel, explaining that an elder must hold fast "the faithful Word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). Again we see the close parallel between the apostles and elders in their ministry and leadership roles.

Peter alluded to the close relationship between apostles and elders when he called himself "also an elder" (1 Peter 5:1). This confirms that an apostle was also considered an elder, but a traveling elder whose responsibility was not confined to a local church but who also served as an evangelist, raising up new churches. Paul demonstrated this kind of leadership when he revisited the churches he had established in Asia Minor on subsequent journeys.

The Abandonment of the Jerusalem Leadership Model

Throughout the first century of the Christian era, elders led the churches. However, soon after the death of the prophet and apostle John, the organizational structure of the local church began to change. The writings of the early Christian writer Ignatius of Antioch revealed the beginning of a different leadership structure in the early part of the second century.

Ignatius is the first representative of a new form of church government called "the episcopate." His writings reveal that at this time the presiding elder had taken on the title of bishop. In the new church structure, the bishop stood at the center of church life, with the other elders, deacons, and laity subject to his authority.¹³

Ignatius described the relationship of the believers to the bishop in the following terms: "We should look upon the bishop even as we would look upon the Lord Himself, standing as he does, before the Lord."¹⁴ "See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Christ Jesus does the Father.... Let no man do anything connected with the church without the bishop."¹⁵ "And say I, Honor thou God indeed, as the Author and Lord of all things, but the bishop as the high priest, who bears the image of God. . . . Nor is there anyone in the church greater than the bishop, who ministers as a priest to God for the salvation of the whole world.... He who honors the bishop shall be honored of God, even as he that dishonors him shall be punished by God."¹⁶

This leadership model, which introduces an extra level of authority in the

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local church, is a departure from the Biblical model because it makes the bishop the head and center of the local congregation. This model of ministry has been described as the first phase of the episcopacy—a rulership of the church by the bishop. In time, this type of church organization came to its full fruition in the papacy.

Throughout the centuries various reform movements have tried to restore the New Testament model of church leadership. Through the working of Providence this Biblical model was adopted by the Adventist pioneers.

B. Adventist Pioneers Adopt the New Testament Model

During the formative years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, its members included believers from many different churches who were united by a common expectation of the imminent return of Christ. They had left or were disfellowshipped by their churches when these organizations rejected the proclamation of the first angel's message to prepare people for the Second Advent. These believers had no desire to establish another church.

Most Adventists opposed any form of organization because they thought it would lead them into a similar confusion as existed among the numerous Christian churches. However, after these Advent believers had discovered the significance of the three angels' messages that explained the Great Disappointment of 1844, they gradually saw that the New Testament taught the need for order and organization. If they were going to effectively proclaim the Gospel of the three angels' messages to the rest of the world, they must be organized. Now the question was, "How?"

Providential Intervention

In the early 1850s the Lord gave the small company of Adventists, who had accepted the truth on the sanctuary and the Sabbath, special insight that would lead them to adopt the New Testament model of church organization.

In 1850 the Lord gave Ellen G. White, the prophetess to the remnant church, a vision emphasizing "that everything in Heaven was in perfect order." The angel in the vision instructed her to follow order. "Said the angel, 'Look ye; Christ is the Head; move in order, move in order. Have a meaning to everything.' Said the angel, 'Behold ye, and know how perfect, how beautiful, the order in Heaven; follow it.'"¹⁷

Two years later in 1852¹⁸ the Lord gave her another vision on the importance of order in the Advent movement, impressing her with the need of adopting a plan that would organize Adventists for effective outreach. The

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vision showed her that "Gospel order had been too much feared and neglected."¹⁹ It revealed that order is part of God's kingdom. "There is order in Heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was strictly observed among His apostles."²⁰ Order would be especially important during the closing days of Earth's history: "Now in these last days, while God is bringing His children into the unity of the faith [since 1844], there is more real need of order than ever before; for, as God unites His children, Satan and his evil angels are very busy to prevent this unity and to destroy it."²¹

A major challenge to the fledgling movement was men entering the Gospel ministry whom God had not called. The vision showed that through Satan's influence, "men are hurried into the field who lack wisdom and judgment, perhaps not ruling well their own house, and not having order or government over the few that God has given them charge of at home; yet they feel capable of having charge of the flock."²² Others had an unholy lifestyle with a theoretical knowledge of the truth, but lacking spirituality.²³ Still others were confident that God had called them, yet "they lack sound judgment and patient reasoning, talk boastingly of themselves, and assert many things which they cannot prove from the Word."²⁴ All such persons the vision described as "self-sent men."²⁵

The problem with these persons was that they felt that God had called them to the Gospel ministry. This led to more confusion because "those men who are not called of God are generally the very ones that are the most confident that they are so called and that their labors are very important."²⁶ Some of these persons "have a measure of success, and this leads them and others to think that they are surely called of God." Ellen White pointed out that because they had some success in leading God's "honest children" to accept "the present truth" was no evidence that God had called them.²⁷ "If self-sent men put themselves where God does not put them and profess to be teachers, and souls receive the truth by hearing them talk it, this is no evidence that they are called of God."²⁸

The lack of organization among Adventists at this time was not something that could not be solved. The vision showed that the church was responsible to stop the confusion. Ellen White stated,

I saw that the church should feel their responsibility and should look carefully and attentively at the lives, qualifications, and general course of those who profess to be teachers. If unmistakable evidence is not given that God has called them, and that the "woe" is upon them if they heed not this call, it is the duty of the church to act and

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let it be known that these persons are not acknowledged as teachers by the church. This is the only course the church can take in order to be clear in this matter, for the burden lies upon them.²⁹

The vision showed Ellen White that the church in the days of the apostles was in danger of false teachers. To counteract this problem in the New Testament church, Paul, under inspiration, presented a list of qualifications so the church could safely select and appoint those truly called by God, distinguishing them from false teachers. Thus "the brethren chose men who had given good evidence that they were capable of ruling well their own house and preserving order in their own families, and who could enlighten those who were in darkness."³⁰ In the New Testament a vital qualification for an elder was giving evidence of successful leadership in one's home. Only these were approved of by the church and the Holy Ghost; only these were ordained "by the laying on of hands."³¹

Adventists were to follow the apostles' example. Said she, "I saw that we are no more secure from false teachers now than they were in the apostles' days; and, if we do no more, we should take as special measures as they did to secure the peace, harmony, and union of the flock. We have their example, and should follow it."³²

Ellen White stressed the need to follow the Bible in determining whether God has called persons to the Gospel ministry. Only persons meeting Bible criteria should be ordained. She wrote, "Brethren of experience and of sound minds should assemble, and following the Word of God and the sanction of the Holy Spirit, should, with fervent prayer, lay hands upon those who have given full proof that they have received their commission of God, and set them apart to devote themselves entirely to His work. This act would show the sanction of the church to their going forth as messengers to carry the most solemn message ever given to men."³³

In her counsel Ellen White fully endorsed for Adventists today the validity of the qualifications for leadership of elders or ministers listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Men should be successful leaders in the "church" in their homes before they should be appointed as caretakers of a church congregation. Throughout her ministry she stressed that Seventh-day Adventists must follow these Bible qualifications.³⁴

James White Establishes a Bible-based Organization

Encouraged by the providential revelations of Ellen White, James White deplored the confusion and disorganized state among Sabbathkeeping

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Adventists and appealed for order and unity. As early as 1853, in a series of articles called "Gospel Order," he showed his strong support for following the *Biblical model* of church organization and leadership.

Elder White wrote that the fundamentals of church organization, or Gospel order, were spelled out in the Bible. He urged that "vigorous efforts should be put forth to restore as fast as possible the order of the Gospel."³⁵ He declared, "The divine order of the New Testament is sufficient to organize the church of Christ" and added significantly, "If more were needed, it would have been given by inspiration."³⁶

Qualifications for Church Elders

In the New Testament model for church leadership Elder White recognized that it is the Lord Who calls a minister. The prospective minister must meet the "necessary qualifications" that "are plainly stated in the Word."³⁷ These qualifications Paul listed in his counsel to Timothy 1 Timothy 3:1-7.³⁸

On the requirements for the office of elder or minister, he commented,

Many seem to desire the office of a bishop, or elder, who fail in many points named here by the apostle. He must be "blameless," "vigilant," "sober," "patient," "not a brawler." He must rule well his own house. How is it possible that the Holy Ghost should make a man an overseer of the precious flock, to rule over them [Hebrews 13:17], who knows not how, or neglects to govern his children at home?—Here the apostle appeals to our reason. And it seems the greatest absurdity that such a man should be called to rule the church. God does not call them. He will not trust souls to their care.³⁹

Elder White believed that church organization was clearly spelled out in Scripture and was just as applicable to Adventists as it was in the days of the apostles. The Bible was the Guidebook for the selection of church leaders.

Relations Between Local Elders and Ministers

In 1861 at the time when the first Seventh-day Adventist conference was organized, James White published his address to the conference focusing on how to organize a church with its officers, their duties, and how to elect them.

Elder White pointed out that in the New Testament there were "the following classes of rulers and officers of the Christian church . . . Apostles, Evangelists, Elders, Bishops, Pastors, and Deacons."⁴⁰ He further divided the

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officers into two major classes, "Those who hold their office by virtue of an especial call from God, and those selected by the church: the former embracing apostles and evangelists; and the latter, elders, bishops, pastors, and deacons."⁴¹

Describing the first class of officers, he designated an apostle as "anyone especially sent out of God in any age to proclaim His truth." This was "especially applicable to those who are called of God to lead out in any new truth or reform; such, for instance, as Luther, Melancthon, Wesley, and William Miller."⁴² He described an evangelist as "a preacher of the Gospel, not fixed in any place, but traveling as a missionary to preach the Gospel, and establish churches. See Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5."⁴³

The local church elected the second class of officers—elders, bishops, pastors, and deacons. He saw the office of elders as the equivalent of the words bishop, pastor, and overseer. The term pastor was identified as "literally a herdsman, a shepherd; specially a pastor, a teacher, a spiritual guide of a particular church."⁴⁴ The office of an elder (*presbuteros*) or bishop (*episkopos*) is "a local office confined to a particular church," while its function involves supervising and pastoring the local church.⁴⁵ Here the elder was also the pastor of the church.

The role of a deacon was that of a servant, waiter, or attendant who, in the New Testament church, "had charge of the alms and money of the church, an overseer of the sick and poor, an almoner (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12; Acts 6:1-6)."⁴⁶ Women could function as female deacons, "who had charge of the female sick and poor (Romans 16:1)."⁴⁷

From this it is clear that "officers of the church which are appointed solely by the church itself are reduced to two, namely, elders and deacons."⁴⁸ The local church elected the elders and deacons based on the Biblical qualifications mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-10 and Titus 1:6-9. In accordance with the New Testament practice, ministers were to ordain them (Acts 6:6; Titus 1:5).

The business meetings of the local church were to be presided over by the highest officer of the local church: "The elder of a church should act as a chairman in all its business meetings."⁴⁹

The Function of a Minister

This New Testament model of church organization guided the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the time of its official organization as a church in 1863, and Adventists followed it throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. During this time ministers were employed by the various conferences as administrators and evangelists, raising up churches, and visiting established churches that needed counsel. No conference-employed minister functioned as a resident

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or "settled" pastor of a local church,⁵⁰ as was the practice in most Protestant churches. James White wrote, "It does not appear to have been the design of Christ that His ministers should become stationed, salaried preachers. Of His first ministers it is said, immediately after receiving their high commission, that 'they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following' (Mark 16:15-20). He added that "Paul was not what is now called a 'settled pastor.'" ⁵²

The elder or elders were the elected leadership and they, with the support of the deacons and deaconesses, were to lead the church, which was basically a lay movement. The elders were responsible for the prosperity of the local church.

James White considered the work of Seventh-day Adventist ministers similar to that of the early Christian ministers who entered a town, began preaching and teaching the Word, until they had formed a group of believers whom they organized into a church. "Then these ministers would pass on to a new field of labor. These churches were not carried upon the shoulders of their ministers, but were left to sustain the worship of God among themselves. Occasionally would they pass through and visit the brethren, to exhort, confirm, and comfort them."⁵³

The best evidence of whether a Seventh-day Adventist minister was called by God depended upon his ability to raise up a church. Said Elder White, "In no way can a preacher so well prove himself as in entering new fields. There he can see the fruits of his own labors. And if he be successful in raising up churches, and establishing them, so that they bear good fruits, he gives to his brethren the best proofs that he is sent of the Lord."⁵⁴ Failure to establish a new church would indicate that God had not called him and that he was not needed in the work. He wrote, if ministers "cannot raise up churches and friends to sustain them, then certainly the cause of truth has no need of them, and they have the best reasons for concluding that they made a sad mistake when they thought that God called them to teach the third angel's message."⁵⁵

1883 Church Manual Proposal

In 1878 or 1879 several church leaders expressed the desire to have a church manual. Reasons given for a manual were (1) its usefulness to assist "young ministers and church officers, etc.;" (2) it would lead "to uniformity in all parts of the fields;" (3) it would help the "inexperienced;" and "be very convenient in many respects."⁵⁶

At the 1882 General Conference three church leaders, W.H. Littlejohn, J.O. Corliss, and H.A. St. John, were appointed "to prepare a manual," and

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submit it the following year for "approval or rejection."⁵⁷ The proposed manual was published in a series of installments in the *Review and Herald* (June 5 to October 9, 1883), and the editors solicited input and criticism from the readers. These articles gave a view of what many church leaders thought about church organization at that time.⁵⁸

Basic Structure of the Local Church

The proposed church manual upheld the New Testament leadership model for the local churches. Regarding the proper organization of a congregation, the manual read that there should be at least four officers; larger churches might increase this number according to their needs.

When fully organized, it consists of the body of the church, or laity, and the proper officers,—an elder, a deacon, a clerk, and a treasurer. Where the church is sufficiently large to render such a course necessary, it is customary to increase the number of elders and deacons sufficiently to meet the demands of the case. The offices of clerk and treasurer are not mentioned in the Scriptures, but it is quite evident that something answering to them must have existed in the early church.⁵⁹

The Two Classes of Church Officers

The manual listed the officers in the New Testament church as "1. Apostles; 2. Prophets; 3. Evangelists; 4. Pastors; 5. Teachers; 6. Helps; 7. Elders; 8. Deacons; 9. Deaconesses."⁶⁰ It divided these officers into two classes.

The first class was called the "general" officers. Their "authority is to be recognized by the church everywhere," and they were "qualified for their work by an endowment of the Holy Spirit in such large measure that they may be said to speak or act by inspiration."⁶¹

The second class was called "local officers." They were made up of elders (bishops or presbyters), deacons, deaconesses, as well as church clerks and treasurers. These officers were "usually elected by a local church." Their responsibility was limited to "the local districts or churches which have been placed under their charge." These officers were guided by the Holy Spirit and "to a very large degree by their own unaided judgment."⁶²

Qualifications of a Local Elder

To a significant degree the growth and prosperity of the local churches depended on the qualifications of the officers. Therefore it was important that

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the membership fully understand these qualifications in order to intelligently select the proper persons for the positions.⁶³

Regarding the qualifications of an elder, the manual drew attention to the various titles the New Testament assigned to this position.

He is sometimes called an elder, sometimes a bishop, and sometimes a pastor. The original term for elder in the Greek is *presbuteros* . . . , that for bishop is *episkopos* . . . , while that for pastor is *poimen*. . . . The first is applied to a person of advanced years; the second signifies an overseer or superintendent; the third, a shepherd or tender of sheep. These three terms taken together imply that the one to whom they are applied should be characterized by the dignity and wisdom of age, capabilities which fit him to act as an overseer or superintendent of the church, and that tender solicitude for the fold of Christ which the Eastern shepherd manifests toward the flock of sheep over which he is placed in charge.

It is not necessary to infer from the ordinary signification of the term elder, that the office which it represents should be given only to aged persons. Anyone who possesses the sobriety and knowledge which are naturally the products of a long experience, can safely be intrusted with the eldership of a church, though he may not have passed the noon of life.

Besides the qualifications of an elder suggested by the considerations offered above, the following additional ones might be advanced: (a) An aptitude for teaching publicly and privately (1 Thessalonians 5:12; Titus 1:9; 1 Timothy 5:17); (b) Strong faith in God, since the elder is expected to visit and pray for the recovery of the sick (James 5:14); (c) A generous hospitality (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8); (d) Experience in the Christian life (1 Timothy 3:6); (e) Blameless (1 Timothy 3:2); (f) Temperate (1 Timothy 3:3); (g) The ability to govern well his own house (1 Timothy 3:4).⁶⁴

In summarizing these qualifications, the manual concluded that "the elder of a church should exhibit those traits of character which imply wisdom, spiritual discernment, faith, liberality, activity, and great firmness tempered by a kindness of feeling such as a natural father entertains toward his children."⁶⁵

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Authority and Duties of a Local Elder

The manual presented extensive information about the authority and duties of an elder. It said, "He has a general oversight of everything which can affect the interests of his particular charge. By virtue of his office, he stands at the head, not only of the membership of the church proper, but he is also the superior of the other officers in the church."⁶⁶

The manual considered the duties of an elder "greater than those of any other officer in a local church." Again, we observe that the elder functioned as a pastor. About the tasks of an elder it commented,

A partial enumeration of the duties of a church elder would run somewhat as follows: 1. He should preside at all the business or religious meetings of the church; 2. Put all motions upon which votes are to be taken; 3. Present the names of candidates for church membership; 4. Apply for letters for those desiring the same; 5. Give out appointments for meetings; 6. Look after the weak and discouraged ones, and visit the sick; 7. Take the oversight of the officers of the church, to see to it that they discharge their duties faithfully; 8. He should examine the clerk's and treasurer's books in order to determine whether they are properly kept; 9. In the absence of a minister, he should administer baptism, and the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and feet-washing, in his own church; but it would never be proper for him to administer either of these in any other church than his own; 10. To exercise a general oversight over the life and conduct of the members of the church, with a view to see that none walk disorderly; 11. To settle all difficulties which may arise between members of the church, privately, if possible; otherwise, to bring offenders to the judgment of the church; 12. To see to it that the decisions of the church in all matters are properly executed; 13. To visit all the members of the church at their homes as often as circumstances will admit.⁶⁷

A Pragmatic Approach to Electing Elders

These standards for elders were high. How should a church go about finding a person who could function as an elder? The manual was quite practical in giving instructions on how to go about finding such a person. It said,

We would not wish to be understood as intimating that no one should be elected elder of a church, who does not meet all of these

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requirements. It is difficult to find a perfect man, but much more so to find one who would make a perfect church elder. Select the best man for the position in the church, cooperate with him to the fullest extent, and pray God that He may develop him into what he should be in the shortest time possible.⁶⁸

So even if the man did not possess all qualifications of elder, he might still be elected with the understanding that, with prayer and God's blessing, in time he would develop the traits he presently lacked. The manual pragmatically concluded, "It is better that a church should have an imperfect elder, than that they should be deprived of one altogether."⁶⁹

Ordination of Elders and Ministers

The manual defined ordination as "a public and solemn separation to the work of their respective offices of the individuals to whom it is administered."⁷⁰ The ordination service involved the laying on of hands and of prayer. Ordination was to bring two things to a person. First, in answer to the united prayers of those involved in the work of ordination, it would bring "those gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit which will qualify him for the special work to which he is separated." Second, it was to bestow "the authorization of the individual . . . to discharge the duties of his office."⁷¹

Three classes of persons were to be ordained: ministers, elders, and deacons. The ordination service of elders and deacons was similar to that of the minister. The differences concerned the place of ordination and sphere of service. Elders and deacons were to be ordained in the local church, and their sphere of ministry was limited to the local church.⁷² Ministers were ordained during a session of the General Conference or one of the state conferences, and they were "set apart by the authority of the church of Christ to the holy work of the Gospel ministry."⁷³ Their sphere of ministry was "largely evangelistic."⁷⁴

The Work of a Minister

Until 1883 ministers were mostly involved in evangelism. The manual reported,

At the present date, the work of Seventh-day Adventist ministers is largely evangelistic in its character. Just enough labor is bestowed upon the older churches to keep them in good running order, the balance of the time being devoted to the proclamation of the present truth among those who have not yet heard the solemn message

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which relates to the near coming of Christ and the Judgment.⁷⁵

However, the manual suggested the possibility that conferences might employ ministers who were not able to do evangelistic work but who confined their ministry to existing churches. This remark indicated the beginning of a trend toward ministers being employed as "settled pastors," a concept previously rejected by the Adventist pioneers.

In this context the manual spoke of two classes of ministers. Regarding the first class, to which most of the ministers belonged, it said, "There is found in the Christian church in our age a class of ministers who, though particularly successful in raising up churches in new fields, are of but little use to those churches after they have once been fully indoctrinated."⁷⁶ About the second class it stated, "There are those who seem especially adapted to act the part of pastors of churches already brought into existence. The latter would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to succeed in that which might be called purely evangelistic work."⁷⁷ The manual recommended that conferences keep this distinction in mind so both classes of ministers might be used. "Those who have the oversight of conferences, therefore, would do well to recognize this distinction, as it would enable them to utilize the labor of both of these classes of preachers, by assigning to each his proper work."⁷⁸

Ellen White would strongly oppose this suggestion about "settled pastors."

The General Conference Rejected the Church Manual

At the General Conference session in November 1883, the General Conference Executive Committee, joined by a committee of ten⁷⁹ appointed by the session, considered the proposal to adopt the church manual that had been published in the *Review and Herald*.

At the end of the deliberations the committee unanimously rejected the proposed church manual. Mrs. White attended the committee meeting, but there is no written report in existence of what she told the committee, except that she "spoke well."⁸⁰ However, a closer look at the makeup of the committee might give us some idea of her position on the manual. One of the committee members was her son W.C. White. As the committee decision was unanimous, he must have disapproved of the manual. Furthermore, his approval of his mother's speech leads one to think that she also was not in favor of the manual but stressed the central authority of the Bible as the source for understanding church leadership and organization, instead of becoming dependent on a manual produced by uninspired men. Her views might very well be reflected in the committee's reasons for the manual's rejection and in the General

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Conference president's article written to explain to the membership why we did not need a manual.⁸¹

The committee gave the following reasons:

It is the unanimous judgment of the committee that it would not be advisable to have a church manual. We consider it unnecessary because we have already surmounted the greatest difficulties connected with church organization without one; and perfect harmony exists among us on this subject. It would seem to many like a step toward the formation of a creed, or a discipline, other than the Bible, something we have always been opposed to as a denomination. If we had one, we fear many, especially those commencing to preach, would study it to obtain guidance in religious matters, rather than to seek for it in the Bible, and from the leadings of the Spirit of God, which would tend to their hindrance in genuine religious experience and in knowledge of the mind of the Spirit. It was in taking similar steps that other bodies of Christians first began to lose their simplicity and become formal and spiritually lifeless. Why should we imitate them? The committee feels, in short, that our tendency should be in the direction of simplicity and close conformity to the Bible, rather than in elaborately defining every point in church management and church ordinances.⁸²

At the same time, the General Conference in session voted to request its president to write an article for the *Review* explaining the action of the General Conference in rejecting the manual.

In this article the president praised the persons who had prepared the proposal for the church manual, commending them for having put together "much excellent matter."⁸³ The article explained that the reason for the manual's rejection had to do with "the desirability of any manual whatever."⁸⁴ It encouraged ministers and church officers to look to the Bible for guidance in church work instead of a manual written by uninspired men.

The Bible "contains our creed and discipline. It thoroughly furnishes the man of God unto all good works."⁸⁵ What was not revealed in the Scriptures concerning "church organization and management" and detailed responsibilities of church officers and ministers "should not be strictly defined and drawn out into minute specifications for the sake of uniformity, but rather be left to individual judgment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."⁸⁶

If we had needed a "book of directions," then "the Holy Spirit would have

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"left one on record with the stamp of inspiration on it. Man cannot safely supplement this matter with his weak judgment."⁸⁷ We ought to study God's Word. "God requires us to study important principles which He reveals in His Word, but the minutiae in carrying them out He leaves to individual judgment, promising heavenly wisdom in times of need."⁸⁸

Ministers must depend more on God, instead of human beings. "His ministers are constantly placed where they must feel their helplessness, and their need of seeking God for light, rather than go to any church manual for specific directions, placed therein by other uninspired men."⁸⁹

The article pointed out the dangerous impact of such a manual on ministers. "Minute, specific directions tend to weakness, rather than power. They lead to dependence rather than self-reliance."⁹⁰ It suggested that it is better to make some mistakes and learn from them "than to have our way all marked out for us by others."⁹¹

Although those who favored a manual did not intend that it would be a creed or have the authority to settle disputes, yet having it published under the "auspices of the General Conference, would at once carry with it much weight of authority, and would be consulted by most of our younger ministers."⁹²

What would be the effect if the General Conference would issue a church manual? "It would gradually shape and mold the whole body: and those who did not follow it would be considered out of harmony with established principles of church order."⁹³ Instead of making our ministers broader and more self-reliant men with deeper spiritual experiences and a more reliable judgment, a manual would have a tendency to accomplish just the opposite.⁹⁴

In conclusion, the article pointed to lessons from history. All genuine reformations had to deal with the issue of publishing a church manual. After they reached a certain magnitude they felt the need of uniformity. To achieve this, church leaders prepared "directions to guide the inexperienced. These have grown in number and authority till, accepted by all, they really become authoritative. There seems to be no logical stopping place, when once started upon this road, till this result is reached. Their history is before us; we have no desire to follow it. Hence we stop without a church manual before we get started."⁹⁵ Union exists among believers, but it is not necessary to achieve uniformity.

From this article it becomes obvious that the committee's recommendation was of the opinion that the Bible should remain the central source we ought to consult, and not a manual written by uninspired men. Spelling out every detail of church organization and duties of church officers to achieve uniformity throughout the Seventh-day Adventist Church was unnecessary. Our ministers should always feel their helplessness, which would force them to

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seek God and His Word for light so that their spiritual experiences become deeper, their judgments more reliable, than depending on a church manual.

Ellen White Opposes Ministers as "Settled Pastors"

Toward the end of the nineteenth century we observe more discussion over the role of the minister and his relation to the local church. In 1883 Mrs. White addressed the General Conference in session that was discussing the proposal of a church manual which suggested that conferences employ ministers who could work as pastors in local churches. In her sermon, she stressed the need for conference presidents to develop a practical experience in trusting and depending on God instead of confessing their problems to others, and subsequently to influence the ministers under them to develop the same dependence. Then they should educate the churches to deal with their own problems without the ministers to help them. Said she, "The president of a state conference is, by his manner of dealing, educating the ministers under him, and together they can so educate the churches that it will not be necessary to call the ministers of the conference from the field to settle difficulties and dissensions in the church."⁶⁶ This was indeed very timely advice from the prophetess, coming at a moment when a trend toward "settled pastors" was about to be incorporated into an official church manual. Undoubtedly, her influence led to the defeat of the proposal.

Shortly after the 1888 General Conference in Minneapolis, Ellen White warned believers against depending on ministers to work for their churches. Said she: "Do not depend on the ministers to do all the work in your church and neighborhood." The task of ministers is to "seek the lost sheep" while the members are to "help them." The church members "must have light in themselves" so they can care for themselves.⁶⁷

A few years later, around the turn of the century, Ellen White became increasingly vocal in her opposition against the tendency by some of the larger churches to request the care of ministers who would restrict their work exclusively to these churches.⁶⁸ She foresaw the negative impact of this model of church organization on ministers, congregations, and the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist movement in evangelizing the world. She drew attention to the cities in America and in other countries that had not been worked as they should have been, because many of our churches had separated themselves from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consequently they had lost their burden for soulwinning and now they were calling for ministers to do their work. She wrote: "Many churches, collectively and individually, have been so far removed from God, so separated from His Spirit, that they have left souls to perish all

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around them, while they have been calling for workers to labor in the church. This labor has been granted them, and the impenitent and the sinner have been robbed of the messages which the Lord would have given to them."⁹⁹

Again she emphasized, "The Gospel is to go to every nation, tongue, and people, and ministers are not to devote their labors so entirely to the churches which know the truth. Both ministers and people lose much by following this method of labor."¹⁰⁰

The trend toward "settled pastors" seriously affected the conferences' involvement in the mission of the church. It drained the available conference workforce for raising up churches in new territories. She said,

Our people have had great light, and yet much of our ministerial force is exhausted on the churches, in teaching those who should be teachers; enlightening those who should be "the light of the world"; watering those from whom should flow springs of living water; enriching those who might be veritable mines of precious truth; repeating the Gospel invitation to such as should be scattered to the uttermost parts of the earth, communicating the message of Heaven to many who have not had the privileges which they have enjoyed; feeding those who should be in the byways and highways heralding the invitation, "Come; for all things are now ready." Come to the Gospel feast; come to the supper of the Lamb; "for all things are now ready."¹⁰¹

As this movement toward "settled pastors" continued, Ellen White in 1900 boldly informed church members that it was their duty to tell ministers to work for unbelievers while they, the members, would take care of the church services and souls within the neighborhood. Said she,

Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: "Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields."¹⁰²

The following year, Ellen White addressed the 1901 General Conference expressing her great concern about ministers hovering over the churches while

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there were so many places where the message had not yet been preached. With great unhappiness she exclaimed: "My heart has been filled with sadness as I have looked over the field and seen the barren places. . . . Who feels a burden for the souls who cannot receive the truth till it is brought to them? Our ministers are hovering over the churches, as though the angel of mercy was not making efforts to save souls."¹⁰³ Then she appealed to the ministers to instruct the newly established churches to not count on continual pastoral care by ministers, saying, "Establish your churches with the understanding that they need not expect the minister to wait upon them and to be continually feeding them. They have the truth; they know what truth is. They should have root in themselves. These should strike down deeply, that they may reach up higher and still higher. They must be rooted and grounded in the faith."¹⁰⁴

The churches needed to be educated to be able to function without a minister hovering over them. She went so far as to say that if they could not function by themselves, the members needed to be rebaptized and born again. She explained, "If the proper instruction were given, if the proper methods were followed, every church member would do his work as a member of the body. He would do Christian missionary work. But the churches are dying, and they want a minister to preach to them. . . . They should be taught that unless they can stand alone, without a minister, they need to be converted anew, and baptized anew. They need to be born again."¹⁰⁵

Not only churches were at fault, but also ministers were to blame for the declining spiritual health of the church. Said she, "If the ministers would get out of the way, if they would go forth into new fields, the members would be obliged to bear responsibilities, and their capabilities would increase by use."¹⁰⁶

Again, one year later, she strongly protested the growing trend of churches to call for "settled pastors" to have control over their churches. This condition produced one-sided churches of which she disapproved: "There should not be a call to have settled pastors over our churches, but let the life-giving power of the truth impress the individual members to act, leading them to labor interestedly to carry on efficient missionary work in each locality. As the hand of God, the church is to be educated and trained to do effective service. Its members are to be the Lord's devoted Christian workers. The church of today is too one-sided."¹⁰⁷

She spoke about the importance of conference workers leaving the churches alone and concentrating on unbelievers in new fields, stating that "as a general rule, the conference laborers should go out from the churches into new fields, using their God-given ability to a purpose in seeking and saving the

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Some conference leaders may have defended the role of a "settled pastor" to solve conflicts in the various congregations. Ellen White, however, argued that it was futile and would ultimately weaken the churches.

