

Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

April 1996

THE SON IS UP



Make the word relevant

I am writing in connection with Dr. Rex Edwards' article "Make the word relevant" in *Ministry*, Oct. 1995. An otherwise good article was spoiled by a false dichotomy of the Godhead in which the author admonished us to preach with a "theocentric" and not a "Christcentric" emphasis, suggesting that God and Christ are separate entities with competing roles.

Christ is God manifest in the flesh (2 Tim. 3:16), and "no one can come to the Father" except through Him, and "he who knows Christ knows the Father as well" (John 14:6, 7). Christ is the revelation of the Father to men "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say [are the words of] the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:9-11, NIV). He who honors Christ honors the Father, he who rejects Christ rejects the Father, "he who hates me hates my Father as well . . . they have hated both me and my Father" (John 15:23, 24).

Should Dr. Edwards' "theocentric" emphasis be shared by a large section of ministers there would be a great need for deeper study and understanding of the Godhead. While Ellen White speaks of the persons of the Godhead, and thus appears to endorse them as separate beings, yet there is no other Christian author who has written so eloquently and lucidly on their complex oneness and total unity. A study of Bible Comments Appendixes A and B, pages 641 to 660 would be most profitable.

As a carefully considered viewpoint of several years of search and study, I am enclosing my manuscript "The Revelation and Manifestation

of God" for your perusal.—Dr. J. S. LeRoux, Babanango, South Africa

Rather than a "false dichotomy of the Godhead," the author was suggesting that our "Christo-centric preaching" is "to the neglect of theocentric preaching." The issue is emphasis, not theological reductionism. The author stands on the apostolic tradition of the Godhead being a perfect union of three distinct or "separate beings."—The Editors

■ Only a brief commentary to Dr. Rex Edwards' article "Make the word relevant." He is right on target; preaching has a very practical objective related to the life of those who listen from the pews. It must be relevant for the listeners. We must not forget God Himself neither the actual content of His revelation.

Since Dr. Edwards was not dealing with the theology of the personhood of God, I do not take his words as a theological declaration. He was simply dealing with a problem of spiritual relevance, and in this sense he is right. There are many preachers preaching about Christ with a strong emphasis on His human reality forgetting almost entirely His divinity. They present Him as our "friend," not as our "God."

In this kind of preaching, Jesus is presented as a loving person almost subject to our personal will with no will powers of His own. It looks as if He was a saviour under obligation before us and we have very little or no obligation before Him. Is Jesus Christ our "friend"? Yes, of course; but He is also our "God" and we need to know it and live it as a reality of our salvation. The one who saved us is not just a human friend. He is our friendly God, the one who saves, and preaching must bring to our attention the whole personality of Jesus the Christ who reveals the fullness of the Godhead

(Hebrews 1:3). Then we can have confidence in His love and assurance in His power; and we can respond with love to Him as our "friend" and worship Him as our "God." He will never be less than God nor less than a responsible friend.—Mario Veloso, Th.D., Silver Spring, Maryland

Blood and judgment

It's about time somebody said it very clearly and accurately. Clifford Goldstein's article ("Blood and judgment," February, 1996) brings out the real truth of our investigative judgment doctrine. Surely the judgment is about Christ and not about ourselves. It is a shame to our church history that we have waited so long to make this significant soteriological contribution to the Christian's faith within our ranks.

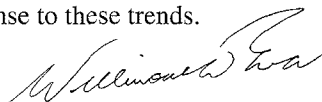
We should not blame the church members for missing out on this wonderful aspect of the plan of salvation because they are just consumers of the improper diet we have been giving them throughout past literature, teaching, and preaching. The fact is that most of the time people become by-products of those who teach them.

If a continual Christ-centered focus is presented, I believe our people will grasp the reason of the mission and purpose of our church, which is to lift up Christ in all of our 27 doctrines. If we continue to emphasize Christ, as Goldstein has done so well in his article, we will see a turnaround in many Adventists for the better. Let us continue to speak and write about His precious work of redemption, since our humanistic approach to salvation has done enough damage already to the Adventist spiritual psychological makeup. The sheep (the Adventists) are just waiting to hear His voice.—Manuel Fernandez, Miami, Florida

The theme article of this issue opens our minds to the seminal hour of our faith, that is to the pivotal acts of Jesus—His dying and His transcendent act of rising from death. Seventh-day Adventists have a certain uneasiness with the celebration of “Easter.” This tension rises in us because of traditions that we have reason to suspect. Yet, with a Bible filled with chronicles of great worship celebrations, we know we were never meant to slight the special commemorations of Christ’s superb acts for us. Thus through **Dick Stenbakken’s** article we celebrate this rising Son, and suggest more profound ways of commemorating His accomplishments for us, especially as we look through this year to celebrate again next year.

A diversity of questions are covered in this issue. There is an attempt, as always, to create an edition that is balanced in terms of the everyday matters that face pastors all over the Adventist world. The concern of crisis counseling, in connection with youth, is covered this month by **Bailey Gillespie**. **Ervin Thomsen’s** presentation on specific themes in Revelation is challenging and eye-opening from a prophetic and exegetical point of view, as is **Walter Pearson’s** when it comes to aspects of Christian and ministerial professionalism. **Bert Beach** tackles the increasingly urgent matter of how we speak and relate to “nonreligious” minds and hearts. **Viewpoint** is a column that will receive more attention as time goes on. In this month’s feature **Neville Webster** provokes our thinking in the crucial area of stewardship. He addresses the question of some of the causes for fading giving patterns in North America, and what the local and corporate church might do in response to these trends.

Good reading!



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Ministry, (ISSN 0026-5314), the international journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association © 1996, is published monthly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and printed by the Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740, U.S.A. Subscriptions: US\$25.00 for 12 issues worldwide, air mail US\$39.85. Single copy US\$2.25. Member Associated Church Press. Second-class postage paid at Hagerstown, MD. This publication is available in microfilm from University Microfilms International. Call toll-free 1-800-521-3044. Or mail inquiry to: University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Editorial Office: 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904. Stamped, self-addressed envelope should accompany unsolicited manuscripts. Office telephone: 301-680-6510; Fax: 301-680-6502.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Ministry*, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740.

COVER DESIGN: Harry Knox

LAYOUT: Regina Hayden

MARKETING: Mark Thomas

ADVERTISING SALES: Melynie Tooley

Volume 69 Number 4



Is tolerance enough?

Rex D. Edwards

Terry Anderson, the longest-held American hostage in the Middle East, refused to hate his captors. "I have no room for hatred, no time for it," he said. "My hating them is not going to hurt them an ounce. It's only going to hurt me, and I'm not going to do that."

Do we pastors ever hate our enemies? Who are our enemies, anyway? Enemies are those who wish to do us harm. They are the ones we really pay attention to, whose moves we watch. We do not have to be on a continual alert with our friends and acquaintances. We can afford to ignore them from time to time. But we cannot afford to take our eyes off our enemies. The pastor who invades our territory and recruits our members or baptizes our converts; the parishioners who threaten to report us to the president if we do not acquiesce to their demands—these can become our obsession.

Hatred's three dimensions

What is our emotional response to our enemies? Anger? Resentment? Hatred? How do we know if it is hatred? Hatred has a way of enduring in time and organizing life around itself. Hatred manifests itself in one of three ways: retrospective, as in anger; prospective, as in suspicion; and present, as in resentment. When we are angry we look back to the deeds that our enemies have already committed. We find ourselves reviewing those acts again and again. The very thought of past injustice causes the blood to boil. We will not rest until we have done "justice" to past deeds by finding some mode of revenge.

Hatred's forward glance is suspicion.

The enemy not only outrages our sense of power because of something in the past but also threatens our power because of something that may be done in the future. Thus, the enemy puts us on our guard. We become watchful and alert to the enemy's every move. Suspicion fastens on hints and clues as to what the enemy is likely to do in the time ahead and maintains itself in a kind of religious state of watchfulness.

Hatred directed to the present is resentment. Our hatred of enemies may focus not only on what they have done or may do, but on what they are. Their very existence—quite apart from any specific harm they may do to us in the future—provokes resentment. While the enemy lives, we cannot be ourselves.

How to combat hatred

How do we as pastors combat hatred in any form—anger, suspicion, and resentment? Only through "tolerance"? By simply believing that in this unideal world there are people much like ourselves, who share a common humanity and represent certain distinctive values that we should not ignore? Do we think that once we discover them in their common humanity and their distinctive virtues, we will be better disposed to tolerate them?

The advocates of tolerance would offer yet another spiritual strategy—coexistence! The idea is to let go of the religious obsessions we aim at our enemies. We are to leave our enemies alone. Move them from the center to the periphery of our attention.

The only difficulty with this strategy is that the enemy is precisely the person we cannot remove from the center of

our consciousness. In hatred the enemy occupies the foreground of our life.

The Christian dynamic

Here's where the Christian dynamic stands out in bold relief. The Christian response to the enemy is basically different. Instead of relaxing one's attention by being tolerant, the Christian faith requires a focus upon the enemy. Jesus said, in effect: Does your enemy—the administrator who exercises arbitrary authority; the colleague you don't like, the parishioner who irritates you—occupy a great deal of your attention? Do not try to solve your problem by driving them to the edge of your consciousness. Let them stand where they are. Love them. Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that spitefully use and persecute you. Let your enemies stand before you. Let them be the object of your concrete love, blessing, and intercessory prayer.

Clearly this dynamic stands in contrast to the idea of tolerance; yet it must not be supposed that ordinary and possessive human love is the pattern and substance of Christian love as opposed to tolerance. There is, after all, a certain releasing and letting go in Christian love, of which tolerance is a better analog than human love.

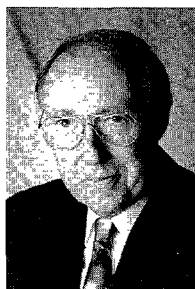
Consider the adulterous woman (John 8:1-11), who is the center of a vengeful crowd, but whom the Lord releases with the words "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (verse 7, RSV). It is the Lord who forgives, not the crowd. His judgment and forgiveness are such as to prompt the crowd simply to let the woman go. "But when they heard it, they went away, one by one" (verse 9, RSV). The crowd can only break up and go away as they surrender the woman into the hands of the Lord. They became "tolerant."

Christian love, however, differs from tolerance. Tolerance is negative; love is positive. Christian love does not merely negate the obsessions of hatred with a vague benevolence. It calls for positive deeds of mercy and compassion directed toward the enemy. Christian love not only seeks to overcome anger and hatred, but to transcend it. ■

The Son is up!

R. O. Stenbakken

Creative ways of presenting the good news of Christ's death and resurrection



R. O. Stenbakken, Ed.D., Colonel U.S. Army (retired), is the director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

The Easter season provides one of the greatest opportunities for the Christian church to witness for the risen Christ. In many denominations this is the pivotal point toward which the liturgical year moves and from which it proceeds. In other churches this major event of the Christian church passes with barely a nod.

Since most Christians are at least in tune with the meaning of Easter, this period of time offers ample opportunity to share the true, deep meaning that the Son is risen.

Imagine you are sitting in church. The choir is singing "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" It's a familiar hymn, and you are following the words. Suddenly through the back doors strides a Roman centurion, complete with sword, spear, and flowing red tunic. His armor shining, the blood-red cape billowing, sword in one hand, spear in the other. As he walks to the front of the church, he says, "Not only was I there, but in fact, I was in charge. I was in charge that day when He died. Let me tell you what it was like to take the life of Jesus. To nail Him to the cross."

Question—would you pay attention? Or would your mind drift off into the gray, foggy mist waiting for the call "And now for the closing hymn . . ."? If you would pay attention, then so will your congregation.

A creative opportunity

The Easter season brings pastors an unparalleled opportunity to preach the gospel. We know that the date and time of year was accurate. The Christian world is tuned in and thinking of the Easter season and its meaning.

Capturing the meaning of Christ's climactic final weekend on the earth and sharing that with the congregation requires creativity. Interestingly, creativity is the very first picture we see in the Bible. The Genesis account shares with us the majesty and the meaning of God's creativity. Being able as a pastor to be creative in celebrating Easter is very much in tune with the picture of the creativity we see in God throughout Scripture.

What can be done in Adventist churches around Easter? We can draw on the richness of Adventism to give us some ideas in leading up to a meaningful celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Liturgical churches focus on Lent, that period leading up to the day of Easter, also known as Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. In Adventism the logical lead is to do a series on the meaning of the Day of Atonement, and the whole sanctuary service. Services leading up to this week can be either simple or more complex, but they can in fact illustrate the depth of theology that is revealed through the cleansing of the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Here are some ideas that you may wish to consider as you plan next year's Easter season in your church.

