

MINISTRY

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THE LANDSCAPE OF THE CHURCH

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OUR READERS RESPOND...

General practice pastors

I am not a pastor, but I have enjoyed *Ministry* for many years. I really enjoyed both Willie Hucks's article ("General Practice Pastors: The Foundation of Ministry," April 2007) and Reinder Bruinsma's article ("The Babylonian Temptation: Making a Name for Ourselves," April 2007) and hope to use the latter as a basis for a presentation at our church.

On the first article, I would like to see more written on this subject, as it is very timely and yet a very complex issue. Our church has fewer than 30 members and is in a four-church district. I would especially like to see a response from the seminary and something from conference leadership. I think funding is a major issue, both from the viewpoint of conferences and the seminary, and this was not dealt with in this article. I also wondered why the writer seems to assume large churches are justified in having multiple paid staff but small churches should operate with volunteers. Do the Mormons have something to teach us on this matter? From my layman's viewpoint, it would seem one of the necessities is to have a clear job description for the small or multiple church pastors so they can feel justifiably fulfilled and successful rather than overwhelmed and simply give in to doing what seems most urgent at the moment.

—Carlyle Welch, email

I really appreciated Willie Hucks's recognition of general practice pastors as skilled and valuable professionals in their own right. As a pastor of multichurch districts for 28 years, I can attest to the fact that there is an unspoken devaluation of the multichurch pastor. Pastoral specialization and apparent yearning toward upward mobility support this perception. Our culture lauds success, and the church follows suit by granting acclaim and recognition for specialty ministries and programs that proffer simple solutions for complex challenges. As a multichurch pastor, I know that one model does not fit all challenges or settings, and a successful future pastor needs to learn multiple approaches and the time-consuming nature of the

process. As an occasional woodworker, I know that there is a time to use the gouge chisel or the vibrator sander, but there is also a result that comes only from tedious hand sanding.

We have done a great disservice to the current and future front line by following cultural norms—placing new recruits primarily in the uncommon setting of a large church. The strengths that the multichurch pastor is required to develop could be recognized, and future leaders groomed, by setting up a mentoring relationship between these two groups that continues until ordination. I believe this could be successfully implemented by blending the large church experience with multiple small church exposures over the two year period that Dr. Hucks recommends.

I fear we tend to laud success and overlook the process that brings true growth and change, or as Gordon MacDonald notes in *The Life God Blesses*, when we polish the rails and glorify what is above the waterline, and forget the critical value of the keel.

—Dennis Altrogge, Columbia-Centerville-Hohenwald district, Tennessee, United States

I wanted to let Dr. Hucks know how much I appreciated his article on general practice pastors. Though I currently pastor a one-church district, I have pastored multiple churches before and I would still consider myself a general practice pastor.

I thought the article really was an encouragement to those of us pastors who find ourselves "doing it all." Excuse me if I sound prejudiced, but I believe "specialists" have their place, but the general practice pastor is really at the heart of ministry.

Thanks for the good words for us all in whatever form of ministry we are in.

—Carlis Clinton, email

The Babylonian temptation

Thank you, Dr. Bruinsma, for your article titled "The Babylonian Temptation: Making a Name for Ourselves" (April 2007). It is my prayer that our church will not be distracted by adopting unashamed

usurpations of God's honor, fortress mentality, safety in numbers, lack of faith, and search for power and control. I hope that we will, instead, face the challenges of the hour, focusing on our mission.

—Elie Weick, Chicago, Illinois, United States.

Dr. Bruinsma puts his finger on a root cause of much of our denominational dysfunction. Too often we serve, preach, and involve ourselves only if the name of the church can be put forward. It gives the impression that our denomination is more about itself than the kingdom of God. Perception is reality for the perceiver, so anything we can do to clarify that we are about honoring the name of God and building God's kingdom would be a good thing. David G. Benner puts it eloquently in his book *Desiring God's Will*: "The prayer that comes most naturally for all of us is 'My name be hallowed, my kingdom come, my will be done.' This is a prayer of independence and willfulness. It is the liturgy of the kingdom of self" (p. 33).

Just as we wish the people assembled at our services each week would not think church is just all about them, neither should we as pastors or denominational leaders think our work is even primarily about building a name for our denomination; rather, it is about glorifying God's name and building His kingdom.

—Andy McDonald, email

The cosmological anthropic principle

Although I do not understand all the science that Dr. Karlow understands, with what science I do know, years ago I concluded that there was a mass of our world in existence many years ago, and the 6,000-year existence applies to the inhabited world as we now know it. I believe all Adventist scientists agree with that view. Evidently there are many theologians who have not been in agreement with that view; hence, the need for such an article. The article ("The Cosmological Anthropic Principle: Apologists and Homilists Beware!" April 2007) was excellent. It almost makes me want to

continued on page 27

Growth calls for responsibility

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER



From the earliest days the Christian church has focused on growth. The book of Acts takes us on a breathtaking journey—following Paul and others as they shared the message of Jesus Christ. More recently, after a few years of ambivalence following the disappointment of 1844, Adventists embarked on gospel-proclaiming journeys. James and Ellen White, Joseph Bates, J. N. Andrews, and others proclaimed the message.

As a result of the journeys of these leaders, the number of believers grew—even before a formal organization existed. It's impressive, as recorded in the early issues of the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, how much attention the church pioneers gave to keeping the family of believers intact. If they heard that someone was discouraged, they hurried to bring hope. If someone stopped attending worship services, the church leaders wrote personal letters of encouragement. The pioneers demonstrated the ability to evangelize and retain members.

More importantly, how are we at retaining members? The Executive Committee of the General Conference issued an appeal titled "Conserving the Membership Gains" in April 2007.* Such appeals are important, but we must resist introducing new programs that "guarantee" that our church will retain its members. First of all, no such program has been developed; secondly, as important as programs are, our greatest need may not include another program.

Where is the list? Can you imagine the new head of a transportation business being told that of the 5,000 trucks the company owns, only 2,500 can be found? Or imagine the new head of a

bank being told that 50 percent of the cash has disappeared? Yet it is not unusual for pastors who come to a new church to find that for a significant number of members even an address does not exist. Worse yet, when the pastor asks about certain names, all too often no one seems to even remember those individuals.

Seventh-day Adventists at times resist "ceremonies," but here's one that I hope we will enthusiastically embrace. At the time a new pastor receives an introduction to the congregation, a leader should present a list of all of the members to the pastor. Perhaps such an approach would compel the congregation and the previous pastor to take more seriously the need to even have such a list.

Don't worship the numbers. In approximately 150 years the Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown to about 15 million members. Good news, of course, but what does that mean? Faithfulness to the call of Christ cannot be counted in numbers alone. What does it mean when an individual is described as the pastor of the largest church in that city? Would they be less faithful in their ministry if they had the second largest or even the smallest church? If we don't care for the person *in front of the number*, we are not being faithful to the calling.

The person comes first. In our congregations, do we emphasize the person? Consider, for example, the way

we welcome individuals transferring to our churches from other congregations. It's a disturbing trend when individuals introduce new members and do not even know how to pronounce the name of the person being welcomed. In at least one case the leader asked from the pulpit how to pronounce the name. I have also witnessed the names read and the pastor or elder asking if the new members are present in the congregation. If people are important to us—and that's how Jesus treated people—then let's also treat them as important by knowing that they are in the congregation and how to pronounce their names.

The pastor who would not stop.

Some years ago I was holding evangelistic meetings in Utica, New York. The pastor, along with various members and I, would meet before the meetings to review the evening's program. One evening the pastor was missing. Just before the meeting started, he called from a pay telephone (before mobile phone days, of course) and explained that he had been traveling most of the afternoon from one location to another looking for a member who was no longer active. He had finally found the member but would be late for the evening's meeting. That's focusing on the person and not the number. I commend that pastor—Henry Kenaston—for knowing the difference between a person and numbers. That's the way Jesus worked. ▀

* www.adventist.org/beliefs/other_documents/conserving-gains.html.

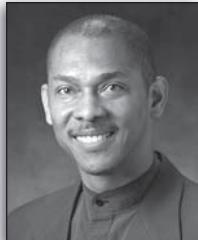
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The landscape of the church

Nikolaus Satelmajer
Willie E. Hucks II



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Historically the secretary of the General Conference has not only kept statistics for the church but has also coordinated the mission outreach of the church. The editors of *Ministry* interviewed the secretary, associate secretaries, and assistant secretary—because these individuals are able to reflect on the state of the church worldwide. (One of the associate secretaries, Claude Sabot, was not able to be present for the interview.)

Nikolaus Satelmajer: On May 20, 1863, Uriah Smith was elected as the first secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Pastor Bediako, since you are the current secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, I'll pose the first question to you. How do you think Uriah Smith would have described the Seventh-day Adventist Church then, and how do you describe it today?

Matthew Bediako: In 1863 the church was a North American church with about 3,500 members. At that time, the church had not even decided to take this gospel to other parts of the world. Today we have a church of more than 14 million baptized Seventh-day Adventists in 206 countries. Printing and preaching is in several thousand languages and dialects.

NS: What are some things similar between the church then and the church today?

MB: We haven't changed the message; it's still the same. The blessed hope, the soon coming of Jesus Christ is still what we talk about, what we pray about, what we sing about.

Willie Hucks: Please describe the primary functions of the General Conference Secretariat.¹

MB: The secretary and his team are officers of the General Conference, and as the working policy states, the secretariat works with the other officers to guide the church. We are charged with preparing agendas for executive committee meetings, keeping minutes, keeping records, and also recruiting missionaries.

NS: What are some of your specific responsibilities, Pastor Evans?

Larry Evans: I assist the secretary, as directed, with his overall responsibilities. The undersecretary deals largely with administrative and personnel matters. He serves as a liaison to one of the world divisions. He also prepares agendas for executive and administrative committees as well as the policy review and development committee. A new policy book is produced each year and is now nearly nine hundred pages including the index. The working policy is much more comprehensive, by necessity, than when the first one was printed in 1926, which had sixty-four pages.

NS: How does policy aid in the mission of the church?

LE: One of the chief values of policy is that it assists with keeping the church unified through its emphasis on equity and fairness. Policy also helps incorporate key governing principles learned from the past. Policy is dynamic rather than static. But it serves an even greater purpose, at least from my perspective, in that it helps facilitate mission. If it does its purpose well, it will help minimize administrative tangents so that the real work of the church can be done.

NS: Larry Evans mentioned being a liaison with various divisions to the world. What does that mean for each you?

MB: Rosa Banks can start. She is the liaison officer for the West Central Africa and the East-Central Africa divisions.

Rosa Banks: It means being able to answer policy questions, train secretaries, help them with

their agendas, and just about anything that deals with secretarial duties. We provide guidance and assistance whenever requested.

Agustin Galicia: The secretariat also relates to administrative issues concerning mission. When divisions have questions, or they want us to help them with the mission, they come to us and then we go either to Pastor Bediako, to the presidential office, or to the treasury office.

Vernon Parmenter: And we also recruit interdivision employees (missionaries) and volunteers for various parts of the world.

GT Ng: We do a lot of mechanical stuff, so our job sometimes appears to be a little mundane because we do the same thing over and over again. So, I'd like to look at secretariat from a bird's-eye view. We are actually an integral part of fulfilling the mission of the church. There is the recruiting, the training, the sending, and the caring of missionaries around the world. That's our job primarily, in a nutshell, because we have around a thousand missionaries in the field and all have been processed through this office.

LE: Also, we are involved with training union secretaries and division secretaries. We're also very much involved, at least once every five years, in the assessment process of how the work is doing at the division level. The central role is to keep the mission going forward, to make sure we're not bogged down in the mechanics of things. If we ever get so encumbered with policies to the point where they're holding us back, then secretariat needs to take a look at that so we can streamline policies and procedures, making sure that mission goes forward.

