

 community through conversation

SPECTRUM



Why Tell Stories?

*Biblical Reconciliation
Teachings in the
Context of the Women's
Ordination Conflict*

Adventist Identity in a Postmodern World

*The Supreme Court,
Same-Sex Marriage,
and Religious Liberty*

The Road from Babylon to General Conference Organization

Running in Church

Because It's All About Us

community through conversation

SPECTRUM

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Cover: *Calcolare Caelo* (*Calculate Heaven*). Mixed Media, 50" x 38", 2013, by John McDowell.

About the artist:

John McDowell is a poet, artist, and professor, and the dean of arts at Canadian University College. His poetry and photography have been featured on past *Spectrum* covers, and his essays have appeared in the journal. His bio, artwork, and contact information can be found at jmcowellart.com.

Artist's statement:

I begin with the assumption that art occupies space where something happens. Such a position posits the art object and viewer in a relationship where a narrative for the eye constitutes the aesthetic experience. The interplay with the eye and the object provides "what happens."

In my work I try to leave enough room for the viewer to create his or her own experience with the piece. I want the work to be suggestive, not declarative. To me what a work means is the result of an interactive relationship—or play—between the object and the viewer. Both bring a particular reality to the occasion that I hope will spark an interchange that will allow individual and personal meanings to emerge.

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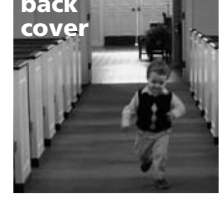
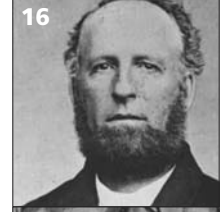
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At the Intersection of *What If* and *What Is* | BY BONNIE DWYER

Sitting across the table at Chili's from a screenwriter friend, I asked about his current projects and where his stories come from. First, he told me about the Christmas script that his agent is circulating, a charming small-town tale of two kids fascinated by astronomy who think they have found *the* Christmas star.

Then he added with a grin, "As for the stories themselves, they all come from a big warehouse in Utica, New York," a line he borrowed from Stephen King.

And I laughed.

"Actually, they always begin with some form of the question 'What if?'" he said. "What if two kids really could discover the true Star of Bethlehem?"

Ah, stories of possibilities. What fun they must be to write. As a journalist, my stories always begin with what is. Bits of reality. (Reality bites?) Pointing out *what is* can be hazardous. People tend to blame the messenger if *what is* is not to their liking.

Is there ever a meeting point between *what if* and *what is*?

The SONscreen Film Festival that we were both attending was over. My head was aswirl with ideas. That morning, Raewyn Hankins had given a powerful sermon titled "Why Tell Stories?"

To answer her question with another ques-

tion seemed logical. Well, what kind of stories? Stories of possibilities or stories of *what is*?

The source for her sermon was, of course, that great storyteller Jesus, in conversation with his disciples who asked him, with a sliver of irritation in their voices, "Why do you tell us stories?"

In Matthew, Jesus's stories of the kingdom always circled around the word "like."

For example, the kingdom of heaven is like a...

Does *like* hold the possibility of *what if*, together with *what is*?

Now, I have always been grateful to Jesus for talking in stories. But as I thought about different kinds of stories, it dawned on me that God, the Great I Am, lives at the intersection of *what is*, holding out his hand and softly asking, "*What if?*" Oh, the possibilities.

In this issue, we primarily have the *what is* variety of story, as we look at the state of the conversation on women's ordination, religious liberty, and Adventist identity. But, we also have Raewyn Hankins's excellent sermon.

And in each article, I think that you will find seeds of ideas, possibilities to consider.

Perhaps we need to contact the warehouse in Utica, for more *what if* stories. Or, ask my friend to send a few our way.

As we explore this Adventist life, holding onto *what if*, while we examine *what is*, perhaps, like T. S. Eliot, we will come to know this place called Adventism for the first time. ■

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum*.

Is there
ever a meeting
point between
what if and
what is?





Why *Spectrum* Matters: And how you respond matters, too | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN



**[*Spectrum's*]
communication
platform aims
for straight-
from-the-
shoulder truth-
telling.**

Only the passion, intelligence and faithfulness of an *engaged* membership can energize Adventism. Every member makes a difference. Every voice deserves a hearing.

Through our journal and website, *Spectrum* gives everyone a chance to speak up—and talk back. Through these media, we are now touching 400,000 people a year. (Yes, 400,000.)

The number needs, actually, to leap upward. *Spectrum* is Adventism's best and longest-lived platform for *open, honest conversation*. Scripture itself is the inspired record of such a conversation, and Jesus himself proposed truthful conversation as the right means of addressing conflict, achieving reconciliation, and advancing the church's mission.

So, open, honest conversation is a value that matters, a key to authentic Christian community. When voices unfettered by fear or stale orthodoxy engage the Holy Spirit's promptings, the church begins to think and live its way into better answers and deeper concord.

Amid harrowing cultural change, Adventism is today struggling to find itself. Too many are estranged from Adventist life, too many cynical or bored. Even the ardently engaged are too often angry or small-minded. Nevertheless, there is still vibrancy. People of every kind and color are still *pursuing* and *exploring* the Adventist way. Fired by hope and buoyed by Sabbath rest, they are attempting to *be* a people favored by grace and committed to Jesus.

It is worth investing in such a community. And just because conversation is so basic to true Christian community, it is also worth investing in *Spectrum*.

Our communication platform aims for straight-from-the-shoulder truth-telling. The journal provides in-depth reports and groundbreaking scholarship. The website delivers news and opinion on matters of immediate urgency. In response, everyone—likeable or not, knowledgeable or not, gracious or not—can chime in. Through *Spectrum*, every thoughtful Adventist can find both stimulus

Through
Spectrum, every
 thoughtful
 Adventist can
 find both
 stimulus and
 freedom
 [and] find, too,
 that they are
 not alone.



and freedom. Such Adventists can find, too, that they are not alone. Redemptive ideas, and people who believe in them, abound and bring encouragement. Even when bad news makes the truth hard to bear, the unflinching pursuit of it is encouraging.

Along with passion for truthful writing, financial generosity has powered all of this. And now as ever, gifts are leverage for new life in Adventism. *Spectrum* keeps justice for women pastors at the forefront, publishes assessment as well as appreciation of Ellen White, gives scientists and theologians an unmuffled voice on matters of science and faith. All the while, it offers new perspective on the deep meaning of Adventist convictions and experience.

Thanks to the website, conversation like this is now global. And supporting gifts matter, modest ones as well as, of course, major ones. A few years ago, \$40,000 from one individual turned a rudimentary website into an interactive, online news site and gathering place. Earlier, a gift of \$10,000 sent a reporter to the war crimes trial of an Adventist pastor in Rwanda. Today, similar gifts, together with new commitments to systematic generosity, will stimulate similar breakthroughs.

Our goal for the ***Spectrum* Global Community Campaign** in 2013 is \$250,000, about twice what we raised in 2012. Gifts will help us:

- Enlarge the editorial team and recruit additional writers/reporters worldwide.
- Pay for travel expenses entailed by timely and in-depth reporting of Adventist news worldwide.
- Upgrade the technical staff for the website.
- Finance the development of mobile platforms.

All of this must happen for the sake of Adventist renewal and for the sake of Adventist hope, which moves from one generation to another and back. In this light, we are asking you for a pace-setting commitment. Your gift will inspire others to give. And it will—it really will—help the whole church to live into a better version of itself.

Thank you for support in the past. Thank you for considering this new opportunity. ■

Charles Scriven chairs *Adventist Forum*.



Sabbath with *Spectrum*

Addressing Issues of Current Concern

DEAR EDITOR,

A couple Sabbaths ago, I stayed home from church because I had a sick dog. Scout had thrown up a half dozen times throughout the night, so I wondered if I should take him into the emergency veterinary clinic. I decided that I'd see if he continued to throw up or exhibited new symptoms on Sabbath morning that might require medical attention.

And then I remembered that the new issue of *Spectrum* had just arrived, with its intriguing yellow, green, and blue map on the cover, including the God compass floating between the "Sea of Preparation" and "The Straits of Circumstance." I always flip through the latest issue of *Spectrum* when it arrives, looking at all the art, poetry, titles, and call-outs—just as I immediately look at all the cartoons in the *New Yorker* when it shows up. Perfect. I would brew a fresh pot of rooibos tea, put on the *Harmony* album by The Priests, and dive into the fresh pages.

What a remarkable Sabbath of reading! I began at the back with Brenton Reading's review of *Naked Spirituality*. I had just finished Brian McLaren's *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?* so I wanted to learn about another of his books. Brenton's very personal responses to the book touched me.

Don Williams's wonderfully organized piece on "A New Mission School Model" has so much to carefully consider, for everyone from our school administrators and parents of school-age children to conference leaders and those who contribute tithes and offerings.

Ruben's energetic tour of faith communities and Petr's discussion of the role of research in mission left me feeling as if I'd just put in some serious mileage from my wingback chair by the front window.

Then, working my way from back to front, I came to the center section of articles on suffering and spirituality.

Any of these pieces would enlighten, intrigue, or inspire me whenever encountered. Yet, because I have recently been confronted by the vast and varied landscape of suffering inhabited by many dear friends or family members, this set of writings addressed many issues of current concern to me.

And so, in a rather tender state of mind, I paged forward to "Mugging at Midnight." This dramatic story is powerful in the images and tensions it conjures and the recorded dialogue. "We won't call the cops. But there's one thing you're going to have to watch out for. We turned you over to God tonight....He's better than cops." I read this piece twice. And I read it at the Easter service at our church.

About the time I would have been coming home from church potluck, I was reading Charles Scriven's editorial, "A New Kind of Adventism." It seemed the perfect summation, a resounding amen, pronouncing a blessing and benediction on all the other pieces in the issue.

Thank you all for a memorable issue that bears re-reading and sharing.

JULI MILLER | *Sun Valley, Idaho*



P.S. Scout (*above*) recovered with no medical intervention.



Notes in Play When Considering

Calcolare Caelo | BY JOHN MCDOWELL

Note to the Reader: You will notice that the following article unfolds in a series of numbered sections. You will also note, possibly with some puzzlement, that the numbers are not in sequence. Surely, it must be an error on the part of the author or editor. I assure you that this is not the case. A sequential sequence provides an expected order. Try the unexpected. I invite you to create your own sequence, your own order. The order you create will provide (I assure you) a slightly different shade and tone of meaning when you are done than if you had chosen another route.

4. Title

The art featured on the cover of this issue of *Spectrum* has as its title, *Calcolare Caelo*. A colleague, much better versed in Latin than I, suggested that a more correct rendering of “Calculate Heaven” is: *Caelum Calcula*. Why Latin? I am referencing the language (in the Western tradition) of learning, scholarship, inquiry in the sciences and humanities.

9. Quotation

“Only imaginative vision elicits the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual.”¹

3. Process

Tarpaper backs rolls of copper flashing. With a propane torch, I burn off most of the paper and some of the tar. The bits of paper that remain, small, burnt ovals, are eventually covered

with gold leaf. I apply a high-temperature silicone to the plywood and adhere lengths of copper to the base. I also attach a strip of lead. Once secured, I use the torch as a drawing tool to burn off more tar. Thus begins a process of uncovering and covering. I blur the horizontal lines where the copper pieces line up. The challenge: create a pattern that works with

the horizontal strips and makes the space work. The “burnt” areas, cleaned with steel wool, are ready for the application of various chemicals. Once the chemicals (in liquid form) are applied, I place the painting on a bed of wood shavings coated with household ammonia (this brings out blue hues) and place the piece in a fume tent for several days. This creates the patina. While waiting, I weld the metal frame together. Once removed from the fume tent, I inspect



Calcolare Caelo by John McDowell

the piece of coloration and “paint” again by removing material in some spots and redoing the patina process in other places. I also add dashes of powdered pigment (the reds for example). Once happy with the patina, I remove the wood chips and attach the frame. The patina, at this point, is fragile (it takes time for it to bite and bind with the copper), and some comes off—thus the task begins to apply sizing (glue) in some areas, and dyes in other areas to bring out

and strengthen the colors I want. (I work with a small brush and even cotton swabs.) Once I have the color and composition of the copper I desire (there is often revision), I work with the lead strip—the “blackboard” (or horizon line)—and with transfer paper apply the formulas and symbols. The final step involves applying layers of clear lacquer to stabilize and harden the surface.