A Tenebrae service

A Tenebrae service is one in which the sanctuary is lit only with seven candles. Meditations are read on each of the seven last words of Christ. At the end of each meditation, one candle is extinguished. As the seven last words are contemplated by different speakers

or by the same speaker, lights are successively put out until there is only one candle left. At the last word, as Christ dies, the last light is extinguished and the congregation sits in absolute darkness. The impact of "And the light of the world went out" is sure to strike the people and help them realize that without Christ, we are in darkness.

The seven last words

This process has been used frequently. The focus is on the last hours of Christ's life. By building either sermons for the seven preceding weeks around the seven last words or by having one service in which vignettes and small sermonettes are given on each of the words, the focus on Christ and what He has done for us at the cross can be made more real.

Nails in the cross

A large cross can be constructed out of heavy timber or a "box cross" made from plywood. The congregation is invited to come forward after a meditation on how Christ nailed our sins to the cross so that we do not bear them anymore. The people are invited to come forward, pick up a nail and hammer, driving the nail into the cross. As they do so they are invited to leave their sin and guilt at the cross. This brings home the realization that it was not the Roman spear that killed Christ, but *my* sin. Yet, thank God, I need no longer bear that sin. This is a very effective service when combined with music, depending on what's available at the church in which you serve.

Faces around the cross series

In the weeks leading up to Easter, biographical studies can be done about those individuals with whom Christ had contact prior to His death. They can be narrative sermons, they can also be first-person presentations, they can be done in multiple-voice readings, or in a variety of ways featuring individuals such as Peter, Caiaphas, Pilate, Nicodemus, the centurion at the cross, the thief on the cross, Barabbas, John the Beloved, Mary, and many others. You can look at the last week of Christ's life leading up to the

cross and the events of the cross from unique and powerful perspectives.

Dramatic presentations

A new play has been written by Tom Neslund of the General Conference Health and Temperance department called *Matthew's Miracle*. It may be done in five parts or all at one time. It is the story of a tomb builder whose job it was to prepare Joseph's tomb. Matthew is a Jew: he does not believe in Christ. Matthew's wife, however, is a believer, but she dies because she cannot get to Christ before the Lord is crucified. Matthew's miracle happens when he understands the meaning of Christ's death and accepts Jesus as the one who can give life not only to himself but to his beloved wife. (This original play is available by writing: Tom Neslund, Health and Temperance Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600, or calling 301-680-6720.)

Communion and the Easter season

An agape Communion service on Friday evening is an appropriate way to celebrate Easter and shows how it links to the real meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection and the washing away of our sin.

Arranging the church decor

The visual aids used in the sanctuary can be a reminder of Christ's passion and help the spoken word have more of an impact on the congregation. One pastor began a special series with a small wooden cross placed in the front of the church sanctuary. Each week the smaller cross was replaced by a larger wooden cross until the front of the church was dominated by a huge cross. From week to week he expanded on the reality of Christ moving closer and closer to the cross, which at first seems very distant and nonthreatening but ultimately became that which dominated all. Again, the visuals made the spoken word more effective.

The use of the cross in front of the church draped with different colored

cloth on it also has deep meaning. In anticipation of the Crucifixion, a white drape is placed on the cross indicating the purity of Christ. On Friday and over Sabbath the cross is draped with black indicating His death. Following the Resurrection, the cross is draped with purple indicating the royalty of the Son of God, whose sacrifice was accepted that I might live. The front of the church may also display appropriate items such as a large mallet with huge nails, a whip, and a crown of thorns. The impact of this visual helps drive home the point of Christ's death and my deliverance.

A series of sermons can be developed around these items: the three crowns of Christ—the crown of royalty that He gave up in order to take on the crown of thorns for us, and then the victorious crown that He now gives to us because of His sacrifice. These can be placed in front of the church sanctuary as illustrations for a series of sermons. The visuals of the church are not merely for decoration; they are to illustrate the meaning of Easter.

Ellen White tells us it would be good to spend an hour a day contemplating the life of Christ, particularly the last days of His life. Sermons, illustrations, and church decor leading up to and including the Easter season give us an unsurpassed opportunity to focus on and gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christ's death and His resurrection. In Adventist theology we certainly can draw on our understanding of the sanctuary and its meaning, and how that links to Jesus' last weekend on earth. We can also deal with another key aspect: He not only rose from the tomb, but He is coming back again for us.

Whenever visuals are being planned, care should be taken to be sensitive to the concerns of a given congregation. Some will not be comfortable with every suggestion made here. Being prayerful and thoughtful in the light of any worship planning is always a must. Special programs leading up to and including Easter are not celebrating a day or a season, but instead are giving homage and worship to the Son who has risen and is soon to return. ■

Ohio tape outreach

Excitement has encircled the Lancaster, Ohio, Seventh-day Adventist Church since members launched a video tape outreach under the direction of their Bible worker, Freda Shultz. The videos, most of which feature evangelist Kenneth Cox, are delivered and shown in more than 90 homes. Additionally, 20 residents of a retirement home are viewing them. Members also show the videos in a local prison, where attendance has grown so much that the small room first provided became overcrowded.

Included among those watching the tapes regularly are five ministers of other denominations. One remarked that the tapes have been a real eye-opener to him. He said he finally understands things in Revelation that were unexplainable before. Another pastor said, "I don't know where this is leading me. I'm reading everything you give me in addition to watching the tapes."

Lancaster pastor, Rick Remmers, supervises a visitation program in which interested people, generated by the tape ministry, are called on. As new people begin attending and are baptized, there is a new vitality in the church. These new members then join the rest of the membership in becoming actively involved with the tape ministry.

One Bible study student donated \$1,000 toward the tape ministry. Four members of his family attend the Lancaster church regularly. Another family with seven children will be sending their oldest son to Mount Vernon Academy.



Bible worker Freda Shultz hands a video to Howard Koontz, recently baptized after 54 years with the Reorganized Church of Latter-day Saints.

Impressive evangelistic event in Kenya

Over 2,700 individuals were baptized at the conclusion of a great evangelistic crusade conducted by Australian evangelist, Anthony Kent, and lay elder, John Jeremic, in Nairobi, Kenya.

More than 40,000 individuals crowded into Uhuru Park on a nightly basis to listen to the proclamation of the gospel and to make decisions for Jesus Christ and for membership in the Adventist Church. Probably twice this many candidates were cleared for membership but had to be baptized in subsequent services because the initial baptismal site was too limited to accommodate the crowds.

Thorough preparation on the part of the former Eastern African Union ministerial secretary, P.O. Wahonya, was coupled with clear organizational strategies developed by John Jeremic and his ADA (Amazing Discoveries Australia) team, which has sponsored evangelistic crusades in the South Pacific islands, Eastern Europe, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.



NET '96 produces soulwinning synergism

NET '96 will help the pastor and his congregation realize unrecognized potential for unity and membership growth. That's what happened during last year's NET '95 Crusade and as a result, nearly three times as many churches are signing up for NET '96.

Synergism is the word that best describes what is happening with NET '96 and its focus on the local congregation. Pastors say this approach makes evangelism easier and a lot more fun, because there is less pressure when virtually the whole denomination is working with you.

Never before have so many evangelistic agencies, departments, and institutions of the North American Church teamed up with our local pastors and their congregations for direct, face-to-face, on-the-line soulwinning. This is a new and welcome day!

All the Adventist Media Center Ministries, such as Voice of Prophecy, Breath of Life, Faith for Today, It Is Written, and La Voz de la Esperanza are partners in NET '96.

In addition, various supporting ministries such as The 3 Angels Broadcasting Network, Quiet Hour, and Amazing Facts Radio and TV Ministries are participating.

Each of these broadcast ministers, along with their speakers and staff, are playing a 'key role' in the NET '96 Big Screen, Satellite Television Evangelistic Crusade scheduled October 5 to November 9 direct from Orlando, Florida, to 2,000+ SDA churches across the United States and Canada.

Also, the North American ASI and special contributor families have joined with Hart Research Institute, Seminars Unlimited, Pacific Press, Review and Herald, and Christian Record publishing houses, *Signs and Message* magazines, Adventist Health Systems West and Sunbelt, along with the departments of the North American Division, its 9 unions and 58 local conferences, which are combining their efforts to help our pastors and their congregations experience successful soul-winning through NET '96.

In summary, pastors and congregations are excited about NET '96. They like the live audience, interactive big TV screen approach used last year. It makes the audience feel that they are part of something much larger than the local church.

Pastors also appreciate the united departmental support received for NET '96 preparation, as well as NET '96 follow-up, which assures larger audiences and more baptisms.

Here are some areas of support for pastors

and their local church NET '96 Coordinating Committees:

Publishing Ministry: Will encourage literature evangelists to work with our members to enroll people in the NET '96 Discovery Bible Lessons. Goal—1 million persons registered three months before NET '96 begins.

Women's Ministries: Will operate the exciting Discovery Bible School in local churches as preparation for NET '96. Goal—graduate 100,000 students opening night of NET '96.

Church Ministries: Will organize follow-up teams for NET '96 interests. Goal—maximize baptisms and retention from NET '96.

Youth Ministries: Will train and equip 58 youth teams to assist in various NET '96 locations. Goal—inspire, train, and equip young people for evangelism through NET '96.

Education Department: Enlist youth from academies and colleges for participation in NET '96.

Ministerial Association: Assist the local pastor in coordinating all NET '96 materials and activities. Goal—2,000+ pastors and congregations involved in NET '96.

It is not too late to sign up. This is an event that will not occur again for two years, so call in your request today, 1-800-983-1423! Plan to make 1996 your best soulwinning year ever! Become a part of NET '96!

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Starter Kit

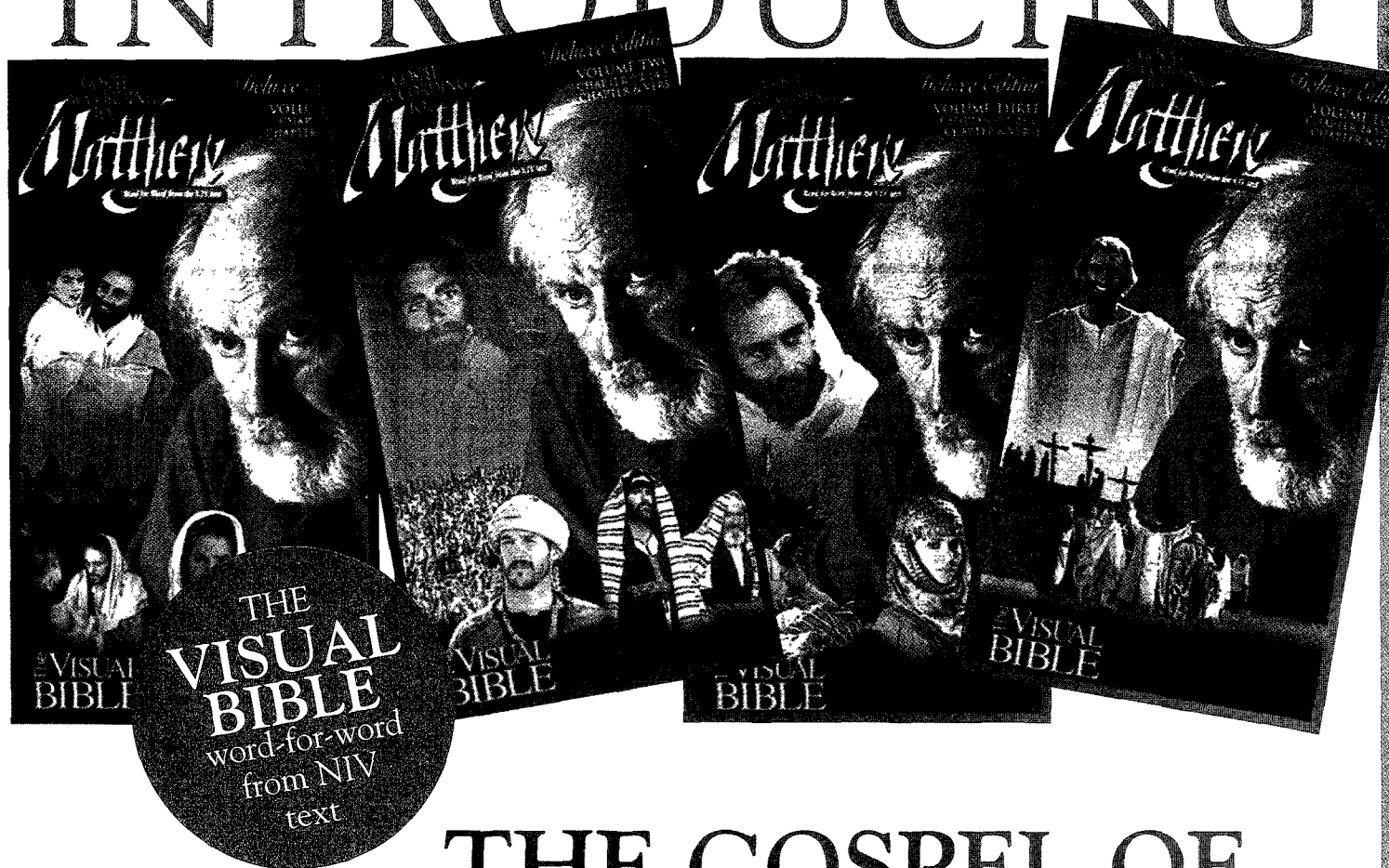
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The crisis of adolescence



Counseling
people in
crisis

V. Bailey Gillespie

"Coping with crisis as a parent of teenagers requires the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of the Messiah."