MB: Let me add that secretariat is there to support the leadership of the division and the union. We are not there to take over but to support and to work with them, counsel with them to make their work a little bit easier. The secretariat is the face of the General Conference to the divisions and the unions.

NS: From all of your perspectives, what are some of the challenges—politically, economically—that we face as a church? What are the things you want the readers of *Ministry* to know?

RB: Recently I was in The Gambia, where we were interacting with government officials in regard to the church helping with various projects connected with their hospital—that's a part of mission work.

AG: Inter-America is launching a division-wide program in order to reach the three million membership mark in May.

GN: We have a lot of good happenings in South Africa, but our readers should be mindful of the challenges of ministering to people of other religious groups. We have not found an active way of presenting the gospel to many of these people, so most of the people who have been baptized have been from other Christian denominations.

VP: My area is a little different from the rest because I oversee the volunteer program. That means for the whole world church, not any one division. I often tell people when I move around that I have the most exciting job in the office, because I get to see our church members involved in ministry around the world. There's something about seeing these people, often not trained for the ministry, being used by God in a tremendous way.

NS: How many volunteers do you have out at any one time?

VP: That's difficult to ascertain. It depends on what your question really is. Are you asking me how many interdivision volunteers, or are we talking about intradivision volunteers?

NS: I guess interdivision, people who actually leave their homeland and go somewhere else.

VP: Interdivision is around eighteen hundred. Intradivision, the numbers are so large it is hard to determine the number.

NS: Dian Lawrence—you take care of service records, I understand.

Dian Lawrence: Yes—missionary records—or interdivision employees.²

NS: It's a very exacting job, I'm sure.

DL: Yes, it is. I also provide yearly statistical reports on different aspects of interdivision service, such as how many interdivision employees have permanently returned, and how many have been sent out each year. We also keep record of deferred³ mission appointees, which are usually dentists and physicians.

NS: Now, there must be times when you keep somebody's record, you have no idea who they are, and then you meet them.

DL: Well, that's really special. When I attended my first Welcome Home Seminar at Andrews University, it was thrilling to hear their experiences that they had in the field. I see their names all the time, in minutes, in Appointees Committee; but to be able to put a face with a name is special.

MB: The Institute of World Missions, based at Andrews University, is a part of secretariat. It is our hope to also train the intradivision personnel within the divisions. We are now getting ready to begin training personnel who receive missionaries.

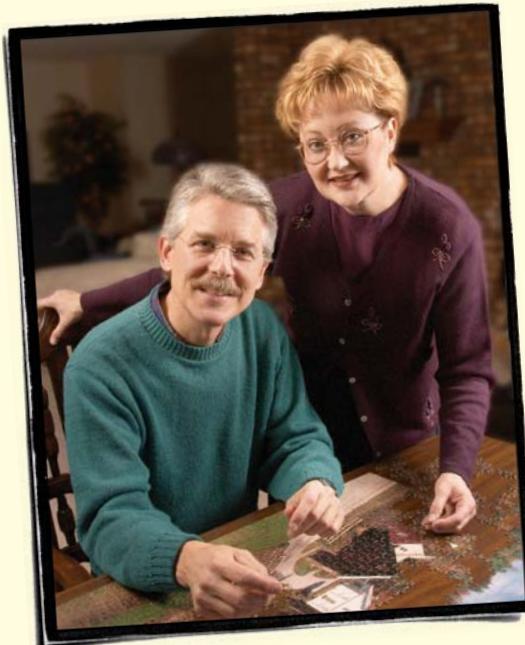
RB: The secretariat now has what we call a missionary care program, where we pray for these missionaries during their birthday months, write letters to them on their birthdays, and send special "Thank-you" cards and gifts during the Christmas season. These are some of the ways that we thank them for their service. I am always joyful when I get letters from them, thanking us for remembering them. The letters we write have all of our names on them, so when they write back, as they often do, they get to thank each associate secretary personally.

WH: Let's change the topic. What is the "glue," be it theological, operational, and so forth, that holds the Seventh-day Adventist Church together?



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LE: It seems to me that the glue, at least from my perspective, is a sense of mission. Mission involves theology, it involves nurture and compassion, it involves finances, it involves all of those things. But the central point, it seems to me, is our passion for mission. And I think all of my associates reveal that passion as they work and inspire the missionaries that we send out. We must send them out with a sense of enthusiasm, with expectancy, with confidence that they will be cared for when they get there.

VP: When we look at our mandate in secretariat, I think we see that one of our major roles is to foster mission. Just recently we had a whole weekend retreat dedicated to the issue of how can we do mission better in the 10/40 Window.⁴ Yes, the secretariat exists in order to provide possibilities for mission service.

MB: What we need to remember is that secretariat doesn't do things on its own. We are working together with others at the General Conference. We are all working together as a team to foster this mission that the Lord has given to us.

RB: I think it's our love for Jesus too, and willingness to do the work that He left us to do. When I think of the "glue," I think of Jesus as being the One who holds us together.

LE: It's amazing how well organized and unified the church is. The human element is there, but the amazing thing is to see this huge structure work together. And there's no secret that what we do is being blessed by God.

NS: The period between the nineteenth and twentieth century, at least from what I can tell in our history, was a period of explosion, with us sending people overseas, usually from North America and from Europe. I get the impression there were times that there were more missionaries than there were members in some countries for years.



Dian Lawrence



Matthew Bediako (left) and Larry Evans (right)

MB: Yes, there were the years that we had only missionaries from the Western world. But we have been successful in training nationals to replace these

missionaries in their own areas, so that these missionaries could move on to places where the church is not known or the church is not established. And thank God we have established many colleges and seminaries throughout the world, where nationals are now well prepared to do the work that missionaries had to do. And it's interesting that people from those countries that once received missionaries are now sending out missionaries. That's a successful program.

NS: That is a radical shift then, from the time when one part of the world would send to other parts. Now it's really interconnected.

AG: We want not just to be recipients of the gospel, but to share the gospel in many parts of the world.

NS: What kind of individuals are you sending? What are some of the professions? They're not all ministers, are they?

DL: Medical, for instance.

MB: The need is for medical professionals, or for professors in universities. When it comes to ministers, we prepare the nationals to do it. We send missionaries to these universities and seminaries so that they will multiply their talents by training more nationals who labor at the front line for their own people.

NS: Is that also true with the volunteers?

VP: It could be copied in many respects, but I think you'd see on our list quite a number of additional vocations. The list is quite exhaustive, and whatever the need is, we try to find the right kind of person.

GN: One of the major challenges in the twenty-first century is doing cross-cultural mission. Usually you go to a culture that is not yours, and therefore, there are a lot of things to learn. Thus I see Mission Institute taking on greater significance because of the world becoming a global village. We need additional training of these missionaries before they go out.

MB: We need to emphasize that, contrary to rumors, the General Conference is not withdrawing missionary budgets. What we want to do is to redistribute the budget. Some countries have received missionaries for the past fifty to sixty years. We feel that the time has come for us to transfer those budgets to the 10/40 Window, areas where the church is not known. Thus, we are not reducing missionaries. We are redistributing them.

NS: Where does the money come from for all of these appointments?

MB: The funding is provided by the church, through tithes, offerings, and mission offerings.

NS: So the Sabbath School offering supports the work of the missionaries.⁵

MB: Yes, and I can tell you right now that doors are opening in places that

were once closed to us, and when that happens, we need the funds available to send people there.

NS: So are you suggesting another Pitcairn⁶ type of growth and interest in mission offerings?

MB: Well, we need to promote the total offering so that we can increase the number of missionaries.

VP: And we've opened the door with the new His Hands⁷ program we launched last year. We have tremendous need for workers in places like Africa and India and so on. But they just don't have the funding, not even sometimes to provide accommodation for a volunteer. Because of that need, the Lord showed us a way, I believe, to encourage churches and institutions to catch the vision of the need and raise the money to send volunteers to serve in those particular areas. This is really quite a new direction, even though Ellen White years ago encouraged churches to unite together to send missionaries to foreign lands. But as a church we need to balance regular giving with special giving.

LE: We have a desperate need for more missionaries who know the language of unreached people groups. We need to have people learning the languages of the places where we do not have work.

AG: I was in a meeting last Sabbath, and one person was trying to raise money because they said that they have ten couples with Arabic background ready to go, but they don't have the funds.

WH: What are some statistical trends that encourage you and some that concern you?

MB: Right now, accession for the past three or four years has been about one million people coming every year to our church. But when you look at the retention, we have many challenges.

We are losing about one-third of those that come into the church. That's a great concern. We need to be able to close the back door, so that people who come in will stay. How can we nurture everyone so that we can keep the retention very high? Right now, that's our major concern when we deal with statistics.

LE: On the other side of the equation, the growth side, we're baptizing someone on the average of every thirty seconds. That means about almost three thousand a day. An organized church is formed every four and a half hours. Now, that not only creates financial problems and the need for more church buildings, but it also means that we need to provide the infrastructure to support these new members. Literature is a big need in some of these places. How to help people become stabilized in their new faith is one of our great challenges. So, the strengths overextended become a weakness. We've got to find a way of meeting these challenges.



Rosa Banks (left) and Agustin Galicia (right)



Vernon Parmenter

MB: Church unity is very high on the agenda of the church. Secretariat is charged with the responsibility of the preparation of the *Church Manual*. The manual guides leadership for the running of local churches worldwide and is updated every five years and approved at General Conference sessions.

NS: We send out missionaries from all divisions; but don't all divisions receive missionaries also?

MB: Yes, right now, our slogan is "From everywhere to everywhere." Even North America, the birthplace of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, receives missionaries. And this is a good thing. It keeps reminding us that we are a world church, and I'm one of those who believes that even if a division has all the personnel, we still need to have somebody from another division working in that division to remind us of just how worldwide we are.

VP: We also have some other areas of concern. Things like the percentage of our church members engaged in regular Bible study, those members who are not involved in the community at all, those who don't have regular worship and prayer. And as we look at the future, the church has taken these concerns seriously and is looking at ways to encourage our members in these areas.

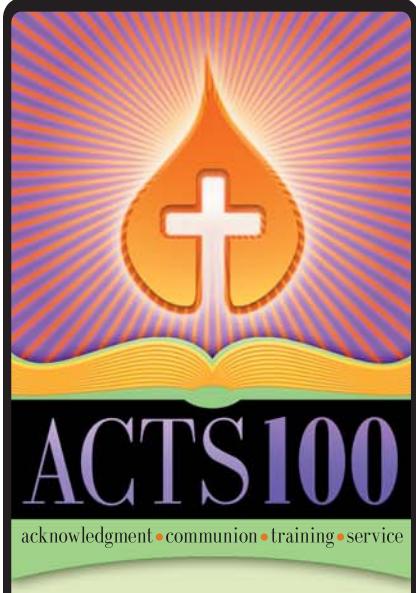
NS: Here's my last question: I'll start with you, Pastor Bediako, and all of you who wish to respond can respond. How has your job impacted your life?

MB: Being the secretary of the General Conference has enriched my life because now I look at the church on a worldwide basis. It has helped me to know the power behind the gospel, how the gospel has entered places that once seemed inaccessible. And that brings joy to my heart. And when I meet people who are happy to volunteer their time, their lives, and their resources for this work, that's really encouraging.

GN: I would like to say that I like the feeling of belonging to a worldwide family.

RB: I like the fact that all of us work together to reach people without distinctions of color, gender, physical status, and so forth. All of this diversity that surrounds us is joy for me.