8. Quotation

“To interpret is to try to see in things what is distinctly their own. That is in turn to see them in ways that are distinctly our own and, to the extent that they are ours alone, these ways of seeing turn out to be aesthetic features in their own right and have themselves a claim to beauty....”²

5. Formulas

With their numbers, signs, and symbols, formulas have a wonderful beauty. New insight is achieved via balance. There is a journey from the known to the unknown. A river (“=”) must be crossed. The coins paid are *not* to the boatman of the river Styx. No, the opposite is true. The coin paid is the stretch of the imagination. When things equate, and we cross over, we step into the paradise of new knowledge; the unknown becomes known in ways we might have thought impossible, yet here we stand agape in awe in a new world of understanding. (The formulas depicted relate to motion, planetary movement, and aspects of astronomy.)

1. Quotation

“Works of art are means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other

forms of relationship and participation than our own.”³

2. Idea

Coming to meaning means the continuous process of translating what our senses receive, and how we read the symbols we have created as tools to investigate: to know. The calculation of heaven is the supreme exercise of the continuously informed imagination. (I speak here both literally and metaphorically.)

11. Quotation

“Admire me is the sub-text of so much of our looking; the demand put on art that it should reflect the reality of the viewer. The true painting, in its stubborn independence, cannot do this, except coincidentally. Its reality is imaginative not mundane.”⁴

6. Science and Art

As disciplines, science and art are often constructed in a dualistic, paradigmatic construction and hence our understanding of reality is broken into separate polar entities for investigating and even determining truth. We even talk of science and art as inhabiting different areas of the brain (a fallacy). I chafe against dualist categorizations. How much more can be gained if both science and art are understood as partners? Beauty informing empirical data, empirical analysis informing beauty. The circulating, reciprocal is the way: science and art, us and the world, the mortal and the immortal. Surely, calculating heaven is both/and.

10. Quotation

“Art does not imitate nature, it imitates a creation, sometimes to propose an alternate world, sometimes simply

to amplify, to confirm, to make social the brief hope offered by nature.... Art sets out to transform the potential recognition into an unceasing one. It proclaims man in the hope of receiving a surer reply... the transcendental face of art is always a form of prayer.”⁵

7. Viewing

What do you see? (When you look?)

12. Poem

The heavens are telling—

*We
shall not
be excised
from*

the story.

John McDowell is a poet, artist, and professor,



and the dean of arts at Canadian University College. His poetry and photography have been featured on past *Spectrum*

covers, and his essays have appeared in the journal. His bio, artwork, and contact information can be found at jmcowellart.com.

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BIBLE



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WHY TELL STORIES?

Why Tell Stories? | BY RAEWYN HANKINS | PHOTOGRAPHS BY GERRY CHUDLEIGH

The following was adapted from Raewyn Hankins's sermon at the SONscreen Film Festival, at the Adventist Media Production Studios in Simi Valley, California, on Saturday, April 6, 2013.

In Matthew 13:10, Jesus's disciples come and ask him why he speaks to the people in parables. *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible asks, "Why do You tell stories?" That's a good question, as about one-third of Jesus's recorded teachings are parables, and Mark goes so far as to say that "without a parable he did not speak to them" (Mark 4:34 NKJV). Jesus responds with a troubling quote from Isaiah about hearing and not understanding, seeing and not perceiving, dull hearts, deaf ears, and closed eyes. What do Jesus's stories conceal? What do they reveal? How do his stories heal hearts and change lives?

You are storytellers. Each year since 2002, SONscreen has been bringing people together, Christian, young, young at heart, visual, storytellers. Jesus was a storyteller. Sometimes, though, this confused and frustrated his disciples. Sometimes it confuses us today. Come with me as we join Jesus and his disciples on a very long day. Jesus's disciple, Matthew, writes about this day, starting in Matthew, chapter 12. Jesus goes on retreat to Capernaum, possibly to his disciple Peter's house. Peter's place was on Lake Galilee, the perfect getaway from the crowds and critics. But they follow him.

That day, that really long day, starts at Peter's house, where Jesus heals a blind and mute man. The crowd is amazed, but Jesus's critics claim his

miracles are demonic and demand a sign. Which is a bit counterintuitive. The crowds, the critics, even Jesus's mother and brothers show up at this retreat, and come to the door, wanting to talk to him, perhaps to encourage him to slow down and stay out of trouble. Jesus says his disciples are his mother and brothers.

Then we have a scene change. "On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to him, so that he got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore" (Matt. 13:1–2). Jesus is so bombarded by the crowd and critics that he gets into a boat, sits down, and starts telling stories. The Bible calls them parables. The word *parable*, in Greek, means, "to place beside." A parable is an everyday story "placed beside" a spiritual truth.

Jesus looks at the scene in front of him and starts telling parables. It's autumn, and farmers are scattering their seeds. Jesus sees and tells the story of a sower. Then, still sitting in the boat, he tells more stories, starting them with "The kingdom of heaven is like..." The kingdom of heaven is like a man sowing good seeds and an enemy sowing weeds. It's like a mustard seed. It's like leaven in dough. It's like hidden treasure, like a pearl of great price, like a fishing net. In Mark's account of the day, from his angle, he adds two more stories: it's like a growing seed, it's like a lamp on a stand (perhaps it was getting dark by then). It's like a film festival, one story after another, but Jesus's disciples don't get it.

Mark tells us that when the crowds are gone,

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**I felt like
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belong to.**

the disciples ask about the parable, particularly the Parable of the Sower. Matthew has them interrupting Jesus's storytelling session, right between two films, with an urgent question. "And the disciples came and said to him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (Matt. 13:10). In *The Message* paraphrase, the disciples ask, "Why do you tell stories?"

It's been a long day, week, month, long couple of years, and I imagine the tone of this question is not only confused, but frustrated, and maybe even accusatory. "Jesus, why do you tell them stories? Why don't you tell them who you really are? Why don't you give them a sign? Why don't you declare the kingdom of heaven is here and rally the crowds into a militia and tell Rome a thing or two? Why don't you give them answers?"

Has this question ever reverberated in your heart? "Jesus, why do you tell stories about what the kingdom of heaven is supposed to be like, stories of other people being healed, stories, when what I need right now are some answers?"

One of those moments came when I was a sophomore at La Sierra University in Riverside, California. I'd come from my home in Berrien Springs, Michigan, to take Religious Studies, Pre-Seminary, believing that Jesus was calling me to be a pastor. In my ethics class, I was assigned to write a paper on women's ordination, i.e., if it is appropriate for the church to officially recognize and authorize women to serve as pastors. The paper required reading both sides of the debate. On the anti-women's ordination side, I read an article from a magazine called *Adventists Affirm*, which turned out to be anything but affirming, at least to me. Having grown up as a fifth-generation Seventh-day Adventist Christian, with great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents who helped start the work of the church in South Africa, for the first time I felt shut out. I felt like the church I loved and believed in wasn't big enough for me to belong to. Me, a woman who loves Jesus, loves my church, and felt God was calling me to serve in full-time pastoral ministry. I asked, "Jesus, why

don't you tell them how it's supposed to be? Why are you telling them stories?"

Jesus loved telling stories. It's estimated that at least one-third of Jesus's recorded teaching are parables.¹ When you add other types of stories, narrative makes up as much as 91 percent of Jesus's preaching. This was frustrating to those who came to Jesus with questions and wanted answers. Here are a few shots of these Q&A moments that didn't quite make the cut, at least not as questions and answers. In Luke 12, someone from the crowd demands an answer from Jesus: "Lord, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Jesus doesn't ask for the details to make a decision or a declaration. Instead, he tells a story about a rich man who builds bigger and better barns, and then dies. And that's the end of Jesus's story.

When Jesus's disciples ask him to teach them how to pray, he doesn't offer a formula and training; he prays and then tells a story of a man receiving a guest at midnight. The man goes over to his friend's house, knocks on the door, and finally gets some bread, only because his friend is afraid that if he keeps knocking he'll wake up the whole neighborhood. In Matthew 18, Peter comes to Jesus with a question: How many times do I forgive my brother? Jesus gives a ridiculous answer, seventy times seven. Peter thinks, "OK, this is sin number 261, that means you have, ah, exactly 229 left, but who's counting, right?" Then Jesus tells a story about two debtors and their relationship to the king and to each other.

Possibly one of the best-known stories Jesus told, the parable of the Good Samaritan, he tells in response to a question from one of his critics, a lawyer who was testing him. The lawyer asks, "Jesus, the Bible says I should love my neighbor as I love myself, but who exactly is my neighbor?" Instead of giving an answer, Jesus tells a story about a man who wouldn't have been included in the Jewish lawyer's list of "neighbors": a Samaritan, an ethnic and religious rival of the Jews, who helped his Jewish neighbor when no one else would.

Jesus Tells Stories. Why?

In Luke's telling of this long day by the sea at the beach, Jesus simply tells the disciples, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand'" (Luke 8:10). Why would Jesus tell stories to conceal?

Just before this long day started, the whole reason Jesus retreated with his disciples to Peter's place by the Sea of Galilee is that in Matthew 12, for the first time, the religious leaders had a meeting where the number one and only agenda item was how to destroy Jesus. Jesus keeps healing people, but insists that they not tell anyone. The kingdom of heaven was threatening to the religious and political powers of the day, and in order to continue his mission, Jesus had to go underground.

In Matthew 21, his critics, still working on accomplishing their destroy-Jesus agenda, come to him with a question, "Who gave you the right to do this?" Jesus tells two stories. The first one is about two sons, one who says he's going to do what the father wants and doesn't, and the other who says he won't and does. The second story is about a vineyard, an absentee landowner, and the workers, who end up beating up the landowner's son to death. This time, Jesus's critics, the religious leaders, figured out he was talking about them, but couldn't get their hands on him because the crowds hadn't figured out he was talking about them.

Jesus tells the disciples that he tells stories to conceal the truth. Then, he explains the story of the sower. In that story, the seed sown is the word of God. The word of God would be concealed or sown in several different types of soil—along the wayside, where it gets eaten by birds; stony ground, where it grows, but withers in the sun without roots; thorny ground, where it grows, but gets choked out by weeds; and good ground, where it grows and produces a crop, thirty times, sixty times, one hundred times more. Jesus told stories to conceal truth, to bury the word of God deep in the soil of people's

Hankins presenting her sermon on "Why Tell Stories?" at the SONscreen Film Festival.



**I am the one
who was lost
and is found,
the one sinner
for whom
heaven wants
to throw a
welcome home
party.**

hearts. But for a seed, burial is never meant to be the end of the story.

A year and a half ago, my cousin Chelle bought some tomatoes at the farmers' market. The farmer wanted to sell her a tomato plant as well. Chelle explained that she wasn't a good gardener, but the farmer insisted that this plant was indestructible. So, she decided to give it a shot. She put the plant in a pot on our step where it could be watered by the sprinkler. She thought about it a couple weeks or months later, and looked at it—it was dead. She gave it a burial in the front garden and forgot about it, until half

Raewyn Hankins



**Jesus's
stories
conceal truth,
to reveal
truth.**

a year later. At Christmastime, my parents were here. They said, "You've got lovely tomatoes in your garden." We were shocked! The following year's crop was unbelievable; tomatoes everywhere you looked. We were giving tomatoes to our neighbors, trying to think of tomato recipes, and making lots of pasta sauce, frozen tomatoes, etc. Chelle buried that plant because its life was over. The Sower had different plans in store.

Jesus conceals, in order to reveal. A little further in the chapter, Matthew 13:34–35 summarizes,

All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable he did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

*'I will open My mouth in parables;
I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.'*

Jesus told stories, not to keep secrets but to share things kept secret from the beginning of time. He tells stories to reveal truth.

Jesus's storytelling sessions, his film festivals, had some very strange audiences. One evening a couple weeks ago, I went to Pasadena for the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour: Caltech; it was amazing. We saw stories of trail runners, and twenty-somethings kayaking off

waterfalls; climbing up rock walls, without ropes, that had never been scaled in so little time before; mountain biking over parked trains; a team climbing up a rock face in Yosemite for several days—not too unusual, except that all three climbers were amputees. As an audience, we loved it. When they gave out prizes at the end, I could see why. Everyone there was an outdoor adventure enthusiast. We were watching the stories because we wanted to be part of them. They revealed something about who we are.