"Understanding teens? It's just impossible! End of discussion."

"Don't tell me what my kids have done now. It is all I can do to cope with the day-to-day problems of living; don't add anything more to my plate. It's already way too full."

"You did what? I am embarrassed for you, and what is more, I am deeply hurt too."

**Building secure
relationships**

These are voices of parents at their wits' end as they try to cope with their teenage children during moments of crisis. How should parents respond to such crises? How can pastors help teens respond to crisis? How can the church be a positive influence during times of crisis?

Research on teen problems is clear. Drug and alcohol abuse still rank first as the problems of greatest concern for teens, but their importance is diminished as they are joined by other emerging social concerns, such as peer pressure, AIDS, teenage pregnancy, and the age-old problem of identity.

Fifteen years ago one teen in five was concerned about the "generation gap," and reported that getting along with their parents was the greatest problem they had to deal with. But today only 2 percent still cite this as the most important problem facing their generation. Grim new problems now confront the teen generation: one youth in nine cites AIDS as a most important problem. In fact, problems facing teens are so pervasive that only about one teen in 20 appears to be in a blissful state of nonawareness of the problems confronting their generation.¹

These are national public high school figures, but studies on Seventh-day Adventist youth also identify many of the same problems as being of great concern. While participation in most of these at-risk behaviors is below national averages, perhaps because of many youths in "protective" environments such as churches and church schools, still any involvement in these crisis behaviors is a signal for attention and concern.²

There are crises in relationships too. Most teens (52 percent) get along well with their parents, and are twice as likely to get along better with their mothers than with

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their fathers.³ Relationships of all kinds cause personal tensions. Parents often express how difficult it is to keep calm and rational in the face of an emotional teenage reaction to discipline, suggestion, help, or correction.

Teens in a real world

We live in a world filled with germs of a sinful, fallen, and broken culture. Many of today's evils didn't exist when the Bible was written, and many others were far less pervasive. In the religious sphere, youth too often state how irrelevant their Bibles seem to be in dealing with the "personal" problems they face. The teens intellectually know that Scripture contains principles that can help solve crises. They also know that a loving family grounded in scriptural principles can be a strong antidote in today's societal aberrations. But they don't see much compassion and application of principle in the faces of their angry parents or feel it in the disapproval of condemning church members.

Professional counselors and trained, experienced pastors have learned that it is not the type of counseling technique that is important for healthy change and redirection. The pervasive influence in all healing therapy is the need for understanding, meaningful, and healthy human relationships.⁴

Since the church is people, not buildings, budgets, or denominations, think what would happen if only five people in every congregation would reach out to one troubled teen or one family in the throes of pain and crisis, and show the same unconditional love God gives to us as a gift. Sadly, youth don't enter our churches looking for people like that. So it is imperative that we find ways to seek them out.

Issues of identity

The crisis of identity is not particularly a new concept. Most professionals recognize that the identity issues facing youth simply change *style*, not *substance*, during successive generations. Pastors, religious educators, and teachers work with individuals who are seeking identity and change all the time. Self-understanding takes time, but the fact that the teen is moving toward change aids the process. Teens in crisis explode with questions of identity (Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here?). They need someone who has found his or her identity.

Knowing God, feeling God's presence, experiencing acceptance and feelings of belonging in the church go a long way to assuage the crisis in adolescents' lives that stem from feelings of distance, criticism, unacceptance, and rejection. Churches can be wonderful places in which identity is found. Being "in Christ" is more than a biblical passage. It is the essence of the Christian community itself. So take the

temperature of your church. Ask members about the thinking climate on Sabbath morning, and don't omit the youth's opinions, either. If your church temperature is too cold, do something about it!

A related identity crisis issue that directly points to the church, pastoral staff, or membership is that of criticism. Young people feel that the church simply does not care for them. *Valuegenesis* showed that only 44 percent of the students felt their church was "warm," and 61 percent felt it was friendly.

Preparing for the crisis

Crisis in most people is created by failing to think about the alternatives at their disposal that can help them successfully deal with life's trials. What we need is appraisal.

Think about a plan before a crisis comes. Help parents develop a plan of direction before their problems arise. As pastors, we should be aware of the nearest counseling program that deals with troubled youth. We should have information available on drug use. We may need a crisis counseling telephone hot line number. Keep the phone numbers of relevant youth resources and research centers nearby on your desk. We need to have Christian referrals ready *before* problems hit.

We probably need to create new Bible studies to deal with problem areas youth and young adults face—loneliness, acceptance, friendships, criticism, compassion, etc. We need a list of publications and videotapes that we can refer parents and youth to for help. We need to have Internet resources from which they can

get help, such as the Parenting Resource Center on the Web @parentsplace.com or the Hancock Center for Youth Ministry @HCYM@lasierra.edu where helpful ideas about youth in crisis are posted on a weekly basis. There is even a special place to look for when you need immediate help at KidsPeace @kidspeace.org.⁵ We must recognize that we alone can't do it all.

Reacting to crisis

Crisis is not necessarily a negative term. It usually denotes or dramatizes an existing area of conflict. It provides a chance to move beyond the problems that bring the conflict. Erik Erikson, the psychologist who made the term *identity crisis* famous, suggests that crisis is "a moment of decision between strong contending forces."⁶ Crisis can be therapeutic and lead to dynamic, forward-looking decisions. It is an acute period of time, or a situation which anticipates conclusive change.

In dealing with conflict, the most important thing we can do is to create a climate in which dialogue and communication are increased, not decreased. Once I had a particularly difficult day. I was rushed and felt pushed to finish projects already

**Crisis provides a
chance to move
beyond the
problems that
bring conflict.**

stretched well beyond their reasonable deadlines. Then my teenage son came home with his ear pierced and a gold stud challenging my anger. Immediately I was ready to reprimand him with a discussion on values and church standards about jewelry. It took the maturity of my son to point out my own problem. He wanted to talk. He wanted to understand. I wanted only to demand obedience. Luckily, after some reflection, I saw the picture. I began to listen. Of course, the earring disappeared in due time on its own; my son's values were intact, even though I feared the worst. And by this experience I learned that a bad reaction is never a cure to crisis.

Learning to listen is difficult, but it is one of the best gifts you can give to the youth.

Practical ways to help

Here are some ideas that may help you develop a proactive style to deal with the teenagers in crisis in your local congregation.

Help your teens develop skills in decision-making. Helping youth mature in their own thinking process is one of the most valuable skills a local congregation can provide. After all, when a crisis comes, teens must eventually make up their own minds about those issues anyway. The church can be a place in which this creative decision-making is modeled. Rather than telling youth what to do, instead, ask them what conclusions they have come to and how they have arrived at them. Avoid labeling and belittling. Saying such things as "What do you know? You're just a kid!" or "You're a disappointment to me" paves the way for a total lack of communication. Teens stop listening and no one gets heard when people they hope to respect are ordering, prescribing, and lecturing.

Be careful not to filibuster. Monopolizing the conversation and silencing everyone else is hardly a listening skill.

Assist youth in developing personal standards and values. Avoiding crisis is in many ways an educational problem. Helping teens understand what their personal values are can go a long way in avoiding the problems that face youth. When a teen knows his or her own standards and values, he or she can easily decide not to participate in activities that conflict with them.

Build a biblical basis for action. A balanced youth ministry is always biblically reflective. When I teach teenagers, I always try to direct them to biblical passages that relate to the issues with which they are concerned or that directly relate to the crisis confronting them.

A small group Bible study program for teens can go a long way toward preventing crisis through open, personal discussions about standards and values. Youth respect the authority of the Bible when it is opened up to them in warm, loving, and accepting relationships. Youth helping youth see what the Bible says about life, trials, and conflict is one of the best things they can experience.

Help build a biblical worldview. Our perspectives are influenced by our worldview or ideology. How we cope with crisis can be impacted by thinking clearly about our priorities.

People who see themselves in a relationship with God often choose actions and lifestyles that stem from that basic reality. Biblical doctrines are often the agency through which the ideology of God is explored. Sound, rigorous exploration of biblical concepts is essential, but for youth they must be couched in practical, relevant applications. This is the challenge. Proof-text approaches to crises won't work.

Merton Strommen argues that our theological orientation is crucial in determining whether or not we will learn significant values. A grace orientation with a focus on the love, promise, and presence of Jesus Christ inspires people to accept the lifestyle and ideology of Christ.⁷ What better place to explore our ideological views than in a congregation of friends and with loving mentors.

Valuegenesis research suggests that building this kind of rapport with adults may be difficult. "It would appear that a great opportunity for the transmission of faith and values is being missed. Only 22 percent of the fathers and 30 percent of the mothers were communicating personal religion even as often as once a week. Large percentages did so seldom or never."⁸

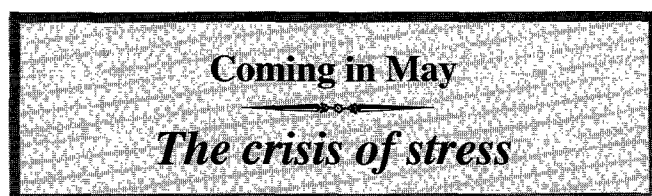
Relational retardation

A film producer recently described the crisis among today's youth in this way: "For too long, young people have been told that their greatest problems are drugs, sex, alcohol, etc. . . . These are, in fact, only symptoms of a much greater disease. The disease of youth is [that key relationships] are in disarray—their relationships with God, self, parents, friends, and the world."⁹

And if you spend any time reviewing the films teenagers are watching in theaters and on television, you will note that in many there are no adults with significant parts at all in those films. Mark DeVries, in his significant book *Family-based Youth Ministry*, suggests, "Characteristically, teenagers do not have the relational and developmental capacity to maintain a single, committed relationship for an extended period of time. They flow in and out of relationships with their peers. This year's enemy is next year's best friend."¹⁰

An increasing number of youth are entering adulthood without the skills to develop significant relationships with each other. They enter adulthood lacking the relational maturity to establish long-term friendships and relationships. How, then, can we expect them to build a meaningful relationship with Jesus as their personal friend?

The church has all the theological and philosophical resources to cure this problem. We preach that a relationship with Jesus is constant. His love and acceptance is not like this world's. We celebrate the nature of God's grace as all-



CONTINUING EDUCATION EXERCISE

The crisis of adolescence

1. **The most important priority** a church can have in its work with teenagers is providing them with opportunities for significant dialogue and relationships with mature Christian adults. How can your church develop this priority?

2. **It is hard to compete** with today's communication vehicles of youth culture—television, contemporary music, stories of successful athletes. How do we carry the demanding claims of the gospel to youth in the midst of these kinds of distractions?

3. **What crises are your youth having?** How many of these crises can be related to the breakdown of relationships with God, family, friends, community? Brainstorm to develop creative ideas you, your leaders, and youth feel would meet these concerns.

4. **Evaluate the resources** available in your congregation and community that can help youth in times of crisis. Create a list of sources for parents to help them cope with teenagers. Do the same for youth.

5. **Develop a Bible study series** that deals with issues youth face, such as loneliness, isolation, dissatisfaction, worship, temptations, existence of God, creation/evolution, friendships, standards, values.