VP: I came from one of the smallest divisions, the South Pacific Division. It's



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—Brooke B. Collison, Inviting People into Small Groups.

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a division that is somewhat isolated from the world. And I guess working there for thirty years or so before coming here, I now have a perception of what the world church is, and what it stands for and how it operates. I discovered, coming here, that my tiny little world was so unrealistic. When confined to a small area, you say, "OK, that's the task that's been given, it's in this area, and we have to do this and this to finish the work." But when you look at the world on a world scale, it opens your eyes tremendously. And I've come to the conclusion that, as I think about the difficult places we have yet to make an impact on, like the 10/40 Window, I can't for the life of me see how we ever will achieve it. I think that the Lord will cut the work short in righteousness and some miracle's going to happen. And, for me, that's an exciting prospect.

LE: I think probably the thing that has impressed me is that, no matter how big the world is, the gospel comes to people one at a time. Yes, there are group influences and all that, but the good news still has to reach each person individually. I haven't found one person in any part of the world who doesn't need hope, a message of hope. We happen to have a message that the world needs, and I am so fortunate to be one of the ambassadors.

GN: May I say something to the readers of *Ministry*?

NS: Sure.

GN: Most of your readers are pastors, some elders. Many face budget questions. Sometimes it's difficult to think of the mission in New Guinea when you are trying to see how you can survive for the month. And yet, we have to ask ourselves, how is this church fulfilling its mission, besides doing evangelism on the local level? How can I enhance the mission of the overall church? It's natural for us to tend to give more to local church budget than to mission. Yet Ellen White calls it collective selfishness. So our appeal is to our readers, besides caring for the local budget, don't forget mission offering, because by emphasizing mission and mission offering, we can

help make sure that the mission of the local church will flourish.

MB: Let me end with this. We thank God for the growth that has taken place the last ten to fifteen years. We have entered many territories for the Lord, but we need to remind ourselves that the gospel commission is to every tribe, kindred, and people. What is twenty million compared to seven billion? This commission is for all of us, and to those of us who have experienced the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, there's a responsibility that together we carry this message to those who do not yet know Jesus. ▀

Photography by Reger Smith

1 The Web site for the General Conference Secretariat is www.gcsecretariat.org.

2 Individuals who leave their home division (South Pacific, for example) and serve in another division (Southern-Asia Pacific, for example).

3 Individuals who make a commitment during their training that they will accept missionary appointments once their training is completed.

4 The imaginary rectangle called the 10/40 Window is located between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north of the equator, and stretches from West Africa, through the Middle East and into Asia. Two-thirds of the world's population live here and they're the world's poorest people, the vast majority of whom have never even heard the name of Jesus.

5 For additional information about such offerings, visit www.adventistmission.org/article.php?id=282.

6 In 1876 Pitcairn islanders read with interest the contents of a box of Seventh-day Adventist literature sent from the United States. A decade later, on October 18, 1886, Mr. John Tay, a missionary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, arrived at the island and, by unanimous vote, was allowed to stay and argue his cause. The islanders decided to make Saturday the day of rest. Conversion was greeted by the Seventh-day Adventists in America, and they raised funds for a missionary ship, which sailed for Pitcairn in 1890. The islanders were baptized in one of the rock-bound coastal pools. Information from library.puc.edu/pitcairn/pitcairn/history.shtml.

7 The His Hands program is a new initiative of the General Conference Secretariat and the Adventist Volunteer Center, which challenges every church in the world to sponsor and support a volunteer missionary and for every church to host a sponsored volunteer missionary. Institutions and individual church members can also participate in the program. The purpose of the program is to engage church members in the mission of the church on a full-time basis for a period of one or two years.

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Children and Communion

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One of the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs, "The Lord's Supper," states that "the communion service is open to all believing Christians."¹ While this statement does not address the question of whether unbaptized children of church members should take part in the Communion service, the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* states that "after receiving formal instruction in baptismal classes and making their commitment to Jesus in baptism, they are thereby prepared to partake in the service [Communion] themselves."² No age limitation is given in the reference to "all believing Christians," nor does it state that "all believing Christians" must be baptized.

The question of participation in Communion by children who are not baptized was discussed at the 1980 General Conference Session.³ Helpful insight is also given in the "Bible Questions" column by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez.⁴ The issue is still being discussed and it is a topic that pastors have to deal with. At the 1980 General Conference Session, W. B. Quigley appealed, "I would like to recommend that both areas be studied."⁵ One of those areas he stated was the question of children and Communion. In the spirit of wanting to study this topic further, we offer two articles that reach different conclusions. We hope that our readers will find the articles helpful.

—Editors

1 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2005), 225.

2 *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2005), 85.

3 "Sixth Business Meeting," *Adventist Review*, 22 April, 1980; "Tenth Business Meeting," *Adventist Review*, 24 April, 1980; "Fifteenth Business Meeting," *Adventist Review*, 1 May, 1980.

4 Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "Children and the Lord's Supper," *Adventist World*, June 2006, 40.

5 "Tenth Business Meeting," *Adventist Review*, 24 April, 1980, 29.

The Lord's Supper and children's participation

Darius Jankiewicz

While maintaining that Adventists practice "open Communion," the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* states that unbaptized children should not participate in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.¹ The manual, however, does not provide an adequate theological explanation for its stance. This is perhaps why, in practice, Adventist congregations approach this issue in a variety of ways. In some churches, children and unbaptized teenagers are indeed precluded from participation; in others, families take part together, the parents deciding if and when their children are ready to understand the significance of this ordinance. In churches uncomfortable with either of these options, children may participate in a separate Communion service, complete with footwashing and "unblessed" bread and wine. This ambiguity may have its source in a lack of theological clarity regarding the ordinances of baptism and Communion. Thus, a brief discussion regarding the scriptural understanding of these ordinances, as well as their interrelationship, is necessary.

From the New Testament rituals to sacramental theology

While the New Testament does, to some extent, explore the nature of these ordinances, the question of their mutual relationship, or the order in which they should be administered, appears to be of no concern to the New Testament writers. According to them, baptism and the Lord's Supper had primarily symbolic significance (Rom. 6:3–5; Col. 2:12; 1 Cor. 11:24; John 6:53–56). Baptism was seen as a public declaration of one's new birth and allegiance, and an individual was also incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Additionally, participating in the Lord's Supper symbolized one's commitment to Christ. This communal meal was celebrated in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, as well as for the enrichment of one's relationship with Him. Apart from the issue of "worthiness"

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(1 Cor. 11:27), we find no instruction as to who could participate.

During the post-apostolic era (second to fourth century A.D.), these ordinances, now called *sacraments*, came to be seen as a "means of grace"; that is, when a sacrament was received, God's grace was supernaturally infused into the believer's soul. For this to happen, however, one had to have been baptized into the church. Baptism, the gateway into the church, imprinted human souls with an indelible mark or seal (called *Dominicus character*) that separated those who were baptized from the rest of humanity for the rest of their lives.² This seal, validated during the sacrament of confirmation, enabled believers to benefit from the sacrament of the Eucharist, i.e., to receive God's grace through partaking of the emblems.³ Additionally, the fourth century saw the introduction of the belief that, following the words of consecration, the bread and the wine changed into the actual body and blood of Christ.⁴

Thus, the elements were worthy of veneration, that is, a form of worship. In this way, the sacrifice of Christ was reenacted on behalf of believers each time they participated in the Eucharist, regardless of their spiritual disposition. The benefits of the sacrifice, however, were not transferred to them if their souls were not especially enabled through baptism. In this way, a causal

relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper was established. Thus, according to Roman Catholic (and later Orthodox) teaching, baptism qualifies a person to take part in the Eucharist. Unless these sacraments are administered in the prescribed order, the fullness of salvation is not available.

The Protestant Reformers refuted the Roman Catholic understanding of the sacraments on several grounds; they insisted on the primacy of the Word of God and, most significantly, argued that faith, and not the sacraments, was the means of God's grace. The sacraments now represented God's promises and were a sign of Christ's presence. Participation was viewed primarily as a sign of grace already given rather than being the "means of grace" per se. The Reformers considered the sacraments to be no more beneficial to the believer than other forms of proclamation, such as a sermon or personal witness.⁵ The sequence of the sacraments and especially the causal relationship between baptism and the Lord's Supper, so crucial to Catholicism, was no longer an issue. It may be conjectured, however, that the Reformers did not depart significantly from Catholic tradition on this point. With the exception of the radical branch of the Reformation, the Reformers continued the Catholic tradition of infant baptism; thus, it was natural that baptism preceded the Lord's Supper.

Theological considerations

Cutting through the sacramental crust that at times obscures biblical teaching regarding baptism and Communion helps us to reflect on several important issues.

First, in contrast to Catholic theology, it must be affirmed that participation in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper is not necessary for salvation.⁶ While baptism symbolizes a new beginning, the person being baptized is already under the grace of God. This does not say that the New Testament negates the relationship between conversion and baptism. This relationship, however, does not appear to be absolute, with the thief on the cross, who was converted but had no chance to be baptized, as an example. (Luke 23:40–43; cf. 19:9).⁷

Second, Catholic teaching that identified baptism as a seal and Communion a vehicle of God's salvific grace is clearly unscriptural. While baptism may have significant and lasting spiritual benefits, the act itself does not bestow God's grace or salvation, nor does it, in some imperceptible way, enable the believer to receive the benefits of Communion. Reacting to the strict sacramentalism of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, some Protestants maintain that Communion has purely symbolic meaning. In agreement with the Reformed tradition, however, it can be stated that, as an act of worship, Communion is more than a memorial because it presents an opportunity for believers to be drawn closer to Christ, who is present spiritually among the believers.⁸

Third, Catholic theology maintains that, following the blessing, the bread and wine change into the real, albeit invisible, body and blood of Christ. Biblically, however, the prayer that precedes Communion appears to say nothing more than "Thank You" to Jesus for His sacrifice (Matt. 26:27; Luke 22:17; 1 Cor. 10:16). Since nothing really happens to the bread and wine, offering it to children should not present a theological problem. By the same token, the practice of offering children "unblessed" bread and wine, however well intended, is theologically misguided.⁹ Those who

participate, rather than the bread and wine, are the ones blessed.

Fourth, for the above-mentioned reasons, Catholic theology advocates a "closed Communion." In contrast, Adventists have advocated the opposite, as they have seen no biblical reason to limit participation in Communion to church members.¹⁰

Finally, we need to decide the status of unbaptized children and teenagers in the church. While unbaptized children may not yet have their names on the church roll, they are nevertheless an important part of the family of God¹¹ with salvation available to both children and baptized members alike (Matt. 18:3, 4; 19:14).¹² The entire family, from the youngest to the oldest, participated in and was blessed by the ritual of the Passover¹³ (Exod. 12:25–27), a practice that persists to this day among orthodox Jews.¹⁴ Likewise, both children and baptized members can be blessed by participating in the Lord's Supper, an ordinance that was typified by the Passover.