God has not given His ministers the work of setting the churches right. No sooner is this work done, apparently, than it has to be done over again. Church members that are thus looked after and labored for become religious weaklings. If nine-tenths of the effort that has been put forth for those who know the truth had been put forth for those who have never heard the truth, how much greater would have been the advancement made! God has withheld His blessings because His people have not worked in harmony with His directions.¹⁰⁹

Ellen White further predicted that ministers giving time and talent to members instead of the unconverted would produce weak churches. Said she, "It weakens those who know the truth for our ministers to expend on them the time and talent that should be given to the unconverted.... So long as church members make no effort to give to others the help given them, great spiritual feebleness must result."¹¹⁰

Members should be taught to work for God and depend on Him, not ministers. She said, "The greatest help that can be given our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers.... There are times when it is fitting for our ministers to give on the Sabbath, in our churches, short discourses, full of the life and love of Christ. But the church members are not to expect a sermon every Sabbath."¹¹¹ Instead of spending time on believers, ministers ought to evangelize new areas, raise up churches, and then move to other territories.

She instructed ministers "to sow the seeds of truth. Place after place is to be visited; church after church is to be raised up. Those who take their stand for the truth are to be organized into churches, and then the minister is to pass on to other equally important fields."¹¹²

After organizing a new church, the minister is to set its members at work, teaching them how to begin to work successfully.

Just as soon as a church is organized, let the minister set the members at work. They will need to be taught how to labor successfully. Let the minister devote more of his time to educating than to preaching. Let him teach the people how to give to others the

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knowledge they have received. While the new converts should be taught to ask counsel from those more experienced in the work, they should also be taught not to put the minister in the place of God. Ministers are but human beings, men compassed with infirmities. Christ is the One to Whom we are to look for guidance.¹¹³

It is obvious, especially during the latter part of her life, that Ellen White, with her prophetic authority, instructed ministers, as stewards, to no longer hover over established churches but to be involved in aggressive evangelism in unentered areas. "Our ministers should plan wisely, as faithful stewards. They should feel that it is not their duty to hover over the churches already raised up, but that they should be doing aggressive evangelistic work, preaching the Word and doing house-to-house work in places that have not yet heard the truth. . . . They will find that nothing is so encouraging as doing evangelistic work in new fields."¹¹⁴

1907 Book on Church Organization

A few years after Ellen White's testimonies against the trends of ministers taking control of local churches, the Review and Herald published *The Church, Its Organization, Order, and Discipline*, authored by J.H. Loughborough. Although it was not issued by the General Conference, it functioned as a church manual for local churches for years.

The book contained an abundance of Spirit of Prophecy counsels and fully supported the position of Ellen White on the evangelistic nature of the work of the minister. It also incorporated James White's view of the New Testament model of church organization, the leadership of local elders, and their ministry as pastors, teachers, and spiritual guides. Consequently the book does not mention the function of the minister as "settled pastor" of a congregation.

The elder was seen as the officer "in charge of a local church"¹¹⁵ and he "should act as chairman in all its business meetings."¹¹⁶

Ellen White Upholds Leadership Role of Church Elders

During her prophetic ministry Ellen White gave detailed counsel on what the Lord expected of elders. Their responsibilities in the local church involved five major areas: as undershepherds, assisting members with their gifts, ascertaining faithfulness in financial stewardship, dealing with erring members, and upholding the church's standards and policies. Her counsels to elders below delineate what the Lord expects from elders. If followed, churches could fully

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operate without a "settled pastor."

Responsibilities as an Undershepherd

Mrs. White revealed that local elders, as undershepherds of Christ's flock, have a threefold duty. They are to nurture and oversee (supervise) the members of the church and provide them an example of the Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle.¹¹⁷ In their leadership they should avoid showing any partiality to anyone in their treatment of believers.¹¹⁸ They are not to drive them but with great wisdom feed them unselfishly with spiritual food.¹¹⁹ They are not to be dictators but should be an encouragement to members.¹²⁰ Ministering to the sick is part of their responsibilities.¹²¹ In their leadership they need to display Christlike humility.¹²²

Their work is not only to the church members, but they should also labor two by two in evangelistic work, reaching out to unbelievers.¹²³

Responsibilities to Educate Members to Use Their Gifts

Elders should lay plans for educating church members to use their God-given talents.¹²⁴ Their duty is to get everyone to take part in the mission and operation of the church. Said Ellen White, "They should arrange matters so that every member of the church shall have a part to act, that none may lead an aimless life, but that all may accomplish what they can according to their several ability."¹²⁵ They are responsible to "give every member of the church a share in active work for the salvation of souls." This is of vital importance because it is "the only way in which the church can be preserved in a healthy, thriving condition."¹²⁶

Responsibilities to Ensure Faithful Stewardship

Elders are responsible for instructing the membership in "the necessity of faithfulness in the payment of pledges, tithes, and offerings."¹²⁷ They should appoint church officers "who will attend faithfully to the work of gathering in the tithe." If they neglect this important work, involving a blessing or a curse to the church, they ought to be relieved of their responsibilities and others should be selected to do this work.¹²⁸ This is such a crucial task that even conference presidents should make sure that the elders are taking care of this responsibility.¹²⁹

However, if others fail to collect the tithe, it is the elders' duty to visit members who have not turned in the tithe by the end of the calendar year. Ellen White appealed, "Elders of churches, do your duty. Labor from home to home, that the flock of God shall not be remiss in this great matter, which

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involves such a blessing or such a curse."¹³⁰

Responsibilities to Deal With Erring Members

Elders have the duty to deal with sin in the church in an impartial way, no matter how uncomfortable this is. Failure to act makes them responsible for the damage that comes to the church. She said, "Sin should be rebuked. Whatever opposition and trial might come to the elder of the church because of his faithfulness, he should not swerve from true principles. Sins should not, because of unsanctified preferences and sympathy, be lightly regarded in one man which would be condemned in another. This matter is one of great importance." If the elder should fail to deal with sin, and sanctions errors in the lives of church members, "God will hold him responsible for his brother's unfaithfulness in office, and for the harm which will result to the church."¹³¹

Elders have great responsibility to guard the spirituality of the members, and need to curb the increase of sinful behavior and influences. They are not to adopt an attitude of tolerance to the inroads of the world, because this is no sign of love for the sinner. Ellen White stated,

Especially the elders of the church . . . must not carelessly allow the members to be irregular in conduct and thus let evil and sin strengthen in the church, thinking this is the way to show love for one another. God requires faithfulness in watchcare. You must take hold of God with one hand while with the other hand, in love, you lay hold upon the erring and the sinner and draw them to Jesus. Pray with them, weep with them, feel for their souls, love them, and never let go of them. This is the love Jesus has expressed for you. You must ever strive for unity and forbearance and love.¹³²

Although local elders, in cooperation with deacons, are responsible for the prosperity of the congregation, elders do not have the authority to disfellowship members. They have to do this in consultation with the conference.¹³³ However, they need to deal patiently with erring members. Ellen White counseled, "In the fear of God, with much humility and sorrow for the erring, who are the purchase of the blood of Christ, with earnest, humble prayer the proper officers should deal with the offenders."¹³⁴

In this work the local elders were closely to cooperate with "traveling elders," who were itinerant ministers employed by the conference. Mrs. White commented, "Elders, local and traveling, are appointed by the church and by the Lord to oversee the church, to reprove, exhort, and rebuke the unruly and

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to comfort the feeble-minded. There is no higher tribunal upon Earth than the church of God. And if the members of the church will not submit to the decision of the church, and will not be counseled and advised by it, they cannot be helped."¹³⁵

Responsibilities to Uphold Church Standards and Policies

It is the duty of the elders to present a positive attitude in the church. They should refuse to lend undue sympathy to doubters and complainers, or to present trials in an exaggerated light; otherwise they open the door to Satan's suggestions and temptations.¹³⁶ In their work they should be prepared to face persons who are critical of the leadership of the church.¹³⁷

At all times elders are to uphold the standards of the church and to draw nourishment from Christ as the Living Vine so they are full of Christ and Christlikeness. If their heart is not transformed by grace, "the churches would do far better without such elders and ministers."¹³⁸

Elders should never become self-exalted, but should remember that only humility makes them worthy of the honor of the office of an elder. "Let him remember that the office does not make the man, but that before angels and before men he is to honor his office."¹³⁹

An important task of the elders is to bring unity among the believers so that the members "care for each other, to advise with and counsel each other." In supervising the affairs of the church, to prevent confusion elders need "to reprove, exhort, and rebuke the unruly and to comfort the feeble-minded," showing the need of members to respect and to accept the decisions of the church.¹⁴⁰

Finally Ellen White warned elders to affirm the standards of the church, and in no way to use their influence in leading "the church into the world rather than from it."¹⁴¹

C. Adventists Abandon the New Testament Model of Leadership

As we have seen earlier, soon after the death of the prophet John, many early Christians abandoned the New Testament leadership model of elders having the oversight of the local church, to a church leadership that centered on the bishop as the head of the congregation while elders functioned as his assistants. Similarly, shortly after the death of the prophetess and messenger to the remnant church, Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists replaced the leadership of the local elders with a minister- or pastor-centered leadership structure

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in which elders functioned as his assistants.

We will now discover the reasons for this leadership transition. First we will investigate the failure of elders and members to take their responsibilities seriously, then consider the acceptance of the practice of "settled pastors," and finally note the institutionalizing of the leadership position of the minister in the local church with the proportional decline of the authority of the elders.

Failure of Elders and Members

God's plan for local church leadership was not successfully implemented. Elders and church officers failed to get members involved in the mission of the church. In exploring this problem, Ellen White asked herself the question,

What is the matter that the church elders and officers do not arouse and seek with earnest prayer and determined effort to set the people in the church to work? Are elders in these churches carrying any burden? Do they feel any care for the souls of the sheep of God's pasture? Do they humble their heart before God and by faith lay hold on the grace of Christ and put away their sins and believe their repentance is accepted before God? Have they piety? Have they devotion to God? Will the elders of the church, the officers of the church, draw nigh to God, will they now in probationary time learn the lessons of Jesus Christ and practice them until they shall ascend the high places of faith and command a clearer, more spiritual view of the situation?¹⁴²

She bemoaned the fact that elders and other officers had not been successful in providing opportunities for every member to get involved. She said that it "has not been done in the past, and there are but few who realize how much has been lost on this account."¹⁴³

Another area where elders failed was in firmly grounding members in the Advent message. Ellen White asked the probing question, "Have the elders and deacons of the church looked after the weak and straying ones? And have they realized that the wavering are in danger of losing their souls? Have you tried both by precept and example to plant the feet of the straying on the eternal Rock?" To rectify this situation she called for "a decided need of reformation in every branch of the work."¹⁴⁴

When looking at the failures of the local church leadership, we need to realize that the enthusiasm and burden for lost souls that inspired the early pioneers had largely disappeared. A Laodicean condition had arisen among the

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membership that had such an impact on the church that Ellen White blamed them for delaying the Second Advent.¹⁴⁶ Toward the end of her life she even charged members with repeating the "insubordination" of ancient Israel. She wrote, "We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years, as did the children of Israel."¹⁴⁷

Thus both the failure of local church leaders as well as membership apathy created a climate that was responsible for a change of the leadership structure in the church.

A Church in Transition

As long as the prophetic voice of Ellen White was heard, most Seventh-day Adventist leaders followed the New Testament leadership model she had endorsed. This meant that the local elder or elders were responsible for leading the local church. The congregation elected them for a period of one year. These elders were accountable to the local church for its prosperity. Every year their performance was reviewed and evaluated. If the members were pleased with their leadership, they would be elected for another year; if they were not pleased with their performance they were not reelected.

From time to time "traveling elders"—ministers—visited these churches and provided assistance with the training of church members. These traveling elders worked in close cooperation with the local elders but were not "settled pastors" hovering over a congregation, except in some of the largest churches. The local elder presided over meetings dealing with the business of the church.

As we have seen, Ellen White strongly opposed the trend toward "settled pastors," a model of church organization which existed among most Protestant churches. Seventh-day Adventists were not to follow their example, for Adventists were the remnant church of Bible prophecy—a prophetic movement whose mission mandate was to prepare the whole world for the soon return of Christ. They were not just another Protestant church that focused on nurturing its members and maintaining its presence in the community.

After the death of the prophetess, the voice that spoke most strongly against the ministers taking control or hovering over local congregations was silent. As a result of the failure of elders and members to live up to their responsibilities in the local church, a gradual change began to take place in which the New Testament leadership model was abandoned and replaced by the "settled pastor" model. By having a paid "settled pastor" in charge of a church or several churches, church officials seemed to feel that this would be more beneficial than having ineffective elders in charge of the congregation.

The appointment of "settled pastors" had a dramatic impact on the lead-

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ership role of the elders in the congregation. With the minister as the most important leader in the organizational structure of the local church, the church board, after the minister, became the decisive leadership voice responsible for the direction of the local church. Now the influence of the elder was generally reduced to leading out in platform responsibilities, breaking bread at Communion, giving advice to the church board, visiting members, and assisting the local minister. Nearly twenty years after Mrs. White's death, this change of the elders' authority became institutionalized with the official adoption of the first Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* in 1932.¹⁴⁸

The First Church Manual (1932)

Transfer of the Elder's Authority to That of the "Settled Pastor"

The *Manual* gave its blessings on the position of the "settled pastor," a concept so strongly opposed by Ellen White, and incorporated it into the organizational structure of the local Adventist church. Now the minister, assigned by the conference to the local church, took over the elder's authority and became the pastor and leader of that local church. The elder was still recognized as the highest official and religious leader in a local church where there was no "settled pastor." The *Manual* reads, "In the work and organization of the church, except where a local pastor has been provided by the conference, the office of elder stands out as the highest and most important."¹⁴⁹ "The local church elder, in the absence of the pastor, is the religious leader of the church."¹⁵⁰

The elder or elders of the local church now became assistants to the local minister. The *Church Manual* declared, "In cases where the conference committee assigns an ordained minister to labor with a church, he should be considered as the ranking officer, and the local elder as his assistant."¹⁵¹

It is of interest that the minister as the highest officer in the local church was not at all accountable to the local congregation but to the conference. The *Manual* stated, "The minister is responsible to the conference committee, and serves the church as a conference worker." By contrast, the local elder continued to remain "responsible to the church and the church board."¹⁵²

The church board now became the important body for the governance of the church. The elder was no longer its chairman; instead, the local minister was. The *Manual* stated, "The minister serving the church regularly as pastor, usually acts as the chairman of the church board."¹⁵³ The church board consisted of the "pastor; the elder or elders; the deacons; the clerk; the treasurer; the missionary leader, if other than the elder; the church missionary secretary; the Sabbath

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School superintendent; and the Missionary Volunteer leader; and where it seems advisable, two or three other members chosen by the church."¹⁵⁴

The composition of the board showed that the leadership authority of the elder was substantially reduced. However, the presence of the ordained leadership on the church board was still substantial because all elders and deacons were still members.

Regarding the nominating committee, the *Manual* stated that this committee had no *ex officio* members. "The minister in charge of the church may be chosen as a member of this committee, as his appointment to the church does not rest upon any action by the nominating committee."¹⁵³ However, if the church did not elect him to the nominating committee, "his counsel should be sought by the committee."¹⁵⁶

The local church was still to elect the elder(s) but not the minister. A distinction between elders and ministers was made on the basis of the special gifts that the Lord gives to His church in Ephesians 4. Quoting the Spirit of Prophecy, the *Manual* read,

God has a church, and she has a divinely appointed ministry. "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... ." ¹⁵⁷

The conference committee called and appointed ministers, who, in turn, were accountable to the conference.¹⁵⁸ Because ministers received their credentials from the conference, they "are responsible to the conference, and not to any local church in the conference."¹⁵⁹

The *Manual* clearly spelled out the authority of the minister in the local church: "On assignment to a local church as a worker or pastor, the ordained minister takes rank above the local elder or elders, and these latter serve as his assistants."¹⁶⁰

Regarding the minister's role in the local church the *Manual* read,

By virtue of his ordination to the ministry he is qualified to function in all church rites and ceremonies, and should have charge of such services. He should be the spiritual leader and advisor of the church. He should instruct the church officers in their duties, and counsel

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them in carrying them out, and in helping them to plan for all lines of church work and activity. By virtue of his appointment as pastor he is a member of the church board, and serves as chairman.¹⁶¹

Again the *Manual* emphasized, "Pastors or assistant pastors are not nominated or elected to such positions by the church. Their connection with the church is by the appointment of the conference committee, and such appointments may be canceled at any time."¹⁶²

Since the first *Church Manual* was issued, further changes have taken place that show an increasing influence of local ministers and the declining authority of elder(s), as we will see in the most recent Church Manual.

The 2000 Church Manual

The current *Church Manual*, issued about 70 years after the first, shows an increase of the minister's authority in the local church in comparison to the 1932 *Manual*.

The minister serving the local church as a pastor continues to be the highest authority, while the elders are his assistants. The minister serves also as the chairman of the church board, unless he requests the elder to function temporarily in this capacity.¹⁶³

In addition to presiding over the church board, the minister's influence on the church's nominating committee has expanded. He now serves *ex officio* as the chairperson of the nominating committee. Here his influence in the selection process of the new officers can be substantial.¹⁶⁴

The current *Manual* mentions the existence of a "board of elders" which is described as a committee appointed by the church board.¹⁶⁵ The authority of the elder(s) is reduced to that of an advisory role. When a church has a board of elders, the pastor generally functions also as the chairman of the board of elders.

All these changes indicate that since the death of the prophetic voice among Seventh-day Adventists, the minister has significantly increased his influence in the local church by functioning as the chairman of the church board, the board of elders, the nominating committee, and, generally, the chairman of the committee to select the nominating committee. Simultaneously, the authority of the elder(s) has drastically declined.

Presently the *Manual* recommends that the church board consists of the following members: Elder(s), Head deacon, Head deaconess, Treasurer, Clerk, Personal Ministries leader, Personal Ministries secretary, Community Services and/or Dorcas leader, Sabbath School superintendent, Family Ministries leader,

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Women's Ministries leader, Children's Ministries coordinator, Education secretary, Home and School Association leader, Adventist Youth Society leader, Pathfinder Club director, Adventurer Club director, Interest coordinator, Communication Committee chairperson or Communication secretary, Health Ministries leader, Stewardship leader, and Religious Liberty leader.¹⁶⁶

In comparison with the 1932 *Manual*, the presence of the ordained officers has declined on the church board. In 1932 all ordained deacons and elders were part of the board; now only the elder(s) and head deacon are board members. Furthermore, as a result of the expansion of the church board to a presence of about twenty nonordained members, the influence of the elders on the church board has further weakened. If we keep in mind that each board member has one vote, the voice of ordained elders has been so much reduced that motions can easily be voted over the objections of the elders. This situation has had significant and serious consequences, especially when controversial issues are introduced that affect worship style, standards, and spirituality of congregations.

Effects of the Current Leadership Model on Local Elders

Over the years, quite a few Adventist ministers have visited and observed successful Protestant megachurches. Several of these ministers have tried to pattern our worship forms after these megachurches in the hope that their churches would experience strong growth, attract more non-Adventists, and keep our youth from leaving the church.

In many Adventist churches these drastic changes have met with resistance, especially on the part of the elder(s). However, with the declining authority of the elders, these changes could be introduced without much difficulty, despite opposition from the elders. Except in large churches that have many elders on their church boards, in most churches the elders have a minority voice on the church board. One elder's vote is just as influential as the vote of an interest coordinator or a religious liberty leader. If the pastor would like to make substantial changes in the church, and he has the support of most of the church board, the ordained elders have no way to prevent these changes. Today, elders function simply as advisers, not as leaders, because they lack the authority. This leadership situation in which the majority of the church board determines the direction of the local church is far removed from the New Testament model of leadership.

In some large churches the local ministers have used strategies to reduce the number of elders on the church board so that elders are no longer able to oppose controversial changes in worship styles. In one large church the minister introduced the members to a proposal to make the church board more "man-

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ageable" by eliminating "deadwood." This was done by restricting the elders who were allowed to vote on the board from 28 to 5, a more than 80% reduction. Without even discussing the proposal with every one of the elders or obtaining their consent or input, the proposal was quickly introduced and approved by a ballot vote on Sabbath morning between Sabbath School and church. At the next elders' meeting, after having extensively discussed this action from a Biblical perspective, the elders unanimously protested. They realized that taking away elders' rights to vote on the church board was not in harmony with their leadership position in the church as brought out in the Bible and the *Church Manual*. But there was nothing the elders could do because the church had already "officially" approved it.

When the elders related their arguments to the minister, he did not address the Biblical arguments but referred to the *Church Manual* to justify this action. He pointed out that the *Manual* only stated that "elder(s)" were to be included on the church board but it did not spell out how many elders should be included. To him this meant that the church had the right to limit the voting power of the elders on the church board. This is an example of how a local church dispute was decided by using the *Church Manual*, without consulting what the Bible teaches about the role of elders.

When some of the elders contacted the conference, they discovered that this change in the leadership structure had received prior conference approval. Such an incident is evidence of the lack of understanding of the New Testament leadership role of the local elders.

These are a few examples of the powerful impact of the current leadership structure of the local church on the authority of the elders. When the minister is in charge of the local church, he is the one who is most influential in determining the direction of the church. This power has been used to benefit the church as well as to push agendas and dreams that did not take into consideration the voices of local elders, thus introducing controversy and tensions that have deeply divided churches and negatively affected their growth.

D. Challenges of Returning to the Biblical Model

The present leadership model described in the *Church Manual* is so deeply entrenched in the minds of believers that it would not be easy to return to the Biblical model. Very few believers are even aware that during the twentieth century Adventists have departed from Jesus' model of local leadership. Let us now consider some of the possible obstacles to a return to the New Testament model of leadership structure in the local church.

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The Congregation

Each church wants its own minister and doesn't really want to share with other churches. Congregations that share ministers with two, three, four, or more churches generally look forward to the time when they will be large enough to have their own full-time minister who can devote all his time to their own church's needs. Then they would feel they have gotten something worthwhile for all the tithe they have submitted to the conference.

Many members also look forward to having a minister who regularly pays them personal visits. They also expect their minister to be responsible for a steady growth of their church so that in the future they may expand their church facilities and build a larger church equipped with the latest technology and user-friendly sanctuary architecture.

Churches that already have a full-time pastor generally feel disappointed when the conference announces that they have to share a pastor with another church. This means less pastoral attention.

The Local Elder(s)

Today, in general, church elders are so used to having a local minister that most elders have come to depend on ministers to do most of the work in the church. They consider the minister a full-time worker who should do much of the work of keeping the church in smooth running condition. Less pastoral attention would mean that the elders would have to devote more time to the operation of the church. Being so used to ministers doing so much for the church, elders have frequently developed a lifestyle that is so involved with their own jobs, projects, and plans that there is hardly any time left for church work. This may be a major factor in the low attendance of many elders at the elders' meetings and church boards. The other factor may be a general lack of interest in church proceedings.

Ministers who have tried to implement an elders' visitation program have learned from experience that this is generally ineffective because many elders just do not have the time in their schedules for this type of work. And elders who have time often feel that the minister is much more qualified to do this job, and they defer the visitation to the pastor—after all he is paid to do the job.

The Ministers

Many ministers enjoy being in charge of just one church. They do not relish being responsible for several churches. Young ministers being placed in a district with several churches see it as the ultimate in pastoring when they are assigned to one church. They feel that in having one church they can really

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accomplish something great, without being distracted by caring for all the other small churches.

In the past, ministers stayed in their churches only a few years. The rationale given for moving ministers more frequently was that each has strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it was thought, moving pastors every few years would be good for churches. The next minister would bring different strengths to the church than the previous minister, which would contribute to a more balanced church development.¹⁶⁷

However, for some time now, through the influence of non-Seventh-day Adventist concepts about pastoral ministry, the idea has caught on that it is better for the pastor to stay in a congregation for a much longer period to give stability to the congregation and the minister's family and allow him to better execute his long-term plans for the church. Today, some ministers have succeeded in staying 10, 15, or even 20 years in one church. To return to the practices of the Adventist pioneers who were committed to the New Testament leadership model that has no "settled pastors," may not be welcome news for most ministers.

The Conferences

The current leadership model of "settled pastors" has advantages for conference leaders, one of the most significant advantages being that the conference has more direct influence over the local church because the minister answers to the conference, not to the church.

Since the 1863 organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the local church properties have belonged to the conference. Today, not only does the conference own the church building, but because the minister is a conference employee, the conference is ultimately in charge of the local church. Which conference would be willing to give up this control? There may be a few conference leaders who might be interested in exploring options about returning to the days of the Adventist pioneers and the counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy, but most likely it may not appeal to the majority of the conferences.

In addition, conferences may fear that a return to a model of churches being under the authority of local elders may increase a trend toward Congregationalism. In recent years several churches have left the Seventh-day Adventist Church organizational structure and have become independent churches.

I would not deny that there might be some church members who might see the return to the New Testament leadership model as an opportunity to leave the conference's family of churches and become a freestanding independent congregation. However, such a situation would be a remote possibility if the

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elders of these churches had proper training in the Spirit of Prophecy concepts of church leadership.

We must ask ourselves, Who was primarily responsible for inspiring these churches to adopt a congregational model of organization and to break with the Seventh-day Adventist Church? It was not so much the church members, but charismatic Adventist ministers, who, deeply influenced by non-Biblical models of church leadership and church growth philosophies of the megachurches, spearheaded the break with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These ministers, who were conference employees, effectively influenced a large portion of the membership, and, with its support, organized themselves into independent "community churches," and eventually adopted Sunday worship celebration services.

Lack of Credibility of the Testimonies of the Spirit of Prophecy

One of the most significant obstacles to a return to the New Testament leadership model of church organization has to do with the perceived credibility of the counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy to the Adventist Church. Many may question the validity of the inspired admonitions given over 100 years ago. No Seventh-day Adventist would doubt their applicability to the nineteenth century. But who would presume to advocate that these testimonies are still very much applicable to a church that struggles to adapt itself to a postmodern world?

Before taking any action, some leaders may be inclined to pass an opinion survey around and see what others may think about the relevance of these testimonies today, but that would not be helpful. What we need more than ever is a careful study of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy to see what we can learn from these counsels in the light of our past experience. We need to keep in mind that at the end of time very few will have any confidence in these messages. "The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. . . Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony."¹⁶⁸ We should also remember the tragic consequences of such a deception, for "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV).

E. Advantages of Restoring Jesus' Model of Leadership

Aim for the Most Effective Model of Leadership

Many church members and leaders may seem satisfied with the organizational structure of the local Adventist church as it is today. They may admit that the way we do church at this time has its weaknesses, but so do other leadership

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models. They might say, "Why should we tamper with the present situation? Let us keep doing things as we are. We are too close to the Lord's return. Going back to the New Testament model would require such a large-scale and time-consuming plan of reeducation of the membership, ministers, and conferences, that it is not worth the effort."

Today, when we hear so much about the need of good leadership and leadership training, it becomes very obvious that Seventh-day Adventists ought to study God's plan of leadership and investigate what He has revealed in the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy regarding the most efficient leadership structure for His remnant during the closing years of Earth's history.

In this search for the best leadership model it is not necessary to look to non-Adventist church organizations to discover the best insights on church leadership.¹⁶⁹ Adventists have had experience in church leadership and organization for more than 160 years, and it behooves us to reflect on how His Spirit has led us until this day. A century ago the prophetess to the remnant wrote, "In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as Leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."¹⁷⁰

This experience should be our experience as well after we have observed how the Holy Spirit has guided our church toward the Biblical model of local church organization and leadership. We as a church need to have the best model and not settle for anything less than the best. In doing so we will receive the abundant blessing of the Lord and count on His continual guidance. Both church leadership and members should reflect on what is the best and most effective leadership structure for the church. Only when we are willing to prayerfully engage in this investigation, will we be able to see the true value in Jesus' model of leadership that He revealed to His apostles in the New Testament.

Advantages of the Biblical Leadership Model

In the counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy we have discovered that having a "settled pastor" is not the best for the local congregation, the ministers, and the conference. We will briefly consider the advantages of the adoption of the Biblical leadership model on each of these three entities.

For the congregation ... It becomes self-sufficient.

With a local minister in charge of the church, the church members have

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the tendency to "become religious weaklings,"¹⁷¹ display a lack of the burden for soulwinning,¹⁷² and are unable to take care of themselves.¹⁷³ Indeed, "both ministers and people lose much by following this method of labor."¹⁷⁴

For the best interest of the congregation, therefore, the minister should devote part of his time to train the church members. This training should not be limited to soulwinning. He should give proper training to elders and deacons in how to give appropriate leadership in their respective areas of responsibility. In addition, he should educate the other church officers about how to take care of the various ministries of the church. With proper training in all the areas of church work, church leaders and members will be able to function without the constant care of a minister. When the minister leaves the local church, the congregation would be "obliged to bear responsibilities."¹⁷⁵ This would result in members having to use their talents, which will improve through use in keeping the church functioning.¹⁷⁶ Instead of calling for pastoral help, church members should let "the life-giving power of the truth" impress each member to do missionary work for the Lord in their own neighborhood.¹⁷⁷

It is no longer pastor-centered.

Church members know from experience what happens to a church when there is a change of pastoral leadership. In this transition period most congregations are kept in a holding pattern; not knowing what the next minister will do, they simply take a wait-and-see attitude. They plan no major evangelistic efforts. And while the elders are trying to keep the church functioning, everyone is looking forward to what plans and programs the next minister will introduce. This is the general pattern of pastor-led churches. Everything revolves around the local minister, and without his permission or initiative very little goes on in the church.

With proper training of the congregation, this period of stagnation would not happen. There would not be the needless interruption of the church programs and the evangelistic thrust. The leadership of the local elder(s) in close cooperation with the other church officers would continue the church's activities.

Instead of calling for a minister to devote more time to their church, members should encourage the minister to go and do evangelistic work while the elders take care of their own church needs and its worship services.¹⁷⁸

It brings greater stability now and in the future.

With a properly trained leadership of elders and deacons, the church

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would be able to embark on a stable and successful course. These elders and deacons have roots in the community that provide stability for years to come.

Building a strong elder leadership in the local church is not only important for the growth and stability of the church today, but it is the best way to prepare churches for the difficult days ahead when many will be faced with persecution, while participating in the loud-cry message of Revelation 18. In the event that the communication lines with the local conference should be interrupted, the local churches would still be able to continue their witness without being seriously affected.

Churches led by well-trained local leadership that is accountable to their congregations makes them stronger than having a minister in charge who is not at all accountable to the local church constituency that he is leading.

Finally, a properly trained and stable elders' team will protect the congregation against radical changes by incoming ministers in worship style, music, and Congregationalism—all of which have affected so many churches. Only when proposed changes have the approval of the majority of the board of elders should they be allowed.

For the minister..

He trains the congregation to be self-sufficient.

A minister is to be a trainer of the congregation. While "settled pastors" may be able to do a good work in training members to be soulwinners, that is not all the training for which a minister is responsible. Effective training includes training the ordained leadership of the church—elders and deacons—to function as God intends, so they will be able to operate their church with success. The minister ought to train these leaders to teach the congregation to function without a "settled" minister or pastor.

Unfortunately, this is a goal that very few ministers have in mind. A minister who leads a church year after year without training members to operate their church in his absence has failed in his responsibilities. Inspired counsel notes that "unless they can stand alone, without a minister, they need to be converted anew, and baptized anew."¹⁷⁹

Ministers themselves are also to blame for weak congregations by being overly protective. With the proper training, elders, deacons, other officers and members should be encouraged to carry out their responsibilities. Then ministers can simply fade into the background, leaving the church alone to handle its problems while he goes on to evangelize new areas. This way the members will have to carry out their own responsibilities.¹⁸⁰ This would result in members having to use their talents, which will improve through use in keeping the

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church functioning.¹⁸¹

He is to raise up new congregations.

