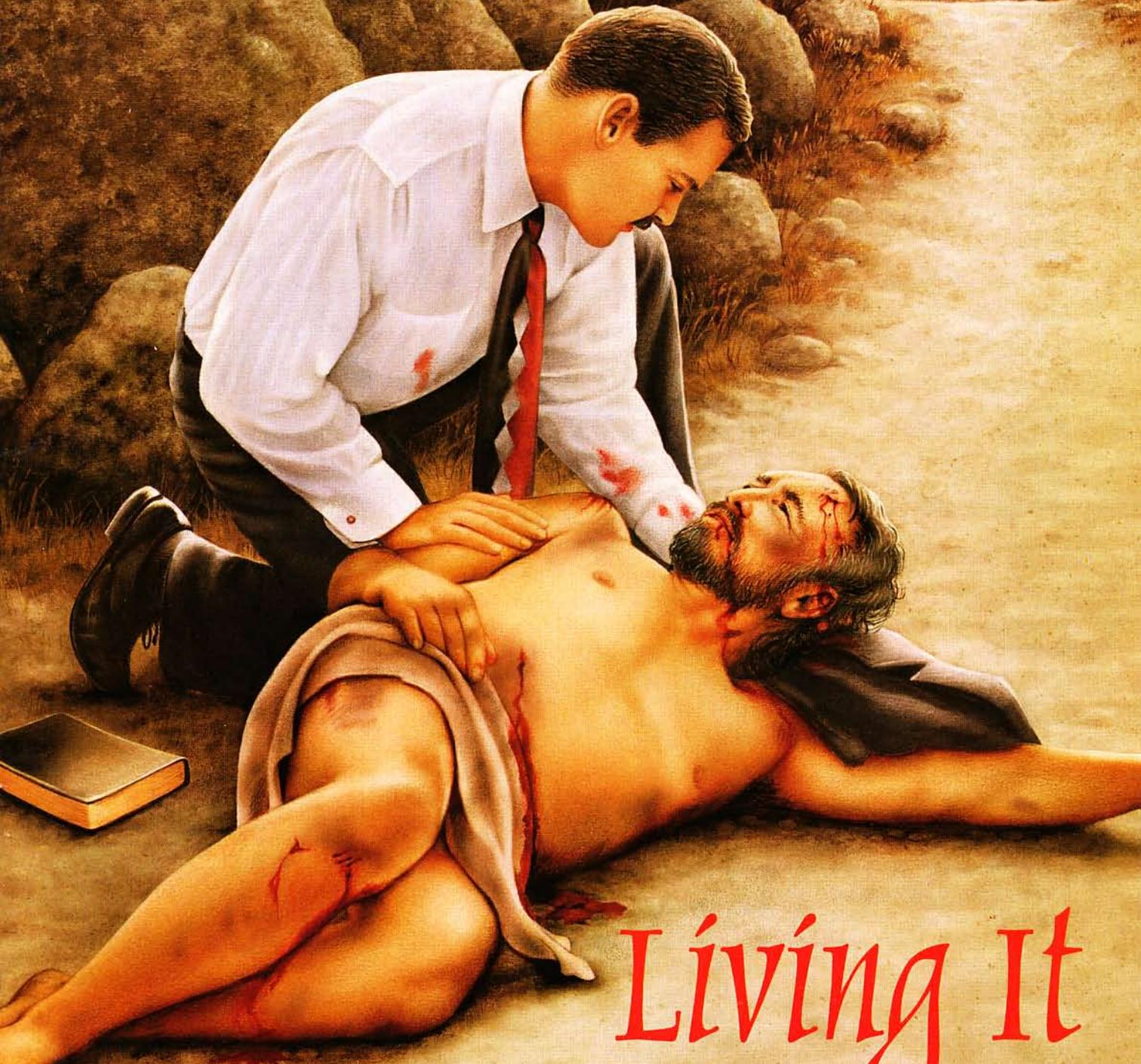


# MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors

October 2002



*Living It*

THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT.

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EVERY  
ISSUE

Letters

3

Editorial

4

Pastor's Pastor

28

Resources

30

5 **Living it. That's what it's all about!**

*A challenge from the president of the General Conference to actually live our faith*

Jan Paulsen

8 **The enigma of "unanswered" prayer**

*A thoughtful look at how we may know and understand how God hears our prayers*

Richard W. Coffen

12 **Church discipline the redemptive way**

*The challenge to care enough to administer redemptive church discipline*

Tim Crosby

14 **Mavericks on the payroll?**

*How the established church views and deals with those who are controversially innovative*

Paul Cone and Lawrence Downing

18 **Adventist identity in a changing world**

*How the SDA Church may handle the pressure to redefine itself in a world that's continuing longer than expected*

Rick Ferret

24 **GraceLink: Linking children with Christ**

*A dynamic new Sabbath School curriculum to reach children of all ages*

René Alexenko Evans

AFTER THE PIONEERS DIED, HOWEVER, WE LOST OUR ORIGINAL BALANCE AND THE CHURCH BEGAN INCREASINGLY TO FOCUS ON AND INVEST IN PROCLAMATION ALONE, TO THE EXCLUSION OF "THE SOCIAL SIDE OF THE GOSPEL."

### Another look at Babylon

Thanks for the excellent article by our ever-provocative but always informatively insightful colleague, George Knight. I am referring to his "Another Look at Babylon: Cooperating With Other Christians?" which appeared in the April 2002 issue of *Ministry* (which I regularly receive).

As the first GC-approved translation consultant with the global United Bible Societies (UBS, since 1996), and primarily responsible for monitoring and mentoring mother-tongue translators in their translation of the Bible into various African languages spoken mainly in Angola and Mozambique (in my case), I can readily relate, at the professional level, to the whole issue of having to cooperate with other Christians—Protestant and Roman Catholic alike and at both the clerical and lay levels—as we work together for the "common good" and as I endeavor to protect the interests of our church insofar as Bible translations are concerned.

Thankfully, our church, in its collective wisdom, has tended to adopt a rather "moderate" position when it comes to this very important ministry and, in all kinds of creative ways, (financial included), it has consistently sought to be supportive of UBS not only here in Africa, or in North America, but around the world.

Thankfully as well, the book I just happened to come across in a secular bookstore in Botswana (Southern Africa) some months ago does not speak for most of us in the church when it comes to the sacred ministry of Bible translation. In that book, the author adopts a

rather harsh (and not always sufficiently informed) stance on the issue. Not only does he (like some others) seek, unsuccessfully, to defend the seventeenth-century King James Version as the only acceptable version in English, but, by and large, he also associates the work of Bible translation, as done collectively by the various churches, as Babylonish through and through. I am referring to the book by H. H. Meyers, *Battle of the Bibles* (revised and enlarged, published by New Millennium Publications, 1997).

Thanks again, George, for your very balanced article.

—Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke, Johannesburg, South Africa.

### The gospel commission has another side

Dr. Rudi Maier hit a grand slam in his article "The Gospel Commission Has Another Side" (*Ministry*, June 2002). Historic Adventism was a combination of proclamation and meeting the real needs of people. Our early church was immersed in both the proclamation of the Sabbath and Second Coming and helping people escape slavery, poverty, and disease. After the pioneers died, however, we lost our original balance and the Church began increasingly to focus on and invest in proclamation alone, to the exclusion of "the social side of the gospel." Thus we have not told the whole truth. As Maier said, ". . . we all too easily make too sharp a distinction between evangelism and social concern."

We know this unbalanced approach does not work in the third world, and

we're learning that it doesn't work in the first world either. The counsel and example of Christ and Ellen White clearly condemn our current unbalanced presentation of the gospel. Read the whole quotation in *Ministry of Healing* (142, 143). It is a shocking reminder of why we continue to strike out in bringing in and keeping new members. The gospel commission does indeed have another side—one that we have been neglecting for far too long.

Let's stop "poor-mouthing" when it comes to community service ministries and inner-city projects while extravagantly funding evangelistic crusades and net projects. The world is thirsting for need-based ministries motivated by godly love and concern. We say we believe in a balanced ministry. But talk is cheap. When will we start "putting our money where our mouth is"?

Thanks for the outstanding job you are doing.

—Byron Dulan, Bothell, Washington.

### Appreciation

Praise God for the initiative you've taken to link pastors around the world through *Ministry*, and I pray that you keep on doing it till He comes. My concern is what will be the role of an Adventist pastor in this growing and changing society or better said: How can an Adventist pastor fit the challenges of this modern society? What I mean is this: It is not a secret to anyone that education plays a very vital role in our society today; and because of that, I strongly believe that pastors are to be well-educated people.

continued on page 31

### Free Subscription

If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

# What Heaven sees on the news

Though wearing an expensive dark business suit, the company executive was not on his way to the office. Handcuffed, WorldCom Chief Financial Officer Scott D. Sullivan walked in front of the cameras. Along with former Controller David F. Myers, Sullivan is accused of hiding \$3.9 billion in an effort to make WorldCom appear profitable.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the price inflating, 17,000 of the long-distance company's employees have been laid off, innumerable employees and shareholders have lost their pensions, and many are also in danger of losing their homes.

In contrast, after a brief afternoon hearing U.S. Magistrate James C. Francis released Sullivan on a \$10 million bond secured by a \$5 million lean on his home in Boca Raton, Fla. Similarly, Myers was released on a \$2 million bond secured by two properties he owns in Mississippi.<sup>2</sup>

America is astounded at the thoughtlessness of top business executives. According to a recent Gallup poll, 73 percent of respondents said that chief executives of large corporations cannot be trusted. Furthermore, the same poll showed that "81 percent think the nation's moral values are only fair or poor, and 67 percent said moral values are getting worse."<sup>3</sup>

Are America's moral values getting worse? Are more and more corrupt people gaining access to the business world? Do corrupt people seek power or does power tend to corrupt? Is the perhaps-all-too-human greed for wealth to blame? Or is it perhaps too convenient to shake our heads and

JULIA W. NORCOTT



blame the avarice of the secular world?

Of course, however scary the world can be, the church can be scary as well, especially when we put one foot in front of the other, strive to do our best—our human best—and forget whom we serve. Whether in a financial establishment or in a ministry for God, the positive traits that steer people in the direction of leadership can be the same qualities that lull leaders into a comfort zone—into an anesthetized state, making them unaware of those around them. Management qualities such as vision, organization, and confidence, easily become narrow-mindedness, thoughtlessness, and even arrogance. Thus, administrators can "accidentally" become thoughtless toward subordinates, unless purposely and continually seeking the Lord to live in our hearts and shine out of our lives.

God understands the weight of the responsibilities of leadership. He provided us, for example, with the story of a church leader of Jesus' time. Nicodemus had many of the same struggles we have. Nicodemus also had the clout, the friends, the titles, the robes, the rules; he studied his Bible. Nevertheless,

something about Jesus stirred in Nicodemus a curiosity in him—a desire for more than the condescending methods of Nicodemus's colleagues. Caught up in the stress of the system, Nicodemus unwittingly found himself caught up in what we now might call legalism, the legalese of being a boss.

In *He Still Moves Stones*, Max Lucado says that legalism "is slow torture, suffocation of the spirit, amputation of one's dreams. Legalism is just enough religion to keep you, but not enough to nourish you." Lucado continues: "Legalism is the search for innocence—not forgiveness. It's a systematic process of defending self, explaining self, exalting self, and justifying self. Legalists are obsessed with self—not God. . . . Christians must toe the company line. Your job isn't to think; it's to march. If you want to be in the group, stay in step and don't ask questions."<sup>4</sup>

Knowing what Nicodemus needed, Jesus didn't set Nicodemus straight about some of the codes or some of the protocol for successful leadership. Instead, he shocked Nicodemus by telling him simply that *everyone* who believes can have eternal life.