Ellen White's position

According to Ellen White, church ordinances continue as a time when the worship experience is elevated to the highest levels. They also promote a spirit of communion, forgiveness, and humility.¹⁵ These rituals, however, are not the vehicles of salvation. "Salvation is not to be baptized, not to have our names upon the church books, not to preach the truth. But it is a living union with Jesus Christ."¹⁶ This living union with Christ rarely occurs instantaneously in the believer's heart; rather, this union becomes a lifelong process, of which baptism is but a part. Although Ellen White counsels that baptism is desirable as soon as possible for young believers, "there should be no undue haste to receive the ordinance."¹⁷

In contrast with strict memorialism, Ellen White maintained that "[Communion] forms a living connection by which the believer is bound up with Christ, and thus bound up with the Father. In a special sense it forms a connection between dependent human beings and God."¹⁸

On the basis of the published writings of Ellen G. White, it appears that she

also ardently supported an "open Communion." Of all her comments on the matter, the following are perhaps the most poignant and unambiguous: "Christ's example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord's Supper."¹⁹ "There may come into the company persons who are not in heart servants of truth and holiness, but who may wish to take part in the service. They should not be forbidden. . . . He [Christ] is there to convict and soften the heart."²⁰ This statement clearly allows the participation of anyone who wishes it, even though they may not understand the full meaning of the ordinance or be prepared for it. Christ's role, she insisted, includes the convicting and softening of the heart. If *anyone* can be invited to participate, why should the children of the church be excluded? Would not Christ be willing to work with children?²¹

Nowhere in Ellen White's published or unpublished writings, and this should not come as a surprise, do we find a definitive stand on the issue of children's participation.²²

Putting it all together

In view of the above considerations, it may be concluded that there are no substantial biblical or theological reasons that would preclude unbaptized children's participation in Communion. Scripturally, baptism does not appear to

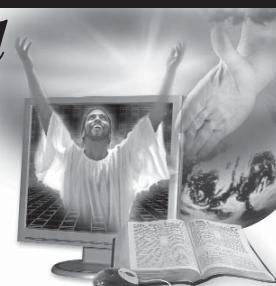
be a marking point of participation. Making it such may contribute to viewing baptism as either a magical or mystical event or a maturity passage, something baptism was never intended to be.

Believer baptism, in contrast to infant baptism, assumes a vital relationship with Jesus and an understanding of salvation through grace, as well as a knowledge of doctrinal teachings. It also assumes a readiness to accept the responsibilities that come with church membership. Young children may have a vital relationship with Jesus as well as an understanding of salvation through grace.²³ However, they may not yet have a clear understanding of doctrinal teachings or of the meaning and responsibility of church membership (e.g., attendance at business meetings). For this reason, children who are part of the faith community may be ready to participate in and be blessed by Communion but not be mature enough for baptism.

When, therefore, might a young child be ready to participate in the ordinance of Communion? First, a certain level of understanding on the part of the recipient is necessary. Jesus' use of the word *remembrance* (Luke 22:19) reinforces this concept. Thus, perhaps very young children should wait until they gain some comprehension of the ritual and its symbolism.

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Second, research in faith development may give us some guidance. The foundations for faith development are laid in infancy, when, depending on the environment, an infant learns either to trust or to fear. If "seeds of trust, courage, hope, and love" are sown, a foundation for faith development is laid.²⁴ Between the ages of two and seven, children's understanding is intuitive, even though they lack the thought processes necessary to understand the abstract concepts of religion. It has been argued that the symbols that a child is exposed to, as well as the stories and examples of parental faith, form lasting impressions and can powerfully influence the faith of a young child.²⁵ Between the ages of six and eight, however, children typically begin to "appropriate the stories, beliefs and practices that symbolize belonging to the faith community."²⁶

Parents who have nurtured their child's faith will know their child's heart, and they are the ones, with the assistance of the church pastor, who should decide when their child is ready to participate in Communion. They will know when their child believes in Jesus, loves Him, understands what He did on the cross, and has a desire to be with Him in heaven. They will also know when their child understands the concepts of wrongdoing, repentance, and forgiveness. "If properly instructed, very young children may have correct views of their state as sinners and of the way of salvation through Christ."²⁷ In fact, the simple faith of a six-year-old may, at times, embarrass his more sophisticated parents. It is no accident that Jesus pointed to a young child as an example of faith (see Matt. 18:3; Mark 10:15).²⁸ Connecting a complete catechetical process that results in baptism with readiness for participation in Communion may send the erroneous message that until doctrinal knowledge is obtained, children are not fit to be a part of the family of God. In contrast, participating in Communion with the church family should, ideally, awaken a longing that eventually results in a mature walk with Jesus and a decision for baptism.²⁹

Unfortunately, some families view the Communion service as divisive, that is, separating families rather than

uniting them, thus providing an excuse for avoiding church that day. A family oriented Communion service, in which children are prepared by the parents beforehand, seated with them during the service, and instructed throughout about the meaning of Communion (Exod. 12:26, 27) could revolutionize the way in which this ordinance is experienced by the community of faith. As parents see the wonder of Christ's sacrifice through their children's eyes, their faith will be rejuvenated. As children participate, their faith strengthens as their place in the community of faith is affirmed. The role of the community is to assist parents in nurturing their children's faith and to embrace children as an important part of the church.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have always practiced open Communion, and for good reasons. If strangers and their children are allowed, indeed encouraged, to participate in the ordinance, how can we exclude our own children? Let us be true to our words by rejecting any form of sacramentalism and opening the way for our children to participate in this special time with Jesus. □

1 The actual statement reads, "Seventh-day Adventists observe open Communion. Adults who feel they have committed their lives to Christ may participate. . . . Children, however, should not participate until they are mature enough to have received formal instruction in the meaning of the service and committed themselves to Christ in baptism." *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: The Ministerial Association, General Conference of SDA, 1992), 212.

2 *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Libreria Editrice Vaticana* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), 2.1.1274. It must be noted that by the third or fourth century A.D. the belief that baptism should be offered to infants had developed. This raised the need for another rite, known as *confirmation*, which confirmed the child's wish to become a full-fledged member of the Catholic Church when he or she reached the age of accountability.

3 This doctrine later became known as *ex opere operato* (literally: "by the very fact of the action's being performed"), i.e., mere participation in the sacrament would result in the benefit of grace; although the receptive spiritual disposition was considered helpful. *Ibid.*, 2.2.1128.

4 This change was later designated as *transubstantiation*.

5 Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in Luther Works, 56 vols., ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), 66-7;

Jaroslav Pelikan, *A History of the Development of Doctrine: Reformation of Church and Dogma* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 177, 187-92, 317-9. Cf. Martin Luther, *Small Catechism* (Adelaide: United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia, 1941), 13.

6 Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1954), 499, 500.

7 With regard to John 3:5, where Jesus states that "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit," commentators are divided. Many believe that this statement may not actually refer to the actual rite of baptism, as this would negate the doctrine of salvation by faith. They suggest that *water* may refer to the purifying action of the Holy Spirit rather than to the rite of baptism.

8 White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 278. Herbert Kiesler observes, "the Lord's Supper is more than a mere memorial meal, for Christ is present by His Holy Spirit. Participation in the Communion service by members of the body contributes to Christian growth and fellowship. The Communion service commemorates deliverance from sin, signifies corporate Communion with Christ, and anticipates the Second Advent." Raoul Dederen, ed., "The Ordinances: Baptism, Foot Washing, and Lord's Supper," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 604.

9 See "Letters to the Editor," *Record: Official Paper of the South Pacific Division*, November 6, 2004, 13.

10 See excellent article by Frank Holbrook, in "For Members Only?" *Ministry*, February 1987, 10-3.

11 "Never allow your children to suppose that they are not children of God until they are old enough to be baptized." White, *Child Guidance*, 499. Cf. *idem*, 486-92.

12 White, *Evangelism*, 579, 80.

13 Holbrook, 13.

14 In Jewish tradition, the entire family, including the youngest child, was to participate in the Passover celebration, while the parents taught their children the meaning of the service. In a conversation with an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, I was informed that, to this day, Jewish children participate in the Passover prior to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, which is a formal acknowledgement that the child is a mature follower of God.

15 White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 642-61.

16 White, *Evangelism*, 319.

17 White, *Child Guidance*, 499.

18 White, *Desire of Ages*, 661.

19 White, *Evangelism*, 277 (emphasis mine).

20 White, *The Desire of Ages*, 656.

21 White, *Evangelism*, 580.

22 There is one indirect statement that would seem to preclude unbaptized children from participating in the Lord's Supper. In response to a query on the matter from A. H. Peet, dated March 1, 1904, Ellen White's secretary, Sarah McEnterfer, wrote, "But she [Mrs. White] says that it has never been made a practice that children who have not united with the church by baptism should partake of the ordinance any more than should grown people

who have never united with the church." It is to be noted that these words do not come from Mrs. White's pen and are not a direct quotation; the historical context of this statement is unknown; and there is the possibility of misunderstanding on the part of the secretary, who, in the same letter, makes the statement that she "was led to believe." Moreover, this statement stands in contradiction to the published statement quoted above, as it would clearly advocate closed Communion. For these reasons, this statement should perhaps not be taken into consideration.

23 White, *Child Guidance*, 486.

24 Scott Lownsdale, "Faith Development Across the Life Span: Fowler's Integrative Work," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 25 (1997): 57.

25 C. Daniel Batson, Patricia Schoenrade, and W. Larry Ventis, *Religion and the Individual: A Social Psychological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 72; Lownsdale, 58.

26 Lownsdale, 58.

27 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 400.

28 White, *Evangelism*, 579, 80.

29 "He [Christ] is there to convict and soften the heart." White, *The Desire of Ages*, 656.

churches—provided that they have received some kind of baptism—to participate in our celebrations of the Lord's Supper.

But the statement has been pressed far beyond its original intention when used to support the allowing of participation by persons who have never received any kind of Christian baptism. An examination of the context shows that Ellen G. White makes this comment in connection with Christ's including Judas Iscariot at the table. Her point is we have no right to exclude someone from the Supper on the basis of whatever secret sins or insincerity we might suspect this person harbors.

The reasons for discouraging unbaptized persons of any age from partaking in Communion are biblical, historical, spiritual, logical, and pastoral.

Biblical reasons. On the basis of John 13, Seventh-day Adventists regard footwashing as a part of the Communion

eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, 'Give not that which is holy to the dogs' " (*Didache* 9:5). For many centuries the common practice was to separate the preaching service from the Communion service and to send unbaptized persons home after the preaching and before the Communion.

Spiritual reasons. An unbaptized person, especially a child, who partakes of the elements of the Lord's Supper before becoming a baptized Christian can hardly be expected to develop a sense of the privilege and special blessing involved. It can only be common—and commonplace—to him or her. While we should avoid superstition and any idea of *ex opere operato*, we dare not allow this wondrous occasion to seem common or routine.

Logical reasons. A natural and logical order exists among the ordinances. Baptism signifies the birth of faith and

Unbaptized children and Communion

Robert M. Johnston

An unfortunate practice occurs in some Seventh-day Adventist churches, perhaps as a result of ignoring the context of a statement by Ellen White in *The Desire of Ages*, page 656. The first part of the paragraph reads as follows:

"Christ's example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord's Supper. It is true that open sin excludes the guilty. This the Holy Spirit plainly teaches. 1 Cor. 5:11. But beyond this none are to pass judgment. God has not left it with men to say who shall present themselves on these occasions. For who can read the heart? Who can distinguish the tares from the wheat?"

This statement provides the basis of what we call open Communion. Unlike certain denominations, Seventh-day Adventists permit members of other

GOD HAS NOT LEFT IT WITH MEN TO SAY WHO SHALL PRESENT THEMSELVES ON THESE OCCASIONS.

service. What applies to the basin applies also to the table. In John 13:10, Jesus makes clear that baptism is a prerequisite of footwashing. In this verse, two key Greek words are used: *louein* and *niptein*. The first word is used for bathing, and in this context, it represents baptism. The second word represents footwashing. Just as one who has not bathed is not made clean by washing only the feet, even so an unbaptized person is not made clean by the ordinance of footwashing, which here synecdochically stands for the entire Communion experience. At this point we should remember the powerful warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27–32 against partaking of the Supper unworthily.