When the minister has trained and fully equipped the local church, he will no longer be vital to the maintenance of a church. He will then be able to spend his time in soulwinning and establishing new congregations. These congregations in turn will have to be trained to exist without continued pastoral care, because the elders will do the nurturing and grounding of the members into the truth.

As the Spirit of Prophecy has so eminently brought out, the task of ministers should first and foremost be in the evangelistic mission of sharing the three angels' messages with nonmembers. Second, in their remaining time they may train church members to efficiently run their own church and be engaged in its mission. This means that ministers need to train the local church leadership in how to give sound leadership to the congregation in the absence of a "settled minister."

For the conference...

It becomes the source for church planting and evangelism.

Well-trained churches are a great advantage to the conference. They will not demand from the conference a permanent minister. Having an understanding of God's leadership plan for the local church, congregations would encourage ministers to do evangelistic work while they would take care of their own church and its worship services.¹⁸²

A congregation requiring a local pastor to hover over the church robs the conference of a valuable worker who would otherwise be available for doing evangelistic work in unentered areas to establish a church.¹⁸³

Any minister following the New Testament leadership plan will be a great advantage to the local church and conference. Local churches will become strong and able to take care of themselves, while conferences will get more of their employees to be involved in soulwinning and raising up new churches in unreached areas.

It becomes a resource service and training center.

With local ministers training the churches to be able to take care of themselves, the conference will have a growing pool of qualified workers who be able to focus on evangelism and raising up new churches. Whenever a local church needs help, elders will be able to call upon this large pool of workers to teach them how to deal with the challenges they are facing. Consequently, the

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conference becomes a powerful and indispensable resource service and training center for church growth and for developing strong and mature churches.

Implementation

The implementation of the New Testament leadership structure would only be successful through a thorough process of reeducation of the conference leadership, its ministers, and the church membership with its elders, deacons, and church officers.

Conferences interested in adopting the Biblical model must, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, find out which churches would be interested in making the transition, and which ministers are willing to have their ministry shared between training churches and being involved in evangelism. Then a pilot program could be organized with an annual evaluation of the accomplishments. This pilot program would give the conference the experience in how to improve future implementation in other churches.

Every year more and more churches would be able to participate in the adoption of the Biblical model until the whole conference has returned to God's plan for ministry in the remnant church.

The adoption of this leadership model will have a profound impact on conference hiring policies. The model would demand that conferences employ ministers who are able to function in training church members and working in evangelism. Conferences may develop ministerial training teams to work with the local churches, as well as soulwinning institutes where church members can receive specialized training by attending training seminars or workshops in which the participants can be involved in a hands-on experience.

This kind of ministry would also demand a new model for ministerial training that is not patterned after the seminaries of other churches, but would be based on the mission-driven model of the New Testament, which follows Christ's ministry; and the training He gave to His disciples, which focused on proclaiming the Gospel through teaching, preaching, and healing (Matthew 4:23; 10:1,7, 8; Luke 10:1,9).

At the level of the local church, every congregation should have a board of elders made up of all local elders and chaired by the first elder, who is a first among equals, working in close cooperation with the other elders. Furthermore, the first elder should be the chairman of the church board unless he feels uncomfortable with this role. In that case, he would ask another elder to function as chairman in his place.

All church board actions affecting the spirituality of the congregation should have the approval of the majority of the board of elders. Without their

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approval, these church board actions should not be implemented. If a congregation does not approve of the performance of the elders, the members can hold them accountable at the church business meeting. If members continue to be dissatisfied, they can express their disapproval at the next annual election of church officers by refusing to reelect the elders, and electing others in their place. In this way the Biblical model of leadership will be fully maintained—one that assigns to elder(s) chosen by the church members the spiritual leadership of the local congregation.

The implementation of this model becomes especially valuable in times of uncertainty and tight economical resources. A study of church growth in developing nations shows great successes in areas where ministers function as itinerant preachers over 10, 15, 20, or more churches. They have no time to hover over these churches, but are busy training the leaders of the local churches as well as being engaged in evangelism.

Conclusion

Our study began with describing the New Testament organization of the local churches. The Jerusalem model of leadership that divided the responsibilities between elders and deacons, with elders having the oversight over the church, was to be the organizational model for new churches to be established.

The Adventist pioneers adopted the New Testament model. Local elders had the oversight of congregations and functioned as their pastors. Throughout the nineteenth century this model was maintained, with full support of the Spirit of Prophecy. After the death of Ellen White the model was abandoned, and the "settled minister" took the local church leadership function of the elder, who then became the minister's assistant. With the introduction of a *Church Manual* in 1932 this new leadership model became institutionalized. Subsequent manuals showed an increase of the influence of the minister over the congregation.

In the last part of our study we compared the New Testament leadership model with the current model recommended in the *Church Manual*, and discovered that there are substantial advantages to returning to the New Testament leadership model so strongly endorsed during the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. It is still possible to restore the Biblical model of leadership in the church today, when we take time to understand the beauty and wisdom of God's plan of leadership.

Undoubtedly, churches that go by the Bible value the testimony of Jesus through the Biblical gift of prophecy. They should be interested in studying

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how they might restore the leadership model Christ so providentially gave to His remnant church. A reformation of the leadership of the local church may be a powerful catalyst to encourage a mission-driven lay movement that would contribute to the coming great worldwide revival of Revelation 18.

Endnotes

¹ E.G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), p. 291.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 89.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 88, 89.

⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 91, 92.

¹² "Elders," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, Siegfried H. Horn, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1960); J.H. Loughborough, *The Church, Its Organization, Order, and Discipline* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1907), p. 129.

¹³ See P. Gerard Damsteegt, "Shapes of Ministry in the New Testament," in Mercedes H. Dyer, ed., *Prove All Things: A Response to WOMEN IN MINISTRY* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: ADVENTISTS AFFIRM, 2000), p. 142.

¹⁴ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:51.

¹⁵ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnians*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:89.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1:90.

¹⁷ E.G. White, Ms. 11, 1850, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13 (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), p. 299.

¹⁸ J.H. Loughborough, *Organization*, p. 98; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1985), p. 286.

¹⁹ E.G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945), p. 97.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., pp. 97, 98.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 97, 99.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 100, 101.

³¹ Ibid., p. 101.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

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³⁴ See, for example, E.G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), p. 617; *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 620, 621; *ibid.*, Ms. 104, 1901 and Ms. 67, 1900, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5 (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), pp. 449,450; Letter 164, 1902, in *ibid.*, vol. 21, p. 98. See also E.G. White's comments in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Francis D. Nichol, ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), vol. 2, p. 1009.

³⁵ J. White, "Gospel Order," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 6, 1853.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.* "Gospel Order," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1853.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ J. White, "Conference Address," *Review and Herald*, October 15, 1861.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ See also Russell Burrill, *Rekindling a Lost Passion: Recreating a Church Planting Movement* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Hart Research Center, 1999), pp. 49-55; *ibid.*, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Hart Research Center, 1998), pp. 162-173.

⁵¹ J. White, "Go Ye Into All the World and Preach the Gospel," *Review and Herald*, April 15, 1862.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ G.I. Butler, "No Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ The manual included the following topics: How to organize churches; duties of the officers of the church and their election; the ordination of elders, deacons, and ministers; reasons for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination; qualifications for membership, and admitting and transferring members; proper church discipline; how to disband a church; how to baptize and conduct the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and feet-washing; conducting funerals, weddings, and the quarterly church business meeting; the issuing of credentials and licenses; conferences and their delegates; the tithing system; the holding of church property and making of wills; the use of proper parliamentary rules; the special gifts such as apostles, prophets, teachers, ministers; the need of taking minutes and how to do them at each church meeting; and a statement of fundamental beliefs.

⁵⁹ W.H. Littlejohn, "The S.D.A. Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, June 5, 1883, p. 361.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, "The Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, June 19, 1883, p. 393.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, "Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, June 26, 1883, p. 409.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

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⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., "Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1883, p. 457.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., "Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, September 25, 1883, p. 618.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ These persons were Ellen White's son W.C. White, H. Nicola, J.H. Cook, S.H. Lane, O.A. Olsen, M.H. Brown, R.E. Andrews, J.B. Goodrich, A.S. Hutchins, and H.W. Decker. "General Conference Proceedings, Twenty Second Annual Session," (Nov. 12, 1883), in *Review and Herald*, November 20, 1883.

⁸⁰ W.C. White said, "She attended Com. Meeting on Church Manual & spoke well." Letter, W.C.W. to May Lacey, Nov. 13, 1883. See also Gil Valentine, "The Stop-Start Journey on the Road to a Church Manual," *Ministry*, April 1999.

⁸¹ In a sermon delivered at the 1883 General Conference she revealed similar sentiments when she warned conference presidents to lean on God for wisdom, not on the president of the General Conference (E.G. White, *Gospel Workers* [Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1892], p. 234).

⁸² "General Conference Proceedings," *Review and Herald*, November 20, 1883.

⁸³ G.I. Butler, "No Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ E.G. White, *Gospel Workers*, 1892, p. 238.

⁹⁷ Ibid., "The Necessity of Connection with Christ," *Review and Herald*, May 7, 1889.

⁹⁸ See also Russell Burrill, *Rekindling a Lost Passion*, pp. 52-62; *ibid.*, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, pp. 173-177.

⁹⁹ Ibid., "Go Ye Into All the World," *Review and Herald*, June 11, 1895.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., "The Great Need of the Holy Spirit," *Review and Herald*, July 23, 1895, in *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), pp. 382, 383.

¹⁰² Ibid., *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 30 (1900), in *Evangelism*, p. 382.

¹⁰³ Ibid., "An Appeal to Our Ministers. Talk to Ministers," *General Conference Bulletin*,

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April 16, 1901.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Ms. 150, 1901, in *Evangelism*, p. 381.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Letter 56, 1901, in *Evangelism*, p. 382.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., "The Work in Greater New York," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, January 8, 1902.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Letter 136, 1902, in *Evangelism*, p. 382.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 18.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 18, 19.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 19.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Letter 169, 1904, in *Evangelism*, p. 382.

¹¹⁵ Loughborough, *Organization*, p. 68.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

¹¹⁷ E.G. White, "The Workers Needed," *Review and Herald*, June 30, 1904; *ibid.*, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 525, 526.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., *Acfs of the Apostles*, p. 94.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Ms. 59, 1900; *ibid.*, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Francis D. Nichol, ed., vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1957), p. 942.

¹²⁰ Ibid., "Exhortation to Faithfulness to Church Members and Elders," March 12, 1907, Ms. 43, 1907, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 451.

¹²¹ Ibid., *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1963), p. 16; *ibid.*, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1973), p. 315.

¹²² Ibid., *Acfs of the Apostles*, pp. 527, 528.

¹²³ Ibid., Ms. 59, 1912, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4 (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 279.

¹²⁴ Ibid., "The Church Must Be Quickened," *Review and Herald*, January 17, 1893.

¹²⁵ Ibid., "Ye Are Laborers Together With God," *Review and Herald*, September 2, 1890; *ibid.*, "God's Means for Diffusing Light," *Review and Herald*, December 19, 1912; *ibid.*, *Christian Service* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1947), p. 62.

¹²⁶ Ibid., "God's Means for Diffusing Light," *Review and Herald*, March 24, 1891; *ibid.*, *Review and Herald*, December 19, 1912.

¹²⁷ Ibid., "The Duty of Paying Tithes and Offerings," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 17, 1889; *ibid.*, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1940), p. 106.

¹²⁸ Ibid., *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 106. See also *ibid.*, "Honesty Toward Men and Toward God," *Review and Herald*, December 1, 1896.

¹²⁹ Ibid., *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1962), p. 305.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 306; *ibid.*, "Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers. No. 7" (1897) *Special Testimonies*, Series A, pp. 21, 22.

¹³¹ Ibid., Elder Daniels and the Fresno Church, 1890, *Pamphlet* 028, pp. 17, 18. See also *ibid.*, "A Consecrated Ministry," February 13, 1890, Ms. 1a, 1890, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, pp. 447, 448.

¹³² Ibid., Ms. 32, 1887, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 127.

¹³³ Ibid., Ms. 1, 1878, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12 (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), p. 113.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., Letter 5, 1863, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 296.

¹³⁶ Ibid., "The Work in Michigan," Ms. 3, 1890, in *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 2 (Silver Spring,

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Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1994), p. 78.

¹³⁷ Ibid., *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 196, 197. See also *ibid.*, *Sketches From the Life of Paul* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1883), p. 70.

¹³⁸ Ibid., "An Appeal to Our Ministers and Conference Committees," (1892), *Special Testimonies A*, 01b, pp. 24, 25.

¹³⁹ Ibid., "A Message to Church Members," *Review and Herald*, April 26, 1906.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Letter 5, 1863, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 296.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., "Testimony for the Battle Creek Church," (1882), *Pamphlet* 117, p. 82.

¹⁴² Ibid., "Missionary Work," May 9, 1893, Ms. 20, 1893, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 448.

¹⁴³ Ibid., "Ye Are Laborers Together With God," *Review and Herald*, September 2, 1890.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1938), pp. 161, 162.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., "Camp-Meeting at Ottawa, Kansas," *Review and Herald*, July 23, 1889; *ibid.*, Ms. 51, 1901, in *Selected Messages*, bk. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 92; *ibid.*, "A Call to Repentance," *Review and Herald*, December 15, 1904.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Ms. 4, 1883, in *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 69. Here she said, "It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years."

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., Letter 184, 1901 (*Evangelism*, p. 696).

¹⁴⁸ The 1932 *Church Manual* contained the following topics: The plan of church organization; duties and responsibilities of church officers; church membership matters; church discipline; holding church properties, wills and annuities; Gospel finances; the minister and Gospel worker; services of the church; Sabbath observance; marriage; and the fundamental beliefs. It comprised a total of 198 pages of text.

¹⁴⁹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1932), p. 23.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 162, 163.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ E.G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 52, 53, in *Manual*, pp. 133, 134.

¹⁵⁸ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Manual*, p. 136.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 138.

¹⁶³ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, rev. ed. (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), pp. 49, 83, 137.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁶⁷ In her address to the 1883 General Conference, Ellen White shared the light the Lord had revealed on moving ministers more frequently, saying, "I have been shown that ministers should not be retained in the same district year after year, nor should the same man long preside over a conference. A change of gifts is for the good of our conferences and churches. Ministers have sometimes felt unwilling to change their field of labor; but if they understood all the reasons for making changes, they would not draw back. Some have

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pleaded to remain one year longer in the same field, and frequently the request has been respected. They have claimed to have plans for accomplishing a greater work than heretofore. But at the close of the year there was a worse state of things than before. If a minister has been unfaithful in his work, it is not likely that he will mend the matter by remaining. The churches become accustomed to the management of the one man, and think they must look to him instead of looking to God. His ideas and plans have a controlling power in the conference. The people may see that he errs in judgment, and because of this they learn to place a low estimate upon the ministry.... Many are strong in some points of character, while they are weak and deficient in other things where they should be strong. As the result, a want of efficiency is manifest in some parts of the work. Should the same man continue as president of the conference year after year, his defects would be reproduced in the churches under his labors. But one laborer may be strong where his brother is weak, and so by exchanging fields of labor, one may, to some extent, supply the deficiencies of another" (*Gospel Workers*, 1892, pp. 240, 241).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., Letter 12, 1890, in *ibid.*, *Selected Messages*, bk. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 78.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., *Early Writings*, pp. 124, 125. Here Mrs. White warned, "If God has any new light to communicate, He will let His chosen and beloved understand it, without their going to have their minds enlightened by hearing those who are in darkness and error.

"I was shown the necessity of those who believe that we are having the last message of mercy, being separate from those who are daily imbibing new errors. I saw that neither young nor old should attend their meetings; for it is wrong to thus encourage them while they teach error that is a deadly poison to the soul and teach for doctrines the commandments of men. The influence of such gatherings is not good. If God has delivered us from such darkness and error, we should stand fast in the liberty wherewith He has set us free and rejoice in the truth. God is displeased with us when we go to listen to error, without being obliged to go; for unless He sends us to those meetings where error is forced home to the people by the power of the will, He will not keep us. The angels cease their watchful care over us, and we are left to the buffetings of the enemy, to be darkened and weakened by him and the power of his evil angels; and the light around us becomes contaminated with the darkness."

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1943), p. 196.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 18.

¹⁷² Ibid., "Go Ye Into All the World," *Review and Herald*, June 11, 1895.

¹⁷³ Ibid., "The Necessity of Connection With Christ," *Review and Herald*, May 7, 1889.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., *Evangelism*, p. 382.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., "Work in Greater New York," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, Jan. 8, 1902.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 30.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., *Evangelism*, p. 381.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 382.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid., *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 30.

¹⁸³ Ibid., "Go Ye into All the World," *Review and Herald*, June 11, 1895.

Section 7
**New Structure for
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Chapter 43

Do We Need Another Church Organization?

Adventist Theology, Mission,
and Church Government

By Jay Gallimore
President, Michigan Conference

Introduction

Today, in increasing intensity we are hearing some outspoken voices call for the dismantling of certain levels of our church organization. Some churches have no regard for the Sabbath School lesson study; others would not preach, teach, or instruct their members to uphold our distinctive doctrines.

Others are suggesting that local congregations must keep much, if not all their tithes; in some cases they do not encourage mission offerings. In certain cases, it is being suggested that ministers pastoring larger congregations should be paid more than their counterparts who have smaller churches.

Again, others retain in membership individuals who are openly teaching and preaching messages contrary to our faith, or who are adopting lifestyle practices that are incompatible with our teachings.

Still others are openly defying decisions that have been taken by the worldwide body of believers, choosing not to be theologically accountable to any bigger body but their own local group.

While the above examples may seem innocuous, they are actually symptoms of a new emphasis among us called *Congregationalism*. This form of church government is where the local congregation makes all the decisions. They decide where and how they will spend the tithe. They hire, fire, and pay the pastor. They may have loose affiliations with a denomination, or none. They decide what to believe and what their mission is.

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Congregationalism and Church Growth

As mainline Protestant denominations in North America declined in both Biblical teaching and numbers, congregational churches filled the void. Some of these developed into what is now called megachurches. These can have anywhere from five to twenty thousand members or more. Many of these churches were more focused on pragmatic methods of getting crowds, rather than faithfulness to Scripture.

All kinds of methods were used under the "church growth" label. Intense drama and "gospel" rock bands were all part of the vehicles to get their message out. Large, beautiful facilities were built. Most on the inside were designed like a theater with some Christian themes scattered around. Some have had great success with these methods. This in turn has drawn intense attention at American seminaries. These megachurches became the dream of many ministers. Church growth was the watchword of the day. Unfortunately, very few noted that much of the "church growth" was not real kingdom growth. It was transferring a lot of members from small and medium churches to these exciting and active centers.

Our own denomination has sent hundreds of ministers to these megacenters to learn how to grow churches. It did not take long for them to figure out that if they were going to have a megachurch dream, our system of sharing our tithe would not do. In addition, our system of world church government was seen as a drag to innovation and creativity. To them the small Adventist churches outside of educational centers felt unimportant and without inspiration. There was no glamour in pastoring a three-church district in the countryside.

So some pastors, members, and church leaders began to change their thinking about the mission and organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The voices and restlessness are growing in some places. Lots of attention has been devoted to worship services. It is not uncommon to find megachurch influences in Adventist worship services.

Behind much of this is the belief that the local church is the primary organizational unit of the Christian church.

It may come as a surprise to learn that Jesus did not organize the church around a congregational model. He first organized the 12 apostles over a church that had as yet no local churches. He commissioned them to evangelize and make disciples. The organization of local churches was a natural result of evangelism. These churches existed to assist the world leadership in spreading the Gospel to the whole world. As each added its strength to the mission, the power to spread the Gospel multiplied exceedingly. As long as they were willing to be bound together by the Spirit of God and an Acts 15 form of church government,

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the Gospel commission would be completed quickly. Congregationalism is the temptation to turn the church government of Jesus into a selfish focus.¹

With all the impact that congregational or independent churches are having on Western Adventist churches, perhaps it is time to ask how such changes might affect what and who we are.

Adventist Theology, Mission, and Organization

As others have correctly pointed out, throughout our history, three major factors have greatly contributed to our worldwide unity:²

First, *our distinctive doctrine and lifestyle*. Despite obvious cultural differences, Adventists everywhere in the world have held the same doctrines and embraced the same lifestyle. As a group, they have manifested a distinctive personality. The near unanimity in belief and lifestyle practices has been possible because of our adherence to the teachings of God's Word.

Second, *our sense of mission*. Accepting Christ's commission (Matthew 28:18-20), we have always understood our reason for existence to be the clear and persuasive proclamation of God's Word within the context of the end time (Revelation 14:6-12). The sending forth of hundreds of missionaries around the world every year and the movement of our workers "from everywhere to everywhere" have been constant reminders to all that ours is a worldwide work, and the mission of the church can only be accomplished by a united body of people from all nations of the world.

Third, *our unique church polity (the form of organizational structure in the church)*. Despite its limitations, the Adventist Church's unique church structure—uniting local churches, conferences, and unions at the divisions of the General Conference—has not only maintained the stability of the church, but has also ensured doctrinal unity and purity, and has facilitated the equitable distribution of the resources of the church for the accomplishment of its mission.³

Together with the Lord's blessings, these factors—theology, missions, and church organization—may explain why the Seventh-day Adventist Church is enjoying an unprecedented growth around the world today. But as we noted at the beginning of this article, today some are calling for (and in some cases, actually attempting) the dismantling of our form of church organization.

What Happens When We Change Our Organization?

Contrary to what is held by some, the Seventh-day Adventist system of government (or polity) is not just the result of the pragmatic concerns of our

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pioneers. Instead, it has a very strong theological undergirding. Our pioneers felt the urgency of their time and message; they believed that organizational unity was necessary for both doctrinal unity and the accomplishment of the church's mission. It was this conviction that influenced the subsequent concrete form of our present church government.⁴

Thus, an attack on our form church organization is a de facto attack on the mission and theology upon which the organization was founded. A replacement of our worldwide form of church government for an independent congregational model (as found in some megachurches or some independent "community" churches) will ultimately lead to a change in our missionary outlook and our belief system.

Let me say it differently. The teachings or theology of a church determine its mission. Its mission determines its church government.

If you no longer believed in the teachings but were afraid to say so openly, what method would you use to irrevocably change the church? Here is the answer. You would attack its church government. If you succeeded in changing its church government, the mission would naturally fall, and with it the teachings.

If we adopt one of the many varied forms of congregational church government, in time we will also adopt their mission. And if we adopt their mission, in time we will adopt their theology. Yet some are willing to risk this for the sake of change. Change can be good or bad. So we ought to have a good idea of where change will take us before we change.

If you are sure that the world mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is *not* central to its teaching, you will consider such change a blessing. But if you believe that the three angels' messages must go to every tribe, nation, tongue, and people, you would consider such changes to its church government a curse.

Most Adventists recognize that our theology, identity, and mission are found in Revelation 14. All three aspects are merged together. You cannot change one without changing the other. The everlasting Gospel in the setting of the three angels' messages describes our theology. We identify ourselves with the remnant who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony and faith of Jesus. Our mission is to give that everlasting Gospel to every tribe, nation, tongue, and people.

That's why these congregational churches cannot be a model for the Adventists. They don't have our theology, identity, or mission. I didn't say that we cannot learn from other churches and organizations. I said they can't be models. *Anything we learn from anywhere should be tested against the Scripture, Spirit of Prophecy, and our theology and mission. If it cannot bear those tests, it should be promptly discarded. Unfortunately, too many are willing to discard*

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Inspiration if it gets in the way of cherished goals and outcomes.

What's Wrong With Congregational Models?

Without the right Gospel organization, our mission cannot be carried into all the world. So maybe our early Adventist fathers and mothers were right after all about church organization. By spreading our human and financial resources over the entire world field, we are able to grow in many different cultures with an amazing amount of unity. Our organization is not rigid but elastic. It is adaptable but not pluralistic.⁵

Our organizational structure adapts well worldwide, while providing unity and oneness. It allows for a great deal of cultural diversity without sacrificing Biblical teachings.

Congregational churches, on the other hand, are rigid because they are limited by their local focus and culture. They may believe in the Gospel commission, but their organizational vehicle is simply too small and fragile to carry out a world mission. By their very nature they cannot maintain any degree of unity and cooperation beyond a very small point.

In addition, congregational churches consume most of their resources on themselves or their local mission. Outside of their oasis, the Gospel work can turn into a desert. They fail to grasp the need for an *unselfish unity and sacrifice* in order to reach all languages and people groups.

There is a principle here. *Concepts of mission give birth to church government.* Adventist churches that have recently left us to follow their congregational megachurch dreams are an example of how this principle works. They changed their mission and then their form of church government. They went from a passionate worldview to a passionate local view. Then they went from a representative to a congregational form of church government. Eventually they changed their teachings. All of them that I know about are now worshiping on Sunday.

Does this mean that we Adventists are not passionate about our local work? No. It just means that we are passionate about both.

We believe that investment in missions returns to strengthen the local work. It should not surprise us that unselfish love unleashes more human and financial resources than any other power in the world. So instead of having fewer resources, we actually have far more.

In short, if the local church keeps the tithe, our giving will soon reflect the pitiful support that the other Protestant churches have. Yes, there might be some exceptions where there is a charismatic pastor who raises lots of money. But the tithe he would *hoard* would translate into robbing others of being able

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to hear the three angels' messages.

Adventist giving is astounding when compared to other churches. Our passion for the whole leads us to cooperation, not selfish competition. Our theology believes that the Gospel work is not finished anywhere until it is finished everywhere.

Too Many Layers?

One speaker at the 2000 Toronto General Conference session criticized the church for having more layers of church government than the Roman Catholic Church. The statement resonated with many, although I doubt that many fully understood the implications. Let me attempt to illustrate.

In 2000 the United States went through a constitutional crisis. We did not know who the President-elect was going to be for weeks. Yet, the nation kept on going despite the fact that we did not know whether the President would be Al Gore or George W. Bush. Here is one of the reasons.

It is a known fact that representative forms of government will not succeed well unless they have building blocks starting at the grass roots. This way the power is both top-down and bottom-up. These layered institutions steer and provide stability throughout the whole. Yes, it is cumbersome but necessary.

On the world scene, some former totalitarian governments are having a difficult time switching to a representative government because they often don't have the institutions of democracy at every level.

The United States has the same number of layers as the Adventist Church. There are the city, county, state, and national governments, and, of course, the courts with their layers. The Adventist Church has local church, state conference, union conference, and general conference. (The divisions are considered part of the makeup of the General Conference. Division presidents are *also* vice presidents of the General Conference.)

My point is this: Sure, we can eliminate several layers of our representative church government. But we will replace it with either Congregationalism or some form of popery.

It can be argued that the papacy is a successful form of church government for a church that has a world mission. But it is alien to the Biblical principles we hold dear. Either Congregationalism or else a religious monarchy or autocratic leadership would confuse and destroy "who we are." We already have some bitter lessons in consolidating power in a few hands. Remember those fires in Battle Creek?

Nevertheless, with the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy as our map, it is always

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appropriate to think about doing church government better. As a church we have a Biblical model for church government, not a corporate or political one. Authority is shared and balanced. That is the way it was in the book of Acts.

For example, the conference, unlike cooperate America, does not from a central headquarters choose where all the church schools will be. Here the local decision is primary. One must ever remember that the conference is given life by local church delegates at a constituency meeting. Those *combined* delegate votes give the conference its authority to oversee and guide the operation and expansion of churches, schools, and other ministries. A conference exists to choose pastoral and educational leadership and to shepherd unity, local initiative, and self-determination within the whole.

The local conferences in turn form the union conferences. Unlike some organizations, the Adventist Church is not held together by charismatic personalities. It is policy that keeps the organization working together. The union conferences then form the General Conference. They represent their part of the world field to the General Conference. They are vital to the policy-making process, just as the bone marrow is vital to the blood-making process. The General Conference develops material resources and is the vision-caster and final authority on policy that drives the church.

Each of these parts wields real power, but in different spheres. We all depend on each other doing well. Like wheels within wheels, we need the Holy Spirit to constantly pour His oil over the machinery.

Spiritual, Not Political Organization

We sometimes fail to realize that we are very different from secular politics. Our process is set up for spiritual purposes, not political ones. I worry when I see people trying to work our spiritual process like politicians. The two don't mix. Whether we are members at church board or at a conference committee, we are not politicians or CEOs, but servants seeking the will of God.

There is always the temptation for members and workers to try to manipulate local church business meetings or conference, union, and GC constituencies. We must remember that the various leaders represent the body of Christ. They have sacred duties, not secular or political ones.

When our organization was set up, it was done with the concept that humble, godly believers would come together in an organized way and make decisions. It never envisioned one person running for office against another. Neither was it meant to sustain well orchestrated manipulative campaigns to force or trick the body into decisions.

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In the New Testament, the manipulative methods of Simon were immediately put down by Peter (Acts 8). In Galatians, Paul challenged Peter's hypocritical politics publicly (Galatians 2). In Acts, the early church called for the leadership and delegates from various places to come and settle disputable matters (Acts 15).

Political maneuvering promotes division, pride, and competition, rather than unity, humility, and cooperation. To try to impose the secular processes on the church is to ruin it as a reflection of the humble Saviour. That is why we should send our most spiritual and dedicated people to constituency meetings. The most committed and faithful people should be placed on our governing boards. These qualities should come before any other considerations.

Godly servant-leadership will educate the body so that it may carry out its functions well. First of all, when decisions need to be made, the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy should be searched for any counsel that applies, and then be fairly shared. The *Church Manual* should be consulted because it represents the mind of the world church in session.

Of course, there are some issues where there may be no direct counsel. In those cases, common sense backed up by Biblical principles and spiritual wisdom must guide the decisions. Secondly, the issues should be presented in a way that fully informs the delegates as to what the options are. Bathing delegates in light on issues is practicing the Golden Rule. When these approaches are present, under the Spirit's guidance, we can advance toward making decisions that will reflect our best efforts to correspond to the will of God.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that non-Adventist Protestant churches, for the most part, do not share our mission. Oh, they may give lip service to the "go into all the world" business. But they don't put their money or their organization where their words are. Their programs, organizations, and worship styles reflect their *local* mission and theology.

Trying to embrace their methods wholesale without embracing their theology is causing a great deal of stress in many of our congregations. Trying to merge their methods with our mission will not give us a super hybrid. Instead, our frustration and confusion will build. *That pressure, at some point, could drive us to change our mission and our church government.*

One does not have to be a Nobel Prize winner to realize that at stake in all of this is the survival of the Adventist Church itself.

Two Ditches to Avoid

There are two ditches we must avoid. One is to complacently forget why

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we have the system we do, and thereby allow it to be hijacked by the secular political concepts. In that ditch we only end up being disgusted with ourselves.

The second is to believe we can adopt these non-Adventist methods and still be who we are and carry out our world mission. In that ditch we deceive ourselves that we can have it both ways.

I can hear some say, "Relax, the Adventist Church is too big and diverse for this to happen."