More profoundly, Jesus' point regarding ministering for God is made by the extended metaphor of His own earthly life. Jesus, whose magnetic personality, attention-grabbing, unique realness, and godly charisma filled any room, had the broadest range of possible connections and friends. His friends and cohorts ranged from the ruler of the synagogue to the prostitute (Matt. 21:31; John 8:7),\* from the woman

*continued on page 29*

# Living it. That's what it's all about!

Jan Paulsen

**Editor's Note:** *This article is based on a sermon recently preached by Elder Paulsen.*

**P**aul's impact on our doctrines and beliefs cannot be overstated. Look at any of our central doctrines—the nature of Christ, His death and resurrection, His intercessory ministry, His second coming, salvation, the meaning of faith, baptism, the nature of the church, spiritual gifts, or whatever. What strikes me the most, however, is that Paul is never satisfied with just settling doctrinal matters or clarifying theological issues. His ultimate concern is for the life that is to be lived, for it is in everyday life that faith is actually exposed.

The doctrine of life after death, for instance, is a wonderful promise, but life before death is surely God's gift to all of us. We are alive, we plan, we think, we say things, we do things, we touch each others' lives. There are smells and tastes, thoughts and actions, sounds and feelings. This is life. Life is not something you can step out of and look at and then step back into.

The object is not just to know; the object is to live. And so, the really important question is, How does our knowledge and understanding of what we believe impact the lives we live?

Doctrine, in a sense, is the servant of life. As Seventh-day Adventists, we read the Bible diligently. We study, we know much, and this is important. God has entrusted to us a very

special understanding of biblical truth, and He has told us to go and share this with the world. But we need to ask ourselves: How does our knowing impact the lives we live?

In Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan, both the priest and the Levite could well have accurately taught the truth that we humans should give meaningful aid to those who are in need, but only the Samaritan actually stopped to help, to live out the truth. He knew what it was all about!

## Knowing and living

Peter, with an eye to the end of the world, asks, "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:11, 12).<sup>\*</sup> And so, he says, "since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (verse 14).

Therefore, we who already know this, we who were brutally reminded of it on September 11, last year; of the frailty of human structures and human security, we ought to be on guard so that we are not carried away by the error of lawless people, and fall from our secure position. What we know and believe are meant to shape us and the lives we live. It's not enough just to know.

There are moments when we need to pause and clarify certain theological uncertainties that have crept into our ranks. There are times when we need to speak up and be sure that we are holding securely that which God has entrusted to us.

Yes, we need to do this, but we should do so for a further purpose—our personal lives; our relationships with the Lord and with people, and our faithfulness to the mission the Lord has given to us. We need to be sure it is in fact finding meaning in the lives that we live.

Theology on its own has no self-existent right. To become a well-informed theological recluse is no goal worthy to live for. Rather, what truly matters is to have done and to have become something useful to God, His mission, and people. It may be a bit presumptuous to speak of God's need, but God needs individuals who are sensitive to His will, who are alive to each other's needs and struggles, and whose focus is on Christ and the quality of life that He wants us to have. God is looking for a people who can witness for Him in



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an unbelieving world by offering more than facts and data.

We must ask, What's happening to me as a person? What is becoming of me and my life? The final events will surprise us all by the speed with which they will come into our lives. So I must press the question, What is happening to us today?

Numerous passages of Scripture illustrate the point that since this is what you know and believe, this is how you should live. Consider three such passages.

### **Life of humility**

First is Philippians 2:6ff. Through a unique choice of words, Paul comments on the process by which Jesus Christ became a man—an act that is really a mystery. Christ emptied Himself of one form, the form of God, and took on another form, the form of a human being.

Flowing from this passage, there have come numerous theories of the self-emptying of Christ. Much has been written on this subject, but it still remains a mystery to our frail human understanding. Just what did He empty Himself of? Did He let it go for time and eternity? Did He pick it up again when He ascended? Were there any risks involved? These are intriguing questions, questions the people of God will have an eternity to study.

But is the exploration of that question Paul's main concern? No, it is not. Paul says that Christ, who had a status infinitely higher than that of any created being, did not have to go around and assert and demonstrate His equality with the Father. That was something He had and was secure about, and He did not need to go around and demonstrate His greatness.

We, by contrast, sometimes get a bit puffed up, maybe reflecting our own insecurity more than anything else. Paul's subject matter is what Christ, who was equal with God the Father, became when He stepped into the world of humanity. Paul is concerned with how Jesus lived among us.

Christ chose to take the form of humanity. He chose the obscurity of a servant because that is how He could best help fallen humanity. He wanted to give hope to fallen humans. He wanted to give you and me a future, and He knew there was no other way He could do it, but for Him to become a servant. And in doing that, He gave an important signal regarding the meaning of Christian living.

Thus verses 3-5 make clear that the real subject matter is humility as opposed to self-seeking and self-assertion. The passage is not primarily about Christ's nature and what He did and did not take upon Himself when He left heaven and came to earth; which summarizes the way we most often use the passage.

Instead the passage is about honoring rather seeking honor. It's about giving rather than taking. This intriguing passage about the self-emptying of Christ is only the illustration of how we are to live. This kind of humility leads us to openness before God, and to the point of accepting one another. It's the only attitude that is Christian. Accept one another just as Christ accepted you.

In Romans 15:2, 3 Paul says, "Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself." The apostle is saying something very critical about our styles of life, the way we spend our time, talents, and interests, and this points to something that is fundamental to the quality of life that we are meant to have. We are to take an interest in the lives of our fellow travelers on this journey, share in their joys and sorrows, and carry their burdens. It's God's intent for our lives. So let's allow ourselves to be drawn into the lives of other people.

To some that's not easy. Some are more private than others. For them it takes more of a moment's effort to be drawn into the lives of other people. But it's God's way.

It's easier for me to accept those

who are like me. But when they look different, speak differently, and go to a different church; when they eat and drink what I would not, the resulting distance becomes difficult to negotiate.

People tend to nurture the distance between them rather than seeking ways by which they can be useful and helpful to each other. Overcoming this distance is not easy. Yet the injunction is to accept one another as genuine human beings of great value before God. After all, Christ gave His life for all humanity, and thereby gave inestimable worth to everyone.

Acceptance does not mean that we accept people's errors in conduct, faith, beliefs, or values. It does mean that we show compassion and care for them as human beings who are also loved by God, even as we help them to see and overcome their error.

By His incarnation and death, Christ declared all people to be valuable. "This is the mystery into which angels desire to look. They desire to know how Christ could live and work in a fallen world, how He could mingle with sinful humanity. It was a mystery to them that He who hated sin so intensely, at the same time felt the most tender, compassionate sympathy for the beings that committed sin."<sup>1</sup>

This is the kind of humility into which Christ wishes to lead us. Humility makes a person less arrogant. It makes one more human, more soft, and more pleasant. And it is this humility that Christ sought to communicate and live out when he took on human form. The issue is one of how to live before it is one that argues over fine points of faith.

### **Living free of judgmentalism**

My second illustration is found in Colossians 2:16-19. This passage, familiar to Seventh-day Adventists, talks about Sabbath and new moons and shadows. Most often it is with these issues in mind that we or others refer to this passage. Is this Paul's primary concern as he writes these words

to the Colossian congregation?

A minister of another church and I were once talking about faith and why and how we had arrived at our various points of belief. He pointed to this passage and said that Sabbath observance is no longer significant in the life of a Christian, and that Sabbath keeping is not a matter on which one should judge anybody.

We agreed that it's not for us to judge anyone. Judgment belongs to the Lord. In due course, He will judge us all, and do it with an even hand. It is first of all the matter of one human judging another that is Paul's concern in this passage, before it is the doctrinal concern as to whether or not sabbaths, religious festivals, and "New Moons" should be celebrated. Christ's powerful injunction was simple: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt. 7:1). This is the heart of the message emphasized in this passage.

The message in Colossians 2 is against judgmentalism. Paul, on his missionary journeys, was constantly plagued by individuals who came along behind him and superimposed things onto the gospel which did not belong there. They castigated those who did not accept their way of viewing things.

Some individuals spend an inordinate amount of time, energy, and money handing out spiritual assessments of their fellow travelers. Let me refer them to this quote: "Often we regard as hopeless subjects the very ones whom Christ is drawing to Himself. Were we to deal with these souls according to our imperfect judgment, it would perhaps extinguish their last hope. Many who think themselves Christians will at last be found wanting. Many will be in heaven who their neighbors supposed would never enter there. Man judges from appearance, but God judges the heart."<sup>2</sup>

Judgmentalism is alien to the mind of Christ. Spending one's time handing out spiritual judgments is destructive to relationships between people. It is personally unrewarding,

and is ultimately disgraceful to God.

"Therefore," says Paul, "as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:12, 13). Again, then, the essential emphasis of this passage is on how we live—how we view people and how in fact we treat them. It is an important and powerful description of the quality of life which must permeate the church community to which we belong. We will be stronger for it.

### Living lives of godliness

My last illustration is found in 2 Peter 3 where the apostle links our living to the second coming of Christ, where the second coming of Christ is graphically described and His coming is proclaimed as absolute fact.

While such things are lucidly and powerfully proclaimed, the emphasis of Peter's words rests also in what impact the knowledge of this fact must have upon the actual way the believer lives his or her life.

In the early church the belief in Christ's return permeated all of their thinking. And Peter says, "Since we had this knowledge that Jesus Christ will return, how is that reality impacting our lives?" We are Adventists. There is no greater reality before us than the Second Coming. That is the moment which will somehow sum up history. It marks the end of our sorrows and hurts. How does that reality impact the way we live our lives today?

Well, writes Peter, since this reality is coming speedily, you are to live "holy and godly lives" (2 Peter 3:11). The apostle is talking about lives on which the imprimatur of God is placed. Holy means a life dedicated to God, and that means Christ will be the centerpiece of my life daily. It means that as I daily make decisions about myself, my resources, and my life, I will think about Christ, His mis-

sion, and the end of time.

It means that daily I will clean up my life and make sure that I've understood the difference between right and wrong. It means that I will make an effort to be a kinder, more considerate person because that's the way Christ is. That is the meaning of holy living.

"Let us diligently study God's Word, that we may proclaim with power the message that is to be given in these last days. Many of those upon whom the light of our Savior's self-sacrificing life is shining refuse to live a life in accordance with His will. They are not willing to live a life of sacrifice for the good of others. They desire to exalt themselves."<sup>3</sup>

"A consecrated Christian life is ever shedding light and comfort and peace. It is characterized by purity, tact, simplicity, and usefulness. It is controlled by that unselfish love that sanctifies the influence. It is full of Christ and leaves a track of light wherever its possessor may go."<sup>4</sup>

That's a wonderful description. "It leaves a track of light wherever its possessor may go."

As we live in the closing moments of life on earth as we know it, with an important mission entrusted to us, what does the Lord expect of each of us? Three things come to my mind.

First, He says, "I want your lives to reflect the values I've taught you. You don't have to look elsewhere. I have taught you."

Second, He says, "I want you to be awake, sober, and alert."

Finally He says, through the prophet, "I want you to do justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly before your God." ■

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

1 Ellen G. White in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957), 7:904.

2 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 71, 72.

3 ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1904), 8:202.

4 ———, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1890), 667.

# The enigma of “unanswered” prayer

Richard W. Coffen



Richard W. Coffen is assistant to the president, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Seven-year-old Kurt and Kent had some idle time at camp meeting, so they scurried down the hill, into the valley, and into the adjacent woods. They tossed pine cones at each other, picked ferns, and raced twigs in the stream.