Often, Jesus's audiences didn't believe they were part of the story. In Luke 15, Jesus is at a party with "tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 15:1 NIV). Jesus's ever-present critics complain about the company Jesus is keeping. A mini three-film festival begins: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. In each, Jesus's strange audience is drawn into the story. I am the lost sheep the shepherd goes looking for. I am the coin, lost in the house, that the woman searches so desperately for. I am the son, who left home for Hollywood a long time ago, and is now eating stuff only fit for pigs, but my father, when he sees me from a distance, comes running to meet me. Most of all, I am the one who was lost and is found, the one sinner for whom heaven wants to throw a wel-

come home party. Jesus's stories conceal truth, to reveal truth.

Remember the quote we saw in Luke—"seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand"? In Matthew 13:14–15, Jesus quotes more from the prophet Isaiah, not just a couple lines:

And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,

And seeing you will see and not perceive;

For the hearts of this people have grown dull.

Their ears are hard of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.'

Jesus tells stories to conceal truth, in order to reveal truth, so he can heal hearts. Stories heal my heart. When magazine articles, Internet blogs, rightwing sermons, and the self-righteous religious leaders of the day impose answers that hurt my heart and tell me that I don't belong, stories heal.

When I insist that Jesus debate his opponents and deliver conclusive answers, he tells stories. I hear the story of Deborah, a judge leading her people into battle, and Esther speaking up and saving her people from disaster, and Mary, encouraged to sit at Jesus's feet as a disciple instead of getting stuck in the kitchen, and the Samaritan woman at the well, who was sent off as Jesus's first evangelist, stories of Mary Magdalene, who was chosen to be the first witness of his resurrection in a culture where a woman's testimony wouldn't count in a court of law.

I hear stories of Paul working with women like Priscilla and Junia to spread the gospel and lead house churches, encouraging women to learn in the posture of disciples instead of interrupting with uneducated questions, stories of

Paul, who was working toward a dream of Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female all being one in Christ Jesus.

Not only did I hear stories of God using women in biblical times, I read stories from a book that healed my heart. *Called by God* tells stories of women in the history of our particular church, the Seventh-day Adventist Christian church, who served as preachers and evangelists in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.² Their stories capture my attention, turn my eyes toward Jesus, and heal my heart. Through *Adventist Women + Equality = Unity in China*, I was excited to hear stories, not only from the Bible or from the nineteenth century, but from women alive today, in China, who are called by God and are part of sharing Jesus's story. I'm looking forward to seeing *The Irrevocable Call*, which reveals the struggle of ordaining women to ministry through Adventist history. The stories of these women help heal my heart. Like the sinners and prostitutes watching Jesus's film festival, I am drawn into the story, the concealed Word is revealed, and my heart is healed.

What about you, as a disciple? Have you ever had a long frustrating day, week, year, looked for answers and gotten stories instead; stories of what the kingdom of heaven is supposed to be

Will you tell stories that conceal the Word, in order to reveal Jesus, and to heal hearts?



Movie producer Felicia Tonga, from La Sierra University, discusses the award-winning film, "The Irrevocable Call," which she helped produce.



The production team behind the *Adventist Women + Equality = Unity* short documentary campaign poses for a photo after their film featuring the ordained women pastors of China was screened. From left: Rajmund Dabrowski, Bonnie Dwyer, Alexander Carpenter, and Timothy Wolfer.

like, stories of other people being healed? Have you cried out, “Jesus, why do you tell stories?” I invite you to keep watching Jesus’s stories, to keep finding them in scripture, and to keep showing up to his film festivals, because the word of God, when it is sown, cannot be concealed for long. It’s concealed to be revealed and to heal your heart. Keep listening to the stories.

What about you? Will you be a regular contributor to Jesus’s film festival? Will you tell stories that confound his critics and invite the crowds to follow him, stories that create space for those lost and left out to come home and feel their Father’s embrace? Will you tell stories that conceal the Word in people’s hearts, where some seed is stolen away, yes, other seed sprouts but dries up, yes, other seed grows but is choked out, yes, but some seed, some seed bears fruit and produces thirty times, sixty times, one hundred times more? Will you tell stories that conceal the Word, in order to reveal him, and to heal hearts? Why tell stories? Why be part of his film festival? Because there are hearts that need healing, hearts that need the Word, who is Jesus. ■

Raewyn Hankins is the senior pastor at the Victorville Seventh-day Adventist Church in Victorville, California.

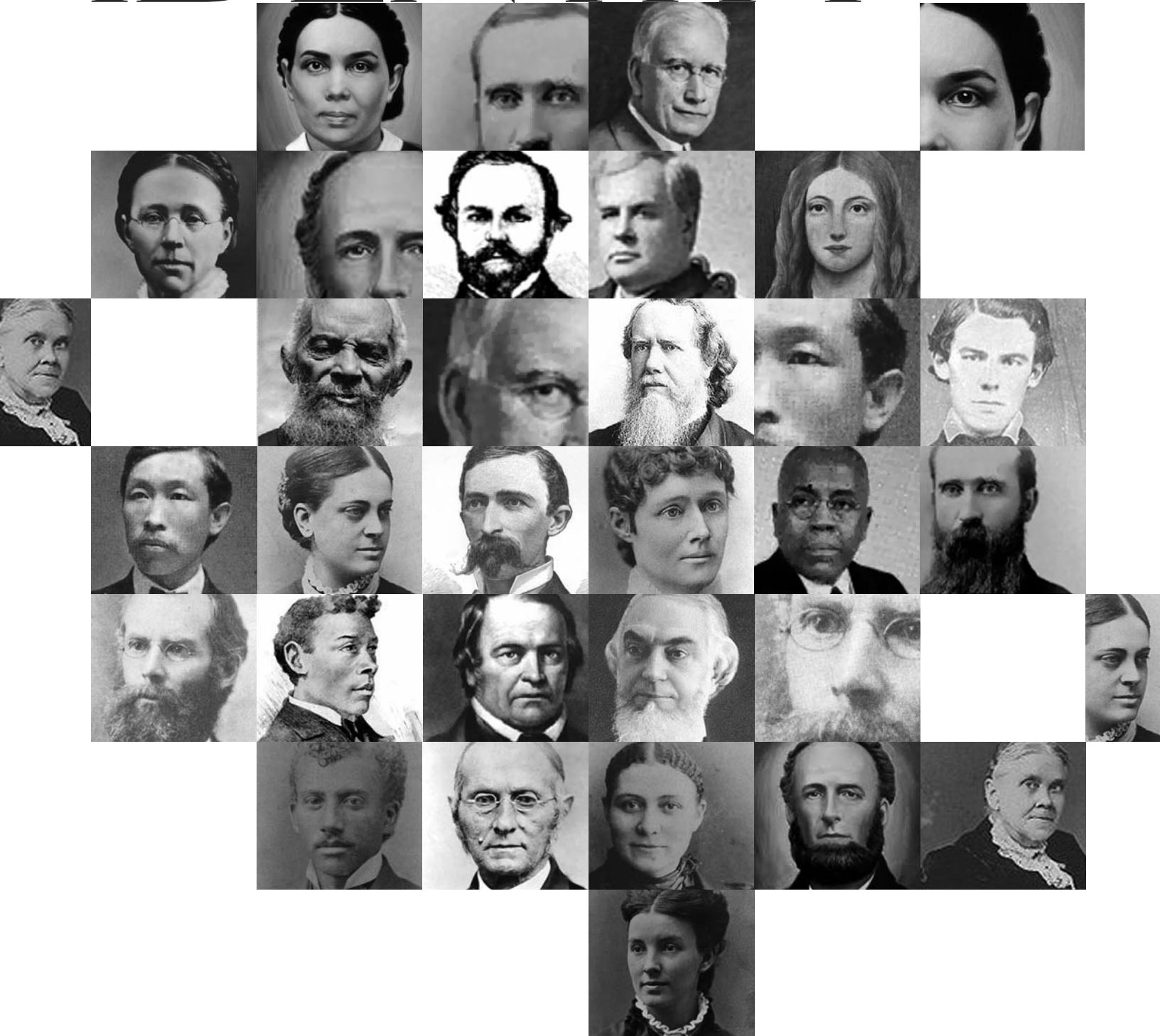


She was born to a South African family, but was transplanted to Berrien Springs, Michigan, at an early age. In high school, Raewyn felt called to full-time pastoral ministry. Due to the obvious absence of female pastors, and not wanting to be seen as a rebel, nor actually go against scripture, she hesitated. When she saw Jesus’s treatment of women, Paul’s work with women, and read Galatians 3:28, she answered the call. After graduating from La Sierra University, she served as an assistant pastor in Chula Vista, earned her MDiv at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Seminary, and pastored at the Yucaipa SDA Church. In June 2011, she was “ordained-commissioned” by the Southeastern California Conference, and was recognized by the Pacific Union as “ordained” on September 4, 2012. Raewyn lives in Loma Linda, California, with her cousin, Rochelle Webster, who is also pastoring.

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ADVENTIST IDENTITY



Toward Oneness and Freedom: *The Road from 'Babylon' to General Conference Organization* | BY DOUGLAS MORGAN

Resolved, That the sectarian denominations of New-England should... be considered and treated, by every friend of humanity, as the 'Babylon of apocalyptic vision' 'the habitation of devils, the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.'

Today, a resolution of such startling severity and sweeping scope might lead to charges of “hate speech.” The “sectarian denominations” consigned to spiritual Babylon by this 1843 pronouncement included *all* the well-established, culturally influential churches of the time—Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, and so forth.

The scripture passages from Revelation that underlie the resolution, one announcing the “fall” of Babylon (Rev. 14:8) and the other calling God’s people to “come out” (Rev. 18:1–4), were taking on central significance for the Adventist movement just at this time. But this resolution was not passed at an Adventist gathering. Rather, it came from the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, meeting in Haverhill, Massachusetts, for its annual convention. The society denounced the leading denominations “on account of the sanction and support they afford to slavery” (this phrase fills in the ellipsis in the opening quote).¹

The Seventh-day Adventists would soon associate distinctive meaning of vital importance for their last-day message with the “second angel’s message” of Revelation 14:8 and the “loud cry” of Revelation 18:1–4. But during the 1840s, and throughout the era of reform and crisis over slavery leading to the Civil War in the 1860s, Adventists were far from alone in emphasizing these texts. A diffuse movement, or impulse, called “come-outerism” gained momentum in the 1840s, making heavy use of these passages. Radical reformers such as William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the *Liberator*, concluded that the established

denominations had forfeited their spiritual legitimacy by rejecting the abolitionist call for an immediate end to the sin of slavery. Abolitionists, using “No Union with Slaveholders” as their rallying cry, also called upon the free states to “come out” of the federal Union with slave states.²

As it turned out, of course, the opposite took place, with the slave states of the South seceding from the Union, leading to the Civil War. During the war, opponents of slavery in the North shifted the identity of apocalyptic Babylon to the Confederacy, and celebrated with the cry “Babylon is fallen” when Union forces finally took the Confederate capital, Richmond, Virginia, near the end of the war.³

According to historian Lewis Parry, come-outerism centered on conviction about the “millennial duty to secede from sinful institutions.” In other words, the arrival of the millennium—God’s ideal future society, understood in a variety of ways—required rejection of corrupt human authority and allegiance to God’s government alone—*now!*⁴

Babylon’s Fall Means Freedom

And that brings us back to the founders of Seventh-day Adventism, who grappled with a dilemma that evolved with the passage of time after the Great Disappointment of 1844: What happens after Babylon falls, when Jesus has not yet returned and the millennium still has not arrived? The endeavor to work out an answer to that question gave rise to the Seventh-day Adventist movement and its organization as a church, culminating in the establishment of the General Conference 150 years ago.