Maybe and maybe not. If you build enough pressure, even in a large organization, at a certain point it does not take much to tip the whole thing into collapse or a totally different direction. History is full of examples. For instance, if the Adventist Church in North America adopted some form of Congregationalism, think of the impact not only on North America but also on the world field itself. While I believe this church will wonderfully accomplish its mission, there may be some rocky days ahead as we sort out and deal with the very clever outside—but now internal—attack on our teachings and mission.

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a true world church. This is no accident. We may be small, but we are very widespread. The early Adventists believed that this was the remnant church of Bible prophecy. They believed that when the three angels' messages had been proclaimed everywhere, Jesus would come. By faith, they, with the help of the prophetic gift, built the organization around this belief and mission.

As Adventists we need a great reawakening to our theology and world mission. That great awakening will produce two reforms. The first will be to be more conscious than ever to wrap our finances around mission. The second will be, What can we do, what can we give to finish our mission and see our Saviour come?

Our Greatest Need

Dying to self and surrendering to the lordship of Jesus is our greatest need.

We must realize that human leadership is not enough. We need in our assemblies the conscious presence of our real unseen Leader. We need an unprecedented return to primitive godliness. We need a spiritual renewal that grows in power and scope until Jesus comes. We need spiritual power from the sanctuary above. We need the glory that shines from between the cherubim to enlighten a darkened world. We need the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat to carry us through the close of human probation. We need the celestial glory of Jesus Himself, directing His church through the maze of temptation, persecution,

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and attack that is sure to come.

In the final analysis we will not succeed because of having the right church government, as important as that is. We will not succeed because of human ingenuity and brilliance, as much as that is needed. We will succeed, when by faith we individually and collectively surrender all of our will to that of Jesus. It is then that He will use poor, feeble, and unworthy mortals like us to "lighten the world with His glory."

Endnotes

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Raoul Dederen for the seed-thought of this paragraph. See his article "The Church: Authority and Unity," Supplement to *Ministry*, May 1995. This excellent paper, originally presented to the Commission on World Church Organization at Cohutta Springs, Georgia, in 1994, presents a Biblical basis for church authority—its source, nature, and expression. This work deserves a far wider dissemination and a more serious attention than it has been given. The entire document, together with another one of Dederen's ("Unity and Tensions Within the Adventist Church") is available on the GC's Biblical Research Committee Web site: <http://www.biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents/churchauthority.htm>.

² See, for example, Samuel Koranteng-Pipim's article "True and Counterfeit Unity—Who Is Really Dividing the Church?" in this section of the present volume.

³ Among Seventh-day Adventists there are four constituent levels leading from the individual believer to the worldwide organization of the work of the church: (1) the local church, a united organized body of individual believers; (2) the local conference or local field/mission, a united, organized body of churches in a state, province, or territory; (3) the union conference or union mission, a united body of conferences, missions, or fields within a larger territory; (4) the General Conference, the largest unit of organization, embracing all unions in all parts of the world. Divisions are sections of the General Conference, with administrative responsibility assigned to them in designated geographical areas. See *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (2000), p. 26.

⁴ See chapters 4 and 5 of our current *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (titled "Organization Founded on Divine Principles"; "The Form of Organization in the Seventh-day Adventist Church"), pp. 21-24, 25-28. For a detailed discussion of the Biblical foundation that guided our pioneers, see Andrew Mustard, "James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization, 1844-1881" (PhD Dissertation, Andrews University, 1987).

⁵ Religious pluralism suggests that you can belong to a church and believe pretty much what you want to, no matter what the official beliefs are. Pluralism turns a church into religious mush.

Chapter 44

How Money Got Us Into Trouble

A Very Surprising (and Interesting) History
About Women's Ordination*

By C. Mervyn Maxwell, PhD

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Author, *God Cares*

As you read this story, do remember that administrators are human, like the rest of us, and need our prayers. Remember too that the money they attempted to save at a crucial point in this story was God's tithe; it was not their own money.

It is a story that shows how the NAD [North American Division] leadership came to the position that (a) ordination is merely a matter of church policy, not of sacred obligation, and (b) commissioning is equivalent to ordination.

In order to move meaningfully into the story, it is needful for us, for a few moments, to flash back a couple of hundred years.

Development of the Parsonage Allowance

When America was young, many churches provided rent-free residences for their pastors. These residences were known as parsonages (or as manses, vicarages, and so on). Because they belonged to their respective churches, the law stipulated that these parsonages (or whatever they were called) were tax-free. Thus the custom arose under which ministers lived in houses that were both rent-free and tax-free. As times changed, more and more churches began paying their pastors a "parsonage allowance," allowing the men to find their own housing at church expense. Because this new custom was a modification of the older custom, the churches persuaded the government to treat the parsonage allowance as tax-free.

Not being required to pay income tax on income used for rent, mortgage, and utilities is obviously a plus for pastors, but because most pastors have been underpaid, few people have seemed to be jealous. Indeed, the advantage has

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been considerably undercut with the growth of Social Security since 1950. The American government requires employers to pay one half of the Social Security (pension) tax on their regular employees, leaving employees with the burden of paying only the other half. Ministers, however, by some quirk of the law, are considered "self-employed" and are thus required to meet the entire Social Security obligation. Even so, most ministers in America pay somewhat lower taxes than other people do who have similar incomes.

The Complaint of the IRS

Now, in 1965 the United States tax people (the Internal Revenue Service, or IRS) began to complain that young Seventh-day Adventist ministers who had been designated "licensed ministers" and hadn't yet been ordained were not really ministers and so were not eligible for the parsonage allowance.

But if the licensed ministers were to be classed legally as ordinary employees rather than as self-employed persons (like ministers), the church would have to pay half of their Social Security obligation. With about 850 licensed ministers at the time, the total cost to the church in the United States loomed large.

For twelve years denominational leadership stalled the IRS, hiring lawyers to persuade the government to change its mind so the church could save all this offering money. Eventually, when it became evident even to the lawyers that the IRS was not going to change its mind and was, in fact, about to seize conference properties in lieu of taxes and penalties, the leaders asked the IRS what they could do to convince the government that licensed ministers really were ministers (and so were eligible for the parsonage allowance and self-employment status).

The IRS answered that if the denomination voted that licensed ministers were authorized to perform weddings, the IRS would be satisfied. So the denominational leadership voted (1976) that in the NAD licensed ministers were empowered to do what they had never been empowered to do, namely, to perform weddings and baptisms, provided only that they were ordained as local elders and that their conference committees approved.

This decision to make licensed ministers virtually equal to fully ordained ones was not voted without protest. In particular, some of the General Conference treasurers, the men most particularly concerned about finances, argued that it was wrong to reduce the value of ordination merely in order to save money, even to save offering money. Speaking for himself and for some of his associates, Robert Osborn, as assistant General Conference treasurer, wrote earnestly to the NAD leadership: "There is a definite detected feeling that it is

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hardly becoming to alter our attitude toward our licensed ministers for tax considerations in a particular country [the U.S.A.]."

But the response of the top leadership was that "the difference between the functions of the licensed and ordained ministry is not a moral or theological issue, but a matter of church policy," and that "the process by which the church trains its ministers obviously is not a matter of theology nor doctrine, but one of methodology, policy."

In this way, for the sake of saving money, the denomination deprived ordination of much of its distinctiveness. No longer did the General Conference look on ordination as a calling whose nature was determined by Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. No longer was the work of the ordained minister a matter for theological study; instead, it was a matter for committee action and administrative policy. And this view appears to be reflected in the NAD's official position today in regard to the role of women.

Enter Term, "Commissioned"

Now it is of significance that when the IRS said (in 1978) that it would accept a licensed minister as equivalent to an ordained minister, it used a word that had little meaning in our denomination at the time. The IRS said that if the person were allowed to perform marriages, it would accept the person as equivalent to an ordained minister whether the person had been licensed, ordained, or *commissioned*. Here was a new word, "commissioned." As we shall see, it was pregnant with meaning for the future.

Through the years many treasurers, departmental directors/secretaries, and institutional managers had been given ministerial licenses and later ordained. These licensees were individuals, mostly men, who had manifested what might be called specialized ministries, but though they were scarcely ministers in the ordinary sense, some of them at least were considered eligible for the parsonage allowance. But in the mid-1970s a reaction against the practice set in. At the very time when the General Conference and the NAD were defining ordination as merely a policy item, many Seventh-day Adventists at all levels were complaining that ordaining treasurers and departmental directors/secretaries and institutional managers just so they could get the parsonage allowance was wrong and seriously diluted the grand significance of ordination to the Gospel ministry. Thus many officers who might in previous years have qualified for the parsonage allowance found themselves no longer eligible.

Then someone came up with a novel type of recognition: what about "commissioning" such people, calling them "commissioned ministers," and giving them the right to perform weddings and baptisms? The IRS had prom-

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ised that it would let such people receive the parsonage allowance. Further, if such men were not ordained, the church members would stop complaining.

And so it was formally voted, and at least some treasurers, departmental directors/secretaries, and institutional managers again found themselves privileged when the American income tax time came around on April 15 each year. Bible workers also began to be commissioned for the first time, and people felt it was right that these hard-working Gospel workers should receive special recognition. Then came the idea of commissioning church school teachers, not as ministers but as "commissioned teachers," and again people felt it was right to recognize these often-unsung champions.

The Commissioning of Women Pastors

It had long been understood that granting a person a ministerial license implied that unless something went seriously amiss, the person within a few years would be ordained to the Gospel ministry; in other words, persons granted ministerial licenses were considered to be "on the path toward ordination" (or more popularly, "on track for ordination"). The few women who had been granted ministerial licenses over the years had not been viewed as "on the path to ordination" for the reason that the church was following the obvious Bible instruction that elders should be men.

In 1975 the practice of granting ministerial licenses to women was discontinued, but at the same time the Annual Council of the General Conference voted that—if great caution were exercised—selected women might be ordained as local elders. You should know that this surprising turn of events came about at the insistent urging of a relatively small group of articulate promoters.

Two years later (1977), women were allowed to serve as "associates in pastoral care." The language was chosen carefully. Women were not to be known as "assistant pastors." Many leaders were uneasy about allowing women to serve as pastors.

The Battle Heats Up

In 1984 a young woman elder serving as a pastor in the Potomac Conference baptized someone with the backing of her local conference but without authorization from the *Church Manual*. In 1985 the Annual Council of the General Conference forbade any more baptisms by women elders—but in 1986 the Southeastern California Conference voted to let women baptize anyway. The General Conference promised to work harder on ordaining women to the Gospel ministry and persuaded Southeastern California to back away. The California conference did back away for a while, but in doing so it stepped up

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the rhetoric. We now began to hear terms like "discrimination," "gender inclusiveness," "affirmative action," and "justice!" Many Adventists felt aggrieved that the language of politics and radical feminism was invading our church.

A Difficult Choice

In 1989, in preparation for the 1990 Indianapolis General Conference session, leadership thrust upon a large study group called the "Women's Commission" the choice of voting Yes or No on a double-barreled recommendation. This recommendation, which was to be sent on to the Annual Council of the General Conference for further action, offered that (1) women could not now be ordained as ministers but that (2) if they met certain specifications, they could perform essentially all the functions of an ordained minister in their local churches.

Many members of the women's commission regarded the choice as unfair, for in order to vote Yes on (1) not allowing women to be ordained as ministers, it was unavoidable to vote Yes also on (2) allowing women to function essentially like ordained ministers. Most of the people on the women's commission voted Yes, which meant *both* that women could not become ordained ministers but that they could behave almost like ordained ministers in divisions that wanted them to. This recommendation went to the Annual Council and from there to the 1990 General Conference.

The two provisions were divided up for the 1990 Indianapolis General Conference, and the vote on Wednesday went overwhelmingly against ordaining women ministers. When the other matter came up on Thursday, many overseas delegates, feeling that the big vote was in the past, were out of their places, apparently sightseeing and shopping. The main argument offered by the NAD speakers was addressed to those overseas delegates who were present. It was this: Yesterday we voted with you for what you wanted; we ask you to vote with us today, taking into account America's cultural needs. There was no appeal to Scripture. This time the vote went in favor, although by a considerably smaller margin than on Wednesday.

We all know that five years later the question of ordaining women as ministers was brought up again, though in a different fashion. This time the North American Division asked for the right to ordain women ministers to Gospel ministry *within its own territory*. Four speakers were appointed by the NAD to persuade people to vote Yes, and only one speaker was appointed to persuade them to vote No. The "No" speaker presented a strong, well-organized Bible study, and, as we have already reminded ourselves, the delegates voted 1,481 to 673 that No, North America should not be authorized to go its own way.

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The Push Continues

Within weeks after this vote was taken, the Sligo Church, located only a few miles from General Conference headquarters, ordained some women pastors, and a little later, the La Sierra University Church followed suit.

As we have observed elsewhere, within three months the NAD appointed a commission to seek ways to enlarge the scope of women as pastors. At about the same time, the idea arose of conducting "commissioning services" for women pastors.

The Commissioning Service

Thus far, the conference treasurers, departmental directors/secretaries, and institutional managers who had been granted "commissioned" status had merely received notification in the mail.

Suddenly, such privacy seemed inadequate. Urgent voices insisted that the appointment of women to commissioned minister status should be made more public; more like, well, more like an ordination service. Thus the "commissioning service" was developed, complete with prayers, Scripture readings, a sermon, a charge, *and the laying on of hands*, all expanded to fill perhaps a whole hour at a large gathering, like a camp meeting.

In this way a process that began with a plan to reduce income taxes (a) produced the concept that ordination is merely a matter of church policy, and (b) developed into the concept that commissioned women ministers are equivalent to ordained male ministers.

When they learn about it, many Seventh-day Adventists consider it a very surprising (and interesting—and saddening) history.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: At the close of this article as originally published in ADVENTISTS AFFIRM, a note from the editorial board indicated that factual material had "been derived from phone calls to administrators at all levels of the church, from materials written by Bert Haloviak, Kit Watts, Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, from additional research, and from the experience of the editors."]

Endnote

* The new trend in certain quarters of our church to ordain women as elders or pastors was created by the converging interests of feminism, liberalism, church leaders' desire to enjoy United States tax law benefits to ministers, questionable church policy revisions and *Church*

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Manual alterations allowing women to serve as elders, calculated attempts by some influential North American churches unilaterally to ordain women as pastors, the silence of leadership to this defiance of two General Conference (GC) session votes against women's ordination, a well-orchestrated strategy by influential thought leaders and pro-ordination groups to domesticate the practice in the church, a determined effort by some church scholars to reinterpret the Bible and early Adventist history to justify the practice, the systematic and aggressive lobbying by liberal and feminist groups for the church to issue unisex ordination credentials for ordained and nonordained employees of the church; the hijacking of official church publications, institutions, departments, and certain other organs and events of the church for pro-ordination propaganda; and the silencing, coercion, or persecution of individuals who challenge the un-Biblical practice of ordaining women as elders or pastors. This article, a reprint of chapter 13 of *Prove All Things*, deals with only one aspect of the issue—namely church leaders' desire to enjoy U.S. tax law benefits to ministers. Readers who desire information on the other aspects of the women's ordination issue, and those seeking a Biblical, theological, and historical response to the questionable arguments often advanced for women's ordination, will greatly benefit from the following works: *Prove All Things: A Response to WOMEN IN MINISTRY* (2000), *Searching the Scriptures* (1995), and *The Tip of an Iceberg* (1994). These works are available through ADVENTISTS AFFIRM (R.O. Box 36, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103, U.S.A.; telephone: 269-473-2300; e-mail: info@AdventistsAffirm.org). Selected articles on the subject can also be downloaded from the ADVENTISTS AFFIRM Web site: www.AdventistsAffirm.org (click the link "Women's Ordination FAQs").

Chapter 45

Shall Women Minister?

By Laurel Damsteegt, MDiv, MPH

Multimedia Developer, *Great Controversy Experience* CD-ROM

Some time back a woman seminary student and I were chatting in my living room about theological issues. Suddenly she said "It's a pity that you [conservatives] are so against women in ministry. I certainly don't agree with the theology of the liberal camp, but I don't get any encouragement for my longings to serve Jesus from conservatives."

It hit me like a dash of cold water. She hadn't meant it in a critical way; she just felt she was stating fact.

Me? Not encouraging a woman in ministry? I don't remember anything else we talked about all evening. My mind was riveted to that one statement.

You see, I had been there too. I had trod those waxed, tiled seminary floors. I still remember the first time I walked into a crowded classroom for the Greek entrance exam—all eyes fastened on me, the only woman in the room. I sat by myself in classes with fifty or more men. I got used to being called "brethren" by professors. In those days there were only two or three women going to seminary.

Why was I there?

Even as a young child I loved to study the Bible. When I was ten or eleven, I told my family the only thing I wanted for Christmas and birthday presents was a new marginal reference Bible and Spirit of Prophecy books. I read them, too. I not only read them, I underlined them and cross-referenced them.

There was nothing more thrilling for me than to pass out *Great Controversy* books or give out Bible lessons while attending academy. In college I had the privilege of sitting by the bedsides of the sick and talking with them of spiritual things. I came to realize there was a place for women to work with women.

I loved Jesus and I just wanted to share the good things He had so kindly given me. So I took theology in college, went on to seminary, and then the school of health. I wanted to be a hospital chaplain or an academy Bible teacher.

Varied Ministry. My ministry actually has included much more. I married

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a pastor, and we enjoyed a team ministry with a strong emphasis in health evangelism in a two-church district.

Later we were called overseas. While he was head of the chaplaincy and health education departments, and pastor of the church, I acted as assistant in all of the above. We did health programs, visited patients, gave Bible studies, did evangelism, and taught Bible classes to non-Christian nursing students.

When we were called to set up a soulwinning institute in yet another country, I assisted some in evangelism but spent more time doing programming and photography for evangelistic multimedia in the local language.

Later when my husband helped to write a book about our fundamental beliefs, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, I helped with typing, editing, and writing. Then as my husband migrated to teach at the seminary I stayed home with the children.

Now as the children are older I, still at home, have become more involved in interactive computer programming with my husband and a team of other multimedia professionals—a CD-ROM series on the *Great Controversy*. Even though I am behind a computer all day I am still ministering by developing spiritual computerized materials for the world.¹

My husband and I have enjoyed a varied ministry. Serving God has been a joy. Not all easy, but I must say I have been treated more than fairly all along the way.

So what qualifications did I need in order to work in the positions I have had?

At our first pastorate, the kindly pastor who was overseeing our district wanted to ordain me as a local elder along with my husband (who was just an intern at the time). Much to his surprise, I declined, on the basis of 1 Timothy 3: 1-7. My husband was ordained alone that day.

When he was ordained to the Gospel ministry a few years later, I stood by his side while hands were laid on him. We have ministered together, yet I did not want to be the overseer. People never called me "Pastor." It was always simply, "Pastor, and Laurel."

Why Not Be Ordained?

So, even though I have the training, some experience, and other skills, why have I not aspired to be an "overseer" or sought to be called "elder" or "pastor"?

Not Sociological. Often feminists will intimate that certain cultures

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(other than North American or Western European) are "patriarchal," or "authoritarian," such as those under communist regimes or a military dictatorship. They suggest that persons coming from such cultures are merely uneducated or negatively conditioned against women's rights. They feel these poor folk just need a bit of consciousness-raising. Feminists can also accuse women who don't accept their views of being just jealous of their educated sisters who have high aspirations.

Men who object to women's ordination are often labeled as "power-hungry" and unwilling to let go of their hold on church authority.

Such accusations are unfair and poorly disguise a sense of racial/class superiority based on place of origin or social status. I am incensed to see persons from other cultures coerced and denigrated in this way.

A stand on the ordination issue is Biblical, not cultural or sociological. If it were merely a cultural issue, I, as an educated American woman, should have been ordained (at least as a local elder) long ago.

No, I will stand with much of the world field (and really, much of North America), and decisively state that there is a deeper ethical/Biblical reason not to ordain women.

An Ethical/Theological Issue. Pro-ordinationists also maintain that their position is Biblical—emphasizing moral justice, equality, and the Holy Spirit's leading.

Feminist theology, however, is inherently dispensational in nature. "Patriarchal" leadership, they emphasize, is replaced by the New Testament gospel of equality, and they make much of the "trajectory" of the Bible's moral tone.

This form of theology can be highly imaginative and speculative. For example, if a Bible writer does not happen to mention or consider women in a passage, feminist theologians take the liberty to superimpose a "woman's consciousness" on Scripture to guess at the "genuine" meaning.

For instance, because Paul was presumed to be culturally preconditioned, they say he really did not mean what he said in his instructions about women in the church; he was merely a creature of his times. If Paul were writing today he would surely say something different. Too, some intimate that Paul was plagued with problem churches and wrote to solve a specific issue in a certain church. Just because he wrote something for that specific church doesn't mean his instruction is for all time and all places.

Feminist theology is part of a larger picture of higher-critical methodology. Scripture is seen as having levels of inspiration that have either "local application"

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or "universal application."

Christians used to maintain that the Bible created a culture all its own. Seventh-day Adventists were a similar people no matter where we went in the world because we took the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy as normative. Together these sources have shaped us into a people different from our local cultures, different from any culture, but united in faith and practice.

Now feminist theology wants to impugn this Biblical culture and reinterpret the "essence" of a passage. Suddenly, under such methodology, Biblical culture falls away and the Bible becomes judged by local culture, be it North American (whatever that is!), African, Russian, etc.

I hope that Seventh-day Adventists continue to embrace Bible culture, even if it should prove to be politically or anthropologically "incorrect."

Equal but Different

Men and women were created equal in worth (sometimes called ontological equality), but not homogeneous. We were created functionally different.

Some things in life are just common sense. Design implies function. A chain saw was designed for cutting down trees, not plowing a garden; a vacuum cleaner for sucking up whatever, not painting the garage; a telescope for looking at birds or stars, not stirring the soup.

If human designers are so function-specific, the all-wise Creator is more so. His designs are so complex that human scientists spend lifetimes studying the most elementary dimensions of His complex designs.

Good Design. There is nothing obscure or controversial about stating that the stomach's purpose is to process food, the nose to smell and breathe, the kidneys to filter out impurities. All systems are interrelated in the body, but good design does not conflict. Organs of the body are not jealous of one another's functions (see 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26). All have roles.

Both male and female are necessary to a family. God created man and woman to be complementary, not synonymous. This is basic to God's design and architecture for family and government. No one would claim that both sexes are functionally identical, so why do we philosophically allow for androgynous crossover?

Today, as the traditional family disintegrates, new orders and variants emerge (some so perverse we should not even talk about them). In society the "family" is undergoing metamorphosis. The ultimate goal of feminism is no differentiation between genders or roles—this is why things like birth control,

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abortion, homosexuality, and even unisex clothing are vital to the agenda.

But that is not God's way.

Bible Roles. Scripture is quite clear about the role of women. Men and women were created equal but with specific roles. As Ellen White noted,

Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation.²

Even though Eve was Adam's equal in worth, man and woman were functionally different. Adam, created first, was head of the race (1 Timothy 2:13). Even though Eve committed the first sin, Adam was held responsible for it in salvation history (Romans 5:12-21).³

From their first small infraction that seems so insignificant came heavy consequences (curses). Neither could eat from the tree of life, and they were expelled from their garden home. Because Eve led out in the initial disobedience (rebellion), she now would experience pain and subordination—a putting under authority that required submission and obedience (Genesis 3:16).

Despite Christ's redemption and setting up the Gospel order within the Christian church, the curses laid down in Genesis 3 will remain with us until the Second Coming. Adam's curse of thorns and thistles remains (and has multiplied, despite herbicides and heavy farm equipment). The serpent's curse has not terminated (neither Satan nor his influences became eliminated with the coming of the Gospel; see Revelation 12:12). So pain in childbirth, and yes, subordination, still remain with us until glorification (epidurals and Lamaze are merely techniques of coping with the inevitable).

Salvation is equally extended to men and women, all classes, and all peoples (Galatians 3:28). God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Yet, though Jesus spent time ministering salvation to women (John 4; Luke 10:38-42), He did not choose them as the leaders of the church. Men were chosen as patriarchs, priests, and kings. (Athaliah promoted herself.) Prophets were chosen from both sexes.

In the New Testament, Paul advocated the family model for church government (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22, 23), with the man carrying the authority. Paul was clearly concerned that women not usurp the authority of

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the early church. Elders were to be men with one wife (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7), for women were not to teach or have authority over men, but to be in silence (1 Timothy 2:12). (More on silence later.)

Details. When Scripture is definitive about details, we look to the general principle being enunciated. The Sabbath commandment sets forth a general principle of worship. But it also gives a directive for when and how God wants us to worship on the seventh day and not do any work.

Seventh-day Adventists have insisted that principles and details are both important to following His Word. Just because we don't stone people who gather sticks on the Sabbath now (Numbers 15:32-36) doesn't mean we throw out the principle of worship and its specifics of time and manner.

Likewise, in the area of church leadership the principle calls for godly persons to be placed in leadership. The surrounding "detail" specifies that God wants: godly males who are able to administer their own families successfully.

Just as we are not able to dismiss the seventh day "detail" in observing the Sabbath, we cannot dismiss the male "detail" of church leadership;⁴ nor can we just view male leadership as part of a Middle Eastern culture that we cannot embrace anymore. Using that hermeneutic, we would discard the New Testament footwashing ordinance as a cultural symbol necessary only in a time when people wore sandals on dusty roads.

The Bible certainly was given to persons within a culture, but we have always claimed a God Who, as its Author, is transcultural.³

Loving Leadership. If leadership is oppressive, submission is a burden, a horrible curse. When leadership is loving, it is almost transparent. There is encouragement, there is love, there is listening. Submission is easy because two wills go the same way.

Like the new covenant experience, obedience is easy because your will is the same as the imposed will—you would want to do it that way anyway. Ephesians 5 details this kindly leadership enjoined upon the men of the family and church, in which the male leader is a type of Christ.

Gifted. Just because males have been designated as the major leaders of the church does not mean that women should just sit by. God has given women gifts that they need to employ in His service right alongside men.

God gave gifts to all,⁵ women included. Jesus is getting ready to come, and longs to pour out His Spirit on His handmaidens as well as His young men. He does not discriminate between genders in pouring out His Spirit (Joel 2:28,

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29). Women have a powerful part to play in getting the world ready to meet Jesus.

Woman, if she wisely improves her time and her faculties, relying upon God for wisdom and strength, may stand on an equality with her husband as adviser, counselor, companion, and coworker, and yet lose none of her womanly grace or modesty. She may elevate her own character, and just as she does this she is elevating and ennobling the characters of her family, and exerting a powerful though unconscious influence upon others around her. Why should not women cultivate the intellect? Why should they not answer the purpose of God in their existence? Why may they not understand their own powers, and realizing that these powers are given of God, strive to make use of them to the fullest extent in doing good to others, in advancing the work of reform, of truth and real goodness in the world? Satan knows that women have a power of influence for good or for evil; therefore he seeks to enlist them in his cause.⁶

Spirit's Call. It is sometimes said that we should not refuse to ordain those who feel called to the office of elder or pastor by the Holy Spirit.

But if a person we are having Bible studies with tells us that "the Lord told her that the seventh-day Sabbath is no longer important to keep," we assure her that the Lord never impresses differently than His Word specifies. The Holy Spirit does not instruct one way and then lead persons in a way contrary to that instruction!

The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Says the apostle John, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). And Isaiah declares, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).⁷

The Spirit Who calls men and women to ministry is the same Spirit Who instructed that the qualifications of elder or overseer (pastor) should include being a male (Greek *aner*, 1 Timothy 3:2), the husband of one wife (*gune*, cf. Titus 1:6).

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The Holy Spirit's gifts are not restricted to any gender. But the gifts of the Spirit that are given to bless the church cannot supersede the role distinctions God established at Creation, namely, that males should exercise the leadership role in both the home and church families.

During this end-time, in the first glow of the approaching Second Advent, what a shame it is that we have such a fuss going on about ordination of women to the ministry. When all of us should be using heart, hand, and voice to God's glory, working earnestly to save souls, Satan has managed to get us fighting about women!

Scripture is not against women working for the Lord with their all. A trail of righteous women listened to God's Spirit and answered His call in varying roles down through its inspired pages.⁸ There are many ways a woman can serve (yes, that means minister) even more effectively than men.⁹

How Women May Minister

1. In Their Homes. I dare not leave out this sphere in an era when homework is considered, well, all right for women with no real potential. But most folk give the impression that certainly anyone with creativity or brains ought to be making a career for herself. Some women who would rather be at home have no choice but to work. Just paying rent, keeping the children in church school, and getting food on the table stretches the financial limit for many of us.

But we are reminded that there is no more important ministry for a woman than being mother at home.

The king upon his throne has no higher work than has the mother. The mother is queen of her household. She has in her power the molding of her children's characters, that they may be fitted for the higher, immortal life. An angel could not ask for a higher mission; for in doing this work she is doing service for God. Let her only realize the high character of her task, and it will inspire her with courage. Let her realize the worth of her work and put on the whole armor of God, that she may resist the temptation to conform to the world's standard. Her work is for time and for eternity.¹⁰

Molding children shapes the future. There is no higher evangelism than painting a beautiful picture on the hearts of little ones and encouraging Jesus in the hearts of our families. More than a hurried morning and evening worship, character development takes time, careful planning, study, and just being there.

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More Than Home. But a family *always* turned inward on itself becomes selfish. And a family can fully swallow a mother. All her time can be taken in keeping house, sewing on buttons, sorting socks, reading stories to kids, crafts, stamping, and any number of hobbies.

Children should not become so absorbing that working for the Lord, reaching out for the Lord, is squeezed out.¹¹ It is very easy to say, "I need to stay home with the children. I cannot help at the meeting." It is true that children should be in bed regularly every night, but we need to make sure this is not just an alibi. We must beware of making children an excuse for not serving the Lord.

Ellen White once did. God called the White family to a very special ministry. But it was not a comfortable one. After the birth of their first child, Henry, Mrs. White assumed that her public ministry was over, so she could stay home and rear her child. As the Whites ceased their travels, heartache after heartache came upon them.

"I was shown," Sister White wrote, "that the Lord had been trying us for our good, and to prepare us to labor for others; that He had been stirring up our nest, lest we should settle down in ease, and that our work was to labor for souls."

Soon after this, baby Henry became very ill. Recognizing that they had made their little Henry "an excuse for not traveling and laboring for the good of others," they feared that God was about to remove the basis for their excuses. With the agonizing prayer of faith they made a pledge to God that if the child's life were spared they would go forth, trusting in Him wherever He might send them. Immediately the baby's fever turned, and the White family realized that God wanted their family more involved than in mere home evangelism.¹²

Children. When God calls us to work for Him, He still expects us to be responsible for our children, our most important responsibility. We cannot devote all to the "Cause," neglect our children, and then expect God to do a miracle to save them.

Marilee P. Dunker makes herself vulnerable by telling her family's story in *Days of Glory, Seasons of Night*. She relates how her father, Bob Pierce, used to say, "I've made an agreement with God that I'll take care of His helpless little lambs overseas if He'll take care of mine at home."

Mrs. Dunker goes on to say, "It surely sounded sensible enough, and Daddy sincerely believed it was right. Unfortunately, future events would prove that this was Daddy's agreement, not God's."

Bob Pierce founded World Vision, one of the largest and most successful

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ministry-oriented Christian organizations in the world. His tiring travels and long absences were meant as sacrifice, but they cost his own mental health, the breakup of his marriage, the suicide of one of his daughters, and permanent scars in the lives of his other children.¹³

Home responsibilities cannot be shrugged, even for "God's work." Each member of the family needs the assurance of belonging to one another, over all others. The chatting at meals together, the spiritual worships, the sharing on a walk, a quick hug—nothing in life can replace those moments. Time can only be given in the present; later we must live with no regrets. We cannot cheat our own precious families.