Tiring of such antics, they decided this was the perfect time for a baptism. Kurt would baptize Kent in the stream, and Kent would return the favor. Removing their jeans and shirts, they proceeded to baptize each other. Wriggling back into their clothing offered a challenge, but they managed.

Reaching the edge of the woods again, the boys decided to pray. After all, shouldn't the newly baptized be people of prayer? This prayer, they agreed, should request something special, so they decided they'd ask God to strike dead the next person who'd grasp the handrail while descending the outdoor flight of stairs leading into the valley.

Each boy prayed and then watched expectantly from the edge of the woods. Sure enough, elderly Mrs. Brown began descending the stairs. Alarmed, Kurt and Kent shouted at the top of their voices, "Don't touch the railing!"

Mrs. Brown squinted at them in puzzlement, grasped the handrail to steady herself, and arrived safely at the bottom. They boys watched in terror. Surely she'd drop dead any moment. But she didn't. And two very confused youngsters wandered back to their tents.

Why hadn't God answered their prayers?

Mr. Kurt Williams, who related this experience during the children's story at church, concluded by asking, "Boys and girls, did God answer Kurt's and Kent's prayers?"

The children chorused, "No."

But the storyteller begged to differ. "Of course God answered their prayers," he countered. "Sometimes God says, Yes. Sometimes He says, No. And sometimes God says, Wait."

The children looked puzzled as they returned to their pews. And I don't blame them. I thought that they'd responded with the correct answer and that the storyteller had it wrong.

## What counts as answered prayer

Perhaps I should explain what I think counts for answered prayer. Suppose Martha prays that God will heal her pancreatic cancer. The next day a headache she had been experiencing disappears, but six weeks later she dies. Did God answer Martha's prayer? I don't think so. She had not asked for relief from her headache, a possible symptom of her disease, but to be healed of her cancer. Nothing followed her prayer that corresponded remotely with her request.

If an answer to prayer makes any sense at all, it must clearly correspond with the request. Answered prayer means that God fulfilled the request. Otherwise, in the absence of divine silence anything—or nothing—could be construed as an answer to prayer. Just any event that sequentially follows a prayer does not warrant being called an answer unless it matches the request. I do not mean that God lacks the freedom to deny a particular request we make. Surely He is free to do so. We do not believe in a divine sugar daddy who simply can't say No.

The problem, however, is that with God's response to our petitions—as with so many spiritual matters—sensory feedback is sparse or nonexistent. For us to speak of answered prayer in an intelligent manner that can also build confidence, the request and the answer should more closely resemble a cause-and-effect relationship than a mere sequentially chronological association.

Christians often echo the storyteller with whom we began this discussion. However, such word games are misguided. They do God an injustice by trivializing prayer. Perhaps a Bible story can help clarify my point.

## Elijah and Ahab

After three and a half years of drought, Elijah told Ahab: "Summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel" (1 Kings 18:19)\* for a showdown between Baal and Yahweh.

Elijah ordered that two altars and two bulls be prepared and proposed that each god—Baal and Yahweh—be invoked. "The god who answers by fire—he is God" (verse 24).

All morning Baal's prophets danced and sang and cut themselves, pleading "O Baal, answer us!" (verse 26). At noon Elijah mocked them because of Baal's silence, urging them, "Shout louder! . . . Surely he is a god!" (verse 27).

Note the narrator's inspired three-fold observation: But there was (1) *no response*, (2) *no one answered*, and (3) *no one paid attention* (verse 29).

At the time of the evening sacrifice prescribed by Yahweh, Elijah took his turn. Before asking Yahweh to answer

his prayer, Elijah had the slain bull and the entire altar drenched with water. With a short, no-nonsense prayer, he pleaded, "Answer me, O Lord, answer me" (verse 37).

And Yahweh sent fire that "burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also . . . the water in the trench" (verse 38). This is probably the most dramatic answer to prayer in all Scripture. What took place—the answer to prayer—corresponded exactly with Elijah's request.

If we were to assume with Kurt Williams that God always answers prayer, sometimes saying Yes but also saying No or Wait, then we might be constrained to acknowledge that Baal *did* answer. He wasn't busy or deep in thought or sleeping. Rather, his answer was a simple No! and Elijah was too quick to claim that Baal was a powerless nonentity.

If one accepts the logic of the theological position told to those children at my church, it would be

possible that all the prayers, those of Elijah as well as those of Baal's prophets, were answered on Mount Carmel. However, none of us would find that conclusion acceptable. Neither would we believe that the inspired writer was wrong when he stated: "There was no response; no one answered" (verse 26; cf. verse 29).

As I see it, if God truly does answer a given prayer request, we will have some objective way to know He answered. Roger Morneau's books on answered prayer would have been a failure if at the end of each account Roger exclaimed, "Praise God! Another answered prayer. God said No." None of us would find such a book satisfying.

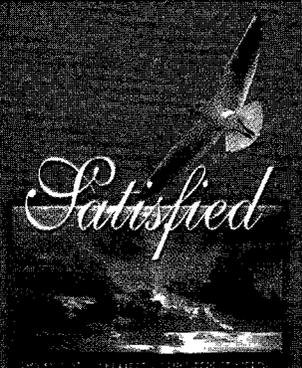
The popular theology expressed in Sally Wong's children's story is problematic because it makes a verifiable answer to prayer impossible unless the answer is Yes. Otherwise, anything that happens—or does not happen, as the case may be—can be twisted into

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an answer to prayer. It turns God's response to prayer into a matter of "Tails I win; heads you lose."

It is true, of course, that sometimes we do not recognize, at least at first, the unexpected way God may take in specifically answering a particular prayer. Only later do we see that He has answered in a surprising way, one we would never have thought He would use in connection with our request.

Yet, if we believe that prayer genuinely makes a difference, then we should have evidence for that belief—evidence that is specific and compelling. That's why many Christians keep a prayer journal, writing down the particular request and the date they made it. Later they inscribe the date when that request met with a specifically verifiable answer. Such prayer journals help faith grow—if the entries for requests and those for answers are equivalent.

That's why the writer of 1 Kings could point out that Baal did not answer the prayers of his 450 prophets on Mount Carmel, whereas Yahweh did indeed answer Elijah's prayer. There was empirical evidence that

Elijah got what he prayed for. There was no sensory data that could justify acknowledging an answer to the prayers uttered by the prophets of Baal. Notice the repetition in 1 Kings 18 of words like "answer," "response," "no answer," "no response," and "paid attention."

### Does God say No?

Perhaps we should not be afraid to admit that sometimes God does not answer our prayers. Sometimes we pray foolishly. Sometimes we pray childishly. Sometimes we pray selfishly. Scripture is not afraid to admit the possibility of unanswered prayer. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss" (James 4:3, KJV).

It's possible, I suppose, to deduce from James 4:3 that God does respond to those prayers that we "ask amiss" with a No rather than with a Yes. And if we had sensory data supporting a divine denial, we could say correctly that God replied with a No. But generally we don't have such empirical evidence. As a result, on a practical basis answers such as "No" or "Wait for God" really can't count as answered prayers. Only a Yes with sen-

sory data that corresponds to the request can count for answered prayer.

Although it's true that sensory experience isn't the only approach to reality, the fact is that the five senses, created by God, constitute the primary way we discern reality and are most often the very senses we are requesting be impacted by answered prayer. Empiricism typically works well with physical reality but falls short when it comes to spiritual reality. However, empiricism does happen to be the method we use in our everyday experience. That's why we hope to experience evidence that comes close to being empirical in nature even when it comes to our religious life. Empiricism is the road to the knowledge of answered prayer, even as it was when God honored Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel.

No wonder the apostle Paul felt the need to explain that when we don't know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit offers a prayer for us because God knows the Spirit's mind, who prays in harmony with God's will (Rom. 8:26, 27).

I infer from these words that our prayers are often "amiss" (to use the expression in James 4:3), but that God Himself, through His Spirit, recasts our prayers so God can indeed hear and answer them. "Weakness is characteristic of the human condition. . . . Because of such weakness Christians know not for what they should pray or how they should pray, as Origen interpreted this verse."<sup>1</sup>

Prayer has dynamics that remain mysterious, sometimes seemingly impossible to understand. Let's not, in our zeal, muddy our already imperfect understanding by undermining the efficacy of prayer through platitudes that make no sense. Otherwise, we inadvertently do God an injustice and nudge thoughtful people toward skepticism. ■

<sup>1</sup>Except as otherwise stated, all Scripture passages are from the New International Version.

1 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible on Romans*, 518.

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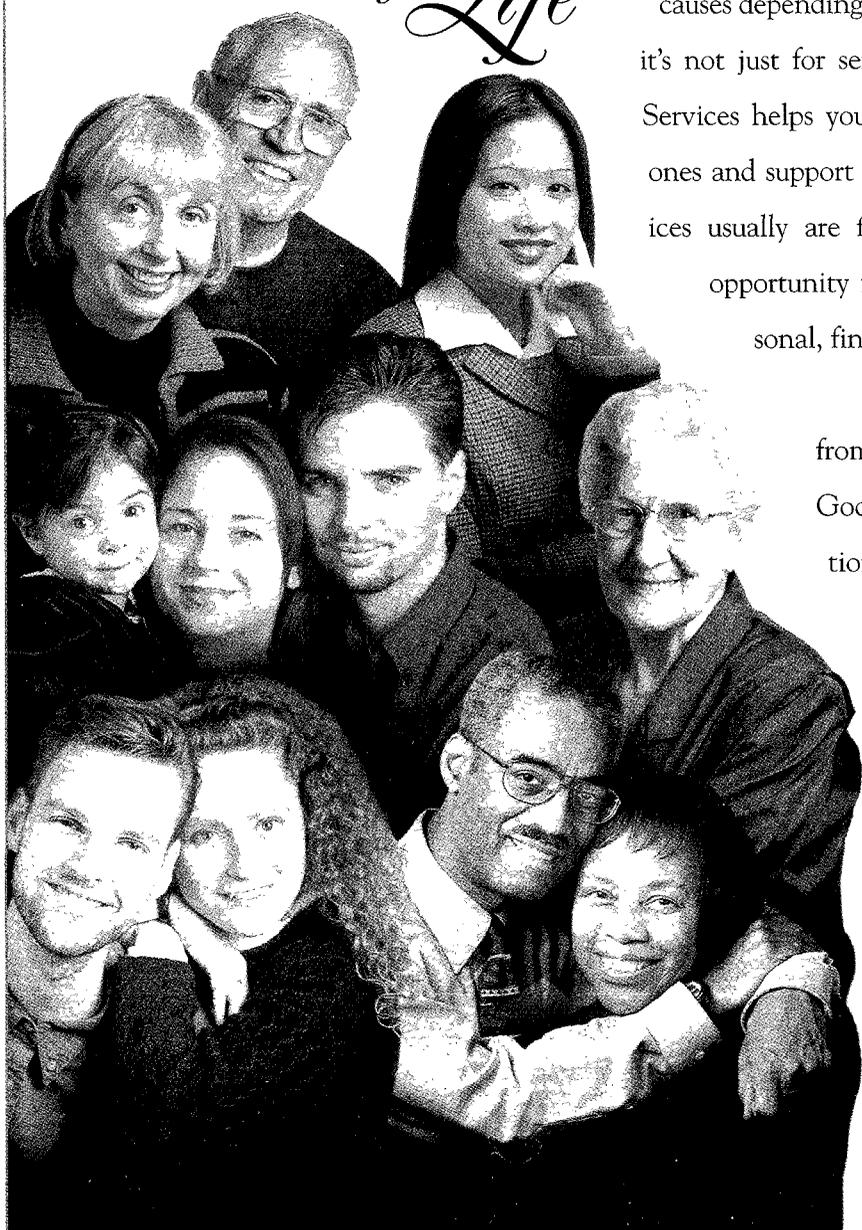
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# Church discipline the redemptive way

Tim Crosby

Imagine a group of people at a picnic watching a man walk blindfolded toward the edge of a steep cliff. A brief debate ensues as to whether someone should intervene, but the consensus is that it's nobody's business, and so the unfortunate man falls over the cliff. There's only one word for the onlooking crowd: *cruel*.