Historical reasons. Christian tradition, until relatively modern times, reveals agreement that Communion is only for baptized persons. The earliest surviving church manual, dating from early in the second century A.D., says, "But let none

commitment while Communion nurtures it. You cannot nurture that which has not been born. One is the beginning, the other the continuation. Ellen G. White writes that "We are not prepared for communion with Him unless cleansed by His efficacy."

Pastoral reasons. If a child is old enough to partake of Communion, why is not he or she old enough to be baptized? Is Communion less sacred and important than baptism? If any person wants to partake in the Supper, let that person give decisive expression to their commitment to Christ by receiving baptism. M

* Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1940), 649 (see also p. 646).

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Mike Tucker is the host of the Faith For Today broadcast and Gayle Tucker is the co-host.

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"Our goal is to present biblical teachings in a relational approach, which we believe will appeal to those who are not very familiar with the Scriptures," stated Mike Tucker during a recent interview with *Ministry*. Tucker explained that study guides will be provided for each broadcast and that these guides will focus on the appropriate biblical passages. It is hoped that each of the

broadcasts will appeal to individuals who are not willing to commit to a much longer series.

While many churches will sponsor the broadcast, the program is designed so that smaller home groups will be able to participate. With the increase of secularism, a significant number of individuals may not feel comfortable visiting a church, but they may feel very comfortable participating in the home of a friend.

Mike Tucker is both the speaker/director of the Faith For Today television ministry and the senior pastor of the Arlington Seventh-day Adventist Church in Arlington, Texas, United States. He has also served as a chaplain, youth pastor, and Bible teacher. His wife, Gayle Tucker, is co-host of the *Faith For Today* broadcast and is also an associate pastor of the Arlington church.

The broadcast will be available over the Hope Channel system and can also be received as a webcast. For registration and host resources, including broadcast times in your area, visit www.HeartQuest.info/host. The broadcast will be in English, Spanish, and French. Those needing a satellite dish should contact www.acn.info or call 1-800-ACN-1119 for equipment and/or technical assistance. ▀

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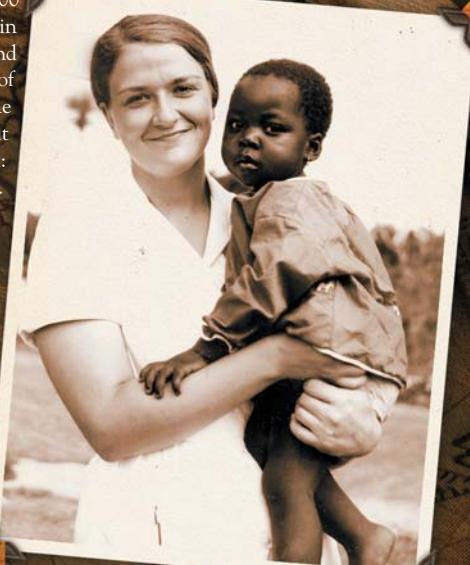
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1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Phil. 3:7-14; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; Matt. 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal. 5:22-25; Rom. 8:38, 39; 1 John 4:4; Heb 10:25).

Growing in Christ: atonement and Christus Victor

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Any revisions are done by the church in General Conference session. During the 2005 session, the fundamental belief "Growing in Christ," was accepted by the delegates. This article is a theological reflection on the following belief:

"By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; Luke 10:17-20; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18;

The study of the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross is possibly the most enriching and challenging one in Christian theology. The history of Christian thought indicates that the theological depth of that historical event on the cross has stimulated a constant exploration of its content. A variety of theories of atonement have been formulated attempting to uncover the meaning of Christ's death,¹ but none of them has been able to integrate the fullness of its depth. Most of them emphasize how the Cross saves sinners, but they say little about its cosmic significance. Christian theology should never ignore or overlook the fact that on the cross Christ defeated once and for all the cosmic evil powers.²

Christ's victory over evil powers

As the cosmic conflict began, God granted space and time for the expression of the intent of those creatures that, in misusing their freedom, corrupted themselves.³ This anomaly of sin and evil was allowed in the cosmos in order for evil powers to reveal their true nature and the results of their choices, and to preserve the freedom of God's creatures and the integrity of His kingdom. The decisive confrontation in that conflict took place on a planet that aligned itself with the forces of evil. The rescue mission became at the same time the deliverance of the cosmos from the presence and influence of evil powers.

Christ as Victor during His ministry. Christ's victory over the cosmic powers developed along two interrelated confrontations. The first one was through His ministry on earth. Christ became the object of constant attack by the enemy, but He never broke the deep bond of unity that existed between Him and the Father. He overcame every temptation and, by remaining loyal to the Father, overcame in His own life the powers of evil (e.g., Matt. 4:1-11). He was by nature and by personal election sinless (Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5). During His ministry on earth, He also liberated those who were possessed by the power of Satan (e.g., Matt. 17:14-18; Mark 1:23-26; 5:1-13). The narratives of demon possessions in the Gospels testify to the fact that the kingdom of Satan was being shaken to its very core by Christ and that it was about to collapse under the powerful presence of the Son of God.⁴

Christ as Victor through the Cross and Resurrection. The second confrontation was the final and absolute victory of Christ over evil powers on the cross. He was doing this on behalf of sinful human beings who are enslaved to the powers of darkness. Jesus faced the hour of the dominion of darkness and in the process “rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13, 14).⁵ Christ went into the realm of chaos and experienced what humans should have experienced in order to deliver them from the power of Satan (Acts 26:18). How was He able to bring deliverance? He battled and “disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:15).⁶ He overcame the cosmic powers!

The phrase *principalities and powers*⁷ and other similar expressions primarily designate powers created by God through Christ (Col. 1:15, 16) that unexplainably became hostile to God, i.e., Satan and his angels (Rev. 12:7, 8). The language of Colossians 2:15 appears to be referring to the celebration of a Roman military victory. In such occasions there was a triumphal procession during which the defeated enemies were publicly displayed before being executed.⁸ This image is used by Paul to describe the utter defeat of evil powers through Christ. He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), and through His death He rendered him powerless (Heb. 4:14), casting him out in defeat and humiliation (John 12:31).

Through His death, Christ fixed the ultimate fate of evil powers, and at the Resurrection He triumphantly proclaimed His victory. We now look forward to the end, when He will destroy “all dominion, authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). His victory assures believers that they are no longer under their dominion and that therefore they do not need to submit to them. He did not annihilate the evil forces, but He broke their power over the human race, making it possible for anyone to participate in His victory.

Participating in Christ’s victory

Since evil powers are not yet totally divested of their power, they are active in the world tormenting humans⁹ and seeking to reign again over those who have found freedom in Christ (e.g., Rom. 6:12). The world is still under their power (1 John 5:19), Satan is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), and humans in rebellion against God are still doing his will (2 Tim. 2:26). But those who by faith have been united to Christ are no longer under the control of the evil one. They will continue to be tempted by him, oppressed by him through suffering, and even harassed by him through natural and supernatural means, but believers belong to Christ. Sometimes God in His wisdom allows these things to happen to them, but He strengthens them to remain committed to Him (e.g., 2 Cor. 12:7–9). Perhaps that is why Jesus commanded His followers to pray for protection “ ‘ ‘from the evil one’ ’ ” (Matt. 6:13). The fundamental truth is that the ruling power of evil has been substituted in the lives of His people by the ruling power of Christ, who through the Spirit enables them to appropriate His victory. Instead of being under the power of evil spirits they are now under the guidance and protection of the *Spirit of God* (Rom. 8:14–17).

Freedom from the burden of the past. The recalling of the past is often characterized by feelings of guilt that tend to diminish the self-worth of a person and that deeply oppress them. Human imperfections are used by evil powers to motivate people to seek peace through submission to them in the form of self-justification or simply by walking away from the Lord. Humans have become slaves of their own schemes aimed at gaining acceptance before God. The Hindu and Buddhist concept of *karma* imprisons humans within a circle that is impossible to break. According to this belief system, reincarnation—as a cycle of birth, suffering, and death—is the process by which human perfection is achieved and entrance into nirvana (i.e., a state of unchanging being) is assured. The memory of the past haunts humans as they in their guilt desperately seek

to deal with it while at the same time they feel impotent. Christ’s victory over the powers frees individuals from that burden by offering them fellowship with God through Christ on the basis of His past work of redemption and not of their sinful past. Thus the grip that evil powers had over humans on account of that heavy burden is broken through unmerited forgiveness.

Freedom from fear and meaninglessness. The victory of Christ over evil powers manifests itself in the lives of believers as freedom from fear and from a meaningless life. Christ overcame the one who had the power of death, Satan, in order to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb. 2:15). The search for freedom from fear and from a groundless life characterized by boredom has led individuals to a life of sin and, therefore, to servitude to evil powers. The powers manifest their influence and control over humans through improper ethical and moral behavior. Those who place their lives at the service of sin and rebellion, rejecting the loving lordship of Christ, exist in willing submission to the powers that Christ already defeated. Those who participate in that victory have overcome fear because they, having been justified by faith in Christ, have peace with God (Rom. 5:1) and find their greatest joy in a life of selfless service of love to the Savior and to others.

Freedom from spiritualism. The presence of the Spirit of God in the life of Christ’s followers makes it totally unnecessary to seek the spiritual guides promoted by the New Age movement, or guidance from modern or ancient divination practices, or the protection of the spirits of dead ancestors. The Bible describes those spirits, not as seeking our good, not as the spirits of dead relatives and friends, but as demonic spirits seeking to deceive, oppress, and destroy humans (cf. Rev. 16:13, 14). The reality of those evil spirits is often denied in the Western world, but that does not make them less dangerous. Spiritualism is rapidly spreading throughout the globe, finding in secularism a fertile soil. The influence of those powers will continue to increase as we approach

the consummation of Christ's victory over them. Believers can joyfully live the Christian life resting in the assurance of His love under all circumstances.

Freedom from demonic possessions. Christ's victory over principalities and powers enabled His followers to cast out demons in His name, but this was to take place in the context of the proclamation of the gospel. The primary task of the church is to fulfill the gospel commission, not to cast out demons. If supernatural

either of unrighteousness or of the righteousness of God (Rom. 6:13). No one can be spiritually neutral. Jesus told a story about a person who was liberated from evil powers but did not use that new freedom for the divine purpose. The spirits returned, found the heart of the person available, and made the enslavement of the person worse than before (Luke 11:24–26). There are no spiritual vacuums. A person is either under the influence of evil spirits or under the

as God's immediate objective speech, become the way to find His will and plan for the individual. The Word of God, through the Spirit, guides believers during their pilgrimage through a world of sin and death. Prayer testifies to the fact that what God did through Christ was sufficient to open up a permanent way to reach out and talk to the Father. There is no need to summon intermediary spirits of any type to assist anyone to access the divine.

HE [CHRIST] DID NOT ANNIHILATE THE EVIL FORCES, BUT HE BROKE THEIR POWER OVER THE HUMAN RACE, MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR ANYONE TO PARTICIPATE IN HIS VICTORY.

spiritualistic manifestations interfere with the fulfillment of that mission, then believers are called to confront them in the name of Jesus. In other words, Christ has shared with His people His power and victory over the powers of darkness to be used in the context of the gospel commission: "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons'" (Mark 16:15–17). In the New Testament, no one is called to a "deliverance ministry," but everyone has been called to the gospel ministry. That message of salvation enlightens the dark conscience and through the power of the Spirit enables the person to live a high moral life free from the absurdities of fables, myths, and superstitions.