Children can be the means of ministry. When a mother stays home she does not have to remain confined to the house. During the early years, changing diapers and keeping a baby happy may seem to be the main mission in life. But even through those cloistered times she can still have outreach, a way of meeting people for Jesus. Going to the park with little ones becomes a time to reach other mothers. Stopping by the library with the children means meeting people (in the children's department, of course) she may not meet otherwise. Sharing recipes, gardening secrets, a natural remedy to help a neighbor's cough, are all ways we make friends and build relationships for the kingdom.

We can minister to those in like circumstances best of all. If young mothers don't minister to young mothers, who will? How better can our children catch the vision of evangelism? The children themselves can be effective missionaries. Home now becomes the means, not the end. Well-behaved children become entering wedges wherever they go.

2. In Personal Ministry. There comes a time when the casual contacts lead to deeper questions. "Does the way you eat have something to do with your religion?" "Would you like to go with me to the craft show next Saturday?" (Isn't it interesting how outward behaviors, sometimes called standards, often lead to deeper questions of the spirit?)

Bible Work. If we are prepared, we can go a step deeper and begin studying the Bible with friends. Women are excellent at personal ministry. For years, Bible workers in local churches or evangelism have been responsible for large numbers of baptisms. Women, with simple Bible lessons (read a question, open the Bible to the text to find answer) have educated our babes in Christ. Bible workers could be sent out into the homes or were highly successful at following up guests who came to worship. They had a knack for getting decisions. They were excellent Bible students who knew Jesus, and people responded with their

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whole hearts.

Hetty Hurd Haskell was one of our most successful Bible workers at the turn of the last century. Single till her later years when she married the widower, S.N. Haskell, she and her husband set up a training school for young workers right in their home. Those desiring to observe, learn, and be trained as soulwinners would come to live with the Haskells for a period of time. Of the Haskells it was said,

Brother Haskell is a man of experience, and is respected and honored by all. His wife is a woman of rare ability as a manager. She takes hold most earnestly, not afraid to put her hand to any work. She does not say, "Go," but she says, "Come, we will do this or that," and they cheerfully do as she instructs them. We have had most precious instruction from the Word from both Bro. and Sr. Haskell.¹⁴

Medical Ministry. One of the vehicles of evangelism the Haskells enjoyed was medical missionary work. Mrs. Haskell was skilled in tying spiritual things to cooking schools or health lectures. She explained:

Before each cooking lesson we give a talk on the health reform from the Bible standpoint, showing the people why we do not have the same diet as the world around us. During the cooking school we will cover the main points of faith in these talks, so that those that only come to the cooking school will learn much about our faith from the health standpoint.¹⁵

Team Ministry. The Haskells worked so closely together that Mrs. Haskell felt, "My studies without his [Elder Haskell's] were not as helpful, for in all our meetings we have made all our studies blend, his has prepared the way for mine and mine filled in the spaces with his."¹⁶ Sometimes Mrs. Haskell even preached some of the sermons.

Ellen White encouraged the Haskells in their team ministry emphasizing that women such as Hetty Haskell, those working in full-time in evangelism, should be fairly remunerated. Some of Mrs. White's strong counsels on this issue were in reference to women working along the lines of Mrs. Haskell.¹⁷

But one need not be a professional Bible worker, highly trained, or on the conference payroll in order to have the opportunity to give Bible studies. Women are uniquely gifted in personal work. All of us have the privilege of working together for Jesus. Lay Bible training is an avenue that any of us can enjoy and be part of.

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Other areas where women can be a special blessing are in the realms of counseling or hospital chaplaincy, specializing in working with women. Unfortunate situations can arise from men counseling women. We have been specifically told:

When a woman is in trouble, let her take her trouble to women. If this woman who has come to you has cause of complaint against her husband, she should take her trouble to some other woman who can, if necessary, talk with you in regard to it, without any appearance of evil.¹⁸

3. In a Public Ministry. Women can even teach and preach in churches. Early in our movement there was some discussion of women's public involvement in light of the Bible's injunction for a woman to remain silent (1 Corinthians 14:34).¹⁹

In an 1866 article in the *Review and Herald*, Uriah Smith wrote regarding the Biblical passage on women being silent in church; he equated it with being under obedience:

The Scriptures represent, that a subordinate position, in a certain sense, is assigned to the woman, for the reasons that she was formed from the man, and at a subsequent time, and was first in transgression. 1 Corinthians 11:8; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14. The leadership and authority is vested in the man. "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." Genesis 3:16. This order is not to be reversed, and the woman take the position which has been assigned to the man; and every action on her part which shows that she is usurping this authority, is disorderly, and not to be allowed.

Hence Paul says plainly to Timothy, 1 Timothy 2:12, "But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." There is no doubt but it was the very same point, the usurping of authority over the man, that the same apostle had in view in 1 Corinthians 14:34.²⁰

Twelve years later, J.H. Waggoner, as resident editor of *The Signs of the Times*, was even more specific about these passages:

The divine arrangement, even from the beginning, is this, that the

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man is the head of the woman. Every relation is disregarded or abused in this lawless age. But the Scriptures always maintain this order in the family relation. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church." Ephesians 5:23. Man is entitled to certain privileges which are not given to woman; and he is subjected to some duties and burdens from which the woman is exempt. *A woman may pray, prophesy, exhort, and comfort the church, but she cannot occupy the position of a pastor or a ruling elder.* This would be looked upon as usurping authority over the man, which is here [1 Timothy 2:12] prohibited.²¹

Waggoner concluded,

Neither do the words of Paul confine the labors of women to the act of prophesying alone. He refers to prayers, and also speaks of certain women who "labored in the Lord," an expression which could only refer to the work of the Gospel. He also, in remarking on the work of the prophets, speaks of edification, exhortation, and comfort. This "labor in the Lord," with prayer, comprises all the duties of public worship. Not all the duties of business meetings, which were probably conducted by men, or all the duties of ruling elders, and pastors, compare 1 Timothy 5:17, with 2:12, but all that pertain to exercises purely religious. We sincerely believe that, according to the Scriptures, women, as a right may, and as a duty ought to, engage in these exercises.²²

Not in authority. Thus we see that early Adventists discovered that the issue in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy is not silence, but authority or rulership. These passages indicate that Biblical order requires a woman to be in submission and not to rule over the husband of the family, nor be an elder, nor a pastor of a church.

Is it any wonder that only three years after Waggoner's article, in 1881, the first motion submitted to the General Conference to ordain women to the Gospel ministry died a quick death? The motion was referred to committee and did not emerge again for nearly another century. Early Adventists were clear on leadership roles and Gospel order.

Not in silence either. Within this Biblical structure, Adventist women in the nineteenth century exercised a significant ministry, which could include

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public speaking. Mrs. S.M.I. Henry provides one outstanding example of such a ministry, conducted in harmony with the Bible's guidelines. An evangelist with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U), Mrs. Henry was convicted of the Sabbath and was baptized while a patient in the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

Because of her prominence, she was immediately to speak at various Seventh-day Adventist camp meetings. Her special emphasis was encouraging women to use their talents for the Lord in their homes and neighborhoods. She established a branch of the church's outreach, which she called "woman ministry," to help women see how to strengthen their homes and to witness to their neighbors. In addition to frequent public speaking, she wrote a weekly column for the *Review and Herald* entitled "Woman's Gospel Work."

Mrs. White wrote to her, encouraging her in her work, even telling her, "Address the crowd whenever you can."²³

Even though Mrs. Henry conducted an extremely heavy public ministry, she never saw herself in a man's role doing a minister's job. She firmly believed that women were most effective at home. The only reason she felt forced into public labor was "because an emergency like that of a railroad smashup was upon us as a race, and everyone who could get hold of a light must carry it out into the darkness, and take a hand in the work of rescue, regardless of age, sex, or condition."²⁴

Mrs. Henry totally disagreed with those pushing for equal rights in politics and in the ministry. She saw hers as a spiritual work, not a political one. Her close friend and coworker, Frances E. Willard, W.C.T.U. president and well-known women's rights advocate, was committed to women's ordination and wrote and spoke extensively on the subject. Mrs. Henry's daughter, Mary Rossiter, tells of one of her own conversations with Miss Willard. When Miss Willard heard that Mary was to attend Northwestern University, she was thrilled, and "she talked to me with enthusiasm about the wonderful opportunities for girls of my day, and sounded my mind as to any latent ambition I might have to study theology and help compel the ministers to let women into their ordained ranks."

What was Mary's reaction? "*But I shared my mother's views as to the sphere of woman, and my whole child being shrank from the thought.*"²⁵

Though pro-ordination advocates often use S.M.I. Henry as a model of prominent early Adventist women doing ministry, she definitely was not out for ordination or authority—she understood the "sphere of the woman." Her goal was to get women to realize their importance in working for God by building the family and through bringing individuals to Jesus.²⁶

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Women's Ministries Now

Today's Women's Ministries contrast sharply with the "woman ministry" back then.

Whereas the spirituality of the Adventist sisters and working for the home, husband, and children were the greatest burdens of the first movement, it seems to be assumed in the second.

Whereas the first movement stressed the worth and influence of a woman on the domestic scene in the home, such a concept seems nigh repulsive to many in the second movement.

Whereas power was equated with the Holy Spirit in the first, one almost senses that it is equated with position and leadership in the second.

The mission of Women's Ministries today is to encourage, empower, and *advance* women:

Our Vision

To know Jesus passionately and to serve and to disciple women.

Our Mission

To lift up Jesus Christ by empowering women to discover and realize their leadership & ministry potential—within their homes, churches, and communities.²⁷

Women's Ministries is all about leadership training. Women are being prepared to lead the church through books, seminars, conferences, and certification programs. For example, note the following taken from the North American Division Women's Ministries Web site:

This Leadership Certification program has come about because we realize the great need for the women of our church to develop skills that will enable them to serve in positions of leadership.

E.G. White reminds us that "there is a higher purpose for woman, a grander destiny. She should develop and cultivate her powers, for God can employ them in the great work of saving souls from eternal ruin" [*Evangelism*, p. 465).

Developing and cultivating the abilities of women is one task of this department, and one to which we are committed....

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It is our desire to see women who are called of God for service in these last days empowered to lead.²⁷

Note that the "higher purpose and grander destiny" is not so much concerned with ministry to families but with empowerment to lead.

The world church said "no" to ordination in 1990 and 1995. But the entire church did not obey. Shortly after the world church's decision, several ordinations of women to the Gospel ministry took place. No disciplinary action has come down from headquarters.²⁸ Instead, now we find the Ministerial Department of the General Conference fully cooperating with women's centers to encourage and promote women pastors.²⁹

Feminists push on, whether they get their way on ordination or not. And they never give up trying to push women into key leadership spots, with a total abandonment of the Biblical model of leadership and the Spirit of Prophecy.³⁰ Ordination is the recognition of the church of someone to ministry. Now they have the recognition without the formality of ordination.

A highly applauded Center for Women Clergy has just been set up at Andrews University to aid and encourage women pastors.

The center helps women taking seminary classes to prepare for ministry through mentoring and networking. . . . There are 95 female students in the seminary, up 20 students from two years ago. . . . in comparison to the 500-plus enrolled in the seminary, it may not seem like much, but it's "huge for female enrollment." . . . The center is working on providing a system where "any woman, anywhere, who feels a call to ministry should know there's someone she can call." This also means that after graduation, women have someone in the ministry they can connect with, "someone who can mentor."³¹

We can applaud Women's Ministries here or in developing countries where women are still very active in soulwinning and sharing their faith. Praise the Lord for their faith and sacrificial work! The churches are growing because such women have captured the spirit of the pioneers in their area. Let us be ashamed to tamper with this form of ministry by infecting them with feminist struggles of empowerment.

Ticket Up. The continued thrust for women's ordination is not merely seeking to recognize women in ministry. Ordination is viewed as a ticket up. Many church leadership positions have ordination as a prerequisite. Feminists have

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their eyes on high-level leadership positions in the conferences, and divisions. Women are not just after the pulpit; they want to be mentored all the way up.

There is something about most men that resists being led by women. Call it chauvinism, call it bigotry, call it whatever you like. But a church dominated by women does not appeal to men. This is a great danger for evangelism. Winning women to our church has always been easier than winning men. Why add further hurdles to drawing men?

Ordination and empowerment have muddied the whole picture of women in ministry and made it a matter of power grasping.

Yes, there is a place for women in public ministry. Of course there is a place for "addressing the crowd," exhorting, writing. But in no way can we usurp authority. As the Bible says so plainly, elders and church leaders are to be men (1 Timothy 3:2). Just because we do not possess that authority does not mean that we cannot serve Jesus with our all.

Let us be willing to take Scripture as the norm! Let us emulate Jesus, Who girded Himself with a towel, then was humble enough to stoop to do a servant's duties. Let us forget the "who is greatest" rhetoric and be willing to go down to embrace real ministry.

Endnotes

¹ See www.ChristianHeritageMedia.com.

² *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

³ See, for example, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 647, 648, for the meeting of the two Adams. There is no mention of Eve, but Adam is called "the father of our race."

⁴ Feminist hermeneutics takes a radical look at Scripture by grounding its analyses in the judgment of the reader and the experience of "women's oppression." Using the historical-critical method, feminist interpreters can dismiss or reinterpret any given passage by guessing at its intent and the culture to which it was presented. Evangelical feminists cannot go that far. Their approach to woman-limiting passages is to doubt that such passages are timeless and universal. Using the principle of analogy of Scripture, they compare John 13's footwashing and the Sabbath commandment to argue that today we need not keep these observances literally: "Yet it is argued from the New Testament, with relatively few dissenters, that the Sabbath need not be observed now in the same way that it had been." Ruth A. Tucker, *Daughters of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 443-448.

⁵ Ephesians 4:8 says that He gave gifts to "men." Men in this passage does not mean male. This is a generic term, *anthropos*, which means human beings.

⁶ *Evangelism*, p. 467.

⁷ *Great Controversy*, p. vii.

⁸ For example, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Esther, Anna, Mary, Martha, Dorcas, and Priscilla are women who served God during Bible times. Many more could be added to this list. They did not function identically, but God had a special role for each of these.

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⁹ "There are women who should labor in the Gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God" (*Evangelism*, p. 472).

¹⁰ *The Adventist Home*, pp. 231, 232. Also, "Could the veil be withdrawn and father and mother see as God sees the work of the day, and see how His infinite eye compares the work of the one with that of the other, they would be astonished at the heavenly revelation. The father would view his labors in a more modest light, while the mother would have new courage and energy to pursue her labor with wisdom, perseverance, and patience. Now she knows its value. While the father has been dealing with the things which must perish and pass away, the mother has been dealing with developing minds and character, working not only for time but for eternity" (*ibid.*, p. 233). "If married men go into the work, leaving their wives to care for the children at home, the wife and mother is doing fully as great and important a work as the husband and father. Although one is in the missionary field, the other is a home missionary, whose cares and anxieties and burdens frequently far exceed those of the husband and father. Her work is a solemn and important one. The husband in the open missionary field may receive the honors of men, while the home toiler may receive no earthly credit for her labor. But if she works for the best interest of her family, seeking to fashion their characters after the divine Model, the recording angel writes her name as one of the greatest missionaries in the world. God does not see things as man's finite vision views them" (*ibid.*, p. 235).

¹¹ "The Christian mother's sphere of usefulness should not be narrowed by her domestic life. The salutary influence which she exerts in the home circle she may and will make felt in more widespread usefulness in her neighborhood and in the church of God. Home is not a prison to the devoted wife and mother" (*ibid.*, p. 236).

An interesting phenomenon is happening in some of the more conservative evangelical circles. Women are not only encouraged to stay home, but to make home their world. They are encouraged to have as many babies as possible (evangelism by biological growth), then to home-school them, home-church them, and home-business them (see for example, Mary Pride, *The Way Home* (Westchester, 111.: Crossway Books, 1985). The family becomes a unit unto itself. Not only is there no room for outside evangelism, the home business so absorbs the mother that she hardly has time to train the many children she brings into the world. (See Cheryl Lindsey, "All the Way Home?", *Gentle Spirit*, February 1995, p. 14.)

Even though the Bible speaks about being saved through childbearing (1 Timothy 2: 15), this does not necessarily mean to have as many babies as you can. Ellen White was quite careful to recommend family planning. A family should have no more children than can be properly educated and carefully cared for. "A child in the mother's arms from year to year is great injustice to her." Women who can do Gospel work "will not fill their hands and houses with children, but will keep themselves as free as possible from everything that will divert their minds from their one great work. The wife, if devoted and left free to do so, can, by standing by the side of her husband, accomplish as much as he. God has blessed woman with talents to be used to His glory in bringing many sons and daughters to God; but many who might be efficient laborers are kept at home to care for their little ones." See *The Adventist Home*, pp. 162-166.

¹² Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1985), pp. 135, 136.

¹³ Marilee Pierce Dunker, *Days of Glory, Seasons of Night* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 103.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, Letter 33, 1897 to Bro. Collins, June 9, 1897, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, p. 255.

¹⁵ H. Haskell letter to E.G. White, May 14, 1906.

¹⁶ H. Haskell letter to E.G. White, July 1900 [n.d.].

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¹⁷ "Injustice has sometimes been done to women who labor just as devotedly as their husbands, and who are recognized by God as being necessary to the work of the ministry. The method of paying men-laborers, and not paying their wives who share their labors with them, is a plan not according to the Lord's order, and if carried out in our conferences, is liable to discourage our sisters from qualifying themselves for the work they should engage in. God is a God of justice, and if the ministers receive a salary for their work, their wives who devote themselves just as disinterestedly to the work, should be paid in addition to the wages their husbands receive, even though they may not ask for this.

"Seventh-day Adventists are not in any way to belittle women's work. If a woman puts her housework in the hands of a faithful, prudent helper, and leaves her children in good care, while she engages in the work, the conference should have wisdom to understand the justice of her receiving wages" (*Gospel Workers*, pp. 452, 453).

¹⁸ *Evangelism*, pp. 460, 461.

¹⁹ The following is a sampling of the articles relating to women speaking in churches. The articles appeared in Adventist periodicals before the 1881 motion for ordination: S.C. Wellcome, "Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches?", *Review and Herald*, February 23, 1860, pp. 109, 110; J.A. Mowatt, "Women as Preachers and Lecturers," *Ibid.*, July 30, 1861, p. 65; "Shall Women Speak in the Church?" *ibid.*, Mar. 14, 1871; I. Felkerhoof, "Women Laboring in Public," *ibid.*, Aug. 8, 1871, p. 58; "Shall Women Speak in the Church?" *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 17, 1876, p. 277; J.H. Waggoner, "Woman's Place in the Gospel," *ibid.*, Dec. 19, 1878, p. 380; J. White, "Women in the Church," *Review and Herald*, May 29, 1879, p. 172; N.J. Bowers, "May Women Publicly Labor in the Cause of Christ?" *ibid.*, June 14, 1881, p. 372.

²⁰ Uriah Smith, "Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches," *Review and Herald*, June 26, 1866, p. 28.

²¹ J.H. Waggoner, "Woman's Place in the Gospel," *The Signs of the Times*, Dec. 19, 1878, p. 380.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Evangelism*, p. 473.

²⁴ S.M.I. Henry, *A Woman Ministry* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1899), p. 38.

²⁵ Mary Rossiter, *My Mother's Life: The Evolution of a Recluse* (Chicago: Revell Co., 1900), p. 208.

²⁶ For more on Mrs. Henry's remarkable life and the genius of her work, see Laurel Damsteegt, "S.M.I. Henry, Pioneer in Women's Ministry," *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM*, Spring 1995, p. 17; and Margaret White, "Whirlwind of the Lord," (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1953). (Later reprinted under the same name.)

²⁷ North American Division Women's Ministries Web site, accessed Feb. 24, 2005: <http://www.nadwm.org/article.php?id=25>.

²⁸ For the full story of the ordinations after Utrecht, see Laurel Damsteegt, "Pushing the Brethren," *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM*, Fall 1998, pp. 24 ff.

²⁹ The Women's Resource Center of La Sierra University openly promotes women ministers and women in leadership. Note the support of General Conference Ministerial Directors James and Sharon Cress in the following WRC Board's Minutes, 05-23-05, portable document format download from <http://www.adventistwomenscenter.org/wrcboardmembers.html>, accessed Feb. 24, 2005). "**Project proposal—James & Sharon Cress:** In the interest of improving fundraising opportunities by enlarging the WRC mailing list from 1,500 to several thousand, James and Sharon Cress proposed that WRC prepare a newsletter—with a response form—that could be distributed at Adventist women's retreats. GC Ministerial Association would assist in getting a list of coming retreats and printing the newsletter.

Agreed: That the WRC directors will follow up on mailing-list expansion proposal with

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the Cresses.

Invitations to WRC—Summer 2005:

1. James Cress invited the WRC directors to oversee a portion of the GC Ministerial Association booth (and share appropriate WRC materials), along with other entities under its umbrella, at the 2005 GC session in St. Louis.

2. Sharon Cress invited WRC to join with her and Diiuane Schoonard of the NAD Ministerial Association, in hosting a lunch for women clergy at the 2005 GC session.

³⁰ For a candid look at the goals of women in the church, see, for example: "Association of Adventist Women 21st Annual Meeting Recommendations and Commendations, Annual Business Meeting October 19, 2003," <http://www.aaw.cc/GetAcquainted/RandC.html>, accessed March 5, 2005.

"The Association of Adventist Women submits the following recommendations to: . . .

All divisions of the world church:

To recognize the talents and abilities that God has freely given to Adventist women as well as to men,

- It is recommended that congregations throughout each division elect, encourage, and empower women to serve as elders of their local churches;
- Wherever possible, purchase and use gender-inclusive language Bibles for Scripture readings and responsive readings in all public gatherings; and
- Seek out and employ women pastors to serve the pastoral needs of Adventist members, both women and men.

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists:

• To take concrete steps to implement Fundamental Belief #13 (Unity in the Body of Christ), and to symbolize the shared responsibilities that women and men have in caring for and instructing the flock of God, it is recommended that in those areas employing men and women in leadership and pastoral ministry, the church grant a common ministerial credential to them. . . .

• To more clearly indicate that women are valuable members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church along with men, it is recommended that the church hymnal be revised with gender-inclusive language in the hymn lyrics and in the responsive readings. . . .

The Association of Adventist Women commends the following: . . .

2. The Southeastern California Conference for continuing to implement a common credential for all ministers regardless of gender. . . .

7. The Southeastern California Conference for seeking to increase the number of women pastors to 20 percent of the pastorate in the conference."

"Southeastern California Conference Holds Historic Election and Elects First Female Officer," *The Adventist Woman*, vol. 22, no. 2, Winter 2000, p. 6, reports that Southeastern California in November of 2004 voted a woman as executive secretary of the Conference. Her unique qualifications include the following: "Since 2000 she has been associate youth director in the SECC, and before that was co-pastor/associate pastor at the Corona Adventist Church for five years. Roberts has many years of experience in youth and summer camp ministry, beginning when she was a student in the 1970s." See also <http://secc.adventist.org/administration.htm>, accessed March 6, 2005.

³¹ "Center for Women Clergy at Andrews University Provides Support, Mentorship," Adventist News Network, accessed Feb. 23, 2005: <http://news.adventist.org/data/2004/10/1101845365/index.html.en>.

Chapter 46

Will Our Church Survive?

By Pastor Mark A. Finley

Director of Global Evangelism, General Conference

Speaker Emeritus, *It Is Written*

There is a subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle struggle raging for the soul of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Serious questions are being raised. Some members wonder why we exist at all. Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church simply another denomination? Do we have a unique mission and message? Have we been raised up to perform a specific task? Le Roy Edwin Froom sums up these questions in his *Movement of Destiny*: "Just why are we here today, as an organized entity? Do we assuredly have an authorized and authentic commission from God—a mission and message assigned to us that command our respect and demand our all, for the fulfillment of which we are solemnly accountable to God?"¹

Other members are asking questions of an opposite nature. They believe the Seventh-day Adventist Church was providentially raised up by God to accomplish a specific mission. But they believe that the church has compromised its integrity and apostatized from doctrinal purity. They are convinced that God has called them to leave the "organized church." They see themselves as part of a "remnant of the remnant"—modern representatives of that select group of "faithful souls" who have constituted the church in every age. They define the church as "committed believers," not as an organized institution.

Let's candidly examine some of these issues together.

The Nature and Mission of the Church

Scripture uses a variety of symbols to describe God's church. It is "the light of the world, "the body of Christ," the "bride of Christ" and the "flock of God."² Christ is its Head, its Husband, its Shepherd.

The embryo of the church was formed in Genesis. As sin widened the gap between Christ's followers and the followers of the evil one, "Humanity began to divide in two categories, the sons of God and the sons of men."³ God established a group of people to preserve His name, His truth, and His worship.

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"Though His special group receives different names in the Bible—chosen people, people of God, Christian church—its main purpose remains the same." God's people represent His loving, righteous character and communicate His message of truth to the rest of the world. They are His witnesses in the lives they live and the words they speak. Their lives of absolute trust, loving obedience, and passionate commitment to truth reveal, to a watching world, His way of life. The church is Christ's witness in the world.

Our church was providentially raised up by our Lord to accomplish His purpose. It is not a manmade, human entity. It is a divine institution established by God. Jesus stated. "I" — not someone else—"will build My church." Then He declared that no one will ever destroy it. "The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). All the powers of evil can never destroy the church Christ has founded.

Jesus Himself gave the commission to His early disciples. His words echo down the corridors of time: "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19, 20, NIV).

That commission is just as relevant today as when Christ first spoke it. "The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the Gospel to the world. . . . The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to 'the principalities and powers in heavenly places,' the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9).

Be sure to note that last statement! The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been raised up by God to "manifest... the final and full display of the love of God." Seventh-day Adventists are not just another denomination. Our doctrinal understanding reveals depths of God's love and unique aspects of His character that are often misunderstood by fellow Christians who embrace doctrinal errors. What are doctrines, anyway? They are objective statements about the character of God.

Not Simply Another Denomination

Recently I discussed the concept of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a people called out by God to accomplish a special mission with someone who felt I was quite "narrow" in my thinking. Their understanding was that Seventh-day Adventists are no more called by God than any other denomination. This individual, although an Adventist, sees the Adventist Church as

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merely part of the larger people of God, the Christian church.

This person's understanding of our mission is that we should convert secular people or the unchurched to Christ, and nothing more. I detected nervousness when I mentioned the concepts of the remnant, the true church, the three angels' messages, the mark of the beast, and the fall of Babylon.

During our discussion I asked, "Is it possible for a church to fully reveal the loving character of God if at the same time it teaches the doctrine of eternal torment in an ever-burning Hell?" Does a person's concept of Hell say anything about their concept of God?

I also asked my friend, "What about the doctrine of the immortal soul as opposed to the concept of physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness?" The Greek philosophers separated the soul from the body. This had a dramatic impact on their ideas about life and death, and I wanted to know how my friend saw these things.

As our discussion continued, I pointed out that one reason the Sabbath is important is that it leads us back to our roots. It speaks of the God Who made us, our loving Creator. It is a weekly reminder that we are more than skin covering bone; we are the creation of a loving God Who cares for us intimately.

The Sabbath connects us in a unique way to the cross, for it is a symbol of rest, not works.

I suggested to him that, rightly understood, the Sabbath is a symbol of righteousness by faith. Each Sabbath as we rest from our works we trust in the completed work of Christ. We cease from our labors to save ourselves and trust in Jesus' finished work at Calvary.

To accept Sunday—a man-made substitute—is to accept a day that man, not God, has decreed for worship. In a sense, this leads subtly to trusting a human work—the change of God's day—rather than by faith accepting a divine command.

In the great controversy being waged in the universe between good and evil, the Sabbath anchors us in our loving Creator. It leads us, by faith, to rest in His grace, and it reminds us of the day when God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

Each doctrine of Scripture, rightly understood, reveals another facet of God's loving character. God raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church to portray fully the magnificence of His character.

It is not possible to understand the depth of the divine character fully and at the same time embrace the doctrinal errors of modern Christendom. I am not implying that doctrine saves anyone. There are millions of committed Christians who have embraced some doctrinal errors but who have accepted

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Christ's death on the cross and will be saved. The gift of salvation is theirs.

But, sadly, they do not have a complete picture of God. Their distorted view often leaves major gaps in their understanding. Many of these sincere Christians are groping, seeking to find answers, longing to understand the significance of the great controversy between good and evil.

As Seventh-day Adventists, God has raised us up for this hour. We have a message for both the church and the unchurched. We have been called of God, brought into existence at this time, to preach the "eternal Gospel . . . to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6). Ours is a special message for a special time, with a special calling. Ours is to proclaim the fullness of the truth about God in the final moments of Earth's history, to prepare a people for the coming of Jesus.

"We are not here to primarily build churches, schools, medical institutions, dispensaries, publishing houses, conference headquarters—except as they are the means to the one end of saving souls. All material things—corporeal, mundane, earthly things—will be consumed at the Second Advent, irrespective of their purpose and use. Redeemed souls alone will leap the abyss separating time from eternity—marked off by the Second Advent—and abide forever."³

An Organized Body-

Some people ask, "What do you mean by the church?" They presume God's church has no organization. They assert that it consists of "faithful believers" who must meet in house groups because of the apostasy of the larger body.

W.D. Frazee dealt with this erroneous idea in a sermon he titled, "The Church Our Mother."⁶ Frazee agreed that faithful souls constitute the church. He showed that Ellen White expresses agreement with this view in *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 11. But, he pointed out, there is nothing in her statement to support the idea that God's true people must be unorganized or disorganized in order to constitute the true church. As that thrilling hymn says, "Like a mighty army moves the church of God."⁷ God's church is not a disorganized mob; it is a well-organized body. And, concerning the remnant who receive the latter rain and go forward to give the loud cry, Ellen White wrote, "They moved in exact order, like a company of soldiers" (*Early Writings*, p. 271).

Elder Frazee quoted two powerful statements from Ellen White: "Oh, how Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings and to

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refute claims not endorsed by the Word of God" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 257, 258).

A little further on in this same section the prophet declared, "Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent" (*ibid.*, p. 258). The Seventh-day Adventist Church "is not to be disorganized or broken up into independent atoms. There is not the least. . . evidence that such a thing will be" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, pp. 68, 69). "Nothing else in this world is so dear to God as His church" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 242). "The Majesty of Heaven has . . . the concerns of His church, in His Own charge" (*ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 753).

"God has not passed His people by and chosen one solitary man here and another there as the only ones worthy to be entrusted with His truth" (*ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 291).

Need for Revival and Reformation

Many thoughtful Seventh-day Adventist leaders and lay people openly acknowledge that the church has not yet fulfilled its destiny. In spite of its marvelous triumphs, its rapid growth, its worldwide influence, its extensive educational and medical institutions, it does not yet fully reflect the character of our Lord.

In 1935 Elder C.H. Watson, at that time president of the General Conference, wrote, "There is setting in on this people a tide of worldliness to which we are surrendering."⁸

Elder J.L. McElhaney, who followed Elder Watson as president of the General Conference, gave expression to his deep concern over worldly trends in the church in these words:

Our greatest danger today is the attitude taken by so many of our people of accepting with apparent satisfaction their present low spiritual condition, and not being very much concerned about it. . . .