Let’s “listen” in as James White, in a letter written to “Brother and Sister Hastings,” in August 1848, hurriedly summarizes a breakthrough that has united a few scores of believers, led by himself, his wife Ellen, and their friend Joseph Bates. They had found their key in the

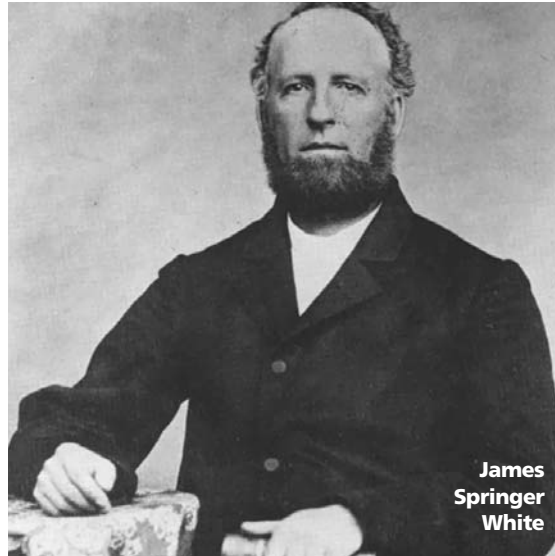
fourteenth chapter of Revelation, and James's excitement is nearly palpable as he rushes through the meaning of the messages given by the three angels:

First is the Advent Angel or message of verses 6 and 7. This took place from 1840 to 1843. Second is another angel in the 8th verse crying Babylon is fallen. This was in 1844 when we all rushed out of Babylon. Next a third angel appears with a warning message for us not to go back and receive the marks we got rid of in 1844. Well here yes right here is the little, despised company who embrace the 7th day Sabbath. Oh! how glad I am that I know my whereabouts. Yes, never was there a people whose position was so plainly marked out in the Word as ours. We know where we stand.⁵

Jesus had not returned as expected, right on the heels of the fall of Babylon, marked by Charles Fitch's galvanizing 1843 sermon, "Come Out of Her, My People." And now it is clear why. The message of the third angel reveals what must happen after Babylon falls: the emergence of a people whose adherence to "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" includes the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath, and restoration of its true meaning.

That insight has lasted, driving the Adventist movement down to the present, though further light was yet to come on the three angels' messages. The sabbatarian Adventists, groping for direction in the confusion that followed the disappointment of 1844, found distinctive meaning in widely used texts—new identity and purpose in God's prophetic Word.

Yet, *similarity* in how Adventists and other "come-outers" applied the Babylon texts also remains of critical importance. It comes through in further commentary from James White on what was at stake when "God called us out of Babylon." In the April 1850 issue of *Present Truth*, he wrote, "If we had stayed there, bound down by ministers and creeds, the glorious light of the Holy Sabbath never would have reached us; but glory to God, the second angel's message called us out from the fallen churches where we are now free to think, and



act for ourselves in the fear of God."⁶

For Adventists, as for come-outers in general, the fall of Babylon meant, in a word, *freedom*. As John N. Andrews put it, the dominant churches had used their creeds to expel believers "for no other crime than that of looking for the coming of Jesus Christ." Coming out, and staying out, of Babylon meant freedom to bear witness to the present truth of the gospel. It also referred to freedom for those shackled by injustice and inhumanity. The "professed church is to a fearful extent the right arm of the slave power," Andrews observed, and thereby "a perfect illustration... of a nation drunken with the wine of Babylon."⁷

The story of church organization centered on tension between an acute need for "gospel order," on the one hand, and zeal to avoid a return to the repression of Babylon, on the other. Would the Sabbath-keeping Adventists find a way to establish the *order* necessary for unity and mission while maintaining the freedom of the *gospel* and openness to fresh infusions of its liberating Spirit?

Gospel Order

After building consensus on their defining beliefs in a series of conferences begun in 1848, the ranks of believers in the three angels' messages grew rather impressively to around two thousand by 1852. By 1860, though cen-

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—James White

tered in Michigan, the movement extended from Maine to Minnesota, comprised of small, scattered congregations as well as lone individuals and families united principally by the weekly periodical, the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (the *Review*, for short). That made James White, as publisher and editor of the *Review*, the movement's informal leader. But other than publications, no formal elements of organization existed: no conference administration, no standard definition of church offices, no church manual, no working policy, no denominational headquarters, not even a name.

In their initial appeals for gospel order, published in 1853, Ellen and James White focused on the need to certify genuine preachers of the three angels' messages to guard against the confusion and division caused by the fraudulent claims of unqualified, ungrounded, "self-sent" men. It seems a clear, practical necessity, but their fellow believers did not quickly warm to calls for greater organization for a couple of reasons.

First, the movement was still in the early stages of working out a challenge that still defies an easy solution. That is, how to sustain conviction about the *imminence*—the any-day-now nearness—of the Second Advent along with *long-term planning* for the possibility that the present age will continue for years, even decades to come. To many, it still somehow seemed a lack of faith to set up systems of formal organization if it was all about to end anyway.

The second factor was deep-seated resistance to creating any authority structure that could become an instrument for the kind of repression that characterized ecclesiastical Babylon. "Take care that you do not seek to manufacture another church," George Storrs had famously warned those who fled "Babylon" in 1844. "No church can be organized by man's invention but what it becomes Babylon the moment it is organized," he declared. A trenchant radical both in his abolitionism and Second Adventism, Storrs made his point in extreme, absolutist terms. But let's hear him out a little further, with two, less frequently quoted sentences: "The Lord organized His own church by the strong bond of love. Stronger than that cannot be made; and when such bonds will not hold together the professed followers of Christ, they cease to be His followers, and drop off from the body as a matter of course."⁸

Throughout their strenuous, sometimes combative

efforts to build a unified church in the decades that followed, neither James nor Ellen White lost sight of the truthful element in Storrs's point. Authoritarian dictates and coercive enforcement of policy are far too flimsy to hold the church together in unity. Only the "strong bond of love" can do that, and only the Spirit of Christ can generate it.

James indeed pointed out that some zealous to leave the Babylon of denominational creedalism had ended up in another form of Babylon—sheer confusion and disorder. And he labeled the notion that "the church of Christ is free from restraint and discipline" as "the wildest fanaticism." But the aim of his proposal was the kind of freedom with unity and order that characterized the apostolic church. Having been "called away from the confusion and bondage of man-made creeds," he wanted Advent believers now to enjoy both "the *oneness* and *freedom* of the gospel."⁹

System for a Vast Work

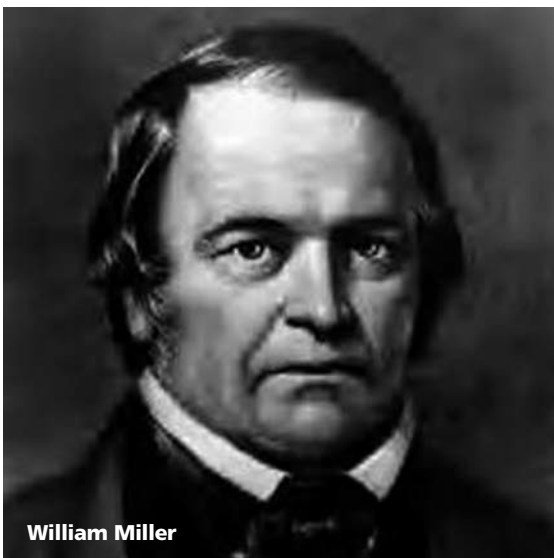
Thus, in the renewed drive for gospel order that began in 1859 and culminated with the formation of the General Conference in 1863, the sabbatarian Adventists faced the daunting challenge of enhancing both *liberty* and *unity*. It was, however, a third value—*mission*—that made it urgent for them to try.

Their understanding of the three angels' messages as going forth in a historical sequence during the 1840s had thrilled the Sabbath-observing Adventists with the conviction that their movement had arisen on time in accordance with prophecy. It fulfilled the divine plan for the interval extending from the fall of Babylon to the Second Coming of Christ. Yet, it also limited their mission. As they initially understood it, their teaching about the third angel's message had pertinence only for those who had accepted the first two. In other words, their mission had a narrow target: to lead those who had accepted the Second Advent message preached by William Miller and come out of the creedal denominations to accept the further truth of the third angel's message, centering on "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."¹⁰

Realization, by 1852, that the door of salvation remained open to all people prompted new thinking about both "Babylon" and the three angels' messages. In brief, our founders concluded that the *second angel's message*

of Revelation 14—“Babylon is fallen” (verse 8)—and *the loud cry* of the angel depicted in Revelation 18 as “having great power” so that “the earth was lightened with his glory” (KJV)—were not simultaneous, but separate events on the prophetic timetable. They remained convinced that the second message had gone forth in 1843 and that they were living in the time when the third message was to be given. Except, now they began to see that the first two messages had continuing relevance to be incorporated into their preaching of the third. And, that all of this was preparatory to the future “loud cry” that would bring the third angel’s message to its glorious culmination. Its mighty voice and blazing light would bring the significance of the seventh-day Sabbath as the seal of faithfulness to the true and living God before the world with unmistakable clarity.¹¹

This was about something much bigger than lining up last-day events in their proper order. It meant seeing the people of the “fallen” churches of “Babylon” in an entirely new light. They could no longer be avoided as doomed reprobates, but must be sought out as potential allies in the cause of truth. It meant that Seventh-day Adventists, in their role as a faithful remnant, should consider themselves not as the exclusive people of God, but as bearers of the light of reform to “the great body of Christ’s true followers” outside their ranks.¹²



William Miller

That mission gave urgency to church organization. In view of “the thousands in Babylon and the world yet to be brought out by the loud cry,” wrote James White in 1860, Adventists had a mission of far greater scope than they had previously imagined—overwhelming, yet at the same time exhilarating in its immensity. A “vast work” lay ahead, and to accomplish it they had to get organized.¹³

Will It Stand the Test of Criticism?

The issues of organization clustered around two major problem areas. James White described the first in 1859 with three words: “We lack system.” Here, he referred to the movement’s preachers, all of whom in this era were traveling evangelists, often called “messengers.” They went where called upon by believers to spend a few weeks or months preaching, perhaps with the use of an evangelistic tent, raising up new congregations, building up existing ones, or both.

While the fraudulent claims of those who usurped “messenger” status still caused occasional difficulty, the system begun in 1853 of issuing credentials signed by two leading ministers—usually James White and Joseph Bates—had lessened the problem. Also, the systematic benevolence plan adopted in 1858 had made a good start at properly paying the preachers. The main systemic deficiency now was coordinating the assignments and itineraries of the traveling preachers as they responded to ad hoc calls for labor, ranging from Maine to Minnesota. In view of their “systematic benevolence,” believers had the right, and duty, said James White, to expect “systematic labor.”¹⁴

The other problem area had to do with legal ownership of church property. Mainly, this meant the growing publishing business and meeting houses for congregational worship. The frequently cited experience of a nonsabbatarian Adventist congregation in Cincinnati, which twice lost its church building because the title was held by an individual member who defected from the faith, illustrated the insecurity of local church property if no

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corporate legal entity existed to hold it.¹⁵

The greater problem, though, lay with the publishing office in Battle Creek, Michigan. By 1859, it not only put out periodicals, principally the *Review* and the *Youth's Instructor*, but also an impressive list of books and pamphlets. Though a committee had been established to see that the work functioned in the interests of the entire body of believers, James White held sole financial and legal responsibility for the entire operation. This put him in an extremely awkward position. Though not in fact making a personal fortune from it, it made him vulnerable to repeated charges of profiteering, painful even if they did not stick. At the same time, he was personally responsible for the business's debts and liable for lawsuits that might be brought against it. On top of that, the property was uninsured.¹⁶

In early 1860, James White set in motion the decisive push for church organization when he made it clear that he could no longer tolerate the ambiguous situation, and called on "preachers and leading brethren" to submit plans for holding church property in a "proper manner." Though it came in the form of a protest, Roswell F. Cottrell's response may have accelerated the process by bringing broader issues into the picture. A former Seventh Day Baptist, Cottrell's frequent contributions to the *Review* and to the *Youth's Instructor* made him a relatively influential figure in the sabbatarian Adventist community. He contended that becoming "incorporated as a religious body according to law" would constitute the kind of alliance between corrupt religion and oppressive political power that was characteristic of Babylon, thus completely undercutting the second angel's message. He worried that his preaching about "the spiritual fornication of Babylon with the kings of the earth" would be silenced by the retort, "You look to the civil arm for aid and protection."¹⁷

Though Cottrell's objections may seem extreme and impractical in hindsight, they represented widespread sentiment in the sabbatarian Adventist community. The movement's most scholarly writer, J. N. Andrews, for example, had argued just five years before that even though the United States had no national religion, the fact that "nearly all her religious bodies are incorporated by the State" was one reason why those denominations should nevertheless be regarded as "Babylon." Cottrell had a genuine concern that Adventism not lose its free-

dom platform by making even a small compromise with the coercive power of the state.¹⁸

Interestingly, it was Andrews who, in a conference at Battle Creek in September 1860, proposed a solution that both met the concerns of those who, like Cottrell, feared a return to the bondage of Babylon, and those like James White, who sought the organization necessary to fulfill the mandate of mission. Andrews suggested formation of an "association to hold property" in contrast to a "church incorporated by law."¹⁹