Growing in Christ

Christ's victory cannot be discussed in isolation from its significance and implications for the daily life of those who have placed their trust in Him. The glorious freedom found in Christ is fundamentally freedom to be what He intended humans to be, namely, reflectors of His image. Humans are servants

power of the Spirit of God. Those who participate of Christ's victory over evil powers are filled by the Spirit and are called to a daily communion with God that will result in constant growing into the likeness of Christ.

The role of the study of the Scriptures and prayer. The life of the believer does not consist at all of attempts to learn the art of self-righteousness or of how to subdue the powers; it rather consists of filling the inner being, the heart, with the thoughts of God. This type of communion is not to be defined in terms of a transcendental meditation that attempts to merge the person with cosmic, impersonal forces. This communion is not to be achieved through rituals that seek to create an emotional trance that supposedly brings the individual in touch with the divine. Such practices are, in fact, a fallback into servitude to the powers. In the Christian life this type of communion is mediated through the study of the Holy Scriptures and prayer.

God speaks to His people through the Scriptures, and consequently, there is no need for humans to try to move Him to speak again through magic or meritorious works. He is beyond human manipulation because He voluntarily chose to speak through His Son as revealed in His Word. The Scriptures,

The role of meditation. Biblical meditation is not an escape from the reality of life into an immaterial, mystical world. This type of escapism is offered to humans by the powers already defeated by Christ. In the Scriptures, meditation is not totally silent but was usually accompanied by muttering the thoughts of reflection.¹⁰ It had an objective content upon which the mind of believers dwelt and reflected. The psalmist described the person who was happy as one who "meditates day and night" on God's law, or instruction (Ps. 1:2). There is spiritual renewal and growth when the human heart, as the seat of human rationality and will, dwells on God's loving will for all. The psalmist also meditated on the promises of God and found joy in anticipating them (Ps. 119:148). Another object of meditation was God's providential acts of salvation on behalf of His people (e.g., Ps. 77:12). When even those who participate in Christ's victory over evil powers confront serious difficulties, the call is to meditate on the way He has delivered them in the past from similar situations. This makes it unnecessary to seek the assistance of the powers to supplement Christ's power to save. Through meditation God's people have communion with the all powerful God from whom they receive strength to face

the most serious attacks that evil powers could launch against them as they seek to regain dominion over them.

The role of individual and corporate worship. Biblical faith is also a corporate faith that finds expression in the collective worship of the Lord. Believers belong to the family of those who have been delivered through the sacrificial death of Christ. They joyfully praise Him individually as well as collectively (cf. Mark 2:12; Luke 18:43). They have a new center of life and humbly approach the Lord in gratitude, with requests and singing. In fact, only those who are alive are able to praise the Lord (Ps. 150:6), and this applies in a particular way to those who through Christ are now spiritually alive. Singing praises to the Lord strengthens the Christian life and expels fear from the heart. The psalmist wrote, "How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!" (Ps. 147:1). He is to be praised because there is no other like Him: "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart" (Ps. 148: 13, 14). Christ obtained for us the freedom to praise God. The "horn," as a symbol of power, is here equated with praises to the Lord, suggesting that in praising Him believers are spiritually strengthened.

The role of Christian service. Those who have been delivered by Christ from the dominion of the powers of the evil one are servants of God. The Christian life is not lived in isolation from others but in the dynamic interaction with the surroundings in which they find themselves. They take their personal commitment to Christ to the streets of the world, the marketplace, the schools, the offices, to every place they go and to every situation they face. The potential for spiritual growth is not limited to the privacy of the homes or to church meetings. The constant expression of the values of the Christian life in a multiplicity of settings will result, through the guidance of the Spirit, into an ever growing relationship with the Lord.

Christ has not called His servants to withdraw from the world but to serve

the world by actively inviting humans to find freedom and forgiveness in what Christ has done for them. The former life of submission to evil powers characterized by enmity toward God and others is now replaced and filled by a life of loving service to God and to others. Awareness of the fact that believers live in the constant presence and company of God motivates their service and nurtures their hope in the final eradication of sin and evil powers from the world and from the universe.

Conclusion

Adventist eschatology anticipates an unparalleled upsurge of spiritualistic manifestations as we approach the close of the cosmic conflict. Spiritualism will play a central role in the final polarization of the human race as everyone is confronted with the challenge to choose ultimate loyalty (Rev. 16:13, 14). In preparation for that final confrontation, it is important to understand and appropriate the reality of Christ's victory over all evil powers. His victory is so absolute that it makes it totally unnecessary for believers to practice dual loyalties. The freedom He obtained for them is to be used to grow, through the power of the Spirit, in His grace and love. Since on the cross He permanently broke the dominion of the principalities and powers, His people can have peace, being "convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38, 39). □

¹ See the discussions of those theories in Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); and Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in NT and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 116–52. For useful discussions of issues related to the atonement, see the collection of essays in, John Goldingay, ed., *Atonement Today: A Symposium* (London: SPCK, 1995); and Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological and Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

² For a historical analysis of this particular theory of

the atonement, see Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (New York: Macmillan, 1969). He considers this theory to be the Christian classical one at the exclusion of the others; a questionable conclusion.

³ For a useful discussion of the cosmic battle from a non-Adventist perspective, see Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

⁴ In the Gospels, the exorcisms performed by Jesus revealed His authority over the spirits, portended "the kingdom's arrival and Satan's overthrow," and enabled those set free from the spirits "to share in the eschatological salvation that has dawned in accordance with the divine plan" (Clinton Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 173).

⁵ All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV).

⁶ We do not have space to discuss some of the interpretational difficulties of this passage, but we should mention that the last phrase, "by the cross," reads in Greek "by/through it/him." In the context the reference could be to the Cross or to Christ and both make excellent sense.

⁷ The meaning of this phrase is debated, but it mainly designates evil powers; see D. G. Reid, "Principalities and Powers," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 746–52; and Clinton E. Arnold, "Principalities and Powers," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 467.

⁸ For discussions on this military background see, L. Williamson, "Led in Triumph: Paul's Use of Thriambos," *Interpretation* 22 (1968): 217–332; C. Breytenbach, "Paul's Proclamation and God's 'Thriambos' (Notes on 2 Corinthians 2:14–16b)," *Neotestamentica* 24 (1990): 257–71; Clinton E.

Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 281–4. For other opinions, see Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 332–6; and G. Dautzenberg, "Thriambos," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the NT*, vol. 2, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 155, 6.

⁹ In the Gospels demons are depicted not so much as tempters but as tormentors; see Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 172.

¹⁰ Two Hebrew verbs are occasionally translated "to meditate." The first one is *h g h*, "to reflect, think, meditate," which emphasizes the soft murmuring of thoughts (see A. Negoit and Helmer Ringgren, "*H g h*," in *Theological Dictionary of the OT*, vol. 3, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], 322, 3; hereafter *TDOT*). The second is *i ah*, "to ponder, to reflect, to talk," and when signifying meditation it emphasizes the reflection itself, the mental activity (see J. Hausmann, "*i ah*," in *TDOT*, vol. 14, 86).

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“This letter be read to all”: a strategy for Christian unity

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In the closing section of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians, we find a solemn instruction: "I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brethren" (5:27, RSV). The apostle's main emphasis is not just that the letter be read, but that it be read to *all the brethren*. This instruction reflects the usual practice that letters to the churches were read aloud in the church assembly (cf. Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:3). There were perhaps some reasons for this. First, literacy in Paul's day was quite limited—among male urban population literacy rate was less than 15 percent, and the figure was much less in rural areas and among women.¹ Second, the written text would have its full impact through audible communication. However, if this was normal,² why would Paul include this instruction and why in unusually severe words: "I adjure you by the Lord".

To whom is this request directed? At first glance, it would seem to be addressed to those who would first get the letter in their hands, probably a group of leaders with enough education to be able to read.³ Why were the leaders directed to read the letter to all the believers? And why does this instruction appear not in the beginning but in the closing part of the letter?

Interpretation from the perspective of performance

In order to understand this instruction it is not enough to explain why Paul gives the *leaders* these instructions. Suggestions are that Paul writes these instructions because the church is still inexperienced as to how to deal with an apostolic

letter,⁴ or because many could not read, or some were not always present in the assembly.⁵

We must not fail to note that the instructions for those responsible for reading the letter aloud is part of the letter that is intended for the *whole* church. In antiquity, the author of a letter wrote from the perspective of the addressee at the time of receipt.⁶ Consequently, Paul had before his eyes the assembly sitting, in circles or half circles with the reader performing in the center.⁷ Everyone could not only see the speaker but also observe the reactions of the others. Since Paul expresses the explicit wish that the letter be read to all believers in Thessalonica, he must have already anticipated the dynamics that would develop between various individuals and groups in the church due to the reading of his letter.

Imagine the session when the letter is read aloud. Those who are hearing it suddenly perk up when the reader reads the apostle's instruction that it be read to all the brethren. What impact that would have had on the hearers—not just the message of the letter but also the concern of the apostle for all the members of the church. Paul certainly could imagine the ordinary church members looking at their leaders while overhearing what is said to them. And what's more, the various groups among the listeners, i.e., leaders and ordinary members, will influence each other with their reactions.⁸

Emerging scholarship in New Testament interpretation increasingly assumes that an apostolic letter was intended to be read aloud before an audience so that, on the one hand, the audience would respond to the one who presented the words, and, on the other, participate in the whole event by their interaction. Generally, the biblical texts were not composed for isolated silent readers. Our modern print culture has made us blind for the dynamics of texts which were designed for public performance and are reminders of a primarily oral society.⁹

Given such an interpretation to the apostolic urging that his letter be read to all, what would that mean to the fellowship of the church?

Promotion of unity

First, it would promote unity. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians recognizes two groups in the church: those who physically receive the letter, and those to whom the letter is to be read. At the outset, the direct recipients of the letter are better informed and therefore in a better position than the others. But with his instruction that the letter be read to all, the author makes it clear that he does not want such a difference to persist. The direct recipients are not the only ones who are

made aware of this concern. By including his wish as a part of the letter itself, the writer reveals even to those who learn of the letter's content only when it is read to them just how important it is for him that all are equally informed. As a result, their position is publicly improved and they are made equal with the direct recipients. By demonstrating his great interest that all receive the same information, the author promotes unity among them.

This does not mean that conflicts existed in the church in Thessalonica. The letter gives no hints of divisions or struggle in the Christian community. With his strategy, Paul seems to address latent tensions between the church leaders and the rest of the believers and provides preventive help.

Second, the reading instruction has also the function of determining the role of the apostle. As the reader of the letter stands in the center of the audience, the apostle takes a position which is distinct from all the different groups of the addressees. He has something to say to everyone. It is a position of authority and at the same time a mediatory role.

The instruction in 1 Thessalonians 5:27 therefore shows that it is important for Paul that all believers in Thessalonica receive the same information and have equally direct access to the apostle. This interpretation does not only explain the unusually strong wording of the instructions, but is also supported by the emphasis of *all* in verses 26 and 27. The leading individuals in the church, who apparently first received the letter, are publicly admonished not to take advantage of their increased knowledge. In no case should anyone get the impression that something is being withheld from some. The will of the apostle is clear: openness and unity.¹⁰

To my knowledge, Adolf Schlatter remained lonely with his assumption that Paul's instructions were intended to strengthen the unity of the church: "So, with the reading of his letter out loud, he also articulates that the church is not segregated into the immature and the privileged, but is rather an integrated whole, in which each individual is precious to the apostle and called to full knowledge of the divine will."¹¹ With his solemn charge, Paul therefore shapes

the relationships between the believers in Thessalonica.