Suggested reading

Benson, Peter, with Dorothy Williams and Arthur Johnson. *The Quicksilver Years*. San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row, 1987. A book about preteenagers based on research completed with Search Institute.

Bezilla, Robert, ed. *America's Youth in the 1990s*. Princeton, N.J.: The George H. Gallup International Institute, 1993. An ongoing survey of 13- to 17-year-olds with regard to concerns and issues affecting their lives.

Case, Steve, ed. *Shall We Dance: Rediscovering Christ-centered Standards*. Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1996. A look at Adventist lifestyle standards from a biblical basis; explores such issues as movies, alcohol, music, sexuality, God's will, etc.

DeVries, Mark. *Family-based Youth Ministry*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994. An approach to ordering, nurturing, and building on the family relationships as keys to effective youth ministry and dealing with crisis.

Dudley, Roger L., with V. Bailey Gillespie. *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance*. Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1991. A detailed look at the massive research project in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists utilizing data from Adventist schools, parents, pastors, administrators, and teachers. Information on Adventist students in public schools is included.

Erikson, Erik. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968. A development of Erikson's stages of life, including a detailed explanation of the identity crisis in youth.

Gillespie, V. Bailey. *The Dynamics of Change*. Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1992. A close look at the experience of conversional change and the impact understanding this concept has on pastoring, teaching, and church work.

Strommen, Merton P. *The Five Cries of Parents*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. Based on research, this book analyzes the tensions that exist in parenting and how the church can help.

———. *The Five Cries of Youth*, revised, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988. A revised look at initial research on the five basic concerns of youth today.

Swanson, Gary. *Sit Down Till You're 35!* Riverside, Calif., Hancock Center Publications, La Sierra University Press, 1996. A book for youth that invites them to get involved in their church as the answer to many of their problems and crises.

Tyner, Stuart, and Bailey V. Gillespie. *Walking on the Edge*. Riverside, Calif., Hancock Center Publications/Pacific Union Conference, 1996. A book containing 13 interactive guides that invite public school Adventist youth to understand their church, their beliefs, and suggests ways in which they might cope with criticism and at-risk behaviors in their school setting.

sufficient and all-encompassing in spite of our partial commitments and failures. The love of God is a wonderful gift that models what humans might become. The church's gift to youth is one of inspiring what "might be" in their lives by seeing how God is at work among all of the membership.

Unfortunately, however, all too often the church is essentially an orphaning structure. It does not parent its members through life; rather, it orphans them at the very time they are most in need of a stable culture.

What a challenge! To assist before the crisis comes. To lead youth to Jesus as their caretaker when a crisis develops. ■

¹ Robert Bezilla, ed., *America's Youth in the 1990s* (Princeton, N.Y.: The George H. Gallup International Institute, 1993), p. 32.

² See Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1992).

³ Bezilla, p. 34.

⁴ Gregory Monaco, "Can the Church Help the Troubled Teen?" *Counseling Teenagers* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1984), p. 539.

⁵ See "15 Ways to Help Your Kids Through Crisis," @kidspace.org, World Wide Web.

⁶ Erik Erikson, "Memorandum on Identity . . ." *The Journal of Social Issues*, 20:4 (1964), p. 31.

⁷ Merton P. Strommen, "How Values Are Communicated," report to Project Affirmation, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

⁸ Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1992), pp. 192, 193.

⁹ Charles P. Warren, quoted in Kari Torjesen Malcolm, *Building Your Family to Last* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1987), p. 77.

¹⁰ Mark DeVries, *Family-based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 50.

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Worshiping whom?

Recognizing contemporary disguises

Ervin K. Thomsen

A fresh look at themes in Revelation



Ervin K. Thomsen, D.Min., is senior pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Sonora, California.

The richness of the symbolism of Revelation challenges us to keep probing further, drawing more meaning from the inspired figures. Studying these symbols in their native setting, with the Bible as its own interpreter, should enable us not only to see greater beauty in the truth but also to detect the shrewdness of eschatological principalities and powers.

One of the primary apocalyptic symbols concentrated on by Seventh-day Adventists has been that of the beast. The historical Adventist understanding of Scripture correctly identifies the beast with the actions of a corrupted religio-political power which seeks to control the conscience of humanity, and displays a particularly potent last-day resurgence. After exposing the nature of this anti-Christ power and describing the reach of its desolating influence, Revelation 15:2 describes the mastery of those who have “victory over the beast.” Here the symbolism again ignites our interest, inviting us to ask, “But what is victory over the beast?”

John displays it as a fourfold triumph: “Over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name” (Revelation 15:2). But what do these symbols imply?

Clues in the literary structure

The clues to guide us in interpreting Revelation 15:2 are found in the literary structure of Revelation 11:19-15:4. Revelation 15 describes the final part of a sequence of scenes which are rooted in the introductory sanctuary scene of Revelation 11:19: “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and

within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant” (NIV).

Throughout Revelation the sanctuary scenes introduce the themes of succeeding passages. For instance, the high priest tending the candlesticks in Revelation 1 introduces the sequence of the seven churches. The sealed book of Revelation 5 introduces the sacrificed Lamb and thus the sequence of the seven seals. In a similar way, the overarching theme of Revelation 11:19-15:4 deals with covenant, and describes seven scenes. Though these scenes are not overtly numbered, they might aptly be called “covenant pageants” (see Figure 1).

Tracing the covenant theme

Studying the book of Revelation is like an archaeological dig in which multiple layers of Old Testament symbolism await progressive unearthing until the meaning of a given passage is exposed. In Revelation 11-15 the symbols focus on the covenant. The covenant theme is one of the great backdrops of the sanctuary and of the Old Testament. Studying the covenant theme brings us to see that God’s plan to save humanity is a generous act of grace.

In Revelation, the numerous occurrences of the woman, the serpent/dragon, her child, and her seed have their roots in the first covenant promise of Genesis 3:15, which foretells the defeat of the serpent by the seed of the woman. The attempt to murder the man-child (Rev. 12:4), the song of victory (12:10), and the wilderness experience of the woman (verses 6, 14) all have their origin in the great covenant-based exodus event. This event, at its heart is a telling demonstration of God’s

covenant faithfulness. In Revelation 12, as in the case of the exodus, a hostile power is defeated. In both cases, for a short time the power continues his warfare against the covenant people "which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (verse 17).

Revelation 13 describes the devil's attempts to lead the people of God away from a covenant relationship with Him. The dragon uses the power and influence of the beast and the false prophet to accomplish this. This Satanic subversive activity is typified in the Old Testament, which constantly alludes to a false leadership luring the people of God away from faithfulness to Him and His worship in the sanctuary or Temple.

The same Old Testament typology is again reflected in Revelation as the agencies of Satan attempt to shake God's people from covenant loyalty: The real Moses built the tabernacle and warned the people against breaking the covenant (Deut. 8). The pseudo-Moses, or the beast, blasphemes the tabernacle of God, which is an exhibit par excellence of God's covenant faithfulness. Through Moses the law was given, but the beast changes the law (Dan. 7:25). The real Moses warred on behalf of the saints, but the dragon through the beast makes war with the saints. The historical Moses led people with deadly wounds to find healing, but pseudo-Moses (the beast) receives a deadly wound, which is healed. Moses was given a mouth to speak for God (Ex. 4:10-15), but the beast is given a mouth to speak against God. Whereas Moses was a deliverer, the beast leads into captivity. All the activities of this power are aimed at destroying the covenant relationship between the people and their God.

The work of the two-horned beast of Revelation 13 (the false prophet) appears to be that of a pseudo-Elijah. The real Elijah appealed to people on Mount Carmel to return to covenant faithfulness. There God signaled His approval of the true prophet's work by

sending fire from heaven. The false prophet, utilizing miracles and fire from heaven, pretends to have heaven's approval on his covenant-destroying activities.

Please look at Figure 1 and notice that under the fourth pageant the covenant people appear with the Father's name written in their foreheads (Rev. 14:1). The term *virgins* describes

their covenant faithfulness (verse 4).

The fifth covenant pageant, parallel with the first angel's message, calls upon humanity to enter into covenant relationship with the Creator-God and exposes the negative results of staying outside the covenant. The second angel's message describes the covenant-breaking unfaithfulness of Babylon as fornication. The third angel

Figure 1:

Literary outline of Revelation 11:19-15:4

The sanctuary setting: The ark of the covenant is seen. (Rev. 11:19).

The Seven Covenant Pageants

Pageant 1:

The covenant promise is realized: The serpent is defeated by the seed of the woman.

*"Now is come salvation . . ."
"They overcame him by
the blood of the Lamb, and by
the word of their testimony"*
(Rev. 12:1-12).

On earth the dragon continues his warfare against the covenant people.

*"The dragon was wrath
with the woman, and went
to make war with the remnant
of her seed, which keep
the commandments of God,
and have the testimony
of Jesus Christ"*
(Rev. 12:13-17).

Pageant 2:

The beast seeks to destroy the covenant and the covenant people.

*"Here is the patience
and the faith of the saints"*
(Rev. 13:1-10).

Pageant 3:

The false prophet pretends heaven's approval on his covenant-destroying activities.

*"Here is wisdom.
Let him that hath
understanding count"*
(Rev. 12:11-18).

Pageant 4:

The covenant people appear with the Lamb.

*The Father's name is in
their foreheads; they are virgins*
(Rev. 14:1-5).

Pageant 5:

Heaven's appeal to enter into covenant with God, and its challenge to covenant breakers.

The messages of the three angels: Worship the Creator, for judgment is come. Babylon is fallen, having broken the covenant through fornication; worship of the beast is fatal. Those who worship the beast have no rest.

*"Here is the patience of
the saints: here are they that
keep the commandments
of God, and the faith of Jesus"*
(Rev. 14:6-13).

Pageant 6:

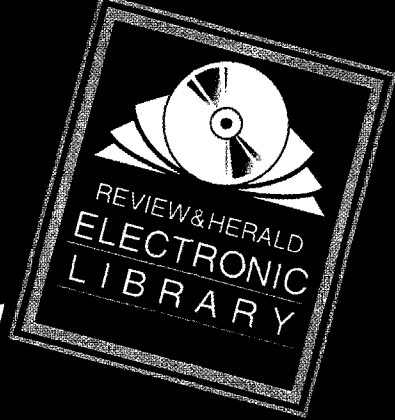
The judgment/harvest separates the righteous from the wicked.

(Rev. 14:14-20)

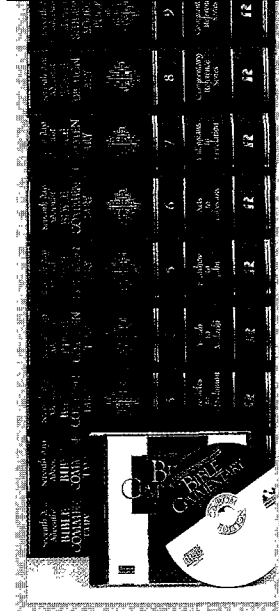
Pageant 7:

The victorious covenant people vindicate in their worship the ways of judgments of God.

*"Great and marvellous
are thy works, . . . just and true
are thy ways, thou King of saints"*
(Rev. 15:1-4)



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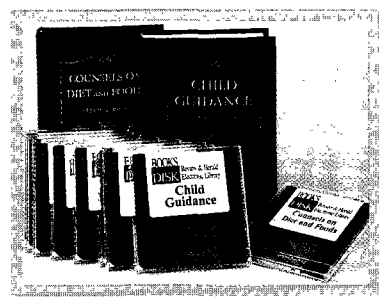
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issues heaven's final ultimatum and warning against worshipping the beast.

Under the sixth covenant pageant, the righteous and the wicked are separated in the harvest/judgment. Finally, the seventh covenant pageant depicts the victorious in worship, praising their God by singing: "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Revelation 15:3).

A divine parody

Throughout Revelation John employs satirical devices and parody to contrast God's truth with Satanic counterfeits. For instance, a comparison between Babylon and Jerusalem leaves little doubt as to the author's intent; though called a city, Babylon is no city, but rather a prostitute riding a dangerous beast in a desolate wilderness (Rev. 17:1-5). Jerusalem, on the other hand, is described as a real city (Rev. 21, 22), with foundations, walls, and streets. There is even a fraudulent counterpart to the Trinity in the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

With all this in mind, is it not possible that along with other comparisons to Old Testament themes, John would describe a counterfeit of the covenant and the commandments of God? It is strongly plausible to suggest that the worship of the beast, the worship of his image, and the reception of his name and number (Rev. 15:2) comprise a divinely inspired parody describing Satan's version of the first four commandments of the decalogue (see Figure 2).