Before wrapping up on October 1, the conference also took care of another major item of business, selecting "Seventh-day Adventist" as the name for the body of believers on whose behalf the publishing association was to be formed. The following spring, on May 3, 1861, the "Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association" (not the "James White Publishing Company") was incorporated as a nonprofit joint-stock corporation, open to all believers who put up \$10 for a share.²⁰

Adopting a church name and incorporating the publishing association were not only major strides toward unity but also, despite fears to the contrary, constituted a victory for freedom. Specifically, the freedom to advance in understanding of truth through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Responding to the charge that legal incorporation ran contrary to the second angel's message, James White pointed out to his fellow believers that they had moved beyond a number of things that they once believed. Early on, for example, they held that "going to the ballot box and holding civil office" would mean an illicit union with the state, a return to Babylon, and reception of the "mark of the beast." Though held with deep conviction in accordance with "the best light we then had," further study made clear that "we embraced too much in the second angel's message," and the baggage had to be laid aside.²¹

Progress toward unifying a movement and mobilizing it for mission in nineteenth-century America required freedom to take action in harmony with scriptural principles, without having to support everything with a direct command or precedent from the Bible, as some demanded. And, it meant freedom to change, in accordance with increasing light. Trying to win over a dissenter the following year, White put it this way: "The question with us is, What will stand the test of criticism? and not, What did we once believe?"²²

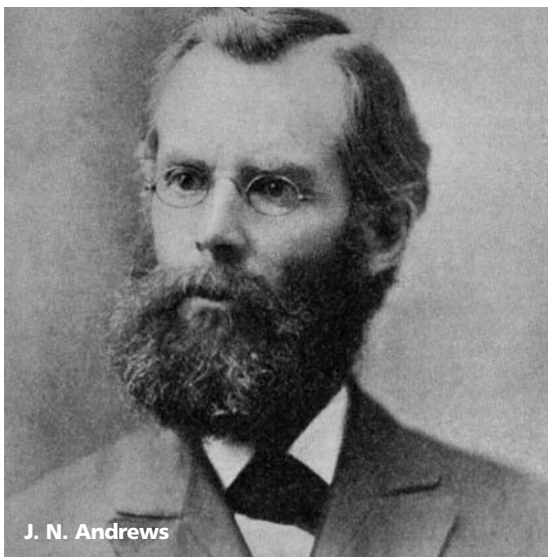
Unified by Covenant

Elder White and his pro-organization allies remained committed to preserving that kind of freedom as attention turned next to the need for “system” in the church’s ministerial work. The unexpected degree of opposition in New York State that he and Ellen encountered during their summer 1861 “tour” through the Eastern states pushed James to the limit of his patience. “We are done moving out in any enterprise connected with the cause until system can lie at the bottom of all our operations,” he exclaimed in the September 3 issue of the *Review*.²³

While resistance delayed progress in some states, Michigan was ready to move forward at the conference held a month later in Battle Creek. Building on an idea initially broached by White in July 1859 and developed at the April 1861 Battle Creek Conference, the first state conference, the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, was launched on October 5. Five more would get off the ground in 1862.

The “conference” at this stage was just that—an annual meeting at which believers in the state (or other territory defined by a district according to need) assembled to worship, study, and conduct business, not standing administrative units in an office building with full-time officers and supporting personnel. Its primary organizational function was to issue credentials to ministers and coordinate their work in the conference’s territory. Delegates sent from each congregation elected officers and a small standing committee to oversee the work until the next annual conference. A president, secretary, treasurer, and a three-person executive committee soon became the norm.²⁴

The October 1861 conference has achieved due prominence as a landmark in Adventist history for its establishment of the denomination’s first state conference. Another action of the conference, taken to ensure that organization would not start the movement down a slippery slope back to Babylon, that the necessary “system” not rigidify and repress gospel



J. N. Andrews

freedom, has not received its due.²⁵

Both for legal purposes and for the sake of unity between the congregations about to join together in forming a state conference, it seemed advisable to have a standard, documented process for organizing churches. But what then did an individual need to say or do or be in order to become a duly recognized member of the church? How should that membership be attested and recognized? In other words, what, beyond the mere name, made someone a Seventh-day Adventist?

Since the Reformation of the sixteenth century, for example, the Tridentine Creed defined what it meant to be Roman Catholic and not Protestant. The Augsburg Confession made one a Lutheran, not a Catholic. The Westminster Confession identified a Presbyterian in contrast to a Lutheran. And so forth.

But for the organizers of the Michigan Conference, a *creed* was the last thing that could identify a Seventh-day Adventist. Fabrication of creeds to suppress the witness of dissenters to their convictions about the truths of God’s Word was the feature of ecclesiastical Babylon that Adventists had decried more than any other since 1843. R. F. Cottrell expressed deeply rooted Adventist conviction when he wrote in 1860 that “membership in the church does not depend on our name’s being attached to any articles of faith,

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covenant or church book, but upon Christian character, or the keeping of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." He warned against adding any kind of test "outside of the Scriptures."²⁶

But now the pioneers gathered in Battle Creek a year later *did* want, for the purposes of unity and organization, a standard process for attesting and documenting membership. Though strongly opposing voices apparently did not make it to this conference, those who were there needed to show, for the record, that what they proposed was in harmony with scripture and was not a creed.

John N. Loughborough repeated a formulation he had previously published in the *Review*, summarizing how creeds inexorably lead to persecution:

*The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is, to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such.*²⁷

In following up Loughborough's remarks, White commented that he had been weighing the matter in the light of the apostle Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:11–13 regarding the spiritual gifts given to the church to unify and build it up in Christ. The passage depicts the gifts working through a dynamic process of growth in knowledge and faith. On the other hand, he pointed out, "Making a creed is settling the stakes, and barring the way to all future advancement."

Creeds represented an attempt to keep God within safe, clear boundaries, and thus preserve the status quo. But the Adventist movement was going somewhere. It needed "the gifts" to make the Bible a genuine, living guide in fulfilling its urgent prophetic mission. In answer to his own question, "Now what is our position as a people?" the Adventist leader declared: "We take the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit; embracing the faith that the Lord will teach from time to time."²⁸

The dramatic highlighting of timely biblical truths through the visions of Ellen White was of obvious prominence in the Seventh-day Adventist experience of the gifts of the Spirit. However, a report on local church offices that came out of the same October 1861 Conference shows that the organizers of Seventh-day Adventism saw a wide range of "the gifts" of Ephesians 4:11–13 at work in their community.²⁹

How then, as believers undertook the solemn act of

joining together to organize a church, should membership be signified, if not by assent to a definitive belief statement (a creed)? Instead of a *creed*, the founders of our movement proposed that scriptural precedents pointed to a *covenant*. With regard to the manner through which churches should be organized, the conference voted the following:

Resolved, *That this Conference recommend the following church covenant: We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ.*³⁰

For these founders, then, being a Seventh-day Adventist expressly did *not* mean agreeing to a list of unchanging statements of doctrine. Instead, it meant a pledge of faithfulness stated in a simple phrase drawn from the third angel's message of Revelation 14. Far from being the fatal first step toward Babylon, then, the covenant promised faithfulness to a way of life, to keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, looking to the Bible as the authoritative guide and to the gifts of the Spirit for help in focusing the scriptural light on the path that lies ahead each day of the journey.

The church covenant offered a valuable legacy to Seventh-day Adventists, both for the remainder of the founding generation and beyond. Not as an unchanging law for the procedure of organizing local churches, but for the way its stance of openness to new light and to the unpredictable leadership of the Holy Spirit provided a check against the deadening impact of overweight organization. It made the quest for "present truth"—new insight based on fresh recovery of scriptural truth to meet the needs of changing times and circumstances—a defining feature of the faith. As the Adventist movement positioned itself to carry forward the great Reformation initiated by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, the church covenant affirmed a central principle of Protestantism—"the church reformed and always reforming," based on continually renewed study of scripture.

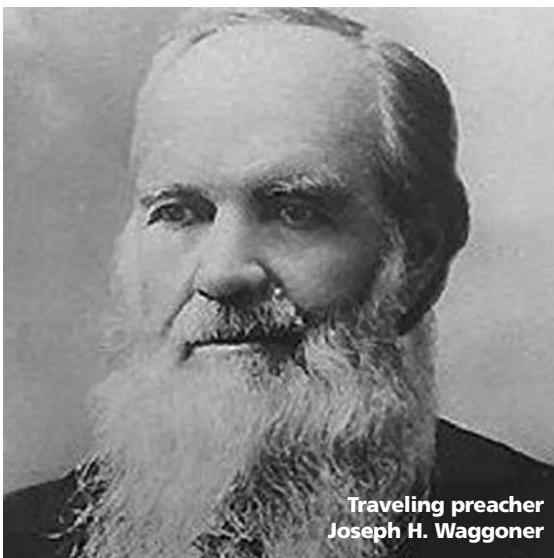
The "Great Regulator"

As the organization of state conferences moved forward somewhat fitfully, Joseph H. Waggoner, one of the church's leading traveling preachers, seems to have been the first to draw the attention of *Review* readers to the

remaining gap in the organizational system. With state conferences, systems were being put in place for credentialing and overseeing the work of ministers within the respective conference territories. But since many, if not most, of the traveling preachers went from state to state, scheduling conflicts and confusion over their preaching assignments were already problems. Annual “general conferences” were needed to resolve such conflicts and ensure appropriate distribution of ministerial labor throughout the various state conferences.³¹

John N. Andrews, earlier leery of Methodist-style general organization, quickly added his support. Without “general conferences that shall represent the whole body of brethren,” Andrews now argued, “we shall be thrown into confusion every time that concert of action is especially necessary.”³²

James White initially seemed surprisingly cool to the idea, more concerned about the remaining resistance and foot-dragging that slowed progress in forming state conferences. Then, in the early months of 1863, he became suddenly enthusiastic about an invitation sent from the first regular annual Michigan conference in 1862 for the other state conferences to send delegates to meet for a “general conference” in October 1863. In fact, the elder successfully pled for moving the date of the conference up to May.³³



Traveling preacher
Joseph H. Waggoner

As the conference neared, he felt confident enough to bill it as “the most important meeting ever held by the Seventh-day Adventists.” And he expressed hopes about the power to be held by the General Conference far in advance of anything he had previously written. He emphasized that the form and function of the General Conference had not been predetermined, but would be opened to the free interchange of ideas. Yet, he did not hold back his own advance suggestion that “the General Conference be the great regulator,” and that it would be of little use if not “higher in authority than State Conferences.”³⁴

Had James White seized the moment to complete a stunningly rapid and thorough abandonment of the spiritual egalitarianism and freedom cherished in early sabbatarian Adventism? Was church organization, after all, about imposing top-down authority over the people of God? Only if one reads the misconceptions of more recent times into the phrase “General Conference.”

James White wanted a General Conference strong enough to achieve the specific, limited goal of “systematic labor.” A General Conference was needed to correct existing imbalances “by making a judicious distribution of preachers throughout the world field.” And, he further suggested, it should “control all missionary labor in new fields.” The General Conference would need full authority in carrying out this two-fold responsibility, White believed. And, its organization should be as simple as possible—streamlined to accomplish that end. “Useless machinery,” as he put it, would only get in the way.³⁵

The Seventh-day Adventists gathered in Battle Creek on May 22, 1863, to formulate a system to strengthen the unity and better coordinate the work of their fledgling denomination amidst a bleak outlook for the unity of their nation. The Union was reeling from another stunning defeat at the hands of Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia two weeks before at Chancellorsville, Virginia. To the

**The question
with us is,
What will stand
the test of
criticism? and
not, What
did we once
believe?**

—James White

west, Vicksburg, Mississippi, remained unconquered after nearly a year of apparently futile effort. The prospects for reunifying the nation through the military defeat of the Confederate rebellion did not look promising.