Now imagine a church in which the members hold a similar theory of church discipline. Don't confront. Don't interfere. Don't embarrass. Don't censure. Don't upset. Don't meddle. The same term applies: *cruel*. But sadly, that's not unusual.

For most churches today, church discipline is a forgotten art. Many pastors find it an uphill battle, because church members tend to think of discipline as unloving.

Linda (not her real name) was the daughter of an officer of a church I pastored. She decided to live with her boyfriend without the benefit of marriage. This young woman was well liked in the church. She was not promiscuous or wanton; her sin was much less serious than sins I have seen tolerated in some churches. After talking with her father, I asked one of our more compassionate deaconesses to visit her. Later I took one of the elders to visit her. She expressed her determination to continue in her present course, but said she could understand what we had to do. When the church, in a business meeting of this conservative congregation, moved to dis-



Tim Crosby is a freelance writer in Hagerstown, Maryland.

fellowship her, roughly one-third of those present voted against the motion.

## Disciplinary excesses

Perhaps our reluctance to discipline is in part a reaction to certain excesses of the past, in which overly zealous leaders, eager to "clean up the church" and unwilling to expend the necessary energy to go through the proper steps, wreaked havoc on some of the weaker members.

For the most part, however, disciplinary excesses are a thing of the past. Few churches today are willing to endure the pain of confrontation. Scandalous behavior tends to be the subject of private gossip, but corporately it tends to be swept under the ecclesiastical rug.

Ironically, the sports world often does a better job of disciplining than the church. Sports officials understand that the integrity of the sport is undermined by athletes who take drugs, gamble on the game, or merely stay out too late, and such infractions bring swift penalties. We are not nearly as careful about the integrity of the body of Christ.

I believe our reticence to discipline results from misconceptions that have been repeated so often as to become conventional wisdom on the subject. The whole topic deserves some demythologizing.

## Myth 1: "Leave the tares with the wheat"

In His parable of the tares, Jesus was not talking about the church, for He explicitly says that the field represents the world (Matt. 13:38). The parable does not speak about unconverted sinners in the church, but addresses the issue of why God allows evil in the world.

If one wishes to apply this parable to the church homiletically, as Ellen White does, then remember that Jesus said to leave the tares (plants that look just like wheat), *not the briars*. Ellen White never understood this passage to require the church to retain those who "persist in open sin."<sup>1</sup>

## Myth 2: "The church is a hospital for sinners"

This adage suggests that the church is a rehabilitation unit for sinners rather than a museum for saints. Of course, if the church were not a place where sick people find healing, you and I could not belong. Christ said,

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).<sup>\*</sup> But the metaphor has limits. A hospital works like this: The sicker you are, the quicker you are admitted. When you get well, you leave. Does the church work the same way? Hopefully not.

The museum metaphor (the church as God’s showcase of grace) has greater scriptural support. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. . . . Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:9-12).

What people see in the church when they look in from the outside should cause them to glorify God. The church should be a place where one can find not perfection, but ample evidence of God’s redeeming grace.

Maybe we need a new metaphor. Perhaps the church is more like an auto shop where battered cars are taken. Although there may be grease on the floor and beat-up wrecks all around, there are some beautifully restored cars coming out of that shop to take their place in auto exhibits.

### Myth 3: “Christians should not judge others”

What is true individually is not true corporately. As individuals Christians are commanded to judge not (Matt. 7:1, 2). But the corporate church body is *commanded to pass judgment upon its members* (1 Cor. 5:12) while refraining from judging outsiders. The church has a duty, an obligation, to deal with sinners within its ranks.

When there is no corporate expres-

sion of rebuke, some members will turn a cold shoulder toward the offender, feeling obligated to express disapproval in some way. But a corporate response frees individual members to befriend the fallen without feeling that the standards of the church have been compromised. Since outsiders are exempt from church judgment, giving the offender the status of an outsider frees the members to treat them as they would any other interested prospect and woo them back again.

### Myth 4: “The church shoots its wounded”

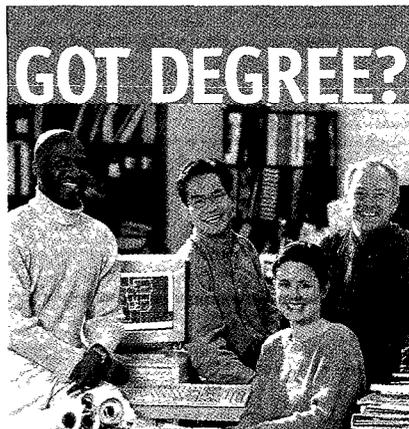
Church discipline is not shooting the wounded; it is *treating* the wounded. And like many medical treatments, sometimes it involves pain. The tragedy is when no treatment—no discipline—is administered; the wounds fester and poison the system. We should not expect the one being disciplined to like it. All discipline is painful at first (Heb. 12:11).

Actually, it is misleading to speak of those who willfully and flagrantly violate church standards as “the wounded.” In fact, they may actually be the wounders of the church; for a little yeast soon leavens the whole batch of dough (1 Cor. 5:6).

A friend tells of one of the first churches he pastored, in which prodigious amounts of hard work produced no results. The pastor and his members were praying, visiting, and giving Bible studies, but God’s blessing did not rest upon the church, and there were no baptisms. After several years of this, it was discovered that the head elder was living in adultery. After the matter was dealt with in a loving way and the elder’s name was removed from the books, the church began to grow.

A time comes when spiritual negligence so leavens the whole lump that the group itself falls into apostasy. God’s blessing cannot rest on a church that tolerates blatant sin in its members, and particularly in its leaders.

*continued on page 27*



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# Mavericks on the payroll?

Paul Cone and Lawrence Downing



Paul Cone, Ph.D. (deceased), was dean of the University of Southern California's School of Business.



Lawrence Downing, D.Min., is senior pastor of the White Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church, Los Angeles, California.

Pastor Joe is a dynamic and creative leader. Through his charismatic personality and the ability to relate with his congregation, it has more than doubled over the past four years. He conducts two services each Sabbath, as well as a Friday night prayer and praise service. Under his leadership the congregation has formed a specialized ministry staff, hired a music/worship coordinator, a drama coach, and a small musical group.

Then the congregation learns that the church bank account is overdrawn by more than \$58,000. The money has not been properly accounted. Pastor Joe is terminated.

Pastor Jim's congregation has been very successful in making the worship service come alive. People drive for miles to attend. Students from the nearby academy and college have made Pastor Jim's church the "in" place for young people. His preaching emphasizes vision and relationship.

His concern is for his local ministry. "The mission fields," he tells his congregation, "are doing better than we are. It's time we keep our money close to home, fund our own needs. The North American church is the mission field today." He has let it be known that people can direct their tithe to the local congregation.

The church split when the conference relieved Pastor Jim of his pastoral duties.

The above two accounts have been played

out in Seventh-day Adventist churches in North America. Church administrators have not always appreciated the innovating and creative pastor. Those who do not fit the traditional ecclesiastical role are not always welcome. At the same time, administrators are charged with the responsibility to maintain control and follow established policy. If they start making exceptions here and there, the floodgates could open and chaos ensue.

What, then, should administrators do with Pastors Joe and Jim? Does the church have a place for the "maverick," and if so, how can administrators successfully manage it so the creative person will maintain a positive relationship with church leadership? How can administrators enhance the creative individual's successful ministry?

## Role of the maverick

The adage goes, "When two people always think alike, one is unnecessary." How true. Most change and progress are started by a few who think differently.

In the business world, 90 percent of the innovations are developed by the 10 percent of the employees or by small businesses. In the religious world, a Martin Luther, a John Calvin, or an Ellen White change the way the world thinks. Daniel, Joseph, and Jesus Himself were each written off, at one time or another, as mavericks.

Of course, organizations thrive on stability, tradition, and assured results. Managers like stability. It is essential for administrators to exercise control; this is proper management. But what happens when administrators exercise their power of control only after an event has brought undesirable ends? Effective administrators practice control before, during, and after the event. They do this through personal plans and review, professional training, and allocations of resources to research and development (product, people, method).

Before-the-event control includes: strategic and operating planning; organization by project and teamwork; careful selection and placement, rewards (both psychological and financial) for good performance, not penalties for bad performance.

When the above components are in place, successful administrators put the dollars where the payoff is greatest: people. People are the only resource that grows more valuable over time.

Successful corporations allocate 9 to 12 percent of their total revenue annually for resources and development. These companies spend their budgeted amount in increments, so that it is evenly distributed over time. People should be trained to respond to found needs and to positive peer pressure.

Capitalize on the potential excitement generated when new ideas are successfully implemented and plans fulfilled.

### Terminating the "best and the brightest"

Creative and innovative people frequently are a management challenge. Managing creative people may at times be like trying to shepherd a herd of cats. At the same time, creative people are essential for an organization. When these brightest and best pastors are terminated, the impact can be devastating. The negative fallout that follows pastoral termination is not confined within geographical boundaries.

Within the context of the Adventist Church, the three major components necessary for successful ministry are maintaining a positive relationship between (1) the pastor, (2) the parish members, and (3) church administrators. A glitch between any of these components threatens the whole.

A recent *Ministry* article proposed that vision is the key to congregational revitalization. The visionary pastor seeks to implement his or her vision only to find it is incompatible with established policy. Result: (too frequently) pastoral discipline or termination.

The local congregation is financially impaired. Many churches have no funds available to carry out specialized ministry or projects. We do not have the resources to compete with the other local churches. Subsidies for education, and funds passed through to higher organizations, take inordinate amounts of money from the local congregation with little return,

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aside from the pastor's salary. In some cases, less than ten cents on the dollar actually goes to the designated project. The rest is consumed in administrative expense. Solution: keep more funds in the local church; do not send them on. Result: (too frequently) pastoral discipline or termination.

### Generally accepted observations

What are some answers? First, it should be affirmed that there is advantage to diversity among a work force. An organization is strengthened when there exists a mix of personalities and skills. Progress and change come from nonconformists, not the majority. Survival demands innovation, new approaches, and new methods. Leaders will have the power to think (plan creatively) and do (execute creatively).<sup>1</sup>

It is important that service organizations attract and keep creative and innovative people. Unless this occurs,

the organization is doomed to fitter away into dogmatic irrelevancy. We can, and often do, gear ourselves to affirm the status quo and thus accept mediocrity as normative. The innovators challenge and change this rule.

Since innovation is one of the significant functions of managers, it is important that the innovators, especially in a service organization, are nurtured and retained. Without them, the organization really does stagnate and become irrelevant. Competent managers will provide an environment that will enhance the gifts the creative person brings to the organization and seek ways to ensure that the creative person functions in ways that are consistent with, and beneficial to, the purpose and goals of the organization. It is a team effort, with each party sharing equal responsibility but each having a separate role.

### Leaders and change

Some of the most difficult ques-

tions leaders face relate to change: what to change, when to change, what not to change, and how to successfully manage change that occurs.

No question, organizations change. Yet do they do it by intention or by default? Successful leaders initiate change by intent, mediocre leaders by default. Ministers who initiate change are frequently viewed as suspect, or worse, heretical. Some have paid a high price for their bold ventures.