The law as covenant, and its fraudulent counterpart

The Old Testament frequently speaks of the tables of the law as the "tables of the covenant," their depository place being in the "ark of the covenant." The preamble to the law makes it clear that God's gracious election of a people for Himself preceded the giving of the Law: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of

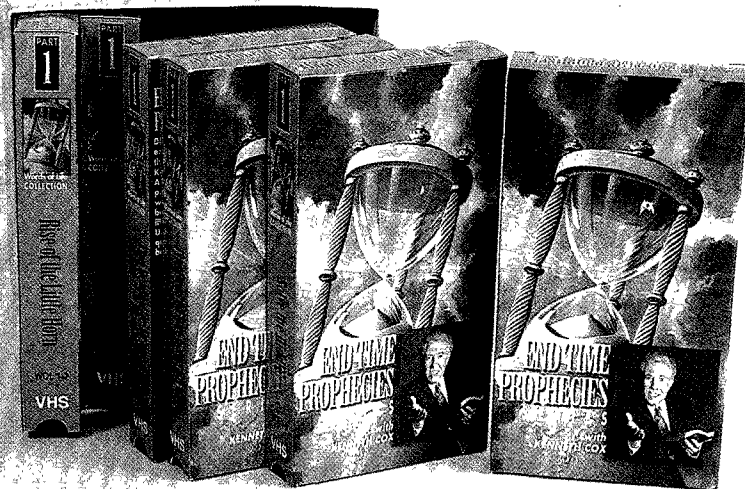
Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2). Here, as the law is given, is heaven's invitation to accept and trust the sufficiency of God's saving grace. The covenant context of the commandments reveals that grace and shows that commandment keeping was the *response* to salvation and *not* the *cause* of it. The Ten Commandments were not given so that by their works people might add something to God's salvation; rather, the law was intended

to *protect the covenant relationship* as it originated in God's gracious redemptive work.

• The call of the first commandment to worship God exclusively is founded on His sole ability to save. When we doubt His ability to save, we become candidates for worshipping other gods. Really, there are no other gods, except as fallen humans confer upon the objects of their choice a worship status. Faith in the sufficiency of God's

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salvation removes the need to worship other gods, even such as the beast.

• The second commandment's instruction not to make and worship images or likenesses of anything that exists, again is designed to protect the covenant relationship. Though ostensibly enhancing the worship of God, any human-made substitute or representation of God leads away from Him.

The worship of idols is rooted in the human quest for security. Not trusting the sufficiency of the salvation that is in God, causes us to feel that we must come up with our own substitutes for God. Inevitably these substitutes are forged out of fear and maintained in anxiety.

Even religious ideology and pet doctrinal theories, though conveying truth about God, can lead us away from God by causing us to think that salvation lies in our intellectual comprehension of that truth. Worshiping the image of the beast is involved whenever we make any human device or theory about God the ultimate word about Him.

The subtlety of idolatry or beast worship is its use of legitimate and good causes (patriotism, self-protection,

defending the faith, etc.) to further its own ends. When idolatry or the worship of anything other than God is present, more often than not these ends are promoted through illegitimate means such as: fear, anger, force, threat, or coercion. These are the modus operandi of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

• The third commandment prohibits taking the name of the Lord in vain. To know the name of a person is to have power with that individual. To receive the name of God means that we live under His ownership, having both access to Him and authority from Him. To take the name of God in vain is far more than the utterance of profane curses; it is to presume to rely on the benefits and protection afforded by that name while never really entering into the covenant relationship offered by the Creator.

To have God's name suggests being under God's protective control, and having His character. To receive the mark and name of the beast is to come out from under the protection of God's covenant and receive in one's life the damaging effects of ownership by the beast. Again, this is a form of idolatry, or making an image to the beast.

• The fourth commandment is a call to remember the sign or seal of the covenant—the seventhness of the Sabbath. The perfection of the covenant relationship is not rooted in our activity, but rests in God's calling and election. Entering into the Sabbath rest signifies that we are set aside for God alone. It is a sign of our sanctification (Eze. 20:12, 20) and our appropriation of the provisions of the covenant (Isa. 56:5, 6). It is a renunciation of all attempts to create any kind of humanly based salvation. By its nature, this renunciation rejects any purported salvation originating in the self or in potentates such as the beast.

To place confidence in the beast sets us apart from a covenant relationship with God, making us candidates for receiving the mark of the beast and the number of his name. Even when trust is focused on the Sabbath day (which itself is created) rather than on the Creator and Lord of the Sabbath, Sabbathkeeping becomes an idolatrous activity. The worship of God as Creator safeguards the covenant relationship by reminding us of the distinction between creature and Creator (Isa. 42:5, 8). The blurring of this distinction leads to idolatry.

Figure 2:

God's Way	The Covenant	The Broken Covenant	Humanity's Way
Acceptance of the sufficiency of God's saving grace	Preamble: <i>"I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."</i>		Rejection of the sufficiency of God's salvation
leads to exclusive worship of Him alone,	First commandment: <i>"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."</i>	Worship the beast	leads to the worship of other gods
which means that there will be no need for man-made substitutes.	Second commandment: <i>"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness, . . ."</i>	Worship the image of the beast	or human-made substitutes,
God owns us, controls us, shapes our characters,	Third commandment: <i>"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."</i>	Receive his mark and name	which own us, control us, and shape our characters
and leads us to freedom and rest.	Fourth commandment: <i>"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God."</i>	Receive the number of his name	and lead us to bondage, labor, and unrest.

The disguise of idolatry

Perhaps John employs the symbol of "worshipping the beast" to caricature the foolishness of all idolatry. The idolatry most difficult to detect is that which parades as worship and obedience to God. This is what makes legalism the most dangerous idolatry of all, and what makes the worship of the beast so alluring.

The charm of legalism is that it seems to work: "Have we not . . . in thy name done many wonderful works?" (Matt. 7:22). But the trap of legalism is its self-deception; it gives cheap and fickle assurance while leaving the heart unchanged. In connection with this comes the clearest illustration of the worship of the beast. We see it in the apparently alive, yet defunct religion that surrounded Jesus in His day. Standing beside this system, Jesus brought into bold relief both the emptiness of a dying, beast-like system, and the glorious dynamics of life in Him.

The commandments of God are openly addressed in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12, but they come in inextricable connection with the "testimony of Jesus" and the "faith of Jesus." The commandments in their covenant context protect us from the twin errors of faith without works and works without faith.

Toward a larger view

The approach presented here in no way threatens the foundations of historical Adventist interpretation. Instead, our prophetic heritage is strengthened as various insights from Old Testament material are plugged into the sequential historical exhibits of the work of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The impending conflict is worldwide, and the great issues in this controversy concern the law and character of God.

The covenant theme, as expressed both in the commandments of God and the sanctuary service, presents a balanced picture of law and grace, especially when put in the light of Christ. The "great controversy" focus has in the past kept the Adventist

prophetic interpretation on track. This great focus has demonstrated the universality of the final apostasy and heaven's challenge to it. Seeing the larger picture in Revelation 12-15 not only reinforces the proclamation of the message Adventists proclaim, but also guards us against the self-deception of making an idol out of

"having the truth."

The messages of the three angels still carry heaven's challenge to earth's apostasy. The marching orders for our church are found in these three themes. But the messages of the three angels contain the medicine we must regularly take ourselves as we move out to dispense it to others. ■

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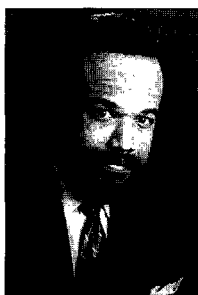
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Beware of the boomerang!

Walter L. Pearson, Jr.

Reciting your predecessor's deficiencies does not win you support.



Walter L. Pearson, Jr., is an associate secretary in the Ministerial Association for evangelism and church growth at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

One of the simplest ways to explain the difficulty associated with any new district is to blame the pastor who preceded you. Everything from the indifferent attitude of the congregation to the poor maintenance of the physical plant can be placed at the feet of that single individual. After all, it would seem that even a leader with minimal skills could successfully analyze needs and take corrective measures before escaping to greener pastures. Even without adequate technical preparation, the former pastor could have dealt with these difficulties by prayerfully seeking and following the direction of the Holy Spirit. There is no excuse.

In the absence of your predecessor's input, reasons for apparent shortcomings are difficult to conceive. The local church leaders also appear at a loss to explain these glaring evidences of pastoral ineptness. You decline to contact your fellow worker regarding the problems. After all, discussing the subject would be less than comfortable for both of you. And so it goes.

The first district probably offers the only opportunity you will ever have to blame a predecessor with apparent impunity. No congregation is left behind to recount your leadership flaws. Oblivious of the fact that there are always enough problems left over as well as busybodies to describe them in the worst possible light, you are filled with righteous indignation. After that first district there should be an increasing awareness of the boomerang theory. One day the pastor who follows you will be tempted to take a similar shortcut. You could easily be the one

who is blamed for all of the problems left behind. Boomerang!

Is it the boomerang theory that Paul had in mind when he wrote "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7)? While the theory operates universally, it certainly applies to religious professionals who stoop to criticize their peers. Hurl criticism at another, and like a boomerang, it will return. No matter how skillfully you disguise barbs in sanctimonious verbiage, public censure damages the reputation of a fellow worker. Even if the members don't immediately understand what you're about, the text suggests that God won't be fooled.

Some of the same people who fervently admonish church members to love each other or who chide them for touching "God's anointed" drift into this nefarious pattern themselves. Yet there is no reason whatever to think that the boomerang theory does not apply to interpersonal relationships between pastors. While you will not necessarily immunize yourself from harm by your forbearance, the Lord's promise is steadfast. You guarantee problems for yourself when you participate in the disparaging of another.

Reciting your predecessor's deficiencies certainly does not win you support, regardless of the factors that may have warranted the need for a new pastor. Not every member of your new congregation was fervently praying for new leadership. The needs of a few members will usually vary significantly enough from the norm to make them appreciate a less popular leadership style. The former pastor probably suited

somebody so well that they were devastated by the change. Though those individuals are in the minority, there's no reason to risk alienating them even further by personal attacks on a defenseless fellow worker.

So what do you do? Here are three things within our reach:

Appreciate diverse talents

Don't lose perspective because certain needs in the church seem to dominate your attention. God has endowed leaders with various capabilities. The needs that tend to correspond with your unique talent mix will naturally be more obvious to you. Who in their right mind would want to recognize ills that they cannot cure? "In our association with one another we are to remember that all have not the same talents or the same disposition. The workers differ in plans and ideas. Varied gifts, combined, are necessary for the success of the work. Let us remember that some can fill certain positions more successfully than others. The worker who has been given tact and ability that fit him for the accomplishment of some special line of work should not blame others for not being able to do that which he, perhaps, can do readily. Are there not things that his fellow workers can do far more successfully than he?"¹

Be grateful that people with diverse professional expertise are enlisted in order to accomplish a task that might be quite difficult if left to only one. Instead of criticizing a predecessor's deficiencies, affirm that individual's abilities as part of the grand plan that also makes full use of your gifts.

Be aware of the tender trap

Some members of the congregation are quick to sense or create professional jealousy within pastoral ranks and are ready to exploit it for personal benefit. They denigrate the former pastor while implying that you represent the cure for the ills of the church. Their hope is that you will express your gratitude in a tangible manner as you formulate your administrative cabinet, guide in the selection of church officers, or make

some other critical decision. If you fall prey to this scheme, you will betray a lack of genuine respect for church leadership and a naive propensity to be blinded by flattery. "Remember that he who takes the position of a criticizer greatly weakens his own hands."²

Don't join the critics

Even if the pastor you are called to follow failed in some regard, it is a mistake for you to join the critics. In some extreme case you might need to address the gravity of a particular situation that resulted from the failure of a fellow professional, but even then your emphasis should center on the situation and not the worker. "My brother, my sister, you are forbidden to make the mistakes of a fellow worker the subject of conversation. By speaking evil of another, you sow the seeds of criticism and denunciation. You cannot afford to do this. Go to the one who you think is in the wrong, and tell him his fault 'between thee and him alone.' If he will hear you, and can explain the matter to you, how glad you will be that

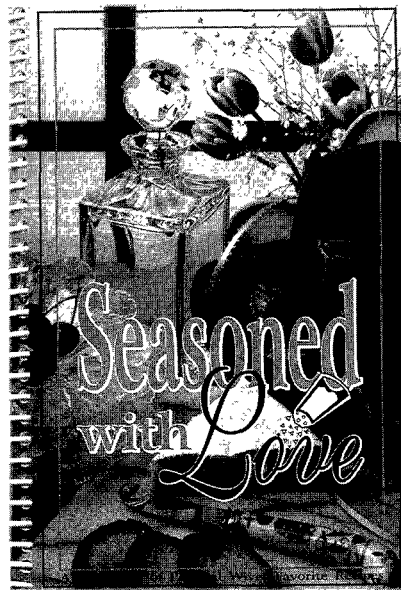
you did not take up a reproach against him, but followed instead the Saviour's directions. Let us refuse to bear evil reports concerning our fellow laborers. The reputation of men and women is held of high value by Him who gave His life to save souls. He has told us how those in fault should be dealt with. No one is sufficiently wise to improve on God's plan."³

The negative energy that you spend in criticizing a fellow worker is bound to make your leadership more difficult. On the other hand, if you emphasize your predecessor's contributions and strengths, you will receive the respect of those who desire the best for the church. Some may even speak of your abilities, having observed your magnanimity. The boomerang theory operates both negatively and positively. Mercy begets mercy. ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 103.