Yet, whether consciously or not, the Adventists in Battle Creek drew on two of the most important guiding principles of their nation's governmental system: representative democracy and federalism—the distribution of authority among the various levels of government. The General Conference Constitution adopted in 1863 empowered the General Conference, through a five-member executive committee, “to take the general supervision of all ministerial labor, and see that the same is properly distributed,” and to “take the special supervision of all missionary labor.” Decisions by the General Conference about the assignment of traveling ministers were binding on the state conferences, though they could be appealed. However, the individual conferences did not thereby become mere departments of the General Conference, any more than American states are local subsidiaries of the federal government. The state conferences held complete authority for functions designated by their constitutions—ordaining and credentialing ministers, control over conference funds, ordaining local elders, and so forth.³⁶

It also seems clear that, right from the start, the new General Conference began taking a centralizing and unifying role for the overall church beyond its formally stated powers. The 1863 General Conference, for example, adopted a recommended constitution for state conferences. Yet, the operative principle in the new denominational organization was not hierarchical management but distribution of authority appropriate to each level of organization.³⁷

The new denomination's governance system was based on the assumption that full authority resides in the entire body of believers, who delegate that authority to elected representatives. It is also true that ordained ministers dominated the early Adventist conference system as a strong majority of the elected representatives. However, the proceedings of the 1863 General Conference as well as the 1862 Michigan Conference contain hints of recognition that lay representation needed to be encouraged. The grand total of nineteen delegates to the 1863 Conference included just two lay members, both from the Michigan Conference. However, one of

these lay delegates, William S. Higley, was the conference president—its first, elected in 1862. The other, James Harvey, joined Higley in comprising the lay majority of the first General Conference nominating committee. The only other member and the only ordained minister was B. F. Snook.

Would It Work?

Though much development lay ahead, the church, with the formation of the General Conference, had the basic structure and operational principles of an organizational system. But how well would that system succeed in achieving the dual goal, expressed by James White a decade before, of bringing the people of God into both the *oneness* and *freedom* of the gospel? Could it really succeed in facilitating both the unity essential to mission and openness to the sometimes unpredictable leading of the Holy Spirit?

Within a decade of organization, the danger of turning the General Conference into an instrument of individual authority became apparent during George I. Butler's first term as president (1871–1874). Ellen White pointed out to him that while not wrong in seeking to uphold the authority of the *General Conference*, he had gone way off track “in giving to one man's mind and judgment that authority and influence which God has invested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference.” When, she continued, a single leader “is invested with the authority to be judgment for other minds, then the true Bible order has changed.”³⁸

The 1877 General Conference, providing clarification that remains useful to the present day, affirmed:

*That the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction, and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God, and the rights of individual conscience.*³⁹

A decade later in the controversy surrounding the 1888 conference in Minneapolis, denominational leaders in Battle Creek responded with implacable opposition to the Christ-centered teaching of articulate young scholar-evangelists A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner. And once again, the prophetic corrective came from Ellen White, who protested this attempt to use the power of organi-

zation in the precise manner that her husband in 1861 had insisted that Seventh-day Adventists must not and would not. Institutional authority was assuming the creedal stance “in opposition to the gifts” that he described. And not only to her gift, but to those of “men worked by the Holy Spirit” upon whose minds “God’s Word flashes light” that “would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago” but is “God’s message for this time.”⁴⁰

The denominational leaders had lost sight of the freedom theme in the second angel’s message. “As reformers they had come out of the denominational churches, but they now act a part similar to that which the churches acted,” she noted in 1889. While endeavoring in every way to maintain unity, she vowed that she would not “cease to protest against bigotry.”⁴¹

In that determination, the prophet continued, throughout the 1890s, to protest abuse of power in Battle Creek on a range of issues, even though most leaders at least formally “repented” of their resistance to present truth in 1888. On more than one occasion, she indicated that due to the pattern of oppression, the General Conference had lost its authority under God. Only when the reorganization of 1901 brought the General Conference back toward its proper grounding in the entire body of believers, acting through their chosen representatives, could Ellen White once again

regard it as having authority under God.⁴²

Having reached the other side of an extended crisis, church organization was positioned once again both to provide the order essential for unity and mission and to make way for the transforming, liberating spirit of the gospel. A century later, a sometimes wobbly journey towards that ideal continues. ■

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history, and other history courses at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland. His recent publications include *Lewis C. Sheafe: Apostle to Black America*,

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Ellen G. White

Creeds

represented

an attempt

to keep

God within

safe, clear

boundaries,

and thus

preserve the

status quo.

draws on Jonathan M. Butler's illuminating study, "The Making of a New Order: Millerism and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventism," in Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), 189–208.

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—Ellen G. White



Left: See www.adventist.org/150/resources for slideshows on various aspects of Adventist history.

Questioning Beliefs: African Church Members

Surveyed | AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ELIZABETH ROLE BY ALITA BYRD



Dr. Elizabeth Role

Dr. Elizabeth Role is conducting a huge poll of Adventists across the continent of Africa, as part of a worldwide survey asking church members about their beliefs. *Spectrum* asked her about the questions being asked, the answers coming in, and the reasons behind the research.

Question: You are leading a research team surveying the beliefs and attitudes of Adventist church members across the African continent. This research has been commissioned by the General Conference. Why does the General Conference want to examine the beliefs of church members in Africa?

Answer: The Future Plans Working Group (FPWG) of the General Conference (GC) needed to identify important issues in the church as a preliminary step to creating the next strategic plan. The director of Archives and Statistics at the GC, who is a member of the FPWG, believes that these issues can only be identified through research.

The study is not only for the three divisions in Africa, but also for the other ten divisions in the world. The same questionnaire is used, although different methodologies are employed in different parts of the world. Some divisions are doing an online survey. Ours is a paper survey.

Question: What is your background and qualifications for heading up this research?

Answer: I hold a doctor of philosophy degree in science education with a concentration in mathematics. I am a data analyst and have a great interest in research.

I was the director of research at Adventist University of the Philippines [where I spent more than twenty years in different roles] and at Asia-Pacific International University in Thailand.



Why does the General Conference want to examine the beliefs of church members in Africa?

The research team from University of Eastern Africa.



**An individual
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his heart.**

At present, I am the director of graduate studies and research at University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, in Kenya, where I have been since 2006.

Question: *A random sample of 18,500 church members from forty-eight countries has been chosen for the survey. How will the data from the research be used?*

Answer: We designed the research so that a random sample of church members from a range of churches in each conference/mission/field in the forty-eight countries of the African continent will participate in the survey. We used a stratified sampling method (based on church size in terms of membership and church location—urban or rural) to identify the churches that will be involved in the study.

It is hoped that the data gathered from this research will provide valuable solid information to the FPWG in their strategic planning for the progress of the church work in Africa.

Question: *The survey includes questions about belief in God and Jesus, how salvation works, creation, the second coming, Sabbath, the state of the dead, witchcraft, polygamy, divine inspiration, and Ellen White. Are you testing the church members to see if their beliefs tally with official fundamental Seventh-day Adventist beliefs?*

Answer: Yes. It is a reality that an individual can get baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church with his previous religious beliefs still impressed in his heart. An objective understanding of the church climate in terms of what the church members believe is an asset for a church leadership to effectively lead and manage change.

Question: *Have you found anything surprising in the data so far? Do church members in Africa have the same attitudes and beliefs as church members in other parts of the world?*

Answer: In our questionnaire we intentionally included the issues of witchcraft and polygamy, as these are some concerns in our church in the African continent. Partial results from the data gathered from five countries reveal that on average, 25 percent of our church members believe in the reality of witchcraft and that Christians can go to witchdoctors for protection. Around 20 percent of the respondents believe that God approves polygamy.

I still cannot make any comparison between the beliefs of the African SDA church members and of those in other parts of the world at this stage of the study.

Question: *The data collection is not yet complete, I understand. Can you tell me how far along you are in the survey, and what you still have to do? What is the time frame for the research?*



Filling out the eleven-page questionnaire.

Answer: I began communicating with the division/union/administrative field secretaries to provide me with needed information on the last week of August 2012. As of [March 20, 2013], 35 out of 128 (27 percent) administrative fields in the three divisions of Africa have completed data collection.

Data gathering is ongoing in forty-six administrative fields (36 percent). I am still waiting for church information from forty-seven administrative fields (37 percent) so I can randomly sample the churches and data collection can begin.

We are expected to submit the research results before the end of June 2013. There is still a long way to go and I am praying that by God's grace, we will meet the deadline.

Question: *How many researchers are surveying church members? Do you have trained researchers doing the work, or is it local people?*

Answer: In Kenya, two of my team members spearheaded the survey with the assistance of some district pastors, church elders, and church members.

In other countries, the executive secretaries of the unions and administrative fields facilitated/are facilitating the gathering of data with the help of district and church pastors. Since data is gathered using questionnaires, not much training is required to administer them. I really appreciate the support of the church leadership to this research.

Question: *What difficulties and challenges do you face in getting the surveys filled out?*

Answer: One challenge is communication. I communicate with the division/union/administrative field executive secretaries through email. It was difficult even to get the email addresses of and to communicate with the executive secretaries in some countries, as there is a problem with Internet connection in some areas. This is partly the reason why

forty-seven administrative field executive secretaries have not sent the information I requested. This is a major challenge. Without the list of all churches in each district, the membership, and location, I cannot sample the churches that will participate in the study and data gathering cannot commence.

We administer an eleven-page questionnaire, with 189 items to respond to. On average, a respondent completes the questionnaire



in thirty minutes. It really requires a lot of commitment for church members to participate in the survey.

In Kenya, we were able to sample churches located in remote areas. One of my research team members had to walk some distance from the main road to reach a church. In these areas, church members are not very conversant in the English language, and it is not possible to translate the questionnaire to the many local dialects being spoken. (We have translated the questionnaire into major languages such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, Luganda, Kirundi, Kiswahili, and Kinyarwanda.) In one church, it took the church members more than one hour to finish filling the questionnaire, as

Around 20 percent of the respondents believe that God approves polygamy [based on partial results from the data gathered from five African countries].

it was necessary for someone to read the questions in the local dialect.

In most cases, the questionnaires are administered on Sabbath. In some churches, it was a challenge to find members who were willing to fill in the questionnaire, since many believe that doing so is transgressing the holy hours of the Sabbath.

On the other hand, this research offered some opportunities, as we were able to reach some churches in isolated areas that have not been visited by district pastors in years. There was one church whose members willingly went to church on a Sunday to fill in the questionnaires, and requested one of my team members (who is a pastor) to preach before they began filling out the questionnaire.

Question: *Has similar research been carried out before among church members in Africa?*

Answer: Some years back, a survey was done on beliefs about salvation, particularly on the doctrine of justification/sanctification by faith.



Group photo outside a church in Kenya.

Question: *Over the last several decades, Adventist church members have occasionally been linked to atrocities and criminal actions, including a warlord in Sierra Leone and a pastor convicted of genocide in Rwanda. There have been accusations that some people calling themselves Adventists have not been taught Adventist beliefs or been truly converted. Does this research seek to address this accusation?*



The survey raised questions on witchcraft and polygamy.

Answer: As we analyze the beliefs of the church members and compare them with what Seventh-day Adventists believe, we can partly address this issue. From the partial results, I have found that there are regular churchgoers claiming to be members of the SDA church, but are not baptized. This implies that they have not gone through the baptismal class and may not have fully understood Adventist beliefs.

Question: *What have you learned so far in your research? Do you enjoy your work? Does this research complement your day job?*

Answer: On a personal note, I have learned patience and the art of communication. I have also learned to appreciate the wonderful virtues of my African brothers and sisters. The support I have received from the majority of the church leaders and the willingness of the church members to participate in this research project has been overwhelming.

From childhood, I wanted to be a pastor-evangelist—so much so that I trained as a ministerial student during my first year in college. However, God led me to a different path in

my career. This research allowed me to be in contact with the pastors in Africa and I enjoy this wonderful opportunity. I am very happy that I can use the talents God has given me to contribute to the progress of his work through this research project.

Being the team leader for this research had been very enriching. I have discovered new things that have helped me to be more effective in my work as director of research. We are doing this research on top of our full-time work; thus, my team members and I have had to learn proper time management!

On the whole, this engagement has been very satisfying both professionally and spiritually. ■



The research offered an opportunity to reach isolated congregations.

Elizabeth Role is the director of graduate studies and research at University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya, and is originally from the Philippines. She holds a bachelor's degree in secondary education (mathematics) from Philippine Union College (Adventist University of the Philippines), as well as a master of arts in teaching (mathematics) and a doctorate in science education (mathematics), both from the University of the Philippines. Role's husband is chair of the department of technology at the University of Eastern Africa. She has two children and three grandchildren, all in the United States. Her son is a critical care nurse at Loma Linda University Medical Center and her daughter is studying for a master's degree in biology at Andrews University.



Alita Byrd is the editor of *Spectrum's* online Interviews column. She lives with her husband and three children in Atlanta, Georgia.

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Adventist Identity in a Postmodern World | BY REINDER BRUINSMA

The following is based on a lecture presented during the Church and Adventist Identity in the 21st Century Conference, at Avondale University in Cooranbong, Australia, on January 16–18, 2011.