On the other hand, change for the sake of change is irresponsible. Making changes without doing your own strategic planning is a high-risk venture. *Management has the responsibility to see that change takes place within the context of, and in harmony with, the organization's set of values.* The effective leader is one who has the ability and willingness to articulate this value base clearly and consistently to those on the organization team.

Whenever change in the parish is

considered or implemented, it is to be consistent with the church's basic values and teachings. Unsurpassed and unresolved value differences and conflicts will undermine processes, stifle motivation, and instill overt and covert divergent perspectives on goals, programs, and policies. The resulting dysfunction between administration and pastors will be a continual source of problems, waste, mistrust, and inefficiencies.

### Dynamic operating control

Control is one of the most sensitive issues within the church today. Control is not a matter of technique or power. Control begins with the selection of top-quality managers and employees and then providing them development opportunities and a favorable administrative climate. Self-control by competent people in an organization structure consisting of small teams or groups that assist the individual to perform better, is the

desirable operating-control goal.

People work well when they have opportunity to interact with their peers. Peers, more than others, have earned the right to sand off the rough edges, to challenge ideas, proposals, or current behavior. In the present Adventist structure, we do not provide opportunity for consistent, quality, or intentional peer interaction. More often than not, peer interaction is discouraged. We are set up to be competitive, distrustful, and isolated.

Adventist clergy are basically formally accountable to no one. Theoretically, we answer to the president. In practice, this is a reality only when a problem exists. Until then, we are most often on our own. The establishment of a peer group guided by designated and trained leaders will go far to establish accountability and head off crisis situations before they blow up.

### Conclusion

The center for action is at the parish, the local church level. When the creative powers of the church are directed toward the parish, then—and only then—can we expect to experience dynamic, creative, and positive change. When the parish becomes the center for creative action, the brain drain that has siphoned off or excluded our brightest and best has the potential to reverse. It is our recommendation that we have innovative people at the parish to develop creative strategic operating plans that are submitted to the administration for approval and have those at the parish level work with a team to implement the plans to achieve superior performance.

Only this way will the Pastor Jim's and Joe's talents be used to strengthen the church as a whole instead of siphoning away precious talents and people, as well as building a wall of distrust between administration and the pastorate. ■

1 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1903), 17, 18.

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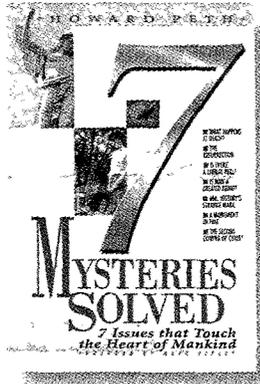
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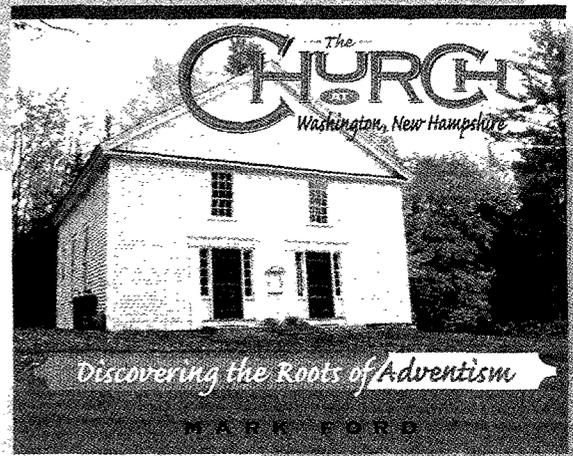
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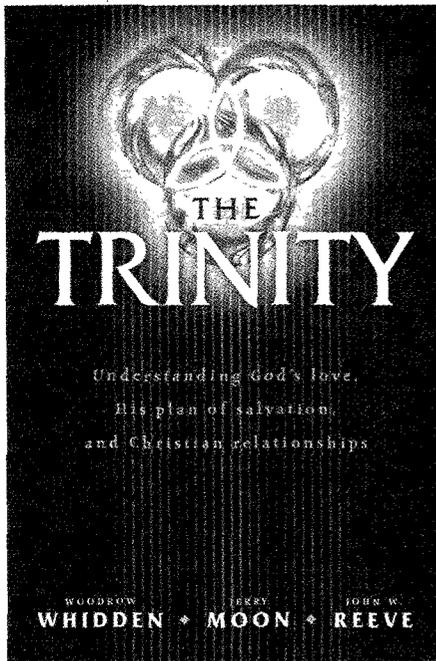


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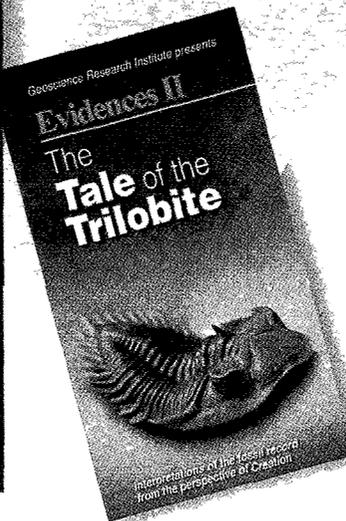
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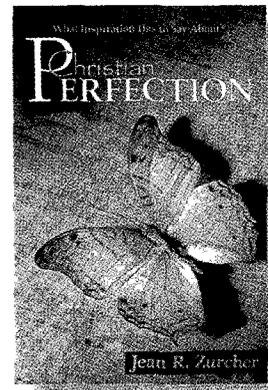
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# Adventist identity in a changing world

Rick Ferret

**P**astor, I became a Seventh-day Adventist after a preacher came to our town and held evangelistic meetings. He told the people that Saturday, not Sunday, was the day of worship. He told us that Jesus was coming soon, and I was so excited. I'm 93 years old now and Jesus hasn't come."

"What does it mean to be a Seventh-day Adventist today? Our denomination—its structures, institutions and, dare I say it, the bureaucracy—is huge. We've always believed that our church is the remnant church, with 'the truth' that everyone needs to hear. But doesn't our message also need to penetrate the secularized societies of our time?"

"I want to make a difference in the world, that's why I'm studying to be a nurse. I want to help people. I hate the way society ignores issues like injustice, minority rights, environmental and ecological problems. What sort of world do we want to leave behind for others? What can we as a church do about these things?"

## A sect or a church?

These comments illustrate some of the tensions that exist especially among Adventists in Western cultures. Given this mood, the words of former General Conference President, Robert H. Pierson in 1978 are even more relevant today. Following the announcement of his retirement, Elder Pierson delivered "An

Earnest Appeal" to denominational leaders and personnel, urging them to retain Adventism's distinctive profile and resist at all costs, taking the path of so many others and evolving from a dynamic sectarian movement into a church.

"A sect," he said, "is often begun by a charismatic leader with tremendous drive and commitment . . . it arises as a protest against worldliness and formalism in a church. . . . Each member makes a personal decision to join it and knows what he believes. There is little organization or property, and there are few buildings. The group has strict controls on behavior . . . then it passes on to the second generation.

"With growth there comes a need for organization and buildings. . . . Children born into the movement do not have to make personal decisions to join it. They do not need to hammer out their own positions. These have been worked out for them. . . . In the third generation, organization develops and institutions are established. The need is seen for schools to pass on the faith of the fathers. . . . Members have to be exhorted to live up to the standards. . . . Leaders study methods of propagating their faith, sometimes employing extrinsic rewards as motivation for service by the members. . . .

"In the fourth generation there is much machinery; the number of administrators increases while the number of workers at the grass roots level becomes proportionately less. Great church councils are held to define doctrine. . . . The movement seeks to become 'relevant' to contemporary society. The group enjoys complete acceptance by the world. *The sect becomes church.*"

Elder Pierson concluded: "This must not happen to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This will not happen to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is not just another church—it is God's church . . . this is God's last church with God's last message."<sup>1</sup>

"God's church" or not, it's not hard to see what's happening to our movement is exactly what Elder Pierson feared.

## Denominational expansion

Seventh-day Adventists are one of the fastest growing Christian denominations in the world; about 2,100 plus people join each day. From its humble sectarian beginnings of about 3,500 American members in 1863,

*Rick Ferret is a pastor in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.*

when first organized, Adventist membership as of 2001 encircles the globe and totals over 12 million, with nine out of ten members living in 205 countries outside North America.

The denomination has one of the most extensive Protestant educational systems in the world (5,846 schools, colleges, and universities) and one of the most comprehensive networks of health-care providers (166 hospitals; 371 medical launches and medivac planes; 30 orphanages; and 117 homes for the elderly).

Adventists speak in at least 725 languages and another 1,000 dialects, leading to the establishment of 56 church-owned printing plants and editorial offices worldwide. Globally, Adventists have 27 food industries and 10 media centers. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA) serves in 124 countries. And these statistics convey only a part of what makes up the work of the denomination.

### **Defining identity as time goes on**

While no one could question the value represented by the incredible growth and development of the Adventist denomination, we must ask, What defines the Seventh-day Adventist Church? What terms actually identify it? What is the mission of the Church today? Many would suggest that we define who we are (our identity) by what we believe and preach, those distinctive doctrines that differentiate us from other denominations.

Charles Teel, Jr. suggests an alternative way of identifying the Church. ". . . the form of a religious movement (its organizational structure) no less than its content (belief system) communicates the essence of that movement."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, we are more than what we teach and preach. James Gustafson sums up the tension of the religious institution: "The vessel pro-

vides a parameter which holds, preserves, and gives shape to the treasured oils; yet any vessel is by definition limiting as well. The same form that preserves and protects also imprisons and imperils."<sup>3</sup>

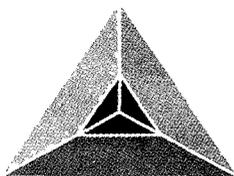
Mission is the stated reason for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Yet as the denomination faces a new millennium, it finds itself (particularly in Western cultures) bedding down within society, illustrating that the progression of sectarianism towards the full church status Elder Pierson feared, is well underway.

The Church's original mission was predicated on the proclamation of Jesus' imminent return. The problem is, of course, that Jesus hasn't returned as originally expected. How do we face this fact?

The continual elapse of time has, along with other influences, spawned the maturing fruits of secularization, disorientation, and institutionalism.