That letter-reading instructions could be understood this way by an ancient audience is illustrated by nonbiblical letters. One example is the sixth letter of Plato around 350 B.C.¹² It is addressed to two parties. The first is two pupils of Plato, Erastos and Koriskos, who have left the academy at Athens and returned home. The second is Hermeias, the ruler in Assós, the pupils' hometown in Asia Minor. Plato's goal is to unite the ruler and his pupils in friendship.

At the end of his letter, Plato urges the receivers that they write to him, should problems arise. Then he in turn could heal the friendship in an answering letter (6.323b). Hence Plato assumes in this letter the role of the third party who is vis à vis both addressees and has the necessary objectivity to mediate in conflict situations.

Plato also wrote (6.323c): "All three of you should read this letter, ideally all together or at least two of you, as often as you can and it is possible, and you should consider it to be a valid agreement and contract." It is important that it be read *together*. This requires that it be read aloud, so that Plato is, so to speak, present in the voice of the reader. Plato is in a position facing both parties and can therefore reestablish and strengthen the friendship again and again. None of the parties should monopolize the letter and thus derive an advantage for himself.

Fostering good relationships between churches

A reading instruction of a different kind is found in Colossians 4:16. It takes the form of a request to exchange letters. According to the will of its author, the Epistle to the Colossians is also to be read in the assembly of the church in Laodicea. Conversely, the believers in Colossae are to read the letter that has been sent to Laodicea. This instruction is also found at the end of the letter and is part of the text that is to be read to all. Consequently, it is also not merely a technical direction, but an effort to influence all addressees. Of what purpose is the instruction to exchange letters?

This leads to a third purpose of reading the letters: Through the exchange of the letters all are to be equally informed. The writer instructs all his hearers in Colossae and Laodicea that he does not wish to create a difference in knowledge between these churches. It is made clear to all that he wishes to have the same relationship to all. No one is to feel that he or she is better informed, nobody is to feel disadvantaged. The instruction at the end of the letter facilitates unity among the Christians and was a signal for the listeners just how important it was for the writer that there are good relations between these neighboring churches.

The exchange of letters is also mentioned in the closing section of a letter that Polycarp of Smyrna sent to the church at Philippi (13.2). He mentions that he is including letters from Ignatius, which the Philippians have explicitly requested. The Philippians themselves therefore wish to read certain letters and thereby compensate for a lack of information. For his part, Polycarp requests: "What reliable information of Ignatius and the ones with him you obtain that make [us] known."¹³ He is also interested in hearing what the Philippians know. So we also find in this later evidence (from the time of the emperor Trajan) an interest in a uniform state of information among believers and churches. In this letter, the exchange of information seems to be more extensive and practiced over a greater distance than in Colossae. Polycarp has a whole collection of letters from Ignatius, and there are churches from Macedonia to Asia Minor, and apparently Syria as well (13.1), that take part in the exchange of letters. We can presume that the relationships between these churches also played a role (cf. 10.1). Equal information establishes equal status.

Conclusion

Thus the apostolic urging in 1 Thessalonians 5:27 and Colossians 4:16 that the epistles be read in public is not simply a procedure for sending his message to a particular audience. Rather it is the apostle's genius at work; it is his strategy to influence the relationships and build a strong church among his listeners. This strategy is placed at the end of the

letter because it is concerned with the *interpersonal effects* of the information and personal communication contained in the body of the letter. Paul recognized the power of information and communication. He did not want to have an elite group that received the letter and perhaps less of an elite or illiterate group. He wanted the letter to be read in full, in the public hearing of the congregation, so that the entire church will know that what he received through inspiration belonged to the entire church. The apostle also wanted the entire church to recognize that the authority of his letters came not from any human source but divine inspiration.

Paul was also aware of the dividing force between church members or local churches, that differences in information could develop—a problem of equal importance in present day churches. He wanted to make sure that all have the same amount of information, and thus an equal closeness to the apostle. Meanwhile, the apostle also hoped that equal information will also produce equal status and that a common close relationship will develop among all the believers.

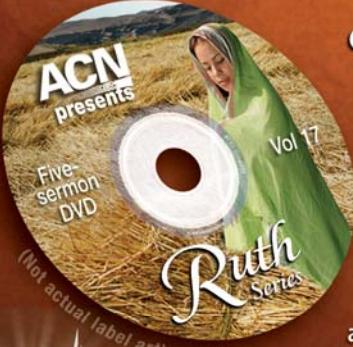
What a noble objective the apostle had in mind—and it can work even today—when he urged the recipients of his letter to read it aloud to the entire community of believers. Here is a powerful strategy for today's pastors to learn and practice to maintain congregational unity, mission, and fellowship. M

- 1 W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), 272–82, 329.
 - 2 P. Achtemeier, "Omne verbum sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 3–27.
 - 3 J. Dewey, "Textuality in an Oral Culture: a Survey of the Pauline Traditions," *Semeia* 65 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 48, 50.
 - 4 E. V. Dobschütz, *Die Thessalonicher-Briefe* (KEK 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1909), 233; R. F. Collins, "I Command That This Letter Be Read": Writing as a Manner of Speaking," *The Thessalonians Debate: Methodological Discord or Methodological Synthesis?* ed. K. P. Donfried and J. Beutler (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2000), 328.
 - 5 F. F. Bruce, *I & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary 45 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 135.
 - 6 H. Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n.Chr.*, AAS.F.B 102.2 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1956), 186–9; J. L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 191.
- 7 This was the arrangement of seats in the open theatres, roofed performance halls (*odeion*), town halls (*bouleuterion*), synagogues, and even for the symposia of associations or in private houses. We can assume the same for the Christian assembly.
- 8 Cf. P. J. J. Botha, "The Verbal Art of the Pauline Letters: Rhetoric, Performance and Presence," *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht, JSNTSup 90 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1993), 412, 413.
- 9 D. Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology on Biblical Studies," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006), 118–33, 164–84.
- 10 There are many elements in 1 Thessalonians that promote the unity of the church. In the letter ending 5:25–27 three times the word *brethren* is used, two times connected with the word *all*. In 5:13 Paul admonishes explicitly to have peace among each other and returns to the "God of peace" in his prayer (5:23).
- 11 A. Schlatter, *Die Briefe an die Thessalonicher, Philipper, Timotheus und Titus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlags-Anstalt, 1953), 35.
- 12 laton, Werke in 8 Bänden, Bd. 5: Phaidros, Parmenides, Epistolai (Briefe), ed. Gunther Eigler (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990).
- 13 K. Bihlmeyer, *Die apostolischen Väter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), 120.

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3. Manuscripts that are not awarded a prize may be purchased by the editors at a price to be negotiated.

Submission deadline

All submissions must be received by the editors no later than **January 2, 2008**.

Why not try a week of prayer and fasting in your district?

Dan Serns



Dan Serns, B.A., is ministerial secretary of the North Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Vancouver, Washington, United States.

Our church was planning an aggressive year of evangelism, and I knew we needed God's wisdom and guidance more than ever before. I asked our first elder to lead out in a week of prayer and fasting. He looked at me like he wanted to say, "Wouldn't we all die if we went without food for seven days?"

I told him, "Isaiah 58 tells us that true fasting is more than just going without food. The idea is to ask God what each of us should fast from so we will have more time available to do God's work. God might impress some to fast from good hobbies and others to fast from bad habits. Whatever it is, God will show them."

"So what do you suggest since I haven't ever done this before?" he asked.

"Let's do this. First, ask God what you should fast from. Then on the first Sabbath of the month, take five to ten minutes during the announcements to let the congregation know what you have done and challenge them to do the same."

"I can do that. Is that all?"

"Be sure to tell the people that on the second Sabbath we will have time for a few short, spontaneous testimonies of what God has done in their lives during the week of prayer and fasting. Also, you might encourage them to call up or get together with other members during the week to pray together and encourage each other."

"I'll do it," he said with a smile.

The first Sabbath came. The first elder got up and said, "This is a new year. And as church leaders we are calling on each member to observe a week

of fasting and prayer. This doesn't mean you have to go without food for a whole week. . . . You ask God, and He'll let you know what you need to do. Next Sabbath we're going to have a short testimony time when people who are willing can tell what God has done in their life during the week. Then phone someone or go see them and pray together."

The second Sabbath rolled around. After some initial hesitancy, people started to raise their hand for a roving microphone, to share their testimonies.

First was a computer programmer. "Every day when I log onto the Internet to start work, I spend a half hour reading the news online. The Lord impressed me to go without Internet news for a week and spend the time in Bible study and prayer. It was hard to break the habit at first, but by the end of the week I was having some incredible 'God time.' "

A lady was next to raise her hand. "I'm single and live alone. I watch way too much television and eat too much, too. The Lord impressed me to go without television, which was really hard, but I found when I did that it was easier to go without so much food. I called up my friend here, and we prayed over the phone almost every day."

Another lady on the other side of the sanctuary raised her hand. "God impressed me to give up caffeine for the week. We all know it's bad for you, but some of us still use it. The third day without it I had a horrible headache, but then it gradually went away. I've decided to stay caffeine-free from now on. I'm planning to use the extra time and money to help one of my friends who is going through a tough time right now."

After several more testimonies, the first elder looked back at me then said "I don't think we were supposed to go this long. We'd better leave time for the pastor's sermon."

I told him, "Don't worry about me. You are all giving the sermon today about what God is doing in your hearts and lives."

We can do many things to prepare for soul winning and reaping. But that Sabbath morning in church I was convinced that this was the best starting place for all the other preparation that was to come. God had already claimed the hearts of those who were willing to be soul winners.

"We are living in the most solemn period of this world's history. The destiny of earth's teeming multitudes is about to be decided. *Our own future well-being and also the salvation of other souls depend upon the course which we now pursue.* We need to be guided by the Spirit of truth. Every follower of Christ should earnestly inquire: 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' *We need to humble ourselves before the Lord, with fasting and prayer, and to meditate much upon His word, especially upon the scenes*

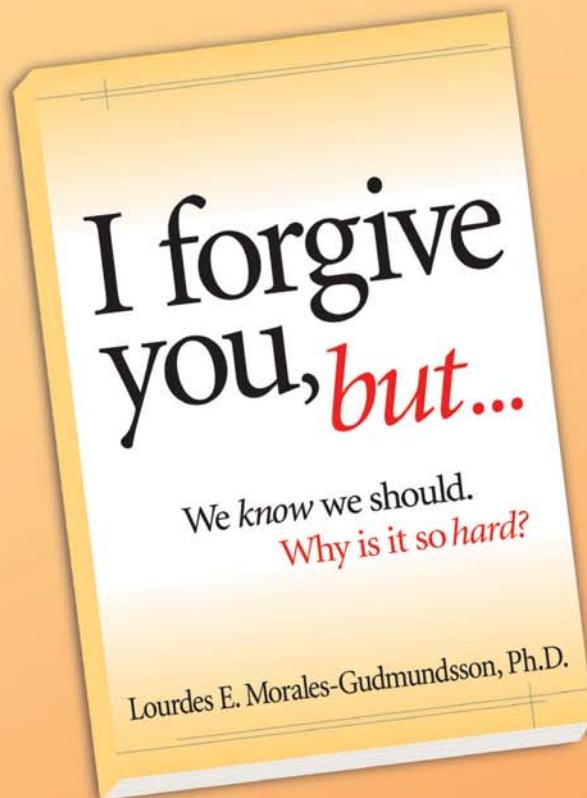
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of the judgment. We should now seek a deep and living experience in the things of God. We have not a moment to lose. Events of vital importance are taking place around us; we are on Satan's enchanted ground. Sleep not, sentinels of God; the foe is lurking near, ready at any moment, should you become lax and drowsy, to spring upon you and make you his prey"¹ (emphasis supplied).