Through the centuries, some simple but profound questions have been asked: Who am I? Where do I come from; for what purpose do I live? Will I continue to exist after I die? How is a human being different from other living creatures? Or, is he or she really different?

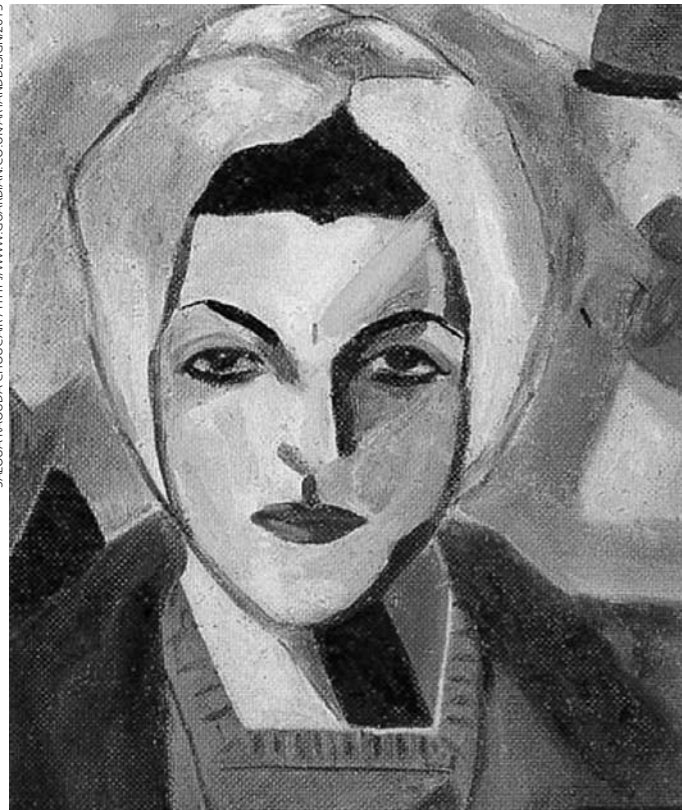
What is it that makes me different from you? Is it my body shape, my face, my voice, that makes me a unique me and no one else? Or, are there other things that determine who I am? We may agree that humans differ from everything else that exists, and that they differ from each other—

but does that also apply to the specific social group, or groups, to which we belong? I may be unique, but is that also true for the group(s) in which I participate? All these questions may be summarized in one fundamental question: *What is identity—individual identity and corporate identity?*

Many definitions have been given. Most of these stress that identity is a definition, an interpretation of yourself that tells you who you are, socially and psychologically. One definition explains that identity is “the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity.”¹ Another says, “In philosophy, identity (also called sameness) is whatever makes an entity definable and recognizable, in terms of possessing a set of qualities or characteristics that distinguish it from entities of a different type. Or, in layman's terms: “*Identity is whatever makes something the same or different.*”² A social scientist, Vivienne Jabri, points out that the identity of an individual is not static, but is a developing framework that is based on the communication, back and forth, between the individual and his or her social milieu.³

To put it in very simple terms: a person has an identity, because he or she has certain unique characteristics that stay with that individual throughout his or her entire life. But things seem to be a bit more complicated. A person may suffer from a serious mental disorder, and that may require some refinement of these definitions of identity. And the Christian will pose the question of whether his identity can persist through death. The definitions just given will, however, suffice for the time being and will guide us.

It is clear that our identity is not something that can be fully described on the basis of objective analysis and empirical studies. It is very much a matter of *perception*: how others perceive us, and how we *perceive* ourselves. In other words: it is first of all a matter of our *self-concept*. That, by the way, is not the same as our *self-consciousness*. We are



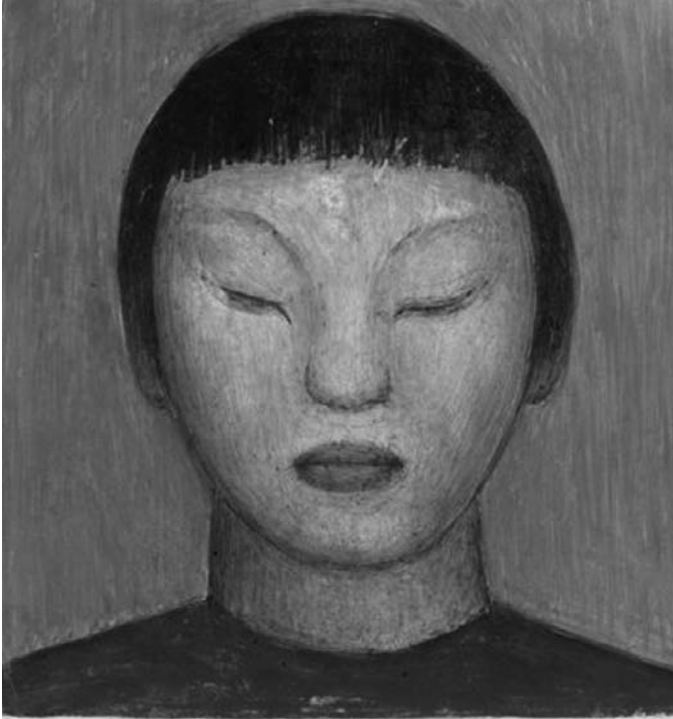


aware of the fact that we exist as conscious beings. The identity question is: *As what kind of beings* do we see ourselves? Here, we touch on such issues as self-image and self-esteem. What we “see” may cause us to be quite happy, or, on the contrary, to be disappointed or even disgusted with ourselves. There may be moments when we feel that some basic elements of our identity are at risk, or we may face developments that make us uncertain or even frighten us. This may lead to an identity crisis: a fear that we have no clear identity or are losing our identity. Tahmina Rashid, an associate professor in international

studies at the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra, Australia, made this helpful comment:

Identity is self-definition and confers a sense of self or personhood, usually found in daily interactions and public discourse and is a continuously evolving process of negotiation, not a rigid entity. Identity turns on the interrelated problems of self-recognition and recognition by others. It's not a harmonious process as there remains a tendency to underestimate the struggle involved in forging identities and the tension inherent in the fact that most of us have multiple, incomplete, fragmented, even conflicting identities.⁴

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We will return to a number of the issues hinted at in this quotation. But before we do so, it must be stated that the concept of identity does not only refer to the individual person. Just as an individual possesses an identity, which sets him or her apart from others, it is generally accepted that a group of persons, small or large, has certain specific characteristics that set the group apart in such a defining way that we may speak of a *corporate* identity. Most of what Rashid says about personal identity applies in a similar way to corporate identity. And, we should add: just as an individual may experience doubts about his identity or may face an identity crisis, so a social group or institution may struggle with defining its identity, or fear that it is at risk of losing its identity, or suffer from an identity crisis.

In this introduction to our subject, we do well to list a few of the core elements of individual and corporate identity. They are listed without an attempt to assign any order of importance:

- **Gender.** Most of us are either male or female. Although the roles of males and females have changed considerably in recent times, being a man or a woman, or experiencing oneself as having a particular gender, is an important aspect of our identity.
- **Sexual orientation.** Whether one is heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual may for many be one of the defining aspects of his or her identity.

- **Ethnicity or race.** In many cases, this is an important aspect in determining one's identity. Being African or Chinese, being white or black, or being of mixed descent, etc., may to a large extent determine one's self-concept. The same may be said about "belonging" to a certain geographical region, or being a member of a particular tribe, or speaking a particular language.
- **Nationality.** This is a relatively new aspect of human identity, since the modern nation state, as we now know it, dates only from the eighteenth century. But today, people define themselves as Australian or Dutch, Japanese or South African. How important this aspect is in relationship to the other factors that were mentioned above will differ from person to person. World history has repeatedly shown that ethnic, racial, or cultural identity may clash with, or supersede, national identity, which may lead to catastrophic consequences.
- **Religion.** This has always been, and for many people still is, a factor that to a large extent—or even in the first place—determines individual or corporate identity. Many will describe themselves as Christians, Muslims, Catholics, Adventists, etc., and consider this as the overarching element that determines who they are. For many, all other aspects are subordinated to their religious allegiance.

Four Elements

With these preliminary remarks in mind, let us look a little closer at our theme: "Adventist Identity in the Postmodern World." This title indicates that we have four elements to consider. There is not just the issue of *identity*, which we briefly discussed in our introduction. We are not just looking at who we are, but asking how our *Adventist affiliation* impacts who we are, or more specifically, how we see ourselves and how we are seen by others. How important is our being Adventist in the hierarchy of factors that determine our identity? And other questions follow: Does being an Adventist today, for the average person who belongs to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, play a more or a less important role in defining his or her identity than it did for Adventists in the past? And: Has the sense of corporate identity in the Adventist community become stronger, or has the opposite happened, as many suggest or fear? We hear voices—and not only at the fringes of the church—about the danger that the church may lose its true Adventist identity.

One of the main topics that we are supposed to address

is: How does the transition of much of the Western world (and increasingly parts of the non-Western world) from “modern” to “postmodern” impact the Adventist element of our individual identity, and the Adventist identity of our faith community? Note that when we use the word *modern* or related terms to refer to the period that followed the Middle Ages, we do so in a particular way, and not as the opposite for the term *old-fashioned*. Modernity is a label for what has also been called the *Enlightenment Project*, which got underway when people were leaving the Middle Ages behind them, and began to think differently. It is widely believed that in recent times this period of modernity has given way, or is in the process of giving way, to another manner of looking at the world: i.e., *post-modernity*.

We will probably agree that the impact of this transition is considerable, but may disagree about whether we see this development as mainly positive or mainly negative. And while we discuss these matters, we should not fail to notice that we are speaking of the postmodern *world*. Being citizens of a *global society*, with all that it entails, calls for certain postmodern reactions, individually and collectively.

We will now address some aspects of the concept of identity that are particularly relevant for our discussion. Subsequently, we will try to describe what “Adventist identity” might mean, and then we will list the main characteristics of postmodernity and will attempt to indicate how these postmodern characteristics have impacted individual and corporate Adventist identity.

Aspects of Identity

It is important to underline that identity formation is a *process*. According to E. H. Erikson (1902–1994), a famous German psychoanalyst, identity formation is a lifelong developmental process involving a number of distinct stages in which the person learns to balance his individual needs and social demands. Most people, he suggests, experience some form of identity crisis around the time of their adolescence, before they succeed in attaining mental maturation.⁵

Although the details of his theory have been criticized,⁶ the idea that identity is not something static, but something that may develop and change, is generally accepted. In his book *Stages of Faith*, James W. Fowler, a developmental psychologist at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia, proposes a faith development theory that is akin to Erikson's.⁷ If we accept that identity is subject to development, the idea that postmodern thought, in the context of the globalization of our society, will therefore have a major influence on our individual and corporate identity, seems more than plausible.

One factor that is not directly related to postmodern thought, but mostly dependent on political and economical circumstances, is the phenomenon of *large-scale migration*. In many countries, this has resulted in a multicultural society that has seriously affected both the traditional and the new population segments. The result has been a multicultural society with all its accompanying blessings and challenges. In many cases it has, unfortunately, led to considerable conflict and animosity, with a strong sense of *us versus them*. This has undoubtedly impacted certain aspects of the



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**We hear
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identity of the traditional population, as well as that of the immigrants. It has also highlighted the phenomenon of *multiple identities*. The identity of the “new” citizens remains very largely determined by the culture of their country of origin, but this loyalty does not preclude a strong, often growing, simultaneous loyalty to their host country. Thus we have the phenomenon of American Jews, Dutch Moroccans, *pid noirs* (French citizens, but born in North Africa), Chinese Australians, and so on. We will have to say more about this aspect.

With regard to the religious component of individual or corporate identity, it must be noted that it is not just a particular religion as such that is a decisive part of that identity. It is not just a question of whether one is a Christian, a Muslim, a Hindu, or a Rastafarian—or an agnostic or atheist, for that matter. One’s religious identity is strongly influenced by the *local* characteristics this particular religion has acquired, and by *historical* developments that may sharply differ from place to place. That means that there is, for instance, a major distinction between a conservative born-again Protestant Christian of Calvinistic vintage in the United States and a Dutch Calvinist, or between a Southern Baptist in the United States and an Australian Baptist. Whether one belongs to a minority religion or to a majority religion may also make a significant difference. It is not the same to be a Catholic in Sweden as being a Catholic in Italy, or to be a Muslim in Australia as being a Muslim in Saudi Arabia—or to be a Seventh-day Adventist in Loma Linda as it would be in New Delhi.