George Knight, history professor at

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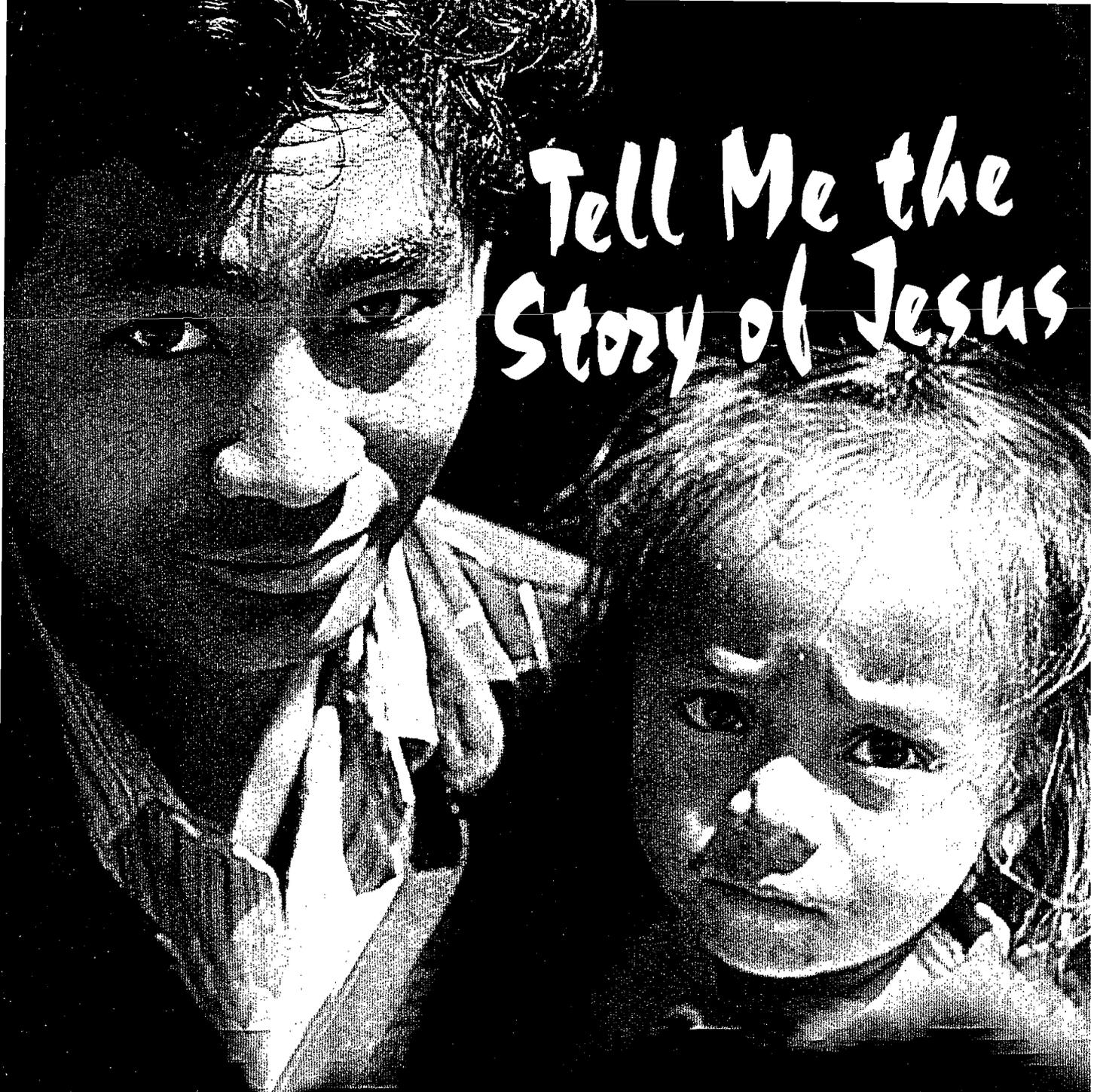
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Andrews University, suggests that there is a sense in which failure was built into the very success of the young denomination. "That is, in order to preserve the message of the imminent coming, institutions based on continuity and semi-permanence had to be erected. And in the process subtle and not-so-subtle transformations took place."<sup>4</sup>

Michael Pearson describes the Adventist dilemma of Christ's unfulfilled imminent second coming as an ambiguity. Adventists experience the tension produced by the dual imperatives, "Prepare to meet thy God," and "Occupy till I come" (Amos 4:12 and Luke 19:13).<sup>5</sup>

Pearson recognizes that there is something awkward, at least at first, about an organization that, on the one hand, proclaims that Christ's return is imminent, and, on the other regularly engages in the construction of institutions costing millions of dollars. One can understand Gaustad's observation that, while Adventists were expecting a kingdom of God from the heavens, they have worked diligently for one on earth.<sup>6</sup>

Michael Pearson described the dilemma this way: "The survival of the 'remnant' [church] has been ensured by the mechanism of institutionalization, but that which has survived appears to some to bear little resemblance to the original."<sup>7</sup>

The perceived delay in Christ's coming is reflected in the life of the Church in a very pragmatic way. The longer the delay in the fulfillment of the Advent hope, the greater is the emphasis on occupation rather than preparation. The longer the occupation, the greater the tendency to embrace the concerns of the world and to diversify the interests and the mission of the Church.

The increasing demand that comes from rising generations of Adventists, that their church address itself to issues of a socio-political and ethical nature, is part of a pursuit of relevance in face of an advent that hasn't materialized as originally expected.<sup>8</sup>



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### Adventist pioneers struggled also

James and Ellen White, with other Sabbatarian Adventist believers, faced the same tension but in a different context. One year after the 1844 disappointment, James continued to believe that Jesus would return in October 1845.

He once chided a young couple intending to marry because their wedding would be a denial of their faith in the Second Advent. At that time marriage was considered by many to be a wile of the devil. This view, James White later said, was held by "most of our brethren," since "such a step seemed to contemplate years of life in this world."<sup>9</sup> Twelve months later James married Ellen Harmon. His stated reason was that "God had a work for both of us to do, and he saw that we could greatly assist each other in that work."<sup>10</sup>

What had happened in Elder White's thinking? A paradigm shift of sorts. Though never denying the perspective of the immediacy of Christ's coming, early Adventists had begun to discern more fully the implications of "occupying until" the Lord did in fact come. As a result, "They took the

first step toward the institutionalization of Adventism. If the end was not to come as soon as they first expected, they had to take adequate steps to prepare themselves in the interim."<sup>11</sup> They did not abandon their faith; rather, they were able to accommodate change as required.

Change is certain; the way a church and we as individual Christians relate to change is vital. Our difficulty is to maintain balance.

### Relating to change

George Knight declares that Adventism must relate interactively with change. He discusses three negative ways of relating to change that are being experienced within Adventism today.

1. One is to live in the past in order to preserve "a golden age." Such an approach disregards the actual realities that make up the thrust of the change, (note Elder Pierson's remarks concerning church/sect). Over time the proponents of this outlook lose their authority and their voice in the current generation because they have lost contact with that generation.

The clarion call is to retire to an era when all was "black and white" and

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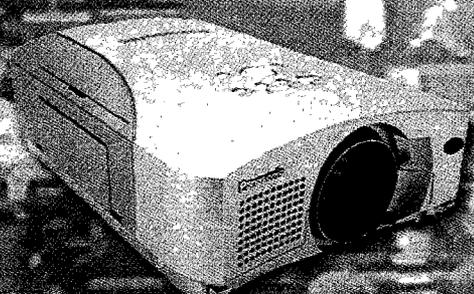
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"the church knew for certain what it was about." This approach tends to appeal to those disengaged by modern society and traumatized by changes occurring within the Adventist Church. They desire to live in the past, where they perceive it was "good and safe."

2. A second dysfunctional way of relating to change and history is to *focus almost exclusively on the future*. This view loses contact with present needs and realities.

3. A third way is to *focus entirely on the present, disengaging from both the past and any meaningful hopes for the future*. The buzz word is "relevance." Every generation has stressed relevance. This alone, however, is not enough. "When Adventism or any other Christian body loses contact with either the historic past or the predicted future it will suffer disorientation in the present."<sup>12</sup>

## Doctrine and deed

The temptation today is to mute

the preaching of an Adventist end-time apocalyptic message and, instead, to busy ourselves with developing more institutions and structures to assist in "doing something useful" in the world.

If this happens, the primary focus of the Church becomes one of improving the present world rather than including and stressing hope of the Second Advent. If this happens, the Seventh-day Adventist Church will have come full circle, having traveled from the extreme of immediacy alone to the opposite extreme of occupancy.

For some Church members the issue can be defined as a matter of "doctrine or deed." Others suggest that it should be "doctrine alone"; others that "deeds" are sufficient. Perhaps "doctrine and deed" requires further assessment.

Knight summarizes the tension well: ". . . Adventism could evolve into the ultimate eschatological contradiction—a religious body that has

immensely succeeded in institutionalizing for preaching the advent near, but a church that has lost the meaning of the very name that originally provided its identity."<sup>13</sup>

And so Teel suggests that our church face the twin paradoxes of form and content. The paradox of form envisions a confrontation by the demands of change, commitment, and spontaneity which characterized the movement's first love; and the demand for systematic order and structure that will ensure the movement's continuity.

At the same time, the denomination is faced with the paradox of content. This paradox demands a return to perceived historic Adventist doctrine that is encased in time, a community detached from the real world with eyes firmly fixed on the Second Advent, over against the real demands for witnessing within society and framing an affirmation of faith within the contemporary social order.<sup>14</sup>

Yes, a prophetic remnant is indeed

one which proclaims the Word, the doctrine, and truth—but it is much more. It is indeed a remnant church offering an alternative belief system—but that same remnant church is more than just a belief system.

It is community, human interaction, a social integration of wholeness, structures, and institutions. Our structures and institutions are indicators of our corporate identity alongside and contributing to what we teach and preach.

Thus the historical beastly powers of Revelation are able to retain their original interpretation and validity, but not to the exclusion of other contemporary beasts in our midst which include oppression, injustice, nonreconciliation, persecution, child abuse, sexual and environmental abuse, and a host of modern Babylonian institutions which rail against humankind, and which the Adventist Church, including its structures and institutions, must strongly oppose.

### Creative tension

If our Christian identity is any indicator, we need to see that our existence as Christians will be a continuing seesaw of “creative tension.” The temptation is to be led into one of the three exits mentioned above.

But if the Seventh-day Adventist Church loses its ability to face change dynamically, it will soon be ready for the museum of ecclesiastical antiquity; “it will have evolved from the likeness of the new wine skin that allowed it to expand and meet the needs of people, to the likeness of a crusty old wine skin that has lost the flexible dynamic that made it successful in the first place.”<sup>15</sup>

Change for change’s sake is, indeed, unnecessary; at the same time, change in this world is an undeniable present reality. Creative tension can be exciting. For when we relate maturely to the challenges of a changing world, we are, in a real sense, establishing a meaningful

identity in the present.

It is valid and necessary to interpret the past in a way that informs both the present and future. At the same time, we must not be absorbed by the past or the future to the detriment of the present. Creative tension does not equal compromise; it seeks to balance past, present, and future.

We must be careful or, as Elder Pierson warned, the sect will become a church. Or has it already done so? ❑

- 1 Robert H. Pierson, “An Earnest Appeal from the Retiring President of the General Conference,” *Review and Herald*, 155 (October 26, 1978), 10.
- 2 Charles Teel, Jr., “Withdrawing Sect, Accommodating Church, Prophesying Remnant: Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Adventism.” Paper presented at the 1980 Theological Consultation for Seventh-day Adventist Administrators and Religion Scholars, 3.
- 3 James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
- 4 George R. Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1995), 153.
- 5 Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventists and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 21.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., 22.
- 9 Letters and articles from James White. Cited in Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom*, 150.
- 10 James and Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (1888 ed.), 126, 238.
- 11 Knight, 151.
- 12 Ibid., 158, 159.
- 13 Ibid., 163.
- 14 Teel, 52.
- 15 Knight, 166.

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# GraceLink: Linking children with Christ

René Alexenko  
Evans

Something exciting is happening in children's Sabbath Schools around the world. Here is a sampling of the things people have been saying about this dynamic new approach to Children's Sabbath School.

*Sabbath School leaders:* "The children are enthusiastic about Sabbath School attendance, and some parents are already pressing for it to be in Arabic" (Cyprus).

"With these new lessons I have gone from 5-10 students to 20+ students. I have eight volunteers. I believe they are from parents and adults visiting the class and seeing the kids having so much fun while they learn" (Georgia, USA)

"All I can say is *Wow!* What a cool way of teaching. Thank you" (Iowa, USA).

"The children love to be able to experience the lessons. They get a chance to live the stories and they remember them better that way" (Iceland).

"While working in Lebanon, one of our concerns was getting the children to Sabbath School on time. When we began using the GraceLink readiness suggestions, children were pushing their parents to get to Sabbath School early. We started 30 minutes early for the eager children, as English was a second or third language for [some of them]. We were thrilled when after only a few weeks, all the children came early and Sabbath School was so successful that folks invited their non-

Adventist friends to come" (Missionary).