"The time has come for a thorough reformation to take place." . . . There has come into the church listlessness, a carelessness that is deplorable.⁹

Ellen White concurs with the observation of these two godly leaders.

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God calls for a spiritual revival and a spiritual reformation. Unless this takes place, those who are lukewarm will continue to grow more abhorrent to the Lord, until He will refuse to acknowledge them as His children. A revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit (*Review and Herald*, Feb. 25, 1902).

Will this revival occur within the Adventist Church today? Will there be a thorough reformation? Or, on the other hand, will God eventually refuse to call us His children? Will the church that calls people out of Babylon become a part of Babylon?

The promises of Scripture clearly teach that God's church will be revived, not discarded. Revelation 18:1 describes a time when the earth will be lightened with the glory of God. God's glory is His character. (See Exodus 33:18, 19.)

According to Song of Solomon 6:10, our God will appear as glorious as the morning, radiant with the magnificence of His character: "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners" (NKJV).

The apostle Paul affirms this truth in Ephesians 5:25-27: "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

The Church Will Triumph

God will not fail His people. His promises will be fulfilled in His church. For, as "enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 12).

"The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 380).

God has a church on Earth who are uplifting the downtrodden law, and presenting to the people the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. The church is the depository of the wealth of the riches of the grace of Christ, and through the church eventually will be manifested the final and full display of God's love. The world will be lightened with its glory. The prayer of Christ, that His church might be one with Him as He is one with His Father, will finally be answered. Take time to read *Testimonies to Ministers*, pages 32-62. And notice that the prophet of God unequivocally denies that the Seventh-

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day Adventist Church ever was, is now, or ever will be Babylon. Her statements are too plain to be misunderstood.

"For years I have borne my testimony to the effect that when any arise claiming to have great light, and yet advocating the tearing down of that which the Lord through His human agents has been building up, they are greatly deceived, and are not working along the lines where Christ is working. Those who assert that the Seventh-day Adventist churches constitute Babylon, or any part of Babylon, might better stay at home" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 36,37).

God's church will fulfill its destiny. It will complete its mission. It will accomplish its purpose. A revived church with members filled with the Holy Spirit will carry the Gospel to the world. The promised latter rain will fall from Heaven on a praying church. The wind of the Spirit will blow. Sins will be confessed. The chains of evil habits will be severed. The spell of worldliness will be broken. The hypnotic enchantment of earthly pleasure will be replaced by the pure joy of sharing Christ with the lost.

"Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from Heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.... The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 612).

The work of God on Earth will be finished. God's purpose will triumph. His church will be victorious! Along with you, I long for that day. Would you like to commit yourself to Jesus to be part of His glorious, triumphant church in Earth's final hours?

Endnotes

¹ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1971), p. 629.

² Matthew 5:14; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13; Ephesians 5:27; Ezekiel 34:29-31.

³ Fernando Chaij, *The Impending Drama* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), p. 15.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 654.

⁶ W.D. Frazee, "The Church Our Mother." *ADVENTISTS AFFIRM* 7/1 (Spring 1993), pp. 18-25.

⁷ Sabine Baring-Gould, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," No. 612 in *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*,

⁸ C.H. Watson, "Separation from the World," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 21, 1935, p. 6.

⁹ J.L. McElhany, "Dangers Threatening the Church," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 3, 1936, p. 4.

Chapter 47

Liberals and Conservatives

Whatever Happened to the Seventh-day Adventists?

By **Lee Roy Holmes**

Retired Pastor and Academy Principal, Upper Columbia Conference

For years our public utilities provider had been Washington Water Power, a member of the great hydroelectric power grid in the Northwest. We had grown accustomed to seeing its distinctively marked trucks in our neighborhood, doing routine service or restoring power after a winter storm. But then, without warning, we received a flyer announcing that Washington Water Power was now Avista. No good reason was given. The flyer said something about "new management" and "better service."

But it's been worse.

My table saw doesn't have the power it used to. And I *know* it takes longer for the toaster to pop up. Instead of 110 volts, we're probably lucky to get 106. I suppose it's just my imagination, but if it is, I'm sure it has to do with the name change. *Avista*. A low-voltage name if I ever heard one. Sounds more like a subcompact car or a New Age journal.

My assessment of Avista's performance may be imaginary, but it is certainly no illusion that a good share of the security we enjoy in our uncertain world comes from names we have learned to trust. We may scoff at those who are "slaves" to brand names, but in practice, most of us are as prone as the next person to buy by the label. Advertisers have powerfully conditioned us to choose the known over the generic.

The Name *Seventh-day Adventist*

So what about the name *Seventh-day Adventist*? Is it one we are proud to wear, one in which we unhesitatingly place our trust? To be sure, it has always elicited a variety of responses from the general public, but among Seventh-day

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Adventists themselves that name has, over the years, stirred deep emotions of loyalty.

And it has provided a fairly uniform definition of who we are. We can be justifiably proud of the fact that our denomination has not been seriously fractured by schism or the creation of national churches. Qualifiers such as "Southern," "Canadian," "Orthodox," "Primitive," etc., have not appeared before our name—at least not as a way of officially defining a subgroup with differing doctrinal positions.

But not anymore. (And I didn't even get a flyer in the mail!)

The New Labels

Seventh-day Adventist seldom stands today without qualification. It has become so common, in the North American Division at least, for members to think and speak of each other as either "liberal" or "conservative" that this is often the *real* identity of interest when one member is introduced to another or the name of a local church is mentioned.

While the majority would probably identify themselves as "moderates," that designation, in practice, is not allowed. One's place is assigned on the basis of the position taken with respect to "hot potato" issues like celebration worship, women's ordination, contemporary music, jewelry, homosexuality, wine sipping, etc. No fence straddling is permitted.

"Liberal" and "conservative" are not just superficial or innocuous labels. They mark a profound change in how Seventh-day Adventists perceive themselves, their message, and their mission. Identity is further complicated by two contradictory ways of defining these labels. The "liberal" sees himself as loving, accepting, and forgiving; his fellow church members may see him as permissive, careless, and worldly. The "conservative" sees himself as loyal, obedient, and principled; others may see him as rigid, legalistic, and self-righteous.

These differences cannot be glossed over by preaching an inclusive theology of "pluralism" or by trumpeting the doctrine of "unity in diversity." The latter proposition, as Ellen White advocated it, endorsed a unity that encompassed racial, economic, educational, and cultural differences, but she would have perished at the thought that it might someday include serious doctrinal divergence. She declared, "God is leading out a people *to stand in perfect unity upon the platform of eternal truth*" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 17, emphasis supplied).

The present condition of things is serious, not because we have differences, but because we have decided to accept them, and because accepting them

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has required a change in the objective criteria by which we measure ourselves. Unless God intervenes, and I firmly believe He will. The church founded by the Adventist pioneers will continue to change until the day could conceivably come when people will be asking, "Whatever happened to the Seventh-day Adventists?"

Why Avoid Liberal and Conservative Labels?

Following are some reasons I believe labeling is hurtful.

It is deceptive. Such labeling pretends to give the member a choice that does not exist. We all took the same baptismal vows. To qualify for church membership, we were asked to subscribe without reservation to a slate of carefully worded doctrinal positions whose breadth and depth is unmatched anywhere else in the Christian world. It follows, then, that to repudiate any one of them is to deny full identity with the Seventh-day Adventist community. To claim this identity while making a partial commitment qualifies as hypocrisy.

And to let such hypocrisy go unchallenged only exacerbates the deception. Whatever label is attached to an individual, as long as it is followed by "Seventh-day Adventist," acceptance is implied. Therefore, one who might have been known in the past as a "backslider" can now be given a warm place within the fold as a "liberal Seventh-day Adventist." Or one who might have been sidelined in the past for being harsh and unloving, today might be simply tagged as a "conservative Seventh-day Adventist" and welcomed aboard—at least by other "conservatives."

This practice promotes an uncritical self-acceptance and a false assurance of salvation—the most terrible deception of all. Because no matter what label is pinned to my lapel, if my standing in the church is "good and regular," I will be inclined to think that this also defines my standing before God.

This does not mean that everyone must fit into the same tight pigeon-hole. There is a spiritual growth continuum along which we all move toward "the unity of the faith . . . to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). When we enter that path, we are properly designated "new converts." Over time we become "rooted . . . and established in the faith" (Colossians 2:7) while we still "press toward the mark" (Philippians 3:14).

It is divisive. We may expect that full acceptance of such widely divergent groups will create a division of the house. In the absence of a unified standard

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by which all prospective members are allowed admittance and current members retained, it is now important that everyone be labeled either "liberal" or "conservative" and the columns added up in order to know how to characterize a given congregation. This serves as a helpful guide to those looking for a church home, to those deciding whether to stay or leave, and for administrators in choosing pastoral leadership. The pastor, in turn, can use the information in preparing his sermons and planning a strategy for refereeing the expected party strife.

Instead of calling all to unite on the "platform of truth," the solution in many instances has been to legitimize the resulting division by creating two separate in-house congregations, each with its own worship service. In situations where one side significantly outnumbers the other, one or the other may withdraw and scatter to other Adventist churches or start a new church. As a consequence, tension and alienation are growing in our churches, and the free association and camaraderie we once knew are diminished.

It subverts church discipline. We have always had the careless and worldly in our midst, but in the past such usually knew they didn't measure up and that by their behavior they had abdicated their right to full participation in the church. Today we call such people "liberal" with never a thought of challenging their right to church membership or even to hold church office. On the other side of the aisle, some "conservatives" may have escaped being properly disciplined for their judgmentalism and uncharitable spirit.

This easy acceptance applies to doctrine as well as behavior. The voices speaking out boldly against long-established doctrines are not always countered by equally strong voices repudiating such errors and defending Biblical truth. We seem to be moving toward the abandonment of any idea of heresy.

So if someone suggests the need for discipline, he is sure to be reminded that we now allow a broader spectrum of behavior and doctrinal views—with some being more "liberal" and others more "conservative."

Seldom is the question raised as to which is most *Adventist*. In any case, Such fuzziness about who we are has made it increasingly difficult for us to hold each other accountable.

It misleads and confuses the public. As the polarity increases, so also do the odds that the public will get a skewed idea of Seventh-day Adventists, depending, of course, on who models the definition. In an effort to create a better public image of ourselves, we are downplaying the things we don't do (don't eat pork, drink coffee, wear jewelry, use tobacco, etc.) and have tried to

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recast ourselves as helpful, fun-loving neighbors—just ordinary folks in every way except for going to church on Saturday. But if we continue to shy away from the things we don't do, the time may come when we are not known at all. We will drift into that gray oblivion known as "modern Protestantism."

The two images need to be merged. There is nothing unhealthy about being identified by what we say No to as well as by the positive contributions we make to our communities. To do less or to be less does great damage to the mission of the church.

The most extreme example of misleading the public is to take down the Seventh-day Adventist sign from our churches, as a few are doing currently, and to advertise ourselves as some kind of generic evangelical group—a "Christian fellowship," or a "community" church.

Planting new churches without identifying them as Seventh-day Adventist is not uncommon. On the one hand, we take legal action against the unauthorized use of our name (and I believe we should); while on the other hand, we approve and support those who refuse to use our name at all! Our faithful members are perplexed and distressed by this strange contradiction.

"No name which we can take will be appropriate but that which accords with our profession, and expresses our faith, and marks us as a peculiar people. The name, Seventh-day Adventist, is a standing rebuke to the Protestant world. . . . The name, Seventh-day Adventist, carries the true features of our faith in front, and will convict the inquiring mind" (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4b, pp. 54, 55).

God's servant declared further, "There is to be no change in the general features of our work. It is to stand as clear and distinct as prophecy has made it. . . . we are to stand firmly in defense of our principles, *in full view of the world*" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 17, emphasis supplied).

It hurts our soulwinning. If there is one reason above another why our members are disinclined to invite non-Adventists to outreach programs, and especially to church services, it is because they fear the witness of a divided church.

Ellen White aptly described this dilemma. "While these differences exist among us, those who stand outside will say, 'It will be time enough for us to believe as you do when you can agree among yourselves as to what constitutes truth'" (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 3, pp. 28, 29).

It mutes our preaching of the second angel's message. Revelation characterizes Babylon as having become "the habitation of demons, the prison of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Revelation

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18:2). The metaphors are repeated and all-inclusive. John wants to make sure the reader does not miss the point: *Babylon has no redeeming qualities*. Every truth has been corrupted, every doctrine turned into a lie. Ellen White wrote, "A terrible condition of the religious world is here described" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 603).

If we would know where liberalism leads, the example of the mainline Protestant churches is before us.

These churches helped to shape America. Throughout our national history they served as the spiritual guides of millions, including presidents, legislators, and business leaders. Now they are largely ignored. They have little to offer because they have abandoned the moral authority of the Bible and are permissive to the core.

An Episcopalian historian observes that "Christianity in modern America is, in large part, innocuous. It tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient, and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, an otherworldly outlook, a zeal for souls, a fear as well as love of God. There is little guilt and no punishment, and the payoff is [that] Heaven is virtually certain. . . . The faith has been overwhelmed by the culture."*

Seventh-day Adventists have been assigned the task of giving the second angel's message to the adherents of these churches. But what can we say to them if our witness is divided between the extremes of a harsh legalism and an insipid liberalism?

On the one hand, our evangelists are sounding the alarm of Babylon's fall; on the other hand, some of our pastors and laity are researching Babylon's wisdom for guidance on church growth and worship style largely because "there is a desire to pattern after other churches ..." and "the young ministers seek to be original and to introduce new ideas and new plans for labor" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, pp. 18, 19).

Today, as Babylon plunges ever deeper into the abyss of error, every truth, every ray of light we have, needs to shine forth with undimmed luster. Every doctrinal position we hold is to be placed in sharp contrast to the errors and darkness of the popular churches. Shall we warn and win them with a compassionate preaching of the three angels' messages, or shall we waste their time and ours with "clown ministry," mime, puppets, and "Christian" rock? Can we expect them to flee from Babylon's confusion into more of the same?

"The Word of God and His downtrodden law are to be made prominent in so marked a manner that men and women, members of other churches, shall be brought face to face, mind to mind, heart to heart with truth. They will see its superiority over the multitudinous errors that are ... pushing their way

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into notice" (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, p. 92).

It may seem there is little the individual member can do to turn back the tide. "Conservative" and "liberal" are so embedded in our thinking and vocabulary that they will likely remain until the shaking purifies and unites our church. In the meantime, Seventh-day Adventists who take their religion seriously have no choice but to wear the "conservative" label with its attendant epithets.

Study Jesus. What we can do and ought to do continually is to assess our own lives for balance. As in all else, we do that best by studying the life of Jesus. Notice how He achieved perfect moral equilibrium in His life:

The Saviour's entire life was characterized by disinterested benevolence and the beauty of holiness. He is our Pattern of goodness. From the beginning of His ministry men began to comprehend more clearly the character of God. He carried out His teachings in His Own life. He showed consistency without obstinacy, benevolence without weakness, tenderness and sympathy without sentimentalism. He was highly social, yet He possessed a reserve that discouraged any familiarity. His temperance never led to bigotry or austerity. He was not conformed to the world, yet He was attentive to the wants of the least among men (*Counsels to Teachers*, p. 262).

Our model. What a model for us to follow! Isn't it time to put away such needless and misleading labels as "liberal" and "conservative" and accept anew the name the Lord Himself chose for us, letting it stand fully defined by every belief we espouse as a denomination?

"Let us take our position as Seventh-day Adventists. The name is a true expression of our faith. I am instructed to call upon God's people *to bring their actions into harmony with their name*, of which they have no need to be ashamed. The Seventh-day Adventist faith will bless whenever it is brought into the character-building" (*Battle Creek Letters*, p. 52, emphasis supplied).

God helping me, that is the position I take, the name I choose to honor, the blessing I desire. I would be pleased if you would just call me a Seventh-day Adventist.

Endnote

* Thomas C. Reeves, *The Empty Church* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p. 67.

Chapter 48

True and Counterfeit Unity

Who Is Really Dividing the Church?

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"When to unite and when to divide, that is the question, and a right answer requires the wisdom of a Solomon.... To divide what should be divided and unite what should be united is the part of wisdom. Union of dissimilar elements is never good even where it is possible. Nor is the arbitrary division of elements that are alike; and this is as certainly true of things moral and religious as of things political or scientific."—A.W. Tozer

Ever since there was rebellion in Heaven there has been division. And alongside this division have been conflicts, wars, and bloodshed. Recent events in the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa, and other places testify to the urgent need for unity and harmony in the world.

The religion of the Bible is about restoring unity—unity between God and man, unity between husband and wife, unity between members of the church, and unity among members of the human family. Such unity is based on truth as revealed in the teaching of Scripture.

But Satan also has his version of unity. His counterfeit unity is nothing more than theological pluralism, the peaceful coexistence of truth and error. Advocated in some quarters of the Adventist Church, this spurious doctrine undermines our Biblical beliefs and lifestyle practices, our sense of mission, and our unique form of church organization.

Those pushing this spurious unity are actually dividing our churches and creating confusion in others. Yet they adopt an ingenious strategy to silence dissent by accusing anyone who opposes their un-Biblical agenda as being divisive or controversial. The fear of being so labeled has intimidated many church members, causing them to acquiesce to error. Others, discouraged by the resulting cohabitation of truth and error, are being tempted to leave their church, considering it to be Babylon.

In this article I will attempt to explain what true Biblical unity entails,

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contrasting it with the counterfeit. I will also offer suggestions to those who are genuinely agonizing over what to do because their churches appear to be hijacked by advocates of certain un-Biblical ideologies and practices.

Christ's Call for Unity

John 17 records Christ's most sublime prayer for the church. It captures His last words of instruction to His apostles before His crucifixion. Within less than twenty-four hours, He would be killed. Thus, in this prayer Christ reveals His innermost thought. He prayed:

"I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given them; that they may be one, just as We are One; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me" (John 17:20-23).

Without doubt, Christ's chief concern in His last prayer was for unity. At least five times He prayed for His followers that "they may be one, as We are" (v. 11), "that they all be one" (v. 21a), "that they also maybe one in Us" (v. 21b), "that they may be one, even as We are One" (v. 22), and "that they may be made perfect in One (v. 23). This unity that Christ prayed for in this John 17 passage is a unity grounded in the Word of God and forged by the Holy Spirit.

The unity of the church for which Christ prayed was not primarily that we might be one with each other. It was not simply the integration or fellowship of believers from different ethnic groups. Rather, the unity for which Christ prayed is first, a unity with the apostles' teaching. This is evident in verse 20 where He alludes to two groups of believers. The RSV designates them as "these" (the apostles) and "those" (all subsequent believers). In the words of a noted Evangelical scholar, "It seems beyond question that the 'all' of verse 21, whose unity Christ desires, are a combination of 'these' and 'those'" (John Stott, *Christ the Liberator*, p. 82).

In other words, the church unity Christ wants to see in His church is one that is in harmony with the teachings of Christ's inspired apostles. *It is a doctrinal unity*, one that is grounded on the Word of God. Like the apostolic church, believers in God's end-time church must "devote themselves to the

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apostles' teaching and fellowship" (Acts 2:42).

Any ideology—whether gay theology, feminist egalitarian theology, or liberal theology—that is not in harmony with God's teaching is a hindrance to Christ's prayer for unity. Believers must courageously reject it, regardless of who is promoting it.

But in addition to doctrinal unity, i.e., the unity with the apostles, Christ also prayed for His disciples "that they also may be one *in us*" (John 17:21b). This is a unity with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It results when, at all times, the church lives in harmony with the leading of the life-giving Spirit Whom the Father and Christ send (John 14:15, 26; 15:26; 16:7). *It is, thus, a spiritual unity.*

Only as Christ's followers are "in Us" (i.e., in the Father and Son, through the Spirit) can they truly "be one" among themselves (v. 21a). In other words, the horizontal unity (among Christ's followers) must be grounded in a vertical unity (oneness with Christ). Such a spiritual unity means we shall accept the correction of the Spirit and His guidance into all truth (16:8-13), including His leading through God's end-time gift of prophecy (Revelation 12:17; 19:10).

But this openness to the Spirit's leading requires caution. We must reject as spurious any calls to embrace some "new light," on, say, homosexuality, divorce and remarriage, women's ordination, worship styles, jewelry, etc., unless the new teachings or practices clearly harmonize with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. We have been warned:

"Faith in a lie will not have a sanctifying influence upon the life or character. *No error is truth, or can be made truth by repetition, or by faith in it.* Sincerity will never save a soul from the consequences of believing an error. Without sincerity there is no religion, but sincerity in a false religion will never save a man. I may be perfectly sincere in following a wrong road, but that will not make it the right road, or bring me to the place I wished to reach" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 56, emphasis supplied).

The reason we seek doctrinal and spiritual unity is so that "the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (v. 21). Jesus declares: "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in One; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me" (v. 23).

In other words, a *visible unity* results when Christ's followers are in harmony with the apostles and with the Father and Son. This unity is readily evident to the world. It convinces the world of the truthfulness of the Christian message. Thus, true followers of Christ will not choose to separate themselves from the organized body of Christ, His visible church.

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The Basis of Our Unity

As a global movement, comprising people from "every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6), the Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to manifest this visible unity to an unbelieving world. Without the church's worldwide unity, this prophetic movement would disintegrate into a pattern of local options, weakness, and confusion.

Seventh-day Adventists take very seriously Christ's prayer in John 17. Concerning this prayer, Ellen G. White wrote: "The Lord calls for men of genuine faith and sound minds, men who recognize the distinction between the true and the false. Each one should be on his guard, studying and practicing the lessons given in the seventeenth chapter of John, and preserving a living faith in the truth for this time" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 239).

Our strength and credibility as a church depend, to a large extent, on our organized unity. For how else can we convince the world that we have a message that heals wounds of division if we ourselves choose to go in different directions? Throughout our history, three major factors have greatly contributed to our worldwide unity:

1. *Our distinctive doctrines and lifestyle.* Despite obvious cultural differences, Adventists everywhere in the world have held the same doctrines and embraced the same lifestyle. As a group, we have manifested a distinctive personality. The near unanimity in belief and lifestyle practices has been possible because of our adherence to the teachings of God's Word.

2. *Our sense of mission.* Accepting Christ's commission (Matthew 28:18-20), we have always understood our reason for existence to be the clear and persuasive proclamation of God's Word within the context of the end-time (Revelation 14:6-12). The sending forth of hundreds of missionaries around the world every year and the movement of our workers "from everywhere to everywhere" have been constant reminders to all that ours is a worldwide church, and the mission of the church can be accomplished only by a united body of people from all nations of the world.

3. *Our unique church polity (organizational structure).* Despite its limitations, the Adventist Church's unique church structure—uniting local churches, conferences, and unions as the divisions of the General Conference—has not only maintained the stability of the church, but has also ensured doctrinal unity and purity, and has facilitated the equitable distribution of resources for the church to accomplish its mission.

These factors, together with the Lord's blessings, may explain why the

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Seventh-day Adventist Church is enjoying unprecedented growth around the world today.

Threats to Our Unity

There are, however, disturbing indications that our unity as a people is being threatened. For example, as apathy and the spirit of Laodiceanism have crept into the church, there are tensions in some places about our distinctive doctrinal beliefs and practices. Also, as worldly gimmicks and entertainment are gaining inroads into our preaching and worship styles, we are slowly losing our sense of mission. In other places, liberal ideologies as well as conflicts like tribalism, racism, nationalism, and classism (economic, social, or educational) are testing the strength of our organizational unity.

As a result of these and other factors, we are witnessing the increased activities of dissident or offshoot movements. Inspired by both the "independent right" and the "liberal left," these movements are disrupting the unity within local congregations and increasing the danger of Congregationalism (breakaway independent congregations). When the spirit of defiance or rebellion goes unchecked, and when they are cherished and encouraged at the conference, union, and division levels, there is the additional risk of fracturing our worldwide unity.

In my earlier work, *Receiving the Word*, I explained that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is caught in the middle of a crossfire of attacks from the "liberal left" and the "independent right."

Although efforts have often been made to inform church members (not always accurately) about the activities of the independent right, little is done to alert unwary Adventists to the influence of the entrenched liberal left. Ellen G. White stated that "we have far more to fear from within than from without" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 122). If this applies to our current situation, then the mainstream Seventh-day Adventist Church, caught in the crossfire, should be more concerned about the liberals within than about the independents without.

Inasmuch as liberalism's spurious doctrine of unity is creating confusion and division in local congregations and threatening the worldwide unity of our church, the remainder of this article will contrast this doctrine with the Biblical one.

Liberalism's Counterfeit Unity

Satan has a counterfeit for every truth in the Bible: miracles, angels, love, faith, Sabbath, etc. He even counterfeits our Saviour Himself (Matthew 24:24).

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So it should not surprise us that, in his plan to deceive, Satan offers a counterfeit unity as well. The counterfeit unity being promoted by theological liberalism adopts a twofold strategy. First, liberalism teaches that God and all good men are for unity, while the Devil and all bad people are for division. Second, it confuses true unity with the absence of conflict or the tolerance of error. What is the truth about these things?

Unity Not Always Good. Those who followed the 2000 United States presidential election campaign may be familiar with the political slogan, "I am a uniter, not a divider." Many interpret this slogan to mean unity is always good and division is always bad. Some Christians, believing that God is for unity and Satan is for division, blindly support or promote any views or practices that are carried out in the name of unity. Such people will not raise a voice against false ideologies like homosexuality, women's ordination, higher criticism, questionable worship styles, divorce and remarriage, etc., because it is "divisive" to do so. And isn't division always bad?

But is this belief correct? Is unity always good and division always bad? Let's not forget that Satan's goal is always to deceive. If good people were all for union and bad folks were all for division, or vice versa, wouldn't it be easy for people to detect error? If we could show that God always unites and the Devil always divides, wouldn't we easily find our way around in this confused and confusing world?

Against this mistaken notion of unity, note these three truths:

1. *God is sometimes a divider.* The first divider was God Who at the Creation divided the light from the darkness. This division set the direction for all God's dealings in the natural and spiritual realms. Light and darkness are incompatible. If we try to have both in the same place at once, we attempt the impossible and end by having neither the one nor the other, but dimness and obscurity.

2. *Satan is sometimes a uniter.* Ever since Satan tempted our first parents to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he has always sought to unite that which God Himself has divided. Thus, we read in the Scriptures that the "sons of God" married the "daughters of men" (Genesis 6:1-5). We also read that the priests of Judah "put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean" (Ezekiel 22:26).

3. *Unity is not always good, division not always bad.* Uniting things that should never be united in the first place is never good, even where it is possible. Similarly, the arbitrary division of things that should be united is never right.

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This is true not only in the realm of nature and politics, but especially so in moral and religious realms. To divide what should be divided and unite what should be united requires a clear knowledge of God's Word and the Holy Spirit's gift of discernment.

Much blood has been shed in tribal wars in Africa because attempts were made during the colonial era not only to divide peoples of the same tribes or nations, but also to forcibly unite tribes or nations that historically never got along. In the same way, there will be confusion in the church if we attempt to unite truth and error, light and darkness. Unity achieved this way is not unity at all; it is compromise. It is sin. And it can be fatal to one's salvation.

Let us be careful that in our quest for unity, we don't attempt to harmonize right and wrong. Writes the apostle Paul: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Ellen White was emphatic: "Light and darkness cannot harmonize. Between truth and error there is an irrepressible conflict. To uphold and defend the one is to attack and overthrow the other" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 126).

Unity Not the Same as Absence of Conflict. To counterfeit the Biblical teaching of unity, Satan seeks to confuse it with peaceful coexistence of truth and error. Those who have embraced this mistaken view think that unity is putting aside theological differences and pretending they don't exist or don't matter. The result is pluralism in beliefs and practices, with each person choosing what "seemeth good in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Thus, in some of our churches, there are different Sabbath School classes to allow for different theologies. Members are "neither for nor against" anything. And some leaders consider it a mark of spiritual maturity to declare "I'm neither liberal nor conservative." Theological apathy and indifference to truth are hailed as Christian virtues. Pluralism or diversity in beliefs and the desire to get along with everyone are confused with marks of true unity. Anyone who challenges conflicting or erroneous theologies in the church is viewed as "divisive" or "intolerant."

Two comments are in order:

1. *Coexistence is not the same as unity.* In the church today, the wheat grows with the tares, the sheep and the goats coexist, and the farms of the just and the unjust lie side by side in the landscape. But the hour is coming when Christ Himself will divide the sheep from the goats and separate the tares from the wheat. Coexistence is not the same as unity.

The question is not about coexistence, but of union and fellowship. The

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fact that the wheat grows in the same field with the tares does not mean the two should cross-pollinate. The fact that the sheep graze near the goats does not mean that the two should seek to interbreed. The unjust and the just enjoy the same rain and sunshine, but shall they forget their deep moral differences and intermarry? The prophet Amos asked: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

2. *Absence of conflict is not the same as unity.* Counterfeit unity is popular because it argues that the absence of conflict is evidence of true unity. But this is not necessarily true. Sometimes, striving to uphold true unity, the unity founded on Christ's Word, inevitably results in conflict and persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). We must not purchase unity at the expense of Biblical fidelity. Loyalty to God and faithfulness to His truth are jewels more precious than gold or diamonds. For these jewels men and women have suffered the loss of property, imprisonment, and even death.

In the last days of the world's history, an attempt will be made to enforce this counterfeit unity. Different religions and churches will unite on falsehood and demand all to follow the path of disobedience. But God's true followers will not embrace this type of unity. They will choose to separate themselves from the path of disobedience (Revelation 13 and 14). As someone observed, when confused sheep start over a cliff, the individual sheep can save himself only by separating from the flock. Perfect unity at such a time can only mean total destruction.

The Bible on True Unity

The Bible rejects pluralism of belief and practice. It rejects the notion that conflicting or contradictory theological views are legitimate and must be allowed to cohabit in the church. In contrast to today's counterfeit unity, the Bible teaches that members of God's church should uphold a unity of faith and practice.

Unity of Faith. Doctrinal unity is the teaching that (1) all God's people should uphold a common faith, and that (2) any new teachings or interpretations purporting to come from God must be in harmony with previous truth communicated to God's true prophets. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah best captured the unity of doctrine when he challenged Israel: "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, the light is not in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

The apostles in the New Testament upheld this teaching when they con-

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stantly sought to establish their understanding of Christ's redemptive work by appealing to the Old Testament. The early believers also recognized that the unity that our Lord prayed for (in John 17) is one that is founded on "a common faith" (Titus 1:4; 2 Peter 1:1), "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3, KJV). In the New Testament church, this spirit of unity was conveyed in a number of ways.

In the early church, believers understood that they did not exist as independent congregations, each choosing to go their own separate ways, believing their own different doctrines, and caring only for their own local interests. Rather, they saw themselves as God's special commonwealth, comprised of all the Christians in every region of the Roman world.

Sometimes the spirit of unity was maintained through greetings from church to church (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philippians 4:22), reminding them that they belonged to a global network. This spirit of unity also underlay the letters of recommendation sent from one church to another or from well-known leaders, commending God-given teachers to other churches (Acts 18:24-28; 2 Corinthians 3:1; Romans 16:1, 2; Colossians 4:10).

When, on one occasion, the Corinthians cherished a spirit of independence, the apostle Paul wrote that he had sent Timothy to remind them of "my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17). He also reprimanded them for their independent attitude: "Did the Word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" (1 Corinthians 14:36, NIV).