² *Ibid.*, p. 634.

³ ———, in *Review and Herald*, May 12, 1903.



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Adventism and secularization

Bert B. Beach

How can Adventism meet the challenge of secularization within the context of its commission and hope?



Bert B. Beach, Ph.D., Th.D., is director for Inter-Church Relations at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Adventism's primary task is to prepare a people for the soon coming of Jesus. Two major obstacles stand in the way of achieving this objective, especially in the Western world. First is a general confusion about biblical teaching. Overcoming this obstacle requires dynamic theological reformation. Second are ideological or conceptual changes which disavow the essence of Christianity and what it stands for. Overcoming this obstacle requires revival of the apostolic spirit and its dynamic mind-set.

This second danger, involving thought change, can be called the ongoing process of secularization. This process began with the Renaissance and the breakup of a thousand years of Western society dominated by the church. During this thousand-year period, the church dominated most aspects of European culture, politics, law, education, art, music, morality, economics, and community life. By contrast, in a secular society, such as today's, church and religious leaders do not control reason and thought processes. There is a free market of ideas that expresses itself in an environment permeated with an array of competitive ideologies.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been reasonably successful in dealing with the first obstacle—confusion over biblical teaching. It has brought about doctrinal reformation and highlighted long-neglected, or even repudiated, truths, such as the Sabbath, the pre-Advent judgment, and Christ's high-priestly ministry. However, the church has been much less successful in dealing with secularization and

attracting people with a secular mind-set. Adventists have been most successful in reaching religious or semireligious people, especially those who are already Christians or influenced by Christianity. They have much greater difficulty in reaching secular people or those of other faiths.

Secularization: the phenomenal path

Further complicating this dilemma of the Adventist Church is a by now well established fact: Western culture, the longtime bulwark of Christianity, can no longer be depended on as the bastion that it once was. Christianity has largely lost out to secularization. How has this come about?

First, the Renaissance. This so-called rebirth of learning shifted attention from God to humans, from the world to come to this world. The discovery of Greek philosophy and literature gave an alternative to the Christian worldview, emphasizing the human as the center and measure of the universe. The Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt said that the Renaissance was the rebirth of the individual person.

Second, the downside of the Reformation tended to make the churches inward-looking and as a result removed church influence from society and directed it to internal theological or church polity issues.

Third, the rise of nationalism helped kill the concept of Christian citizenship, producing competing nationistic states and cultural views. Warfare and conflicts increased, and doubts proliferated about the church and the God it claimed to represent.

Fourth, the rise of science gradually

appeared to destroy the church's assumptions regarding the universe and human nature. While Copernicus and Galileo curtailed the existing doctrine of the cosmos, Newton inadvertently raised questions regarding God's control of the universe. It seemed God could be replaced by the cohesion of the law of gravity. Then Darwin arrived to challenge the doctrine of creation by postulating that human beings were essentially little more than advanced rational animals. About the same time, Marx proclaimed a classless society as the coming new world order. Then Freud questioned the doctrine of conversion and religious experience by providing a psychological explanation for these phenomena, making any supernatural experience superfluous.

Fifth, the Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, was another force in the secularization process. It predicted that progress would come inevitably through the application of reason, science, and human development. There was no need for divine revelation; natural religion could provide a basis for public morality.

Sixth, urbanization had its influence. George Hunter calls urbanization the Siamese twin of secularization.¹ As people flock to the cities and are uprooted from their traditional religious moorings, a consciousness of God is "reduced."

All these developments have given humankind increased autonomy, longevity, and greater control of their lives, the environment, and even outer space.

And so the secular person asks, "Why, then, do we need the crutch of religion?"

The churches' inadequate response to secularization

The secularizing impact of these movements has been enhanced by the generally ineffective reaction of Christian churches. Traditionally, Christian churches have responded to science by controlling or condemning research and by indexing or banning books. Consequently, the church has

been seen as the enemy of research, rational thought, and new discoveries. Also, churches have often opposed, or been unsupportive of, democratic and human rights movements. Christianity has often been seen by its critics as reactionary, and its credibility has been undermined.

It cannot be gainsaid that the churches' response to the cries for justice and the calls for democracy has been irresolute, even hostile. Fortunately, this is less the case today than in the past.

Christianity's response to urbanization has failed seriously. The Western church, especially Protestantism (including Adventism), has generally been uneasy toward cities and urban challenges. It is sometimes said that the churches have lost the cities, but it is clear that the churches never really "had" the urban classes, as John Wesley and William Booth realized. More than ever, today's inner city represents a major evangelistic failure.

The church and culture: a schism

The schism between Christianity and Western society takes at least three forms (from partial to complete), as shown by Martin Marty.²

The first path is "*utter secularity*." God and the churches are attacked, sometimes bitterly. This is exemplified by the French and Russian revolutions and people such as Voltaire, Marx, Bertrand Russell, and Lenin. Continental Europe is the stronghold of these assaults.

The second is "*mere secularity*." God and the churches are not attacked directly, but ignored and made to appear irrelevant. Here, contemporary British society is an example. Religion is taught in schools, prayer begins the school day, but generally this is a powerless, even hypocritical formality. Christianity is seen as having some vague connection with good behavior.

The third is "*controlled secularity*." This path is followed in the United States. The churches are involved in social religion. Traditional American values are proclaimed, and Christianity becomes a kind of civil religion. The

religiosity of the *Reader's Digest* exemplifies this socioreligious picture.

The problems of secularization are not unique to Christianity. Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Shintoism, and other religions are similarly challenged. According to one report, this century alone has seen the world's atheistic and nonreligious people jump from 0.2 percent to 21.3 percent.³ The rise of atheistic or agnostic segments of society has widened the gulf of separation between Christianity and culture.

Some characteristics of secular people

Such Christian thinkers and distinguished preachers as Lord Donald Soper, Robert Schuller, Donald McGavran, Canon Bryan Green, Sir Alan Walker, and George G. Hunter III make it clear that secularists are not just a religious or amoral people, sophisticated academics, or frustrated materialists. They list various characteristics of secular people:

- *They may be described as essentially ignorant of basic Christianity.* Christian knowledge has become "the echo of an echo of an echo," as Sir Alan Walker aptly puts it.⁴ The sound is now so weak it can hardly be heard. Secularists have a negative image of the church. They question the intelligence, credibility, and relevance of the church and its spokespersons.

- *The secularist is life-oriented.* Most sicknesses today are no longer life-threatening crises, but inconveniences. Death is not the ever-present threat it used to be. People concentrate on this life, not on expectations after death.

- *Secular individuals are indeed "individuals," alienated and often lonely—alienated from nature, neighbors, politics, and of course the fellowship of the church.* They are conscious of doubt more than guilt. Guilt is seen not in self, but in heredity, parents, environment, the system, government, etc. Doubt and suspicion are the common factors, not guilt.

- *They are untrusting.* God is the distant and demanding tyrant, the

policeman, the sugared Santa Claus, the manipulator, or the absentee landlord charging a high rent. There is a total misunderstanding of the character of God.

- They suffer from *low self-esteem* and the related loss of dignity. "I'm not what I think I am. I'm not what you think I am. I'm what I think you think I am," says George Hunter about the secularist.⁵

- The secular person *sees the forces of history as out of control*; no one is or can be in charge. They envision a chaotic tomorrow, perhaps even a future on a short atomic or pollution fuse. Not only history, but their own personality is viewed as out of control. Hundreds of millions are addicted—from alcohol to nicotine to drugs to money to sex to food to gambling. Addiction is the great new fact of our secular era.

How shall we approach secular people?

But the real question is how we meet the challenge of secularization within the context of our Adventist obligation and hope. How shall we approach the secular person with what we consider the good news about Christ and the greatest event about to happen? How can we reach out across the divide between us? Here are some suggestions:

- *Provide basic instruction* regarding Christianity. Don't begin in the middle. Assume they know next to nothing. Make yourself interesting. Use more music and drama with excellence and increased audience participation. Use dialogue rather than monologue, participation rather than exhortation.

- *Help people find meaning.* Communicate life's meaning. Dean Kelley in his book *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* suggests that growing churches communicate meaning. They help people make sense of their lives. Meaning gives identity. Identity provides security.

- *Engage them in dialogue.* You must be a communicator, not just a

commentator. It is more effective to quote the living stars than the learned dead! The increasing popularity of radio or television call-in shows indicates the desire for question-and-answer communication. While reaching out in dialogue, you will discover that you do not have all the answers. Hunter is right in predicting this will drive you to prayer and motivate you to study and think about Scripture and its present meaning.⁶

Dealing with the doubts and questions of your interlocutors will confront you with, and help you solve, your own dilemmas.

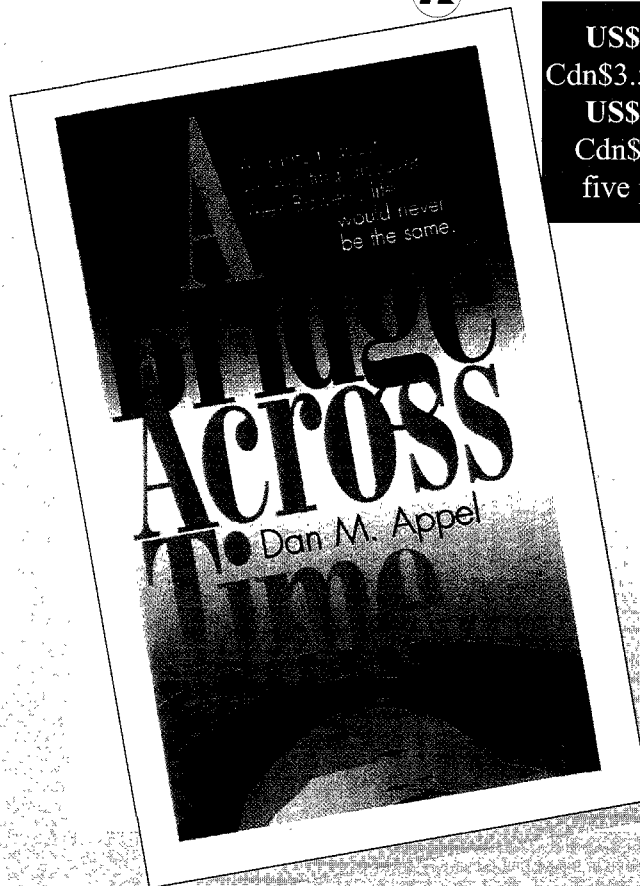
- *Provide opportunities for secular people to meet credible Christians.* The legalistic Christians, the conspiracy-oriented ones, won't do. Those who genuinely love God and love people, those who can share their struggles and victories, and those who care about others, not just about their

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own self-opinionated, theological obsessions, are the ones who can make the contact and the impact.

• *Provide opportunities to overcome alienation.* Many people are alienated from nature, from neighbors, and from political-economic powers. Retreats in natural settings, small group meetings, support activities, and involvement in Christian social causes are some activities that would help overcome such alienation. Such services are parallel to evangelism. They are part of Christian mission.

• *Provide opportunities to discover dignity and self-worth.* Of course, the stars and universe do not revolve around me. But God has given each person gifts, a capacity to excel in something. An effective convert must discover his or her self-worth, or that individual will live in the secular swamp, never climbing the heights of Christian maturity.