*Parents and grandparents:* "My grandchildren had not been to church in a while; their parents had virtually stopped coming. Since the GraceLink lessons have started, the children enjoy Sabbath School so much that their parents have started bringing them again" (California, USA).

"My children love to read and do their GraceLink primary lessons every evening. Our family worships have been given a new vitamin injection with this new GraceLink material, and my husband and I have also learned so much" (Finland).

"My two young boys have not liked their Sabbath School class for a while. Since we've started attending a church that uses the GraceLink materials for kids, they can hardly wait for Sabbath School. But the best part is that as a result of this new Sabbath School class, they are really excited about the Bible—always studying it now and asking me questions" (from a bulletin board forum).

*Children:* "We had such an interesting and fun Bible study today. I want to read the story again" (Finland).

"It helps me come closer to God" (13-year-old, West Virginia, USA).

"My friend came to Sabbath School with me and said that Sabbath School is a lot better than Sunday School at her church" (Junior, Tennessee, USA).

The subject of all these comments is a brand-new set of 624 Sabbath School lessons for children from birth through age 14. The new curriculum, called GraceLink, was first introduced at the Junior-Teen level in the year 2000. Primary followed the next year, and Kindergarten and Beginner's lessons were introduced this year, 2002.

## Why GraceLink?

The roots of the GraceLink curriculum go back to the ValueGenesis studies the Seventh-day Adventist Church conducted in the late 1980s. Those studies showed that a sizeable majority of Adventist youth had poorly developed faith, did not understand the good news of the gospel, and believed their salvation was basically determined by their conduct.

Church leaders looked at that information and compared it to the existing Sabbath School curriculum. Most of the lessons were 20-to-25 years old and had received only minor face-lifts since being introduced.



René Alexenko Evans  
is a freelance writer  
from Franklin,  
Tennessee.

Rather than focusing on one Bible story and point, Sabbath School time was divided into program time and story time, with neither of these activities having much to do with the other. Besides this, the entire curriculum was ancient compared to current educational theory and practice.

Next, Church leaders looked at the children. They've changed. Just ask a teacher who's been in the classroom for 30 years. Blame it on television, video games, lousy parenting, divorce and remarriage, "noisy" environments, or a host of other factors, but children today have shorter attention spans; inferior reading, writing, and oral language skills.

On top of this, when compared with children in the 1970s, as a rule, today's child has a reduced ability to concentrate and absorb information.<sup>1</sup> We may not like it and we may abhor the causes, but the fact remains—these are the kids who come to Sabbath School and whom we must

reach on Sabbath morning.

Then, in 1995, research among children's leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church indicated both a widespread desire for new Sabbath School materials and a surprisingly large number of churches that were turning to non-Adventist sources for religious education materials. If you add to these concerns the fact that 50 percent of Adventist children in North America (more in other parts of the world) do not attend Adventist schools, a real crisis emerges.

Church leaders soon realized that the Church weekly children's program lacked something. In 1996 the General Conference Sabbath School World Curriculum Committee accepted a proposal for a new Sabbath School curriculum. Thus, GraceLink.

### What's new?

1. *International collaboration.* GraceLink is a ground-breaking project in several ways. From the very

beginning it involved Sabbath School and children's ministries leaders from each world division of the Church. Some 60 writers from around the globe met at the initial writer's conference in 1997, and about a third of all the writers on all levels have continued to come from outside the United States. The writers have strived to create lessons with international appeal by focusing on experiences and emotions that cross cultural boundaries.

2. *Faith dynamics.* Each lesson in GraceLink is centered around one of four dynamics of the Christian faith. The dynamic changes each month.

*Grace* lessons, to begin with, emphasize what God has done for us. This includes Christ's life and death for us, and includes the love, forgiveness, and acceptance we have in Christ.

Grace can be summed up by saying "God loves me."

*Worship* lessons center on our response to God's grace. Worship is

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presented as a total commitment to God and includes obedience, Sabbath keeping, faithfulness in tithe and offerings, as well as corporate worship and praise. "I love God" is the foundation of worship.

*Community* lessons stress the idea that members of God's family love and care for each other. Community includes the family at home as well as the wider Church family. Community reinforces the value "We love each other."

*Service* takes that love and extends it to the wider world of nonbelievers. It includes witnessing and evangelism and ways we can help other people.

The idea behind service is to make disciples out of nonbelievers, because "We love you too."

3. *Current educational theory.* GraceLink is the first Sabbath School curriculum to take into account the different ways that children learn, and to incorporate the very best educational methods available. Using educational theorist Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences, the curriculum provides information in a variety of ways to appeal to different learners.

4. *Total Hour Teaching.* Each lesson in the GraceLink is centered on one

Bible story and makes one point, which is repeated several times throughout the hour. This concept is called "Total Hour Teaching." Total Hour Teaching breaks every lesson down into four parts:

A *readiness activity* begins the lesson. This is an activity or exercise that piques the interest of the class and gives the children a reason to want to know more about the Bible story for the day. This part of the lesson appeals to the *imaginative learners*, who ask, "Why should I learn this?"

The *Bible story* is presented in a way that involves the students, often by having them act it out themselves. This makes the Bible story far more memorable than listening to someone tell it. This part of the lesson frequently includes an activity to help the children learn the memory verse. It always takes students into the Bible to read the story themselves or analyze other scriptures that relate to the main point. This section of the lesson meets the needs of the *analytical learner*, who wants to know "What do I need to learn?"

*Applying the lesson* helps the student make the connection between the Bible story and their daily lives, by

giving them practical ways to incorporate what they have learned in Sabbath School into everyday living. This section answers the main question of *common-sense learners*, who ask, "How does it work in my life?"

*Sharing the lesson* is meant to appeal to *dynamic learners*, who want to know, "What can this become? How can I share this with others?" It gives students a chance to develop ways to teach others what they have learned.

5. *Emotional connections.* Each activity concludes with questions that draw meaning out of the experience. This is where teachers help the children make the emotional connection that helps them remember the lesson.

"Experience sculpts the brain," says author and educational consultant Pat Wolfe. "You learn much better by doing something than by reading about it. Reading about something doesn't change the brain a lot; doing it changes the brain a great deal." And, "emotions stamp the brain with extra vividness."

6. *New lesson on Sabbath.* Also new is the way GraceLink introduces the lesson on Sabbath and gives follow-up Bible study suggestions for the week ahead. This puts all students on an equal footing and eliminates the tension between the few students who have studied their lesson and know the story and memory verse, and the majority who haven't and don't.

A GraceLink Sabbath School class might be a noisy, bustling place, but that doesn't mean that learning isn't taking place. In fact, it means just the opposite. Children are learning because they're doing.

"I think the GraceLink curriculum, more than any other curriculum that I have worked with, gives us the tools to reach all the different children with the message of a loving God," says a children's ministries director in Finland. And that, of course, was the goal all along. ■

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1 See Jane Healy, *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

## Church discipline

*continued from page 13*

Gangrene will kill a body if necrotic tissue is not quickly removed by surgery. And surgery is not a pleasant process, but in many cases it is essential before healing can begin.

No, the church should never shoot its wounded. Outlaws, however, are another story. The rules for dealing with outlaws are given in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5.

### Counsel on church discipline

Matthew 18 prescribes a graduated response to those who have offended a church member. First, the offended member is to approach the offender privately. If this doesn't solve the problem, then progressively larger delegations confront the offender. If there is no repentance, the final sanction is exclusion from the group.

The other passage is not so well known; it applies in situations where the offense is not against any one particular member. First Corinthians 5 was prompted by an incident of open sexual immorality in the church. The sin was so offensive that even outsiders found it scandalous. Paul asks, "Why haven't you disfellowshipped this person yet? Paul does not limit his counsel to this particular situation, but lays down the general rule to follow in similar cases: church members are not to associate with "anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler" (verse 11). He reminds the church of their duty to judge its members, and concludes, "Expel the wicked man from among you" (verses 12, 13).

Although this may sound harsh and unloving, *it is the most loving thing to do!* When a parent indulges willful disobedience in children, we

do not call it love. Likewise, when a church allows a member to continue in open sin with no corporate expression of reproof and grief, it cannot be construed as love.

I know of no clearer way to say "We simply don't care" than to leave on the church membership lists people who are in open violation of Christian standards. Such indifference gives them a false sense of security that could prevent their realizing their need for conversion. True love cares enough to confront and to discipline in a loving way. This is crucial both to the survival of the church and the salvation of the individual.

One traveling pastor/evangelist who specializes in working with former members refuses to visit dropouts who have never been disfellowshipped. He knows by experience that it is a waste of time. Church discipline, when properly and lovingly administered, makes it possible to "close the books" on the past and begin afresh. But those who have never left cannot come back. Their membership is a continuation of the old unhealthy and dishonest relationship with the group. Church discipline maintains the integrity of the group and the dignity of the offenders by letting them know that their actions make a difference.

### Discipline with a loving touch

Two women, both members of the same church, lived with partners outside of wedlock. One of them was never disciplined in any way. The second was disfellowshipped. Both of them later married the men they were living with. The first woman is still on the books but has never returned to church. The second one—Linda, who was mentioned earlier in this article—is an active member once again.

When the church wrote Linda of its decision to remove her name from

its records, the letter also said something like this: "Please forgive us for not being closer to you when it might have made a difference. If we had been more faithful friends, this action might not have been necessary. Forgive us for being too busy with our own affairs to take time to nurture your faith. And please don't stop coming to church. We want you here. Your friends need you. While we cannot approve your actions, we want you to know that you are loved, and we want only the best for your future." A few years later she was rebaptized.

The church must discipline with tears in its eyes. The purpose of church discipline is always redemptive, never retributive. A church that lacks the compassion to care and the courage to confront is a tragedy in the making. One of the marks of a dying church is that it is so desperate to retain members that it refuses to do anything that might antagonize them.

If I should ever fall into sin, this is what I hope will happen to me. I hope my friends will ask me "Tim, how is it with your soul?"—the most politically incorrect speech I know of. If that has no effect, then I hope that fellow members will care enough to confront me and remind me of my privileges and my danger, and if necessary, publicly call me to account. As a last resort, I hope my church will have the courage to remove me lovingly from its membership until such time as I am willing to manifest public repentance, because that is how a healthy church disciplines.

God, deliver me from churches that simply don't care. ■

\* Bible texts in this article are from the New International Version.

1 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), 71.

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# Great meetings!

**W**hen planning and organizing a meeting for pastors, a poor meeting is simply a mediocre meeting gone bad. Good meetings take real effort with intentional planning for excellence. Here are some suggestions for producing the best.

**Plan long term.** The best meetings for pastors rely on well-chosen topics which attendees find relevant to their ministry. Plan themes for several years, with one session building toward the next. For example, discovering church growth principles, developing evangelistic strategies, coordinating effective outreach projects, calling for decisions, conducting meaningful baptisms, assimilating new believers, developing disciples, organizing small groups for ongoing growth, evaluating progress.

**Establish consistent dates.** Attempt to choose the same time each year and avoid major scheduling conflicts by remembering recurring events, holidays, school calendars, and high seasons for evangelism.

**Invite the best speakers.** Again, advance planning is the key. The earlier you contact your desired presenters, the better your potential of getting those you want. Provide specific dates and topics when you make contact.

**Stick to schedule.** Inform attendees and presenters of the exact date, location, starting and ending times. Traveling guest speakers need to know the distance and drive time from major cities or airports.

**Balance theory and practice.** Of course you should present theological topics that will build faith, clarify issues, and answer questions. Theoretic, though, should always be accompanied by application. Likewise, practice must build on a solid theological base.