"The Lord has given us the promise, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him' [James 1:5, KJV]. It is in the order of God that *those who bear responsibilities should often meet together to counsel with one another, and to pray earnestly* for that wisdom which He alone can impart. Talk less; much precious time is lost in talk that brings no light. *Let brethren unite in fasting and prayer for the wisdom that God has promised to supply liberally.* Make known your troubles to God. Tell Him, as did Moses, 'I cannot lead this people unless Thy presence shall go with me.' And then ask still more; pray with Moses, 'Show me Thy glory' [Ex. 33:18]. What is this glory?—The character of God. This is what He proclaimed to Moses"² (emphasis supplied).

"Now and onward till the close of time the people of God should be more earnest, more wide-awake, not trusting in their own wisdom, but in the wisdom of their Leader. They should set aside days for fasting and prayer. Entire abstinence from food may not be required, but they should eat sparingly of the most simple food"³ (emphasis supplied).

What better time is there than now: to call for a week of prayer and fasting—for the spiritual health of the people of God and for the salvation of the many in the surrounding communities who are looking toward heaven for something better? ▀

1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 601.
2 —, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1915), 417.
3 —, *Last Day Events* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), 82.

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BOOK REVIEW



Origin by Design

Harold G. Coffin with Robert H. Brown and L. James Gibson, revised edition. Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD, 2005. 464 pages.

This volume is the second revision of the 1969 classic *Creation—Accident or Design*, by H. G. Coffin. Drs. Coffin and Brown, through their research and writings over the past fifty or so years, have provided significant scientific support for the Seventh-day Adventist Church's unyielding insistence of the veracity of the Genesis account of our origins.

The contents of the book are organized into five sections: (1) The biblical narrative of Creation and the Flood, (2) Geology and genesis, (3) Paleontology and genesis, (4) Geochronology, and (5) Biological change. Written in easy-to-understand language (complete with a glossary of technical terms), the book treats the

reader to the best of current creationist thinking on the evidences for the existence of the geologic column, on the geological and fossil evidences for a worldwide Flood, and on interpretations of inorganic and carbon-14 radioisotope dating.

Entire chapters are devoted to the Yellowstone petrified forests (Dr. Coffin's research specialty), to the problems of dinosaurs, to the riddle of frozen mammoths, to the controversies surrounding the origin of humans, and to evidences of a "youthful" earth.

The last section of the book is a short but powerful introduction of the creationists' take on the theory of biological evolution. It is shown here that the rapidly expanding knowledge base of biology and biochemistry continues to provide irrefutable evidences for the reality of Creation.

Being obligated to be maximally informed on the great theme of Creation, this volume—a useful textbook and reference on the topic—should find a welcome place on the bookshelf of every minister. ▀

—Reviewed by George Javor, retired professor of biochemistry, Loma Linda University School of Medicine, Loma Linda, California, United States.

letters continued

be a physicist. In Genesis 1 it is clear that the Holy Spirit walked upon something (the face of the deep) before the Creation week began. However, understanding it in this way, would not Dr. Karlow agree we may use the anthropic principle as excellent evidence there was design and a designer?

—John Scharffenberg, M.D., email

Descending into administration

Ken Crawford's article "Descending into Administration" (February 2007) touched my heart. It is heartening for me to read the words of a conference president talking about the importance of the pastor.

It also led me to a simple question. Recently, during our worker's meeting, a group of pastors discussed the question of whether a senior pastor of a large church should earn more than a solo or district pastor. I am blessed to have served as an

associate pastor at a three-pastor church, the senior pastor at a four-pastor church, and now a solo pastor. I know that the stress of being a senior pastor was much greater than my other two positions and so understand the argument. But the majority of the other pastors were against this pay increase for the senior pastor.

Reading Ken Crawford's article made me question, if the pastor is so important, why are conference officials paid more—especially conference presidents—if we don't pay our senior pastors more?

No matter how this question is answered, a conference president opening his heart and recognizing the local church pastor like Pastor Crawford did is a blessing to me.

—Doug Elsey, pastor, Mt. Ellis Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bozeman, Montana, United States

continued on page 28

Dateline

Global Mission Issues Committee grapples with challenge of dual allegiance

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—Seventh-day Adventist missiologists and church leaders met recently to wrestle with the ongoing challenge of church members who retain non-Christian practices and beliefs from their former religions. This discussion was the focus of the **Global Mission Issues Committee** that met in April 2007 at the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The meeting opened with presenters from Brazil, Africa, and the South Pacific giving examples of how this division of loyalty in the hearts of converts, known as dual allegiance, is hindering mission work. In many cases, new Christians feel incredible pressure to adhere to their old ways.

Dual allegiance may manifest itself differently in various cultures, but it is not limited to specific religions. "It is a pervasive, global problem, impacting all Christian organizations involved in cross-cultural mission," said **Mike Ryan**, Seventh-day Adventist Church vice-president and committee chair.

Many involved in cross-cultural outreach have not fully understood and dealt with the deeply held belief that rituals and sacrifices are necessary to control evil spiritual forces, according to **Bruce Bauer**, World Mission chair at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Converts still see marriage problems, crop failure, infertility, and protection from spirits as requiring supernatural activity. While eliminating the old ways, says Bauer, "Christianity has often failed to relate biblical answers to these peoples' most pressing needs and fears." Often, the result is that converts revert to former practices.

Jon Dybdahl, professor of world mission, Andrews University, sees the

root of dual allegiance stemming from people accepting a doctrine, such as the divinity of Christ, without being led to experience the personal implication of that doctrine, such as no longer fearing evil spirits because Christ is Lord even of demons.

"Before any evangelism begins, serious analysis of the local culture needs to be done at the deepest levels," said **Pat Gustin**, former director of the church's **Institute of World Mission**.

Ryan challenged attendees to envision practical steps for implementing change and chose representatives to compile recommendations based on the presentations and discussion. These recommendations will be edited by a select committee; reviewed by theologians, missiologists, and various levels of church leadership; and presented at the world church's Spring Meeting in 2008.

"As a church we can't turn a blind eye to this problem, or hope that it will just go away," said **Gary Krause**, director of the **Office of Adventist Mission** at the Seventh-day

Adventist Church World Headquarters. "It's a significant threat to the life and effectiveness of the church. The issues committee is recommending tangible steps to help remedy the problem—and they're not just band-aid solutions. They go to the heart of conducting outreach in a biblical, responsible way and properly nurturing new believers in their new faith."

Abolitionists remembered

London, England, United Kingdom—**Historic Westminster Abbey** was the site on Tuesday, March 27, 2007, for

a commemoration of the bicentennial of the abolition of the Slave Trade Act. The occasion spoke of the reality of how Britain was a major beneficiary of slavery, yet the British also led the struggle to abolish the system.

The **Adventist Vocal Ensemble**, led by Ken Burton, was one of the groups that performed in a worship service attended by **Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; Prime Minister Tony Blair**; a congregation of 2,000, including descendants of former slaves; and a television and radio audience of several million.

Burton said he looked at the commemoration service as an opportunity for healing and reconciliation. He said the group chose to perform the song "There Is a Balm in Gilead" with the hope that "as people listen they will hear that God is willing to heal, forgive our sins, and make us whole." **Robin Taylor-Hunt**, the great-great-great-grandson of **William Wilberforce**, in a letter to *The Times* newspaper, complimented "the wonderful singing of the black Adventist Vocal Ensemble" as part of "an outstandingly nuanced, balanced, and creative act of worship."

[BUC News/TED News] ▀



Gary Krause

letters concluded ▀

Discipline in children's ministry settings

Thank you, Dr. Stephen Grunlan and *Ministry*, for your exceptional article regarding children and discipline ("Discipline in Children's Ministry Settings," April 2007). I was delighted with the positive way it was presented. Can we have more articles regarding children and worship?

—Margaret Taglavore, children's ministries director, Southwestern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Burleson, Texas, United States ▀

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Friendraising

A mother asked her little boy how he liked his first day of school. "I hated it," he said. "They put me in a room full of kids all by myself." Suddenly this new scholar had discovered that he could be lonely in a crowd. Individuals who join a church in which they do not participate soon feel that they have entered a lonely crowd.

Church growth studies show three components that are essential for new members to remain within the fellowship of a church: ability to articulate their beliefs, active relationships with friends, and meaningful personal ministry. With one of these missing, the member may survive in a weakened state. If two, the new member will already be moving out of the fellowship they had readily embraced.

Tragedy. A new member without a friend is a tragedy—merely a statistic—and, far too often, this statistic becomes a reality in Seventh-day Adventist churches. While the tragedy of new members without friends concerns every denomination, Adventists have a greater challenge than most others because of unique factors surrounding the doctrinal instruction presented to potential members.

Typical recruitment of new members by Adventist evangelism has emphasized the unique theological positions of the church in comparison with "others" who either lack "full truth" or are unwilling to follow what they know. Thus, Adventists experience the theologically convicted individual who embraces the doctrinal positions of the church and sometimes joins a local congregation on the basis of theological convictions alone.

Reaction to rejection. While theological convictions remain necessary, beliefs alone are insufficient to keep new members bonded to their new congregation. Because the high level of confidence in the "truthfulness" of Adventist doctrine may not have been matched with high levels of fellowship and involvement, expectations have been dashed. As a result, new believers

JAMES A. CRESS



may well experience rejection, pain, and anger at the very moment they need love, acceptance, and forgiveness. When they experience this pain, these new members cut themselves off from committing themselves to one another.

John Savage, Methodist pastor and president of LEAD Consultants, interviewed a group of inactive members regarding their reasons for leaving the church. He noted, "Each of the 23 persons interviewed in the non-active group indicated that no one from the church had ever come to find out why they were losing interest or had dropped out. . . . One third of this group cried during the interview, indicating the intensity of unresolved feelings."¹

Believing they are unwanted and unneeded, these new members easily develop an attitude of indifference rather than risk rejection. Ken Abraham says, "Most psychologists agree that the opposite of love is not hate; it's indifference. For example, a couple having marital problems has a better chance of reconciliation if there are feelings between them, regardless how negative or bitter those feelings are. But if the couple is indifferent in their feelings, it will take serious, long-term work to recapture the love they once knew. . . . The same is true spiritually. Indifference is a killer. Even negative reactions are better than no reaction. If you sense yourself sliding toward spiritual indifference, you must take radical corrective action immediately!"²

Reaction to reaction. However, rather than recognizing their own acts

of abandonment or the subsequent reaction of indifference by new members, longer-term members may conclude that the new member's process of indoctrination was insufficient and that this is the cause of their apostasy.

Furthermore, those pastors or members whose energies are directed to ongoing recruitment of new members are labeled as interested only in "numbers." Such destructive blame-placing negates the very mandate of the gospel commission to take the good news to every creature under heaven.

People are no longer numbers when we love them, value them, pray for and with them, and minister to them. Bailey Smith recounts the story of a Sunday School teacher who responded to a criticism of numbers with determination to emphasize quality. Next week he arrived at class to discover several of his youngsters missing. Then his love for them and concern for their souls led him on an all-out effort to get them back to class. He concluded, "Shall we strive for numbers—Yes, O Yes! When it is my boys, let's have numbers—all eleven of them!"³

Numbers, then, are important only because they represent individuals who need to be reached for Christ. In fact, when we understand numbers from this perspective, we realize that an individual remains only a number until someone becomes their friend and takes a personal interest. Making friends becomes not only a much-needed and excellent method of assimilating new members but also an effective evangelistic strategy. ▀

1 John S. Savage, *The Apathetic and Bored Church Member* (Reynoldsburg, OH: LEAD Consultants, 1981), 57.

2 Ken Abraham, *The Disillusioned Christian* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1991), 127.

3 Bailey Smith, *Real Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 123.

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