In order to preserve the "unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13), the apostles urged believers to uphold sound teaching (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:13) and counteract false teaching and false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3; 4:1, 6; Titus 1:9-11). They occasionally exposed the false teachings of certain individuals (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:19; cf. Philippians 4:2, 3). Even John, the apostle of love, and Jude, the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, found it necessary to identify those who were departing from the teachings of the apostles (3 John 9, 10; Jude). Paul commended the Christians in Berea for subjecting his teachings to the scrutiny of Scripture (Acts 17:11).

Therefore, it is evident that the New Testament believers embraced a unity of doctrine. Were they living today, they would reject any proposals for theological pluralism. The apostle Paul was emphatic when he said, "Though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

The above understanding of unity is the theological basis for the church's requirement that all Seventh-day Adventists—including our pastors, church leaders, teachers in our institutions, publishers and editors of our church pub-

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lications—must adhere to all our 27 Fundamental Beliefs. Wherever the Biblical teachings summarized in our Fundamental Beliefs are questioned or challenged, the result is always pluralism in beliefs and Congregationalism or offshootism in church polity.

Unity of Practice. The New Testament also teaches that unity of doctrine should not remain at the intellectual level. It also extends to practice, as in cooperative actions.

For example, the apostle Paul repeatedly pointed the churches to what was going on in other parts of the Roman Empire. He reminded the believers of the common Gospel that brought them together (Colossians 1:6, 23; 1 Timothy 3:16). In the same way, Corinthian believers were to see themselves united "with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ," Who is both "their Lord and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

The apostles taught that what happened in other congregations or parts of the world must have their full interest (see 2 Corinthians 9:2-5; Colossians 4:16). They exhorted the believers to participate in all that was being done elsewhere and to accept the guidelines that were offered for all the churches (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 11:16). "This is the rule I lay down in all the churches," writes Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 7:17, NIV), adding that "God is not a God of confusion, but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

From this theological understanding, Seventh-day Adventists have sought to uphold their worldwide unity through such means as reading the same mission stories and reports, giving mission offerings to finance specific projects, and respecting the *Church Manual* and other church policies that have been agreed upon to govern the operation of the church at its different levels. Churches that ignore these practices tend to lack a global vision, tend to be inward looking, and tend to be suspicious or disrespectful of our unique system of church governance. The result is always the same: rebellion and a gravitation toward offshootism of either the independent right or the liberal left.

When True Unity Is Compromised

While we must always embrace and support decisions that are in harmony with our established Biblical teachings, there are times when a member may be discouraged because of un-Biblical teachings and practices introduced into or imposed upon the church.

Examples are not farfetched: the questionable Annual Council decision to baptize wives of polygamists (1941) and the political decision to ordain women

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as elders (1975 and 1984) come readily to mind. These Annual Council actions have caused deep polarization and confusion in our churches. One can also point to the controversial decision at the 2000 Toronto General Conference session to widen the grounds for divorce to include "abandonment by an unbelieving spouse" (leaving undefined the meaning of that fuzzy expression).

Examples such as these lead conscientious church members to ask, What will come next? Homosexuality? Drinking alcohol? Eating unclean foods? Rock music and dancing in the churches? Evolution? They know that the enemy will not rest, planting his tares when many of us are asleep (Matthew 13).

How is church unity to be preserved in such instances? What should members do in situations in which a church board or a conference (or even a union conference, a division, an Annual Council, or the General Conference in session) makes a decision that is un-Biblical? What if the collective decision is actually the decision of a small group of handpicked committee members who are motivated by some ideological or political agenda, or that our chosen representatives have buckled under the pressure of pragmatic considerations such as finances (tithes, taxes, etc.), political lobbying, or the desire to be popular with the world?

Should these considerations lead members to withhold tithes or even perhaps to leave the church altogether? Here are some suggestions:

1. Stay With the Church. Since we believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is God's end-time remnant movement according to Bible prophecy, we must make a commitment *ahead of time* that nothing, not even the failure of our fellow church members, scholars, leaders, or councils, will cause us to leave the church.

"Although there are evils existing in the church, and will be until the end of the world, the church in these last days is to be the light of the world that is polluted and demoralized by sin. The [Seventh-day Adventist] Church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reprovved, warned, and counseled, is the only object upon Earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 49; cf. *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 396).

2. Strive for Unity, Not Separation. "Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 258).

3. Use Judicious Procedures. Remember that the Seventh-day Adventist

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Church has a judicious procedure to address this kind of situation. Even with questionable General Conference session decisions, churches can always direct their grievances to the appropriate quarters of the church—from the conference level, through the union and division levels, to the General Conference level—requesting that the issue be revisited. When this happens, and when the issue is sufficiently explored, I am confident that such questionable policies will be overturned at a future session.

4. Respect and Pray for Leadership. David set an example for us when he said. "The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed. . . . For who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" (1 Samuel 26:11, 9).

We do not show a responsible Christian spirit when we claim that the church is God's remnant and profess to be its loyal members, if at the same time we proceed to defy, disrespect, blackmail, rebel against, or undermine the church's authority. To do so is misguided, if not hypocritical.

We must pray daily for our church leaders. They face constant pressures from different quarters. It is not easy to be courageous. Send them words of encouragement from time to time, and let them know that you are counting on them to hold high the banner. Urge them for an immediate freeze or moratorium in the implementation of the questionable and divisive policies that have slipped into the church.

5. Prayerfully Work for a Change. Let us ask the Lord to grant us wisdom how to effect Biblical changes through our witness (by voice, pen, or example). While praying for courage to stand for the truth, let us ask the Lord to help us to be humble and courteous. Let us pray earnestly that the Lord will cause His church to see the light we have seen.

But while praying for a change, we must allow ourselves to be instruments of change. Those of us who are able to write should write. Those who are able to speak should speak. Those who are able to vote should vote. By all means, *we must not be silent*.

Determine that when others choose to go the path of rebellion against God's truth, by God's grace you will remain faithful, regardless of cost. And use your influence to teach others about the dangers of violating the Bible's teaching.

6. Don't Be Intimidated. As we noted earlier, those pushing the counterfeit unity are the ones who are actually dividing our churches and threatening our worldwide unity. Yet they often accuse anyone opposing their un-Biblical

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teachings and practices of being divisive. The fear of being so labeled has led many church members to acquiesce to error. Ironically, many consider the resulting cohabitation of truth and error to be true unity.

But can we afford to remain silent when error is being taught and practiced and when truth is being undermined? Contrary to the pseudo-unity doctrine, division in order to uphold the purity and integrity of the church's message is more desirable than unity in worldliness and error. We must not soft-pedal truth or be irresolute in our Biblical convictions just because the purveyor of false teachings and practices deliberately mislabels us as divisive. It is the mark of true loyalty to point out errors courageously even if we are vilified as "they that trouble Israel" (1 Kings 18:17, 18).

Let's remember that when powerful secular ideologies undermine the Biblical faith, God views indifference and inaction with respect to His cause as a criminal act. This was the sin of Meroz, an Israelite town in Naphtali: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; *because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty*" (Judges 5:23).

Ellen White made it plainer when she commented on the above passage: "If God abhors one sin above another, of which His people are guilty, it is doing nothing in case of an emergency. Indifference and neutrality in a religious crisis is regarded of God as a grievous crime and equal to the very worst type of hostility against God" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 281).

7. Remember That God Is in Control. Over the years, I have found these statements by Ellen G. White reassuring: "There is no need to doubt, to be fearful that the work will not succeed. *God is at the head of the work, and He will set everything in order.* If matters need adjusting at the head of the work, God will attend to that, and work to right every wrong. Let us have faith that God is going to carry the noble ship which bears the people of God safely into port" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 30, emphasis mine).

"If I did not believe that God's eye is over His people, I could not have the courage to write the same things over and over again. . . . God has a people whom He is leading and instructing" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 397).

Chapter 49

Should We Ever Stop Tithing?

By Gerhard Pfandl, PhD

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The apostle Paul, speaking of the church as the mystical body of Christ, said in Ephesians 4:4, NKJV, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling."

All Christians who accept Christ as their personal Saviour belong to God's so-called "invisible" church. God has worked and still is working through many organized Christian churches to make His Gospel known. But Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 show that in the time of the end God is to have a special work for a "remnant," a church that keeps the commandments of God and has the faith of Jesus.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that our church is this remnant church, called by God to proclaim the three angels' messages to a dying world.

The General Conference, meeting in Dallas in 1980, voted to accept as Fundamental Belief Number 12 that "the universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ." It went on, however, to say that, "in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the Judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His Second Advent. This proclamation, which is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14, coincides with the work of Judgment in Heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on Earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness."

The remnant church is *one* body, not many; *one* church, not many.

Until recently, Seventh-day Adventists had no problem with this concept of unity. But today a number of private Seventh-day Adventist organizations and local congregations around the world are challenging the unity concept.

What has happened?

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Supportive Ministries

As Seventh-day Adventists, we generally carry out our mission through the organized structure of our church, which consists of conferences (or "missions"), union conferences, divisions, and the General Conference. Within this structure are many institutions, such as hospitals, schools, and presses.

In addition, a number of private, independent, or special ministries have sprung up which willingly state that their purpose is to assist the church organization in fulfilling its goals. They function outside the regular church structure but in support of it.

Most of these "supportive ministries" belong voluntarily to the Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI), which has its headquarters within the General Conference office building. The ASI began in 1946 with about 25 healthcare and educational ministries but now counts more than 600 private ministries (restaurants, travel agencies, print shops, old people's homes, schools, orphanages, etc.) in North America alone. The ASI motto is "Sharing Christ in the Marketplace."

Each year the ASI conducts a convention for its many members. About 2,500 people attended its 2004 convention. Excellent seminars, Spirit-filled preaching, and exciting stories of personal witnessing illustrated the commitment of ASI members to the church. The Sabbath offering, dedicated to various ministries and soulwinning initiatives, amounted to 2.33 million dollars! The church as a whole has been richly blessed by its private supporting ministries. They accomplish tasks that the organized church cannot do in view of financial or personnel limitations.

Divisive Ministries

In a small number of cases, however, private organizations work at cross-purposes to the church. Whether liberal or conservative, they are highly critical of church leadership, they undermine confidence in the church's mission and even in its doctrines, they drain funds away from the church, and they tend to encourage a divisive Congregationalism.

While these divisive ministries frequently *claim* to work in support of the church, their activities and publications indicate the opposite. Some of them accuse the Seventh-day Adventist Church of being in apostasy and accuse denominational leadership of collusion in the apostasy. Others back away from the church complaining that the conference is insensitive to the social needs of

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their communities and behind the times in its theology.

Are mistakes being made in the church? Sadly, yes. We do not question that there are sin and worldliness in the church and that some spokesmen teach things that are not in harmony with our doctrines and standards. But do we not need to give serious thought to the appropriateness and inappropriateness of our possible responses to these problems?

Church Within a Church

Some critical ministries misuse the Testimonies to prove their points. As long ago as 1890 Ellen G. White wrote a letter that could have been written in 1998 in which she said, "You will take passages in the Testimonies that speak of the close of probation, of the shaking among God's people, and you will talk of a coming out from this people of a purer, holier people that will arise," to which observation she added the comment, "*Now all this pleases the enemy*" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 179).

In 1915, Elder W.C. White, Mrs. White's younger son, wrote to E.E. Andross, President of the Pacific Union Conference: "I told her [Lida Scott] how Mother regards the experience of the remnant church, and it was her positive teaching that God would not permit this denomination to so fully apostatize that there would be a coming out of another church."

Apostasy *within* the church will unquestionably increase as time goes on, pluralism in both belief and practice will become more pronounced as the church grows larger, but we can be confident that the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a *church* will not apostatize. "The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out" (*ibid.*, bk. 2, p. 380).

The Tithe Issue

Loyal Seventh-day Adventists are encouraged by some critical ministries to divert their tithe to the critical ministries and local congregations rather than send it to the conference. Although there is undoubtedly apostasy in the church, *the church itself* is not in apostasy. Therefore, with what justification can I withhold my tithe from the church at large?

Mrs. White counsels us: "The tithe is sacred, reserved by God for Himself. It is to be brought into His treasury to be used to sustain the Gospel laborers in their work...."

"Some have been dissatisfied and have said: 'I will not longer pay my

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tithe, for I have no confidence in the way things are managed at the heart of the work.' But will you rob God because you think the management of the work is not right?" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 249).

So is there nothing we can do to express our concerns? Yes, there is. The passage continues: "Make your complaint, plainly and openly, in the right spirit, to the proper ones. Send in your petitions for things to be adjusted and set in order; but do not withdraw from the work of God, and prove unfaithful, because others are not doing right" (*ibid.*).

When we are faithful and pay tithe, who blesses us? God does—not the church! "Those self-sacrificing, consecrated ones who render back to God the things that are His, as He requires of them, will be rewarded according to their works. Even though the means thus consecrated be misapplied, so that it does not accomplish the object which the donor had in view—the glory of God and the salvation of souls—those who made the sacrifice in sincerity of soul, with an eye single to the glory of God, will not lose their reward.

"Those who have made a wrong use of means dedicated to God will be required to give an account of their stewardship" (*ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 519).

Mrs. White taught that (1) when there are things wrong in the church, we should point them out in the right spirit and in the right way; (2) we are still to pay our tithes into the Lord's treasury, His church; and (3) even if church money is misapplied, the donor still receives a blessing.

In 1890 Mrs. White wrote to people who refused to pay their tithe to the conference, "You who have been withholding your means from the cause of God, read the book of Malachi, and see what is spoken there in regard to tithes and offerings. Cannot you see that *it is not best under any circumstances to withhold your tithes and offerings* because you are not in harmony with everything your brethren do? The tithes and offerings are not the property of any man, but are to be used in doing a certain work for God. Unworthy ministers may receive some of the means thus raised, but dare anyone, because of this, withhold from the treasury, and brave the curse of God? I dare not. I pay my tithes gladly....

"If the conference business is not managed according to the order of the Lord, that is the sin of the erring ones. The Lord will not hold you responsible for it, if you do what you can to correct the evil. *But do not commit sin yourselves by withholding from God His Own property*" (*Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 1b, p. 27, emphasis added).

Ellen White considered the withholding of tithes and offerings from the conference treasury to be a sinful act and not justified on the grounds that an unworthy minister might misuse some of the money.

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Ellen G. White's Use of Tithes

Some people argue that Mrs. White herself didn't always pay her tithe into the conference treasury but sometimes applied it other ways. What about this?

In 1905 Mrs. White wrote,

It has been presented to me for years that my tithe was to be appropriated by myself to aid the white and colored ministers who were neglected and did not receive sufficient, properly to support their families. When my attention was called to aged ministers, white or black, it was my special duty to investigate into their necessities and supply their needs. This was to be my special work, and I have done this in a number of cases. No man should give notoriety to the fact that in special cases the tithe is used in that way....

I have myself appropriated my tithe to the most needy cases brought to my notice. I have been instructed to do this; and as the money is not withheld from the Lord's treasury, it is not a matter that should be commented upon, for it will necessitate my making known these matters, which I do not desire to do, because it is not best.

Some cases have been kept before me for years, and I have supplied their needs from the tithe, as God has instructed me to do....

I send this matter to you so that you shall not make a mistake. Circumstances alter cases. I would not advise that anyone should make a practice of gathering up tithe money.²

Please note that—

1. Ellen G. White was directly instructed by God to aid certain poverty-stricken ministers. At the time, no pension plan was yet in existence. When a minister retired, he received no further income. Not until 1911 did the church have a retirement plan.

2. The money was used for the living expenses of poor ministers, not for running institutions, publishing literature, or paying tuition. It went to ministers recognized by the church.

What Mrs. White did 100 years ago should not be used as an excuse by private ministries, congregations, or individuals today. The fact that there is

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apostasy in the denomination or a perceived need in the local church is not a valid excuse for diverting the Lord's money from His intended use.

Many supportive ministries are doing an excellent work in furthering the mission of the church. On the other hand, a small number of critical ministries and local congregations are undermining confidence in the church and its leaders and are draining away funds. In doing so, they threaten the foundation and mission of the church and attack its unity.

The remnant church is *one* church, not many; it is *one* body, not many. Jesus Christ is Lord and Head of the church, and He wants us to work together and with Him in saving souls.

Endnotes

¹ W. C. White to E.E. Andross, May 23, 1915, in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982), p. 428.

² Ellen G. White, Letter 167, 1905, in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1981), pp. 395, 396.

Chapter 50

Leadership's Role in Maintaining Unity

By Elder Francis W. Wernick

Former Vice President, General Conference of SDA

Division and disunity have marked the history of the Christian church from at least the end of the first century. Among the reasons for these internal controversies, disagreement over what the Bible teaches is certainly high on the list. Many church bodies have suffered schisms because of it. While not immune from this danger of dissent, Seventh-day Adventists have been relatively free of serious discord, having a remarkable unity on Bible truth. But danger is always present as the enemy of the church seeks in every way possible to bring in variance and disagreement.

Church Unity Threatened

Recent years offer evidence that the unity that has marked the history of the Advent movement may be facing its greatest danger. More disagreement appears to be evident, even on crucial doctrines. This should be a signal to leaders to give attention to unity. From the late 1840s when Sabbathkeeping Adventists studied the great truths of Scripture and came together on an understanding of the Bible's teachings, we have had remarkable agreement on these truths, despite occasional efforts by some to introduce new views. But the danger that faces the church in our generation may be its greatest. At least three broad areas are under attack: the method by which the Bible is to be understood, the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the meaning of the Gospel and salvation. While the unity of the church is still strong, we as leaders must recognize the danger that exists.

We can learn much from our pioneers. Our spiritual forefathers were deep Bible students. They viewed the Bible as a unified whole, a message from God through human instruments writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They believed that the Bible, though written in the language and culture of the writer, was a message from God, a truth from Him untainted by human culture. While the writer and his expression may be imperfect, the truth conveyed is

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God speaking to us.

To reach their conclusions, our pioneers compared Scripture with Scripture, using one Bible writer to explain what another had written. They saw the Old and New Testaments as complementing one another and the Bible as a unified whole. Thus today we have a system of truth that has kept us unified for several generations.

It is the beauty of this unified view of Scripture that has been so attractive to so many. It has given us a "worldview" that helps to explain the entrance of sin and the terrible curse of conflict and pain that causes so much dreadful suffering. We see all of the truths of Scripture centering in Jesus and fitting into the "great controversy," soon to end in the glorious appearing of our Saviour. When seen in this light, the full teachings of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation are impressive and beautiful. This message of hope and truth has sent Seventh-day Adventists around the world as a united body of believers. And this has brought upon them the anger of the dragon. As leaders, we must recognize the danger and seek God's help to meet it.

Guidelines for Leaders

The following guidelines, while not comprehensive, may be of help.

1) Seek Unity in Jesus and in the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 reflected His concern for the harmony of His disciples, but not for them alone. It included all of His followers in succeeding generations. Note the following verses:

"Holy Father, keep through Thine Own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are" (v. 11).

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their Word, that they all may be one" (vv. 20, 21).

"And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them: that they may be one, even as We are One" (v. 22).

This small band of eleven disciples was to become the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). If they were at variance with one another over their beliefs and driven apart by envy and jealousy, the superstructure of the church would not have a safe foundation. This was the central concern of Jesus. And Jesus' words have relevance for His body of believers today. Only a fully converted church body guided by the Holy Spirit can be a unified church. Only a church body that allows the Scriptures to speak to them as the voice of God will be a harmonious church. This is the awesome burden that leaders have

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today: to lead the church members into a study of the Bible and into accepting the Holy Spirit's presence in their hearts and lives.

2) Resist Pluralism of Essential Beliefs and Biblical Practices. The followers of Jesus are to believe, live, and teach the truth. Jesus declared that He was the Truth (John 14:6), and He also said in praying to His Father, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). Jesus is not divided against Himself; if the Holy Spirit guides His church it will be in agreement on all essential truths. Though there will always be peripheral areas of disagreement, in those truths that are crucial to the message of the church the body of Christ must be in agreement. Likewise, there must be harmony in the Biblical practices of the church.

The history of Israel and the Christian church demonstrates the dangers posed by Satan's efforts to divide. During the time of the judges, Israel did not always have good leadership; the results were disastrous. The closing verse of Judges (21:25) summarizes the problems this way: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Under the kings, Israel fared no better. Divisions often ran very deep. Thus, we can conclude that leadership is critical to keeping unity in the church. If church members are to give positive affirmation to the truth as it is in Jesus, without pluralism, leadership will be crucial to that effort.

We can be grateful for such leadership over the past 150 years. However, our greatest dangers may lie ahead as pluralistic views on a number of essential truths and Biblical practices are urged upon the church. Now is a time when leaders and church members must study the Holy Scriptures earnestly and seek an infilling of the Holy Spirit.

3) Seek Peace Through Biblical Unity. There is much encouragement found in the counsel of James: "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:16-18).

In the following statement Ellen White makes a very interesting and challenging application of these verses from James:

The principle laid down is the natural outgrowth of the Christian religion. Especially will those who are engaged in proclaiming the last solemn message to a dying world seek to fulfill this Scripture. Although possessing different temperaments and dispositions, they

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will see eye to eye in all matters of religious belief. They will speak the same things, they will have the same judgment, they will be one in Christ (*Historical Sketches*, pp. 122-125).

We have not yet met this ideal. Yet, this is the admonition of both Scripture and the messenger of the Lord, Ellen White. Leaders can do much to lead our people into this spirit of unity.

4) Recognize the Spirit of Prophecy's Role as a Strong Unifying Factor.

The precious gift in the person of Ellen White was a critical factor in helping our pioneers to unite in their understanding of the special Biblical truths that make us a distinct people today. Her writings will continue to keep us together. The notion that she erred in theology is false. Her theology was based on Scripture, and all through her life she advised the church and its leaders to make the Scriptures their guide in all matters of belief and practice. Her work was to keep the church from erring in its understanding of what the Bible teaches and to keep it focused on the Bible itself as an infallible guide to truth.

In 1906 she wrote a most helpful series of twenty articles for the *Signs of the Times* exalting the study of the Bible. Among many other significant statements, she wrote these two:

"The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe we would open God's Word, and with what earnestness we would search its precepts" (April 4, 1906).

"We need not the dim light of tradition to make the Scriptures comprehensible. As well might we suppose that the noonday sun needs the glimmering torchlight of Earth to increase its glory. The utterances of priest or minister are not needed to save men from error. Those who consult the divine Oracle will have light. In the Bible every duty is made plain" (Oct. 10, 1906).

This devotion to the Bible as the rule of our faith and practice validates Ellen White as God's messenger perhaps more than any other evidence. Leaders who follow her counsel will find themselves exalting Scripture and seeking to lead our people into a renewed study of its marvelous truths.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these efforts will bring unity to the church. With a world groping in darkness, we have a message of hope, of warning and of truth that will dispel the darkness and prepare a people for the coming of our Lord. The leaders of today have the greatest opportunity in the history of the world to do a work for God. Let us pray for them. And let us give them every encouragement possible to seek to bring the church into unity of belief and practice around the Word of God.

Chapter 51

Should We Ever Leave the Church?

By Pastor Doug Batchelor

President and Speaker, *Amazing Facts*

"Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31).

Two teenage brothers, Bo and Joe, decided to take advantage of the warm weather one Sunday afternoon and drove to the ocean pier for a swim.

"I can't wait to dive in," said Bo.

"Me either," answered Joe as they parked the car.

They changed into their swim trunks and headed for the pier. Above a rocky shoreline it led out to where waves crashed on the pilings below.

"Last one in is a rotten egg!" yelled Bo, charging down the pier and diving off the end.

"Hey, wait for me!" Joe called as he ran to catch up.

More cautious than his brother, Joe paused to look over the end of the pier before diving. To his horror, he saw the body of his brother floating in the surf, his neck broken by the rocks inches below the water surface. A young teenager had lost his life by diving when the tide was out. He didn't know when to jump.

You may be thinking Bo was not very smart for not stopping to look before he dove, but many today are doing the same; they are diving out of the church like lemmings running blindly off a cliff into the sea. They do not stop to look before they leap; they do not ask whether there are rocks below. They see a problem in the church and follow those who say, "Last one out is a rotten egg!"

Discouragement

It is easy to get discouraged when you consider all the potential problems one may encounter in a church. Myriads of voices constantly remind us of our church's hypocrisy and failures. Independent ministries provide a stream of

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tabloid information, regurgitating present rumors and past scandals, the squandering of money, lack of the Holy Spirit, the famine of real Bible preaching, the general worldliness . . . as reasons to leave the church.

You may be thinking, "Is there any virtue in pretending we are the captain of the *Titanic* and going down with the ship? Can't I be part of God's church without being part of a specific denomination or organization? Must I endure pathetic preaching and spiritless fellowship week after week forever? Is there never a time to leave the church? Or is there, sometimes—please?"

Before I answer that question, it is imperative that we first answer another. Why do we join a church? Once we understand that matter it will be easier to evaluate when to leave.

I took a survey as to why people join a church, and here are some of the answers I received. (This was not a scientific study, but based on the consistency of answers, I think it is very accurate.)

1. It's the church of my parents.
2. It's close to our home.
3. The people are friendly and loving.
4. The music is beautiful or invigorating.
5. The preacher is handsome or dynamic.
6. They have a good children's program.
7. The building is impressive.
8. The important or influential people go to this church.
9. The services are exciting.
10. The church needs me.

Though each of these elements may be good in and of itself, none—not one of them—is the right reason to join a church.

There is only one right reason to join a church. It can be divided into two parts:

(1) The foundation teachings of the church, what we might call the doctrinal pillars, are the true teachings of the Bible, and (2) you are committed to following truth.

You may be surprised but, yes, there is a time to leave the church! I've been asked this question many times so I have thought carefully about my answer.

When the fundamental doctrines of the church are no longer the teachings of Christ, when you are no longer allowed to discuss and practice your convictions of truth within its fellowship, then you have no choice but to go somewhere else.

But my next question is, When that happens, will there be anywhere better to go?

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Paul and the Leaking Boat

There is a true-adventure story in the Bible about a terrible storm in which Paul and his shipmates nearly drowned. You can read the vivid details in Acts 27. Paul was traveling to Rome along with a boatload of passengers, several of whom, like him, were prisoners facing trial before Nero. Shortly after leaving Asia Minor they found themselves trapped in a terrible tempest. For fourteen days and nights *"neither sun nor star . . . appeared"* (v. 20). The little ship, burdened with 276 souls, was lashed by the merciless wind and sea. As it pitched and rolled, the passengers threw practically everything overboard, including, no doubt, their lunch—many must have been dreadfully seasick! The situation got so bad that most gave up any hope of survival (v. 20). The last place in the world they wanted to be was on that boat... but, please notice, nobody jumped overboard.

In the same way, there may be times when you think that God's ship, the church, with all its problems and faults is the last place in the world you want to be. But I promise you, you are much better off tossed about in the church with sinners than floundering in the water with sharks.

Reading on, the Bible tells us that as Paul and his shipmates neared land, some of the sailors tried to get off the ship under pretense of wanting to help. *"Some of the sailors planned to abandon the ship and lowered the emergency boat as though they were going to put out anchors from the prow"* (v. 30, TLB).

In other words they were saying, "We're going to take a lifeboat and paddle off by ourselves; we'll leave the others to go down with the ship."

Some people in the church are doing this now. They are branching off by themselves. With divine authority Paul told the soldiers in charge: *"Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved"* (v. 30).

Did the soldiers say, "Every man for himself!" and join the offshoots by heading for a lifeboat? No. The Scripture states: *"Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off"* (v. 31).

The empty lifeboat was cut away to drop into the sea in order to keep the crew together.

Why is this story in the Bible? For our encouragement and instruction. Paul is saying that unless we stick together we're not going to make it to the kingdom.

In 1519 Hernando Cortez landed near the site of Vera Cruz, Mexico. When he detected a lack of resolve among his troops he burned the ships of his small fleet to eradicate all thoughts of retreat. I believe as we, God's people, near shore (the end of time) God is reminding us that we must stay together

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through the storm. I think He wants us to cut the ropes to the lifeboats and commit ourselves to staying with the ship.

Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Likewise, those in the church who are constantly looking over their shoulders at the lifeboats steer a crooked course. How can we effectively win souls into the church if we are forever planning to leave it?

When someone encourages you to be an escape artist, tell him or her, "Why should I leave? God has promised to bring me safely to shore if I stay with His ship."

What About Sinners in the Church?

They may answer that there are so many sinners in the ship that it can't possibly be God's vessel. But, in our Bible story, Paul tells us that the ship, steered by pagan seamen, contained among the idol-worshipping passengers many a criminal on his way to judgment. There were many different kinds of people of whom very few were good, yet the message was that they all must stay together.

Eventually they did have to leave the ship, when it broke to pieces on the rocks. At that point, they had to grab what was left of the ship—just the pieces—and make it to shore. But do notice that when there was no more ship for them to stay in, holding tightly to the pieces got them safely to land.

Look again at that battered old ship, for our ship will be shaken too. Paul's leaky ship managed to stay in one piece until it struck land.

This, I think, is how God's church is going to be in the last days. I believe that here in North America, where we have so long been free, it will become illegal for our church to operate as a visible organization approved by the government. The organization of our church, the ship, very well may break apart as we strike the rocks at the end of time. If and when that happens we're each just going to have to make our own way to land through the dangerous water, clinging to any parts of the old ship still floating, gathering in small companies to strengthen and encourage one another.

The great final tribulation will be preceded by a small time of trouble. At this time government restrictions and regulations will make it impossible for commandment keepers to worship openly. The church will be forced underground.

"As the decree issued by the various rulers of Christendom against commandment keepers shall withdraw the protection of government and abandon

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them to those who desire their destruction, the people of God will flee from the cities and villages and associate together in companies, dwelling in the most desolate and solitary places. Many will find refuge in the strongholds of the mountains" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 626).

Spared to Witness

Acts 27:24 gives one of the reasons why God will preserve us in His church. It reads: "*Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*"

In case you missed it, God is here promising Paul that his life will be spared so that Paul can witness to Caesar. In the same way, near the end of time, each one of us may be called to be a witness to worldly powers if we remain faithful. Like Paul we may be imprisoned and brought before kings and rulers. God wants us to carry the last message of hope to a dying world. If we jump ship, we'll miss that opportunity. We are doomed to drown in the dark abyss if we try to cross the stormy ocean with nothing but a rubber duck and a bathing suit.

Are there problems in the church? Yes, big ones! Is this a new condition? No. The sad history of God's people is one of compromise and backsliding. But over and over the Lord told His leaders to stay with the people and struggle to effect revival. You cannot clean a house from the outside; you must be inside it. You cannot bail out a boat if you're in the water; you must be in the boat.

When Elijah was hiding in his cave God asked, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"—then sent him back to His wayward people (1 Kings 19:9, 15). When the Lord consigned the children of Israel to forty years of wandering because of their unfaithfulness, Moses wandered with them. Even more importantly, God went with them. Consider for a moment how many times in their history the Israelites backslid, and yet still they remained God's people. Why? "Chiefly," as Paul explained, "because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2).

That's what makes Seventh-day Adventists unique among the world's faiths and denominations. God has committed to us the oracles of truth. We are modern, spiritual Israel. "Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 12).

And if the church is the object of God's supreme regard, it stands to reason that it is the object upon which the Devil concentrates his most intense rage. "The dragon was wroth with the woman" (Revelation 12:17).