• *Provide hope.* The second coming of Jesus is the greatest hope. It is not esoteric doctrine or pie in the sky by and by. It does not belong to date setters, prophets of doom, confused Zionists, or crazy people with stars in their eyes. Properly presented, without gaudy pictures, it has appeal. History is not out of control. We have this hope.

• *Provide support for addicted people.* Art Glasser has called addiction the dominant form of possessive and destructive evil today. We must present Christ and His church as liberation from the demon of addiction in all its compelling forms. We must meet needs and offer freedom, the "glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

• *Provide and use social networks and contacts.* Friendships are bridges. It is so much easier to create our own little separate world of believers. The Adventist Christian must develop "integrity-filled relationships" and be a bridgebuilder. Joining service clubs and other organizations with high standards is helpful in networking and serving the community, thus enjoying and reaching all kinds of people.

• *Provide and multiply units and services of the church.* In the past few

years stores and supermarkets have multiplied their offerings and in many places their hours of service. But many churches offer little more than what they did 25 or 50 years ago. People like and expect options. There is need for new groups and new churches—"ports of entry" for people. We need, where possible, multiple ministries (not just church worship service, Sabbath school, prayer meeting, and youth meeting). We need to scratch right where it itches. Even secular people "need to be needed," need to come to terms with life, need significance by being helped, and by helping.

Standing by the door

Christianity needs to be relevant and be seen to be relevant. While we are not "of the world," we have a need to join the human race. We need to communicate the gospel persuasively and powerfully. But we also need to minister to people. We need to talk to people about the world they know, or we will talk ourselves out of the world into irrelevance. It is nice and comfortable to be far inside the church, surrounded by good, God-fearing people. But if that is where we choose to be, we will be too far away from secular people. It is better to stand by the door, where there may be a cold draft from time to time, but where we can reach out and easily welcome people in.

"Near enough to God to hear Him,
And know He is there,
But not so far from people as to not hear them—

Outside the door!"⁷ ■

¹ George Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 29.

² See Martin Marty, *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular*.

³ See George Hunter, p. 33.

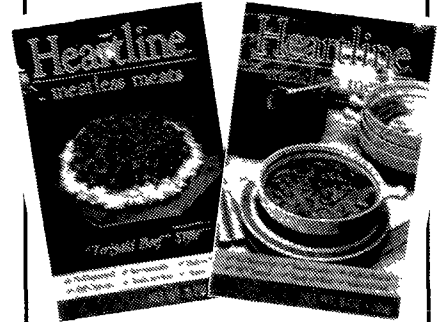
⁴ Alan Walker, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 29.

⁵ Hunter, p. 51.

⁶ Hunter, p. 58.

⁷ Samuel Shoemaker in Helen Smith Shoemaker's biography, *I Stand by the Door: The Life of Sam Shoemaker*.

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Trends affecting giving in the North American church. Analysis along with some answers.

Neville G. Webster

Seventh-day Adventist church members in the North American Division have a reputation for outstanding generosity. In recent years, however, there has been a disturbing slump in their per capita giving (see table). Stated in 1987 dollars, adjusted for inflation, tithe per capita rose from \$383.20 in 1950 to peak in 1970 at \$594.36 and then slump to \$467.79 in 1990. Per capita Sabbath school and mission offerings also fell dramatically from \$136.40 in 1950 to \$25.75 in 1990. Per capita giving to local projects rose from \$98.77 in 1950, peaked at \$296.55 in 1970, then fell back to \$235.33 in 1990.¹ Some may suggest that reduced earnings is the reason for reduced giving. However, the last column in Table 1 shows that disposable personal income per capita in the United States has risen steadily, in constant 1987 dollars.

Reasons for reduced giving must be sought elsewhere. This article highlights several attitude and lifestyle trends, identified in the United States, that may partially account for this reduction in giving. The article also explores the impact of these trends on church leadership, local and cooperate.

Selected social trends in the U.S.

Socioquake is a word coined by Faith Popcorn,² a researcher of sociological and consumer trends, and consultant to many Fortune 500 corporations. Socioquake describes the dramatic

societal shake-ups in the United States, which, in "seismic" terms, will far exceed previous socioeconomic tremors. The effects of these demographic and lifestyle changes on the management and marketing practices of most organizations are often tracked and commented on by strategists and trend-trackers.³ The effect of these trends on the strategies of not-for-profit organizations is often ignored. Even less is written about the implications for religious organizations or churches. The consequences of ignoring what is happening in society would be disastrous for any organization, including the church.

The following societal trends have been selected from among many, particularly for their impact on management practices and strategies within church organizations.

Collapse of confidence.⁴ Big government, large corporations, small

businesses, health care providers, charities, and churches—all have fallen from grace. The trust of customers, members, and supporters has been violated, time after time. Credibility has been severely impaired. The tragedy is that these trust violators have not been limited to slick politicians or unscrupulous marketers. Too many "saints" have also demonstrated their sinfulness by misappropriating donated funds, mismanaging church assets, or failing to render adequate account of entrusted resources.

Sense of victimization.⁵ People react—often excessively—as they search for payback or revenge. Popcorn writes of the vigilante consumer.⁶ For church organizations, the vigilante consumer/supporter has been transformed from the odd single "troublemaker" at the annual church business meeting into an array of disillusioned supporters, complete

Year	Tithe per capita	SS AND MISSION per capita	Local per capita	Disposable Personal Income per capita
1950	\$383.20	\$136.40	\$ 98.77	\$ 6,214
1960	493.47	136.79	201.28	7,264
1970	594.36	121.22	296.55	9,875
1980	564.32	54.21	295.91	12,005
1990	467.79	25.75	235.33	14,101

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with photocopy, fax machine, and Internet, demanding more detailed answers to their questions, more frequent feedback, and greater control over the resources they have contributed.

Cocooning. Popcorn defines cocooning as “the impulse to go *inside* when it just gets too tough and scary *outside*. . . . Cocooning is about insulation and avoidance, peace and protection, coziness and control.”⁷ Americans are retreating from a dangerous world they feel they cannot control, into a smaller world (their home) where they can feel more control. So they screen their incoming telephone calls, shop from home, have their favorite foods delivered to their door, run businesses from home, and beef up their home security. When they leave home, they do so in the plush comfort of their mobile cocoon (minivan). Only those who are invited gain entrance to the cocoon.

Churches are having a more difficult time accessing their members than ever before. Some members are even using call screening facilities against church agents just as effectively as they use them against overzealous telemarketers.

Personalization. People are no longer prepared to accept that they are just a digit in a supercomputer. They now demand recognition of their unique identity. Personal service and customization have become important. Naisbitt and Aburdene call this trend “the triumph of the individual.” In a church situation, members are demanding that they be treated as respected individuals, rather than as part of a faceless mass.

The do-it-yourself trend.⁸ Henkoff calls this trend powerful, massive, and unorganized. Victims of poor service and shoddy products are doing for themselves what they once entrusted to others. They are buying in bulk. They drive utility vehicles that allow greater versatility and do-it-yourself capability. They go for do-it-yourself home products.

These do-it-yourselfers stay abreast of events and information through the Internet. They manage their own finances through electronic connections with banks and brokers. They communicate across the world with friends and business associates via fax and E-mail.

And it is all happening in and around the home cocoon as a way of regaining control, avoiding the rip-off, stretching the dollar, and achieving a sense of pride and accomplishment. These are the members who are likely to give their tithe and offerings electronically, who want to dialogue with their pastors or conference leaders via the Internet, who want to be actively involved in the planning and running of church projects, and who want to keep a supervisory eye on how church finances are being used.

Who are these do-it-yourselfers? Henkoff says they are “mostly middle-aged and middle-class,” and the baby boomers (those born soon after World War II), who to date are the most important segment of the American economy. They are well educated, smart, technologically alert, and astute buyers who tend to be early adopters of new products, ideas, and services.

If the baby boomers are the muscle behind the do-it-yourself trend, there is yet another group that has “much in common with their boomer siblings”⁹: the 18- to 34-year-olds, called Generation X. This group makes up about 30 percent of the U.S. population compared to 26 percent in the case of the boomers. We have largely ignored this new generation, and yet these are the very members we hope will fill our pews, fund our projects, and provide new leadership.

Felt needs behind the trends

What are the underlying motives driving these trends? What do church administrators and pastors need to understand that can help them restructure the giving systems of the church? Here are some of the motives that prompt many, especially in the North American church:

1. Economics—the need to believe that the church is stretching its resources and gaining better value for its money.

2. Personal involvement—the need of members to be personally involved and to have a sense of accomplishment, a sense of ownership.

3. Control—the members’ felt need to have control of their lives, their choices, their resources, and the quality

of everything they are involved in.

4. Distrust of people and organizations that fail to honor promises and live up to declared values.

5. A desire for respect and recognition.

6. The search for an anchor—individuals or a structure with uncompromising, rock-steady integrity they can depend on.

The cash flow problem

We return now to the problem of why funding for the Adventist Church has decreased. The answer is multifaceted.

There are powerful *spiritual and philosophical factors* at work. Are the do-it-yourselfers in the church losing their faith in administration? Is this causing them to evade their commitment to the church’s mission?

Demographic factors could also influence cash flow. In the United States church growth during recent decades has sprung from lower income groups rather than from the upper income groups.

There are *promotional factors* that may be responsible. This article concentrates only on one slice of the total picture—the *social factors* identified in this article as they impact on local and corporate church leadership.

These social factors suggest that loss of confidence, decreased accountability, and the depersonalization of the funding process have been major contributors to the decline in giving. We have already seen in the table that donations peaked in 1970. Tithe per capita decreased after that. Could this correlate with the breakout of major church issues that rocked member confidence in the seventies and eighties? The table also shows that as giving to Sabbath school and missions decreased, offerings to local projects increased. Could it be that as feedback and control over mission projects decreased, members diverted their giving to local needs where they had more control and could ensure greater value for their money? It is true, however, that even local giving decreased in real terms after 1970. This could be because of the same dwindling trust that drove tithe downward.

Church members who are part of the

do-it-yourself trend are genuinely concerned that their donations be used for their intended purpose, and used efficiently. But they apparently feel that their trust has been so violated that they prefer to transfer their funds to projects that give them regular feedback on efficiency of fund usage and some degree of control.

Implications for the local and corporate church

What impact will these trends have on the way we lead the church? Both baby boomers and Generation Xers wait in the wings to take over the leadership and support roles in the church, but currently show little interest in the church as they perceive it, and are the most distrustful of leadership. Listening and reasonably adapting to their needs would have to be a priority.

How do leaders rebuild trust and reestablish a real sense of ownership? To start with, here are some suggestions:

- Redesign the local and corporate accounting and reporting system to ensure higher levels of accountability.
- Avoid establishing funding to be disbursed at the sole discretion of any one person with little accountability to anyone else. This is a sure way to erode confidence, even if handled by the most honest church leader.
- Increase the status and importance of the audit report, which should not only be carefully digested by leaders, but sent to executive committee members and, where appropriate, to constituency business meetings. Auditors should write their reports with the average non-accountant in mind and explain the implications of their findings carefully and in common terms. Church auditors should be totally independent, answerable ultimately to church members only in a constituency session.
- Assure donors of maximum economic value. As administering a larger church becomes more challenging and complicated, higher proportions of the donated dollar go for maintaining the system, and expenses tend to be managed with less care. In today's distrustful atmosphere more accountability is imperative.
- Give supporters more control over

their donations and foster a sense of personal accomplishment. Start by making available a range of projects, with details of what is needed for members to get involved. Put a face on each project. Then invite members to make direct donations to specific projects of their choice—donations involving both their skills and their dollars. Give them regular, detailed feedback on progress and finances, and ask for their comments, questions, or counsel—and actually listen to what they say.

- Cultivate the servant model of leadership and bury forever the autocratic model that so easily creeps in.
- Create an open, trusting culture, from top to bottom. Have an open-door policy by which any individual or group can approach church leaders, be heard, and be given complete and honest explanations to all questions. This could involve opening an E-mail line to dialogue with them.
- Provide continuing training for leaders in current management techniques.
- Avoid the slightest conflict of interest.
- Make *both* the president and treasurer directly accountable to the governing committee. Removing the financial officer from accountability to the president creates an additional check on financial decisions, and a roadblock to dictatorship by either officer.
- Provide an easily accessible, independent, arbitration panel that can act as an "appeals court" for members or employees who are dissatisfied with actions taken by administrators.
- Increase the laymember component on church institution boards and controlling committees.
- Establish an organizational structure that makes church leaders directly accountable to their constituency and gives more authority to local churches.
- Restore authentic spirituality to the center of Christian leadership.