**Watch the clock.** Start each session on time. Don't wait for the crowd to gather before you begin or you will wait

JAMES A. CRESS



even longer tomorrow. Start at the appointed hour and make the first moments so exciting that attendees strive to be present. If tardiness is a challenge, try drawing names for a valuable ministry tool. The individual whose name is chosen must be present to win.

**Avoid too many speakers.** Allow sufficient time for presenters to develop their topic and plan time for questions and answers. Two or three major presenters are usually sufficient for a three or four-day event. Monitor time to prevent speakers from encroaching on each other.

**Care for speakers.** Seek to make your guests as comfortable as possible. Most common needs for those who have traveled great distances include: water, food, climate-conditioned rooms with adequate bathing facilities, information about communication links such as telephone, email or Internet access (they need specific instructions, not just vague assurances that "it's available"), and predictable schedules. If you honor presenters with a token gift (not required), consider the size and weight of what you expect them to transport. Remember too, last-minute changes in the schedule can wreak havoc on a guest's travel budget.

**Avoid promotional overload.** Every aspect of ministry plus the various departments of the church should receive appropriate emphasis. However,

pastors quickly tire of repetitive details or long solicitations. Limit promotional items to five minutes with handouts to support the information.

**Check equipment.** Assign one individual to survey the speaker's needs and to provide simple tools such as chalk boards or chart paper with markers. Pretest more complex equipment such as overhead or video projectors for format, electricity, spare bulbs, etc. Adequate audio amplification includes microphones for speakers and translators as well as sufficient quality to support music presentations.

**Consider optional attendance.** Permit pastors to choose whether or not they attend. Such an experiment forces you to plan such a dynamic program that they dare not stay away. Risk someone making the wrong choice. When they discover what they missed, they will not skip the next time. Invite families. Effective meetings include programming for pastoral spouses, the church's single largest group of volunteer workers. Consider the meeting of their needs an investment rather than an expense. Make certain they are able to participate by planning programs and child-care for their youngsters.

**Schedule recreation.** Relaxation and fellowship make the entire event more effective. Pastors learn from each other as they discuss what they have heard presented. Delicious food, nicely presented always fosters a happy group.

**Provide CEUs.** Professional development is the expectation. Document continuing education events and provide certificates of completion to each participant.

**Seek the Holy Spirit's power.** Time for prayer, devotional and inspirational preaching, singing, group worship, testimonies, and affirmation from administrators will challenge pastors to more effective service for the Savior. ■

## What Heaven sees on the news

continued from page 4

who merely sought to touch the hem of His robe (Mark 5:21-43) to the rich young businessman (10:17-22), from the little children (verses 13-16) to the old and blind and frail (verse 46-52).

"Who is the greatest?" asked James and John. Jesus answered them by referencing the known seating protocol. He pointed out how certain people always seat themselves in "places of importance" at a table. Regarding this practice, Jesus declared that the person who is greatest is he that is humbled, "... for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled" (Luke 14:7-11).

Similarly, Jesus later said that if we "have done it unto one of the least of these [as in—what we might call the last of these]" that we have done it to Him (Mark 25:40, KJV). He can compare the lowest possible class of earthly society to God Himself—because, actually, to Jesus there is no such thing as the "little people."

Nevertheless, Jesus' message didn't sink into the minds of the church managers easily. Always concerned with proper conduct and sure they were always right, the Jewish leaders continually pressed Jesus to share His opinions on protocol—to see how "by the book" He would be. Answering these church leaders, Jesus said that what was truly important was to love God and then to love others. Loving God first means being able to love others with God's love; which is patient, kind, without envy, without boastfulness, without pride, without rudeness, without self-seeking, love that is slow to anger, does not keep a record of wrong, does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the



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truth, love that always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (see 1 Cor. 13:4-7, KJV).

Thanks be to God that He is the supervisor's Supervisor. He is there to look out for us, there for us to lean on, and there to give us the "pep talks." With the tenderest kindness, He reminds us to pray for humility so that we may entertain the true love of God in our hearts. That way, we who lead will not simply "do what we are supposed to do," or just "be good to other people," both of which alone can easily include condescension.

Instead, with God's love, calm and strong, we will honestly communicate respect for other human beings whether children, adults, subordinates,

superiors, our favorites, or our least favorite people. With that kind of love in our lives, others around will not be able to help but feel the love of Jesus flowing from our hearts and spreading the real joy of belonging to the God we serve. This is an experience that we all, including some of America's business executives, need for ourselves. ■

\* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the New International Version.

- 1 "Former WorldCom Executives Surrender to Federal Authorities," from <www.washingtonpost.com>, August 1, 2002; August 7, 2002.
- 2 "WorldCom Arrests Made," in <www.washingtonpost.com>, August 7, 2002.
- 3 "Ethical Fallout," in <www.ocregister.com>, August 5, 2002; August 7, 2002.
- 4 Max Lucado, *Everyone Needs a Miracle: He Still Moves Stones* (Dallas: Word Pub., 1993), 127-131.

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**BOOK REVIEW**

***The Catholic Church: A Short History***, by Hans Kung (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2001), U.S.\$19.95, 231 pages.

When Hans Kung writes a book, it usually demands attention. His missive *On Being A Christian* is beyond doubt one of the most significant religious books of the twentieth century. In contrast, this short history of the Catholic Church is by turn provocative, polemical, informative, and challenging. It is required reading for anyone interested in contemporary religion and the Catholic Church in particular.

Today the Roman Catholic Church, under the leadership of Pope John Paul II, has more moral influence than at any time in its previous history. John Paul II has travelled more widely than any pre-

vious pope. He has spoken to more people and interfaced with the real moral and ethical issues of the modern world more than any previous pontiff. He has charisma and great appeal to many youth who see in him the embodiment of religious ideals. Kung recognizes these qualities and acknowledges them, but his book focuses mainly upon what he sees as the absolutism of the papacy and the intransigence of John Paul II to the calls for reform in sexual matters, the role of women, celibacy of the clergy, more "openness," and ecumenism.

The book, however, is not a negative one for Kung is what one might describe as "the loyal opposition," a priest who loves his church but at the same time is frustrated and angry with it. He sees corruption, intolerance, secrecy, and oppression yet remains hopeful it can be reformed. He writes of its history as it might have been in the hope it may become what it ought to

be. The issues he raises will without a doubt face John Paul II's successor.

The value of the book for this reviewer is its challenge to face up to and confront the papacy as it was in past history and the papacy as it is now and ask, "What has fundamentally changed?" Kung's powerful writing does not sit easily with woolly thinking. He raises issues which challenge both the Catholic and non-Catholic to confront the implications of a church which in turn confronts the world, neither of which are going to go away.

—Patrick J. Boyle, Watford, Hertfordshire, England.

***Healing the Broken Family of Abraham: New Life for Muslims***, by Don McCurry (*Ministries to Muslims*, 4164 Bluffs Parkway 357, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80918). 388 pages. ISBN 0-9710853-0-7. U.S.\$15.00.

Don McCurry, an evangelical Islamicist, has not written his book to deal with the September 11, 2001, tragedies. His aim is solely to help people who are prepared to win Muslims for Christ to know what kind of people and religion they are facing. However, his words on Islamic belief and practices and how they influence the thinking of Muslims are helpful in understanding how the Muslim mind works. His book renders excellent insights into Islam as a religion and its effect on the common Muslim.

In an understandable way, McCurry covers the history, beliefs, and practices of Muhammed and Islam. The claimed divine origin of the Koran is treated. There is a chapter on the Traditions as revealed in the Hadith. McCurry discusses the central place of the Shariah law. Interesting chapters on the divisions of Islam into sects as well as the influences from other religions are also addressed.

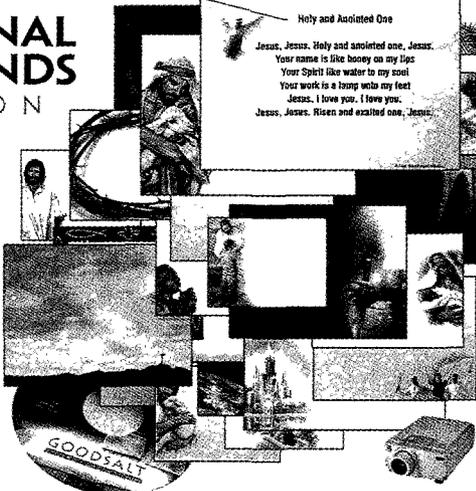
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The last chapters deal with approaches to Muslim people. The author surveys and evaluates the various evangelistic methods used today.

McCurry writes from a wide practical experience as a missionary in Southern Asia. This has been augmented with extensive academic studies in Islamics. His years as a lecturer on Islam have facilitated the excellent way he organizes his material.

McCurry points out the danger in accepting Islamic doctrines to support Christian teachings. Even when the words from the Koran seemingly express the same meaning as the Bible, the underlying understanding and application of the concepts generally is completely different in the Muslim mind. He believes that confrontations are necessary, even unavoidable, in a process to win the Muslims.

Today Islam, as never before, is a challenge to Christianity. For this reason, *Healing the Broken Family* should be on the shelves of ministers who want to feed and expand their flocks. ❏

—Borge Schantz, Vemmedrup, Denmark.

## Letters

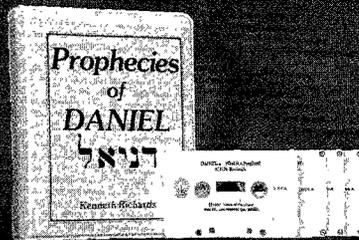
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Taking the case of the Central Africa Union in general. . . . The Church was established here 75 years ago, but it was only during the 1980s that we got our first pastors with B.A. degrees, and now, only five of them have an M.A., and two only are doctors. And . . . those who continued their studies did it thanks to some "good Samaritans" from overseas. Now looking around us, pastors of other denominations are doctors while most of us are but holders of a B.A.; what a shame. I believe that being one in Christ the shame for our pastors is that of the worldwide Church. And since *Ministry* is reaching the church all over, this should be known by the whole church so that those who would like to help those pastors to be well-equipped people for a better service to the Lord may react; and I hope to be one of them. May God bless you. ❏

—Edouard Mezolo, via email.

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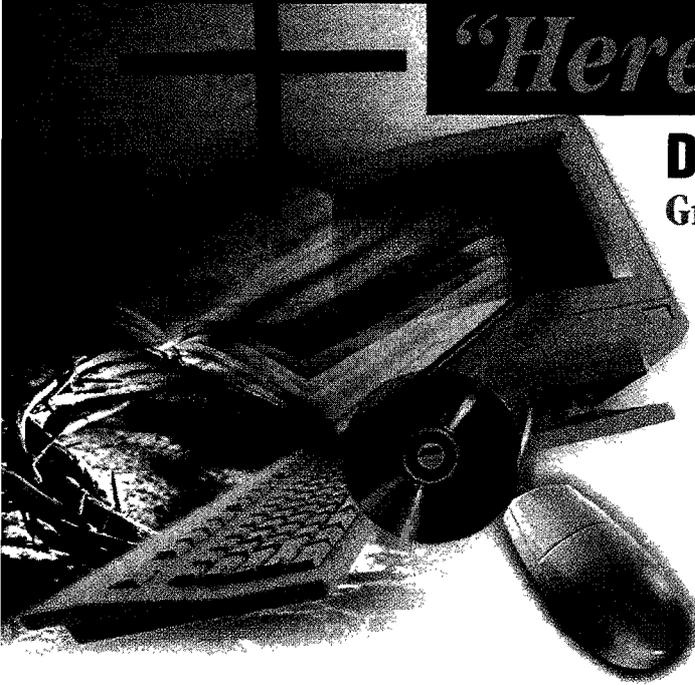
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