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Just as a wolf scatters the sheep of the flock away from the shepherd in order to bring one down, the Devil is working frantically to separate God's sheep from the Shepherd and from one another, so he can claim us as his prey. Divided, we fall!

When the final crashing wave breaks the ship apart, grab onto anything that floats and swim for shore! I don't know what form that wave will take, whether government decrees or religious persecution, and I don't know when it will come. But I do know that things are going to get a lot worse than they are now. We need to be firm in our beliefs. Otherwise we will be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

The way to be ready is to be daily in prayer and Bible study, to be putting on the robe of Christ's righteousness. When the final storm breaks upon us and those last waves hit, that robe will be our life jacket.

That's the way it is with our church. Some people feel that it is the church that will safely bring them to the shores of eternal life. These people are only along for the ride and lose their faith in times of storm. Others have placed their faith in Christ's life, death, and ministry, and live in obedience to Him. They are daily placing their faith in Him through prayer, study, and service. They are also in His church, but they know that when the waves hit, He, not the church, will be the One to hold them up. So long as the ship is afloat, they are on board, not as tourists, but as crewmembers. Not until the ship sinks do they try to make it to shore by any other means.

Friends, that's the kind of person I want to be, the one wearing the life jacket of Christ's righteousness. It's the only way to survive.

Conclusion

The New Versus the True: Where Do *You* Stand?

By Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, PhD

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Author, *Must We Be Silent?* and *Receiving the Word*

Centuries ago, Martin Luther commented on the fascination of his fellow Germans with anything that was new:

We Germans are the kind of fellows who pounce upon anything new and cling to it like fools, and if anyone restrains us, he only makes us more crazy for it; but if no one restrains us we will soon on our own become fed up and bored with it, and soon chase after something else that is new. Thus the Devil has the advantage that no teaching or fancy so clumsy can arise but he can find disciples for it, and the clumsier the more quickly.¹

But that tendency is not exclusively German, nor even that of the sixteenth century. It is universally human—more so in this generation.

Thus, the word "new" has become the operative word on every label; without it, products or ideas cannot sell. This may reflect the evolutionary theory's view of upward progress and its attitude of disdain or condescension towards the tried and proven ways of the "primitive" past.

Today's standard cliché is "new and improved." Never mind that the difference between the new toothpaste and the old one is that the new one is often smaller in size and more expensive! But we seem not to realize how costly the new really is. And so we continue with our fascination with the new (technically known as *neophilia*).

Who has not heard about the "New Age Religion" with its "New Theology," "New Spirituality," and "New Morality" for the coming "New World Order"?

Is it any wonder then, to find "New" Testament Christians who have experienced the "new birth" and have become "new creatures" expressing in

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their "new tongues" their dislike for the "old" paths—whether they be the "Old" Testament, the "old" Gospel, the "old" Christian teachings, the "old" revivals with their "old" hymns of faith?

The New and the True

The "old" is not always positive. Neither is the "new" always negative. When the "new" is true, it must always be preferred to the "old." And when the "old" is true, it is never safe to reject it for the "new." Both the old and the new must be tested by the true.

Biblical and secular history inform us that old ideas are not always true. This is why we must always be indebted to responsible thinkers who dare to challenge old traditions that are not true. It is our duty as Christians to explore new aspects of truth that may have been hidden to us. Without such openness to "new light" there cannot be a full comprehension of God's truth. It is sheer arrogance for us to think that we have all the truth to be known.

Also, when God offers something "new" in place of the "old," we must always embrace His new thing. To do otherwise is disobedience. This is why the concept of the *new* is fundamental in Biblical teaching. Many key Biblical teachings incorporate the idea of the "new": new song, new creation, new birth, new heart, new man, new commandment, new covenant, new spirit, new life, new heaven, New Earth, New Jerusalem, new name, and others.

To reject a new idea or a new teaching simply because it is new is a mistake that can be fatal. In the days of Christ many rejected the Saviour because of what they considered to be "a new teaching" (Mark 1:27).

Furthermore, it is our responsibility, if not our duty, to find new and better ways of doing things. Being "old-fashioned" is not synonymous with being right or being effective. For example, when there is a newer and better way of communicating the Gospel, it is foolhardy not to embrace the new. Progress and innovation are not necessarily opposed to what is true or what is right. Hence, Seventh-day Adventists can remain true to their distinctive Biblical message and the methods of church growth approved by the Spirit of Prophecy, and be innovative at the same time, as for example, has been successfully demonstrated by H.M.S. Richards, Mark Finley, C.D. Brooks, Doug Batchelor, etc., in their evangelistic outreach using the cutting-edge technology of their times.

My point is this: Both the old and the new must always be tested by the true. Unfortunately, our generation is more obsessed with the new, rather than

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with the true. It is this kind of *neophilia* (love for the new) that we have been evaluating in *Here We Stand*.

Neophilia: Our Fascination With the New

There was a time when Christians used to say, "If something is new, it probably isn't true; and if something is true, it probably isn't new." In those days, they believed that the "old" truth in the Bible was the chief test of spiritual wisdom and Christian maturity. Hence, they compared "new" truths with the "old," and affirmed the true by heartily singing, "Give me that old-time religion. . . 'Twas good for Paul and Silas, and it's good enough for me."

But times have changed. We now view old truths as antiquarian memorabilia. Novelty is now the measure of the Spirit's leading. And what is new is replacing what is true as the test of authentic Christianity. Hence,

- We find ourselves inventing new methods and gimmicks for church planting and church growth, ostensibly to reach the youth, the new generation, and the "unchurched";
- We are also adopting new doctrines and lifestyle practices, and replacing them with a content-less "gospel" whose ethos is a nebulous "love";
- Some of our otherwise bright and brilliant scholars are advocating new views on Creation that question a literal, recent, six-day Creation, the historicity of Genesis 1-11, and the global Flood in the days of Noah—new views that, among other things, undermine the Biblical foundation of the seventh-day Sabbath, and of Christ's power to re-create the life of a sinner and of His promise to create all things new when He comes again;
- In a desperate attempt to keep "the bored, burned, and by-passed," we are embracing new styles of worship in which secular dance music, Hollywood theatrics, and the sensationalism and experientialism of a "signs-and-wonders" religion have replaced a worship that is characterized by reverence and humility in the presence of a holy God;
- To give the illusion that we are experiencing revival, our "prayer warriors" are chasing after and promoting new fads of prayer and techniques of spiritual warfare;
- Our ethically "mature and sensitive" are also encouraging "new" forms of marriage, and have succeeded (at the 2000 General Conference session) in voting for un-Biblical divorce in the church under the questionable grounds of "abandonment";
- We have abandoned the Biblical leadership model in which the elected

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local elder or elders were responsible for leading the local congregation, and have institutionalized a pragmatic model of church leadership in which the appointed pastors or ministers take control or hover over the local congregation—a situation that makes it easy for the pastors to push their personal agendas and dreams upon the congregation, often without taking into consideration the voices of the local elders;

- Restless modern Eves and reckless modern Adams within our ranks are also pushing new leadership roles for men and women in both the home and the church, employing inconsistent, speculative, and erroneous methods of Biblical interpretation and a revisionist interpretation of early Adventist history to justify the ordination of women as elders or pastors;

- And vocal and influential voices are agitating for the adoption of new forms of church organization that would not hold us accountable to the Bible or the mission of the church as demanded by the world church.

But what have been the results of our obsession with the new—our preoccupation in worshipping the goddess called Neophilia? One insightful Evangelical scholar, James I. Packer, provides us with an answer: "The outside observer sees us as staggering on from gimmick to gimmick and stunt to stunt like so many drunks in a fog, not knowing at all where we are or which way we should be going. Preaching is hazy; heads are muddled; hearts fret; doubts drain our strength; uncertainty paralyzes action."²

It is this same kind of condition that Luther referred to in his statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

We . . . are the kind of fellows who pounce upon anything new and cling to it like fools, and if anyone restrains us, he only makes us more crazy for it; but if no one restrains us we will soon on our own become fed up and bored with it, and soon chase after something else that is new. Thus the Devil has the advantage that no teaching or fancy so clumsy can arise but he can find disciples for it, and the clumsier the more quickly.³

Nothing has really changed after all between the 16th and the 21st century. We are simply mimicking what has been the general attitude of all unconverted people throughout history. The Bible is, therefore, right when it says "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Indeed, *Here We Stand* has evaluated some new trends in the church, and has confirmed that the new is not necessarily true. Hence, in some cases, we

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have simply been confused, fooled, or "Trojan-horsed" by those promoting Biblically questionable teachings and practices.

The challenge now before us is: What should we say in response to the old heresies that are being recycled as new truths (or as one of our scholars ingeniously calls them, "present" truths)?

I will offer three suggestions: (1) reconsider our ways; (2) understand our true condition; and (3) repent.

1. We Must Reconsider Our Ways

Reconsidering our ways will lead us to understand that what is new is not always true. Sometimes the "new" is something that "has been already, in the ages before us" (Ecclesiastes 1:9,10); in other cases the "old" is preferable to the "new" because it is right (Isaiah 58:12; Jeremiah 6:16).

Peter Taylor Forsyth wrote, "I am sure no new theology can really be theology, whatever its novelty, unless it express[es] and develop[s] the old faith which made those theologies that are now old the mightiest things of the age when they were new."⁴ In other words, new truths should never contradict old truths (Isaiah 8:19, 20).

Also, we must have the moral courage to move against popular tides of un-Biblical opinions. This is neither easy nor palatable, since those who do so are often labeled and disdained by their peers as uninformed, obscurantist, prescientific, intolerant, or judgmental (according to the canons of pluralism), or even fundamentalist.⁵

Yet the faithful church has always had to run upstream against the popular culture. Modern Christianity has by and large lost one of the great themes of the Old and New Testament—namely, all behavior must be measured by, "Does it please the Lord?"

Regrettably, Christians who seek the applause of the world rather than the commendation of God find it more expedient to conform to society's un-Biblical norms than to endure sophisticated intimidation by their peers. And when they conform, the surest way they maintain an appearance of Christianity is to adopt a hermeneutic that explains away unpopular Biblical positions in a popular new light.⁶

Though the temptation to make the distinctive teachings of the Bible compatible with the contemporary culture is strong, the Bible warns us against conforming to the world's ideas. "Be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:1); "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15-17).

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Martin Luther King, Jr., observed, "We are called to be people of conviction, not conformity; of moral nobility, not social respectability. We are commanded to live differently and according to a higher loyalty."⁷

Daniel E. Pilarczyk, the archbishop of Cincinnati, raised a pertinent question: "If the church is singing the same tune as everyone else, then who needs the church?"⁸

If the prophet Jeremiah were living in our day, he would ask the same question that he posed to his contemporaries when they abandoned God's ways for the innovative schemes of their pagan neighbors. He wrote:

For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. . . . Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the River? (Jeremiah 2:13, 18, KJV, NIV).

When we reconsider our ways, we shall discover the total bankruptcy or futility of these un-Biblical new ways.

2. We Must Know Our True Condition

A reexamination of our ways will also lead us to see our true condition as God sees it. We shall discover that our fascination with the new is no progress at all, but a *backsliding*—a regression or a relapse into our old sinful ways. The word "backsliding" is the term the prophet Jeremiah repeatedly uses to describe the condition of God's people.⁹ He also mentions that, like Israel of old, our backsliding actions are symptomatic of our total disrespect for God:

Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy *backslidings* shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of Hosts (Jeremiah 2:19).

Our Lord's repeated plea to us is the same as His call to Israel of old. He calls upon us to return from our backsliding ways. Listen to a few of His pleas:

Jeremiah 3:11. And the Lord said unto me, The *backsliding* Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

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Jeremiah 3:12. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou *backsliding* Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever.

Jeremiah 3:13. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed My voice, saith the Lord.

Jeremiah 3:14. Turn, O *backsliding* children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

Jeremiah 3:22. Return, ye *backsliding* children, and I will heal your *backslidings*. Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God.

This call to "return" from our backslidden ways is a call to repentance. Instead of holding on to our erroneous ways and justifying our wayward actions, we must go to the Lord in humility and contrition of heart and ask His forgiveness. Jeremiah emphasizes this call to repentance when he writes:

Jeremiah 8:5. Why then is this people of Jerusalem *slidden back* by a perpetual *backsliding*? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.

Jeremiah 49:4. Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O *backsliding* daughter? that trusted in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me?

If, indeed, we have been misled by some of the innovative schemes of our times, as the preceding chapters of *Here We Stand* have shown, then we cannot conclude this volume without calling for godly change. Those of us, whether scholars, ministers, leaders, teachers, or members who have brought in or who are practicing or promoting these worldly ways in this beloved remnant church must desist and turn away from those errors.

We are the ones who constitute the church. Often, it is our silence, indifference, inaction, and collusion that have given rise to the conditions in our individual churches. A repentance at the individual level will greatly impact

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and transform the corporate church.

3. A Call to Repentance

The call to "return" from our backslidden ways is perhaps the most important step towards the healing and empowerment of the church. Instead of some flashy "new" ideas, methods, and practices, we need to heed the call to repentance that is contained in the "old" truth. God's end-time church, the Laodicean church, cannot experience true revival unless it first "repents" (Revelation 3:19).

One person in recent times who has clearly understood what such a call to repentance entails is Nancy Leigh DeMoss, the host and speaker for *Revive Our Hearts*, a radio ministry for women. Though not a member of our denomination, her analysis of the condition of the Christian church at large is applicable to our own Seventh-day Adventist Church. Moreover, the Biblical solution she prescribes—namely repentance and dying to self—is what we all need. She issued her call for such repentance almost a decade ago, when she spoke to a group of Christian leaders at a Prayer and Fasting Conference in 1996. Her article, "Begin at My Sanctuary,"¹⁰ is so pertinent to the concerns addressed in *Here We Stand* that I have sought her permission to reproduce it in its entirety in this volume.

Begin at My Sanctuary: A Call to Repentance

We have come together to cry out to God on behalf of our nation. In setting aside these days, we are acknowledging that there are no human solutions to the tidal wave of evil in our land, and that nothing short of divine intervention can overcome the darkness and the lostness of our world.

But I believe we need to remind ourselves at the outset of this gathering, that there are some prayers God will not hear; there are some solemn assemblies He will not attend; there are some fasts that are not pleasing to Him.

When the children of Israel came to fast and pray with unclean hands and hearts, God said, "*Though they shout in My ears, I will not listen to them. . . . though ye make many prayers, I will not hear. ..*" (Ezekiel 8:18; Isaiah 1:15).

In fact, the Scripture goes so far as to say that our prayers and our fasts are actually an abomination to Him if they are not accompanied by humility and repentance.

We would all be quick to agree about the need for repentance outside

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these walls. But are we as quick to recognize our own need for repentance?

We can readily identify the sins of the White House. But have we become blind to the corruption in our own house?

We decry the sin of our world. But have we not tolerated virtually all the same sins in the church?

Tonight we face a danger of feeling that the problem is somewhere "out there"—in Washington, San Francisco, or Hollywood, on our college campuses, or among nominal church members.

But as we read the Scripture, we see that the sternest words of reproof were issued, not to the pagan world, but to the people of God.

The prophet Isaiah calls out, *"Hear, oh heavens, and give ear, oh Earth, for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me.... they have forsaken the Lord; they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger; they are gone away backward.... the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores. . . . How is the faithful city become an harlot!"* (Isaiah 1:2, 4-6, 21a).

Throughout the Old Testament, the Father/Husband heart of God grieved over the waywardness of His chosen people. Time after time, He begged them to repent. And when they refused, the Hound of Heaven pursued their stubborn, sinning hearts with painful discipline.

In the New Testament, we hear Jesus' indictment against the spiritual leaders of His day—men who were renowned for their much fasting and praying: *"These people honor Me with their lips,"* He said, "but their hearts are far from Me."

The opening words of Jesus' ministry here on Earth were not, "Fast and Pray!" but "Repent!"

And when the ascended Lord Jesus looked down from His throne in Heaven, His final message to the churches was not, "Go and preach the Gospel," but, *"Repent!"* For an unrepenting church has neither the motivation nor the capacity to fulfill the great commission of our Lord.

To the first of the seven churches He said, "You have committed spiritual adultery.... You have left your first love.... Repent!" To another, "You have a reputation for being alive, but you are really dead____Repent!" And to the comfortable, complacent church at Laodicea, He said, "You don't think you have any needs, but the fact is, you are wretched, naked, miserable, blind, and poor. . . . Repent!"

And still tonight, the Lord Jesus pleads with His beloved Bride: *"Be zealous, and repent, or else I will come and remove your light from its place?"*

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Over and over again, I have been gripped by the account in Ezekiel 8 and 9, where God takes His servant in a vision to the Temple in Jerusalem. No less than 10 times in the eighth chapter, God says to Ezekiel: "Look! See! Do you see what's going on in there? Look at the detestable things taking place right in the middle of My Temple!"

I have been asking God to help me see what He sees when His all-knowing eyes examine the church in America. The picture is not a pretty one, and the truth is painful to admit. But we have got to get honest, if we ever hope to get God's attention.

The truth is, we have not only flirted, but actually fornicated with the world. When it comes to how we live, how we think, how we look, how we sound, and how we "do ministry," we have become virtually indistinguishable from the world outside the church.

Recent Barna research indicates, for example, that, for the first time in our nation, the divorce rate in the church is actually higher than outside the church.

We have bought into the world's philosophies and practices. Whereas the church used to tell the world how to live, now the world is telling the church how to live. We have accommodated to the culture, rather than calling the culture to accommodate to Christ.

Thus, church and ministry have become big business—we are more familiar with management and marketing principles, than with the principles of humility, purity, faith, and prayer. Many pastors and Christian leaders have become CEOs rather than spiritual shepherds.

We have utilized nearly every worldly method conceivable to attract the lost, and, in many cases, have lost both our distinctiveness and our effectiveness. We have built our ministries on pragmatism—"whatever works"—without stopping to evaluate if the means we are using are in accordance with the ways and Word of God.

In an effort to convince the world that Christianity is fun, we have entertained and amused ourselves to death. Why do Christian celebrities and comedians perform to sellout crowds, while scarcely a few attend the prayer meetings? Why do we feel we can't reach people today without rock bands, hip talk, and worldly dress?

Whatever happened to the power of God? Have we become more dependent on methods, techniques, strategies, and programs, than on prayer and the Holy Spirit?

Have we lost confidence in the power of the Word to convict, the Gospel to convert, and the Spirit to draw men to Christ? We have seen what human effort, ingenuity, creativity, and technology can do; we know what money,

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organization, and promotion can do; but we have yet to see what God can do!

We care more about public relations—how our constituents view us—than about how God views us; we are more concerned about our reputation than His.

In our seeker-driven mindset, we are more worried about offending visitors than offending God. We are more concerned about people "feeling good" than about their "being right." We want people to leave feeling good about church, about us, and about themselves—never mind that they have grossly offended a holy God and are under His condemnation and wrath!

We are so afraid of seeming intolerant or unloving that we tiptoe around crucial issues of the Word of God. Our cowardice in standing with God on such matters as divorce and remarriage has made us accessories to the carnage of millions of Christian families. In fact, we have placed ourselves in the precarious position of justifying and defending what God says He hates!

We have commercialized and merchandized the Gospel of Christ for the sake of financial gain and worldly acceptance.

In many instances, we have pursued unity at the expense of purity. Today, anyone who dares to call sin by name, or to point out doctrinal error is likely to be branded as divisive, unloving, or "legalistic."

In an effort to make Christianity palatable to our soft, self-centered generation, we have preached a diluted message that sidesteps the issue of sin, eliminates the demands of the cross, and overlooks the need for conviction and repentance.

In an effort to make our message "relevant," we have ended up preaching "another gospel" that is no Gospel at all. We have preached Christianity as a way to find fulfillment, rather than a calling to take up the cross and follow Jesus.

In many cases, we are more concerned about additions and statistics than actual converts, or the quality of those converts. Never before in the history of the church, have there been so many millions of people on the church rolls who profess to be Christians, who can even pinpoint the time and place of their "conversion," but whose lives give no credible evidence of a saving relationship with Christ.

Inside the church itself, in far more ways than we care to admit, we have failed to live by the Scripture. Like King Saul, we say we have obeyed the Word of God; but how do we explain all the evidence to the contrary?

For example, we are a community of the forgiven who refuse to forgive. We live with unresolved conflicts—in our homes, among church and ministry staff, and in the pew.

Further, we have ignored or rejected Biblical standards for spiritual lead-

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ership. Instead, we exalt giftedness over godliness and elevate men whose lives and homes are far from conforming to the standard of Scripture.

We brush known sin under the carpet. Why do so few churches practice Biblical church discipline? And why are professing believers who refuse to repent allowed to continue as members in good standing?

The Bride has forgotten how to blush. We sin without shame; we have lost our ability to mourn and grieve and weep over sin. Even our language betrays our theology of irresponsibility—we speak of leaders "falling" into sin, rather than acknowledging that these men and women have chosen a pathway of compromise and gratifying the lusts of the flesh.

In keeping with the times in which we live, we as Christian women have tossed aside such outmoded notions as virtue, modesty, femininity, and submission. We have exchanged the adorning of a meek and quiet spirit for an angry, demanding, controlling spirit. Abandoning our God-created role as helpers, we have insisted on taking up the reins in the home and in the church.

In our casual brand of Christianity there is little sense of the fear of the Lord. How else could millions of churchgoers sit under the preaching of the Word week after week and leave unchanged, unmoved? How else could so-called believers who claim to believe in holiness, sit in their living rooms or hotel rooms, watching television and laughing at ungodly jokes, lifestyles, and philosophies? When is the last time you saw God's people "tremble at the Word of the Lord"? When is the last time we trembled at the Word of the Lord?

Should it come as any surprise that the watching world should reject our message, when our lives bear so little witness to its truth and power?

At the heart of our problem is that subtle, deadly sin of pride—insidious, cancerous, blinding pride. We are proud of our doctrinal correctness, proud of our spiritual accomplishments, proud of our statistics, proud of our stand on moral issues, proud of our reputation and our level of sacrifice.

Pride causes us to be self-righteous, self-congratulatory and self-sufficient. It blinds us to our true condition and our great need. It causes us to fear men rather than God. Pride causes us to compare ourselves to others and breeds a competitive, critical spirit. Our pride is strangling the life of Jesus right out of the church.

Yet, even as we list these sins, some of us may feel that we have not rejected the ways and the Word of God. Then could I ask you some questions God has been asking me in recent days?

If we are so close to God, where is the passion? Where is the compulsion, the unction, the fire? Where are the tears? Where is the mourning, the grieving, the weeping? Why are our eyes dry and our hearts dull? Where is the

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groaning, the crying out in soul travail?

Where are those who cry out with David, *"It is time for You, oh God, to act, for they have trampled Your law" ?*

Where are the Isaiahs who stir up themselves to take hold of God, praying fervently, *"Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down...."?*

Where are those who plead with the psalmist, *"Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts, cause Thy face to shine . . ." ?*

Where are those who abhor sin, whether in the world, in the church, or in their own breast, who cry out, *"Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Thy law" ?*

Where are the Jeremiahs whose hearts are in anguish, and whose eyes overflow with tears for the desolation of God's people?

Where are the prophets who are willing to risk their reputation, their retirement funds, and their acceptance within the Christian community, in order to say what needs to be said to our generation? Where are the men who are sounding the alarm to waken the church out of her sleep and lethargy?

Is not God's Word like a fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Then where is the preaching with conviction, confrontation, divine fire, and Holy Spirit anointing?

Where is the urgency, the solemnity, when we talk to men about eternity and the condition of their souls?

Where are the intensity and terror when we speak of the judgment and the wrath of God?

Where, for that matter, are the tenderness and passion when we speak of the loveliness, the beauty, and the grace of our Lord Jesus? Have our minds been engaged, without our hearts being ravished?

Where are the hot hearts, set aflame by the coal from the altar of the Lord?

Where are the men who have been with God, who have tarried in His presence until they have heard His Word, and then descended from the mount with the glory of God radiating from their faces and the power of God reverberating from their hearts?

Where are those who refuse to be satisfied with explainable, status quo ministry, but who expect to see Hell shattered at the feet of Jesus when they go forth in His name?

Having shown Ezekiel the abominations taking place in the inner court of the Temple, God sends forth into the holy city a man with a marking pen. He is told: *"Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."*

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Then executioners are sent into the city with instructions to slaughter all who do not have the intercessor's mark on their forehead. And, says the Lord, "*Begin at My sanctuary.*"

In that passage, as in this auditorium tonight, there are only two groups of people: those who are the cause of the problem, and those who grieve and mourn with repentant hearts. There is no middle ground.

We know for sure of One Who carries this burden on His heart tonight. What grief must the Saviour feel as He beholds His adulterous Bride in her tattered, stained, threadbare wedding garments?

He Who became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him—He Who shed His precious blood to purchase for Himself a holy Bride without spot and without blemish—what must He think, what must He feel, as He sees His Beloved One seduced, infatuated, and defiled by the world?

If our hearts are not broken over what breaks the heart of God, if we are not part of the remnant that sighs and laments and groans within over the detestable things that are going on in the temple of God, then we are part of the multitude that is in danger of His chastisement and in desperate need of repentance.

So tonight, God calls us to repent . . . to be afflicted and mourn and weep—first over our sin. For He will not hear or heed our prayers for our nation, as sincere as they may be, until we have first humbled ourselves and repented of our wicked ways. "*The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God!*"

In a few moments, I am going to suggest that we go to our knees and humble ourselves in the presence of the Lord—each of us asking God to search our own heart. During that time, would you join me in praying,

"Oh God, it's not my brother, not my sister, not my pastor, not the deacons; it's not the church or the ministry down the street—but *it's me, oh God...* Please shine the light of Your holiness into the innermost parts of *my* heart. Show me how I have sinned against You, how I have been a part of the problem, rather than a part of the solution. Show me where I need to repent."

As the Holy Spirit brings conviction to our hearts, let's humble ourselves, confess our wicked ways, and plead with God for mercy and forgiveness.

"Let us search and try our ways"; let us "turn to Him with all our hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. . . ."

Conclusion

Yes, we must go to our Lord, and in humility say to Him: "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it for Thy name's sake: for our *back-*

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slidings are many; we have sinned against Thee" (Jeremiah 14:7).

If we do so, His promise will be: "I will heal their *backsliding*, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him" (Hosea 14:4).

And once we have been forgiven and restored, the Lord will greatly empower and bless the work we do for Him. For only a broken people are able to love the Lord to the point of always holding to what is *true*, rather than to what is new. Such people alone can echo the words of Martin Luther when he declared at the Diet of Worms:

My conscience is captive to the Word.... Unless I am convinced by proofs from Scriptures or by plain and clear reasons and arguments, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. *Here I stand*. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.¹¹

May the Lord give us the courage to stand up against the un-Biblical traditions of our times—namely the ideologies and fads of our contemporary culture that often masquerade in the church as "new light."

When the religion of Christ is most held in contempt, when His law is most despised, then should our zeal be the warmest and our courage and firmness the most unflinching. To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 136).

Endnotes

¹ *Luther's Works*, 37.19.

² James I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 19, 20.

³ *Luther's Works*, 37.19.

⁴ Quoted in Kenneth Hamilton, *What's New in Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 6.

⁵ In a lecture given in Wycliffe Hall at Oxford University, British scholar Gordon J. Wenham aptly described the situation: "I suspect that if either you [a student] or your lecturers discover during your study that you are a Sabellian Montanist or Semipelagian Gnostic [these were Christological heresies in the early church], it will not cause overmuch excitement. Such deviants are commonplace today and in this pluralistic society are usually accepted without much fuss. However should you be diagnosed as a fundamentalist your fate may be very different. In the modern theology faculty fundamentalism is the great heresy. It is regarded as nearly as dangerous as the HIV virus and is treated with similar fervour but with rather less tact and sympathy." See, Gordon J. Wenham, "The Place of Biblical Criticism in Theological Study,"

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Themelios 14/3 (1989) :84. Bible-believing Christians should not be intimidated by any pejorative labels—labels that are calculated to induce Christians to accept some "progressive" ideas (theological code word for deviations from Scripture).

⁶ See Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Berean Books, 1996).

⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Glasgow: Wm. Collins Sons & Co., 1986), p. 18.

⁸ *Time*, November 5, 1990, p. 83.

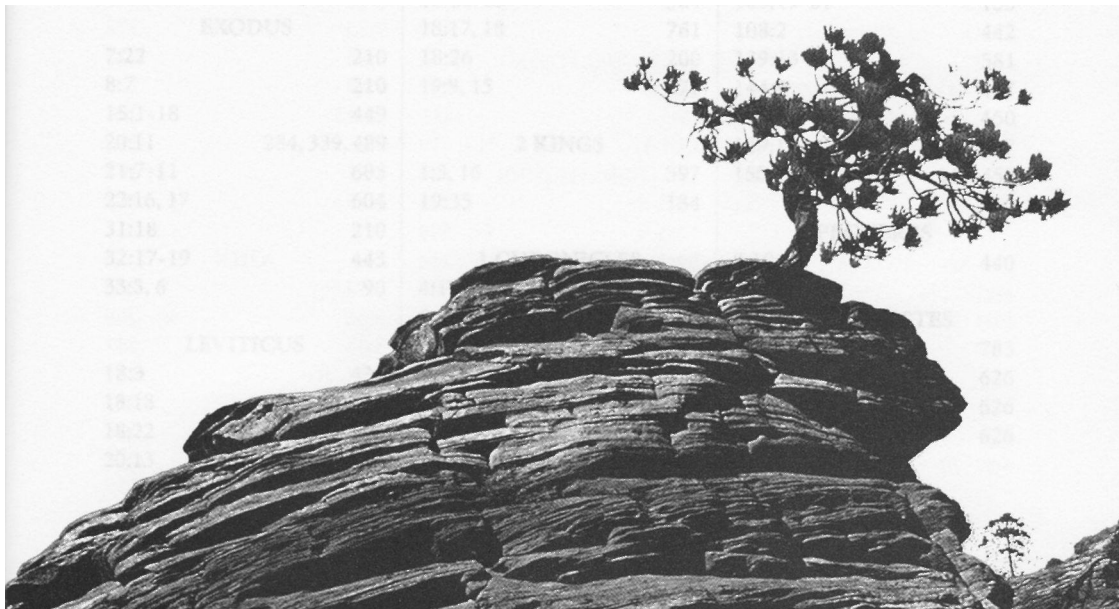
⁹ At least 14 times in his book, Jeremiah describes the condition of God's people as "back-sliding" (see Jeremiah 2:19; 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22; 5:6; 8:5; 14:7; 31:22; 49:4).

¹⁰ For more than 25 years, Nancy has communicated her burden for both personal and corporate revival in conferences and retreats throughout North America and abroad. She is the host and teacher for *Revive Our Hearts*, a nationally syndicated radio program for women. She is also the general editor of *Biblical Womanhood in the Home*. Nancy DeMoss's 1996 copyrighted article "Begin at My Sanctuary" is used by permission of Revive Our Hearts, P.O. Box 31, Buchanan, Mich. 49107-0031; www.ReviveOurHearts.com. A printer-friendly version of the article can be obtained at this Web site: <http://www.reviveourhearts.com/resources/printer.htm/21173>.

¹¹ This is a variation of Luther's famous "Here I Stand" statement. See also endnote 1 in the introduction to this present volume. For more on the events leading to Luther's "Here I Stand" statement, see Ellen G. White's discussion ("Luther Before the Diet") in chapter 8 of *The Great Controversy* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1911), pp. 145-170.

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