General fund needs

Some may well ask, "What happens to the general operating fund that is still the backbone of the church mission program?" What if everybody chooses

one or another exciting, high-profile project from the list and neglects the needs of the general fund? Who pays for administrative overhead, for the retirement fund, and other less appealing infrastructural necessities?

Do-it-yourselfers are not the whole church. There are still many members who do not have the temperament or need to be so involved and controlling. These other members will likely still donate to whatever church fund is currently promoted. Thus, strong public promotion of needy funds will continue to be necessary, but the needs must still be more personalized. Once church leaders have regained the members' trust, it is likely that the do-it-yourselfers will resume giving to the general fund. The key is to regain trust. The rebuilding of trust can work only if applied as a package. Band-aids applied here or there will not work.

Many of the suggestions listed above are already being practiced in parts of the church. Individually they will not accomplish much until there is a true cultural shift that transforms the churches' mind-set and organizational system. The central leadership focus should be on creating and maintaining a long-term trusting bond with individual church members. ■

¹ Annetta Gibson, "Divisional Winners in the Growing World Church" (presentation at Andrews University School of Business, Crosstalk program, Nov. 20, 1992).

² F. Popcorn, *The Popcorn Report* (London: Arrow Books, 1991), p. 228.

³ See, for example, K. J. Clancy and R. S. Shulman, *The Marketing Revolution* (New York: Harper Business, 1991), p. 314; P. F. Drucker, *Post Capitalist Society* (New York: Harper Business, 1993), p. 232; J. Naisbitt and P. Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990s* (New York: Avon Books, 1990), p. 416; T. Peters, *Liberation Management* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), p. 834.

⁴ A. Clurman, "Social Change in a Marketing Context" (presented at a meeting of the Michiana Chapter of the American Marketing Association in South Bend, Indiana, Oct. 20, 1994). (Ann Clurman is a partner at Yankelovich Partners, Inc.)

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Popcorn, pp. 69-77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-33.

⁸ R. Henkoff, "Why Every Red-blooded Consumer Owns a Truck, and a Five-Pound Jar of Peanut Butter, and a Personal Computer, and a Tool Belt, and a Case of Energy-saving Light Bulbs, and Why It All Matters on a Nearly Cosmic Scale," *Fortune*, May 29, 1995, pp. 86-100.

⁹ C. Horton, "Easy Pickup Line? Try Gen Xers," *Advertising Age*, Apr. 3, 1995, p. S-22.

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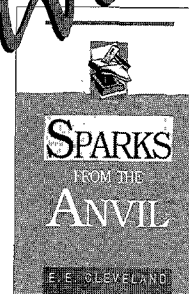
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Careful! Your symbol is showing!

James A. Cress

What do your symbols say? Christians have always employed meaningful symbols to describe their faith, to identify their understanding of mission, to embrace an ideal, or to rally the faithful to spiritual warfare.

Likewise, Scripture is full of symbols. Think of a few that are used to describe Jesus—a lion from Judah as deliverer; an innocent lamb offered in sacrifice; the rejected cornerstone, the rose of Sharon, the balm in Gilead, or the rock cut without hands that crushes all in its path to victory.

Symbols are not wrong. God Himself employs their communicative ability. "I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets" (Hosea 12:10). "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people" (Isaiah 11:10, NKJV).

Sometimes, however, the symbols we use are meaningless or, worse, offensive. Imagine my horror when our Pathfinder club was notified that its flag was offensive because it was similar to a Nazi banner from that tragic era preceding World War II.

With the cross of Jesus . . . going on before! If in these words you hear the refrain of a great Christian hymn and are reminded of the power of the gospel to advance into all the world, you will find the cross a magnificent symbol of triumph. However, if you were on the receiving end of the great crusades during the Middle Ages, you would view the same cross as an imperialistic symbol of those who wish to force either your conversion or your eradication through the force of numbers.

Our editors once recounted a story I

had shared of changing the church signboard. Instead of three angels, in an artistic but vague symbolic style, we chose the more familiar emblem of the cross. Our change was intentional. While the angels had portrayed our self-understanding of a unique last-day message, they conveyed no meaning to the community. We wished to state clearly that we were Christians with our ministry centered in the Saviour.

A few days after the signboard was in place I met an unchurched friend at a business luncheon who remarked that she had noted our new design. Commenting on the clarity of the cross for a Christian organization, she added, "Every time I passed your church before, I wondered what those three bugs were all about." Imagine! We had portrayed angels. She had seen insects.

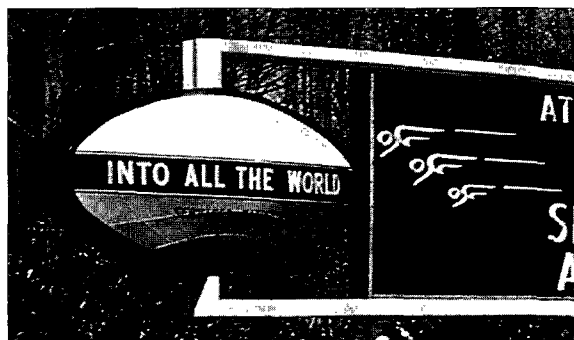
Do your symbols say what you mean? While those angels held deep meaning to anyone who understood what they were and what they represented, they were meaningless to the uninitiated.

On the other hand, I had little realized how much emotion and energy can be stirred by a simple change in symbols. Certain individuals immediately pounced upon this change to prove that our congregation had abandoned the faith. They declared that cross a Romish compromise that was just the tip of the iceberg on our journey to apostasy.

Even our reminder of the powerful scriptural impact of the cross could not persuade those critics whose fervor was exceeded only by their ignorance. They

were not interested in the words of the apostle Paul. *But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.* Their minds were made up. They had found their cause. They were disinterested in what the community saw in our "three insects" as long as there was no compromise in "the way we had always done things."

Recently I saw another new church sign where the angels look like three swimmers in competition. At least the



church is in Atlanta, host to this year's Olympics. Perhaps viewers will conclude that this congregation embraces the spirit of international games!

We should consider what our symbols say. If we use three angels, they may communicate effectively to our members but ineffectively to the world. We should consider for whom our symbols are intended. Early Christians used the symbol of the fish to identify each other as believers. But they used the scandalous cross to proclaim the essentials of salvation through Jesus Christ. Personally, I prefer symbols that are so unambiguous that no one need wonder about either our message or our mission. ■

Reach for Life evangelistic radio

Reach for Life, a new radio program, features the powerful, soul-winning sermons of Charles D. Brooks. The 30-minute weekly program is hosted by veteran Adventist broadcaster Harry Jeffery. Light contemporary music gives the program a "now" feel. *Reach for Life* can establish or expand an SDA presence (e.g., church, school, hospital) in your area or prepare for an area-wide evangelistic series.

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Church planting summit

SEEDS '96 is a summit for church planters held on the campus of Andrews University from June 12 to 15, 1996. Sponsors are the North American Division, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and the North American Division Evangelism Institute (NADEI). Featured plenary speakers will be Al McClure and Charles Bradford. Bob Logan, described by Peter Wagner as "America's foremost authority in the field of church planting," will conduct a major training seminar. In addition, multiple Adventist church planters will be sharing insights into church planting in 15 exciting seminars. A new resource, *Seed Planters Guidebook*, will be released at the summit to all registrants. This practical Adventist guide to church

planting will be the best tool available for those planning on planting a new church. For further information, call 1-800-ALL-PLNT (1-800-255-7568). Or write to SEEDS '96, Russell Burrill, NADEI, 9047-3 U.S. 31 N., Berrien Springs, MI 49103.

SDA Bible studies software

My conference president commissioned me, a local pastor, to write a series of software Bible studies. The *Bible Dig* program features the 27 fundamental beliefs of the church with printable worksheets (in WordPerfect 5.1 or newer or Word 2.0 or newer format). Sixteen extra subtopics answer specific questions common for new believers. The program requires just two megabytes, yet contains more than 100 sheets of information (printable worksheets, add another 2 megabytes).

Bible Dig involves a Windows-based one-step installation. (Not available in Mac.) For evangelists who want a customized version with their own comments and a license to distribute freely at public meetings as an attendance incentive, E-mail 74617,442 about the possibilities.

The *Bible Dig* series is available at Adventist Book Centers. Or order electronically via CompuServe by typing SWREG at the menu traffic light and select the option "register shareware." Then click on Registration ID and type 9002. You will be prompted to enter further information, and CompuServe will bill you US\$10 plus \$2 mailing fee within or \$5 outside the United

States. The product will be mailed within 48 hours.

A free demo program may be downloaded from the Internet at web page: http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Joel_Neil. That page gives instructions on downloading and installing the web page file.—Joel Neil, CompuServe 74617,442.

CPE and PEF residencies

The clinical pastoral education residency at Florida Hospital has five openings for the yearlong program beginning September 1996. In this large, multi-faceted medical center, residents will have experience in a number of specialty areas, interaction with CPE supervisors Wes Monfalcone and Dick Tibbits, colleague relationships with a number of staff chaplains, and an opportunity to enjoy Orlando, Florida. Applicants should have a previous unit of CPE in preparation for this experience.

Additionally, two new positions will open this fall for pastoral education fellows, postresidency students who will concentrate on pastoral care research and publication. Applicants should be persons who have completed one year of CPE residency or who are approaching the research phase of a graduate degree.

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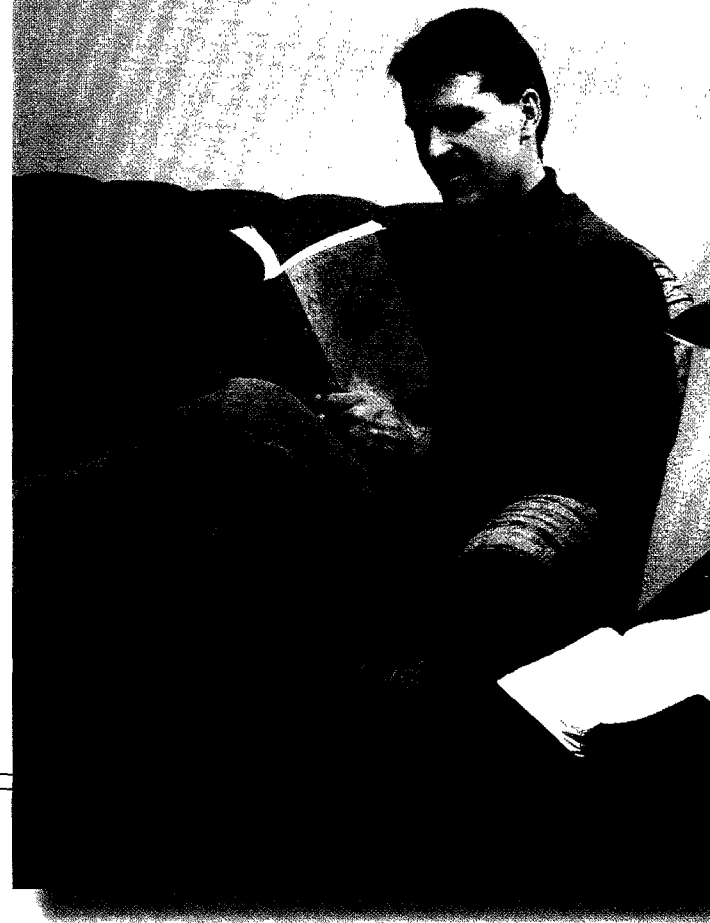
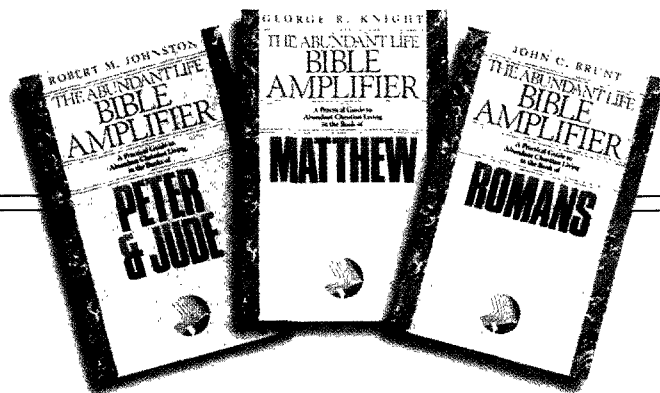
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