Adventist Identity

A former General Conference president, Robert S. Folkenberg, once wrote an article in the *Adventist Review*, entitled, “Will the Real Evangelical Adventist Please Stand Up?”⁸ It is a question that is frequently heard, albeit in different forms: What makes someone a true Seventh-day Adventist? Some time ago, it was the topic of an insightful blog on *Spectrum’s* website. A short quote will rephrase the question in a way that will resonate with many of us:

*There are a number of ways to describe a Seventh-day Adventist. This is a person who finds special meaning in the seventh day of the week, observes a practice of rest on that day, and has a special hope for the future. A Seventh-day Adventist is likely a vegetarian and adopts other healthy lifestyle habits. Adventists are generally known for fostering their own sub-culture, operating church-affiliated schools and universities, defending creation as an event that occurred in seven literal days, and, in the past, registering for non-combatant status in the military. But what is a real Adventist?*⁹

Some would want to define “real” Adventism mostly in theological terms. Adventist identity, they say, is linked with Truth (capital T), with the 28 Fundamental Beliefs, or at least with the Adventist “landmark” doctrines. (It is significant that George Knight titled his book, in which he outlined the history of Adventist doctrine, as *A Search for Identity*, emphasis on “A Search for.”¹⁰) Many will say that our denominational name is the label *par excellence* that identifies us! (That, of course, begs the question of why we so often avoid using it when referring to denominational activities!)

Some would stress, in particular, the importance of staying closely with Adventism *as it used to be* (or, as they *think* it used to be, or should have been), if we want to protect our identity. Others allow for, or welcome, much more diversity, and will emphasize just a few major doctrinal characteristics, together with the main aspects of the Adventist lifestyle and the subculture that has arisen. Few would show such leniency as one blogger who recently indicated that he regards himself as both an agnostic and a Seventh-day Adventist.¹¹

On the other hand, there is a substantial part of the church that insists that the *remnant concept* is the key to a correct definition of our individual and corporate identity. In this view, only those few who meet a clear set of doctrinal standards have the right to identify themselves as true Seventh-day Adventists! Those who hold this opinion do

not seem to be overly worried about the clear injunction of Christ, that making a sharp separation between those who are truly his and those who are not is not *our* privilege, but is *his* prerogative, which he will not exercise until the moment that he comes in his glory!

Defining our identity in such exclusive ways emphasizes an element that, admittedly, tends to be rather prominent in most discussions of identity: it stresses the *distinction* between you and I, between them and us. It seems to return to an element that characterized Adventism of the past—certainly the Adventism of my youth—when the Adventist self-understanding seemed to be in constant need of an enemy. It has the unfortunate (I think) tendency to see Adventism largely in terms of what it *opposes*.

It is clear that our corporate Adventist identity has, over time, undergone major influences. In many parts of the world, the Adventist denomination is no longer regarded as a sect, but as a *bona fide* part of evangelical Christianity, or, in any case, as a “normal” Protestant faith community. This has, no doubt, reinforced our self-understanding as a movement with sound Reformation roots.

Adventist history did not follow the same course in every region of the world and in every country. In many developing countries, Adventism still shows many traces of its missionary origins. Adventism in my own country, the Netherlands, was for several decades highly influenced by German Adventism, and is currently experiencing the results of a major influx of Adventists from the Caribbean and Africa. These two factors have certainly influenced the character—the identity—of the church in my country. American Adventism developed along a path that differed in many ways from the kind of development we currently see, for instance, in the church in China. It does make a difference whether Adventism developed and grew in a mainly Catholic context or in a predominantly Lutheran society; and the Adventist Church in a predominantly secular environment will respond to many questions in ways that differ from how the church

might respond to the same questions in a strongly religious milieu. How quickly these developments may occur as a result of external circumstances is illustrated by the recent landslide changes in the Adventist Church in many countries that once were behind the Iron Curtain.

And thus, quite naturally, the fact that many church members—young and not so young—have not only become quite secular, and have in many ways been affected by postmodern ideas and societal trends, and the fact that in much of the Western world the church must exist and must seek to fulfill its mission in a society that shows many postmodern trends, is a significant factor in shaping—or reshaping—Adventist identity.

What Is Postmodernity, or How Can One Recognize a Postmodern Person?

Many readers of *Spectrum* are probably postmodern in some ways, or may even consider themselves fully postmodern. But let us briefly summarize what postmodernism is.¹² What is a postmodern person? What does he or she think? What do postmodern people do? Where are they to be found?

There is no shortage of books that list the



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Postmodernism

also values

diversity within

our own selves.



main characteristics of the postmodern man and woman. Most authors will indicate that there is a superficial kind of postmodernism, which is almost synonymous with consumerism and hedonism, and which allows its adherents to live a significant part of their lives in a virtual world. But there is more to it than that, and in most cases such a description of a postmodern person would be unfair and inadequate.

Below are some of the most noticeable characteristics of the postmodern approach to life.

These are given in summary form, and the list is by no means exhaustive, but it may be helpful in understanding or recognizing postmodern trends.

1. The postmodern person does not believe that everything will become better and better. The idea of progress is largely abandoned. Science is no longer seen as the unmitigated blessing it once was thought to be.
2. There are no absolutes. We all have our own private truths (lowercase t). Communities and cultures have their own “language games.” What they talk about and believe in does not necessarily relate to any absolute reality. Everything is subjective, relative, uncertain, contingent, and ambiguous.
3. The metanarratives (grand stories) and the grand ideals of the past have disappeared, and no new metanarrative will take the former’s place.
4. Postmodern people like combining all kinds of seem-

ingly incompatible elements. In architecture, as well as in the visual arts, we find a great interest in collation, a mixing of artistic styles, a blurring of the lines between real life and fiction, the real and the virtual. We also find such a blending of styles from different periods in literature and music, and, not to forget, in fashion.

5. Scientists are becoming more modest in their claims, and confess that many of the so-called foundations of science may not be so certain after all. It is recognized that scientists may often be inclined to find what they are looking for, and that commercial interests may be a major factor in shaping a research program.
6. People know they live in a global village. The computer—the symbol of postmodernity—gives them instant access to the world. Yet at the same time, global strategies and alliances are under suspicion, and there is a strong interest in regional and local issues.
7. The postmodern person has a strong dislike for religious institutions, but is open to spirituality. In fact, some advocate a re-enchantment of the world. Mystery is OK. The nonrational, New Age-type approach to the questions of life is popular. (Even though it should be pointed out that postmodernity and the New Age movement are distinct phenomena that only partly overlap.)

Postmoderns have an approach to religion and to the church that sharply differs from that of their parents and grandparents. Religion is *in*, but the institutional church is *out*. Experience and emotions are OK, but doctrines are considered largely irrelevant. Absolute, propositional truth is replaced by what “works for me,” and it is argued that there are as many legitimate ways to interpret the Bible as there are readers. Christianity is one option among a series of religious choices; all are historically and culturally conditioned, and equally valid responses of the human self to the “Beyond.” Sin has been reduced to a sense of regret that things have not quite gone as expected, with little or no room for something like atonement, where Someone steps in on my behalf. More often than not, those who do turn toward Christianity want to pick and choose the teachings they are willing to accept, and will often be reluctant when it comes to manifesting full and permanent commitment.

The contrasts between “modern” and “postmodern” may be summarized as in the following two columns:

Modernity

Emphasis on mind, reason, logic, science

Confidence in human abilities

Systematic order in everything that happens/exists

Belief in "grand stories"

Absolute Truth

Belief in technological and economic progress

Church

Harmony

Unity

Commitment

Organizations

Postmodernity

Open to the nonrational: emotions, intuitions

Suspicion about human abilities

Emphasis on "deconstruction"

Rejection of "grand stories"

Each person has his or her own truth; relativism

Pessimism; sense of fragility and vulnerability

Spirituality

Difference

Fragmentation

Reluctance about commitment

Interpersonal relationships

So, How Does This Impact Adventist Identity?

The postmodernist wave has not bypassed the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Clearly, for a growing number of Adventist believers in the West the "metanarrative" of Adventism as a worldwide, divinely ordained movement, united by one theology and one organizational model, with uniform programs and resources, has outlived its sell-by date. More and more church members tend to think and act locally. They have little or no interest in the church's hierarchy and are suspicious of centralized institutional structures.

Many are increasingly weary of doctrinal fine print and establish their own version of the truth, largely, but not exclusively, within the framework of the Adventist tradition. They tend to regard Adventism as one option among other Christian options, and would be reluctant to call their tradition the one and only true church.

Worship styles have significantly changed, with an increasing emphasis on experience, and on contemporary music, drama, and informal small group meetings. Traditional church disci-

pline has lost much of its corrective power, and an increasing amount of spiritual cross-border shopping takes place.

It has often, justifiably I think, been noted that Adventism has an underdeveloped ecclesiology. This fact will increasingly haunt us, as this happens to be the arena where many of the postmodern questions of our church members are asked. What is the church? Is it the church universal? Is it the visible, historic, institutional church, or the invisible church of all ages? Or is it a small remnant, with a message that changes in emphasis and focus as one Christian era gives way to the next?¹³ All these questions are directly related to our Adventist identity. Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church the only true church, and are all other Christian organizations to be labeled as Babylon? Or is Adventism simply one option amidst a whole gamut of other Christian options, which may be equally valid? Many church members (and I would be among them) will maintain that Adventism represents something special: it is part of Protestant Christianity, but offers a series of insights not readily available elsewhere.

For those who are influenced by postmod-



LEONARDO DA VINCI: HEAD OF A YOUNG WOMAN

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ernism, the question probably goes like this: Does Adventism possess the absolute Truth in all areas of theology, or should we be more modest and claim at most that our church makes a significant contribution to the rich diversity of Christianity? There is much confusion and disagreement about these matters, and the response one gives is largely determined by whether one is a *modern* or *postmodern* Adventist!

The Modern Versus the Postmodern Adventist

Categorizing people is dangerous. Most of us simply do not fit neatly into any one category. This is also true when we try to separate *modern* from *postmodern* Adventists. So, we must remember that the profiles given below are inexact and may, at least to some extent, be caricatures. But, nonetheless, they are, I believe, basically true in outline.

In most regions of the world, the (mostly) modern Adventists are in the majority, and will be for some time to come. They are the traditional Adventists, mostly conservative in their beliefs and in the way they view their church and the surrounding world. They believe in the grand story (the “metanarrative”) of Adventism as God’s “remnant church,” with its sacred worldwide mission mandate—a

movement called forth by God at the appointed time and assured of its ultimate success. Modern Adventists believe in absolutes. They tend to dislike questions that may undermine the certainties of the believers. They defend the historic positions of the church with regard to doctrine, organizational structure, worship, and ethics. They welcome a strong emphasis on eschatology and are staunchly antiecumenical. They hold a very “high” view of inspiration, often bordering on a fundamentalist stress on inerrancy, both with regard to the Bible and to the writings of Ellen G. White. They are strong on policy and on the *Church Manual*. They want their church to remain united and believe that this unity is fostered by uniform programs and a solid central system of governance.

But postmodern Adventists are a growing segment of the church, in particular in Western countries: the United States and large parts of Europe and Australia, with smaller groups in other parts of the world. They tend to be well educated and to live in more affluent areas.

They do not have the same interest in the metanarrative of Adventism as their “modern” brothers and sisters. Their focus is much more regional or local. They are often suspicious of the church’s hierarchy and are not very interested in the upper layers of the church’s organizational structure. They have little affinity with ecclesial authority and do not unduly worry about church discipline, policy, or the *Church Manual*. They tend to allow for diversity in doctrine, and tend to pick and choose which of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the church they will embrace. Their religion is much less rational than traditional Adventism. Experience, celebration, praise, and the Holy Spirit are the catchwords for the way that many of them want to “do” church.

Postmodern Adventists are open to outside influences, and even tend to engage in some cross-border shopping, for they usually view other, in particular evangelical, Christians in a much more positive light than modern Adventists do. The postmodern Adventist will often tend to postpone or have reservations about making a total commitment to the church and its message, or to any active role in the church.

Multiple Identities

I would argue that there is a sharp divide between the modern Adventist and the postmodern Adventist. It goes beyond classifications in terms of conservative, liberal, historical, progressive, middle-of-the-road Adventism, or whatever labels may be given. It is, what I have called “the

absolute divide,” which is extremely difficult to bridge, because it not only touches on *what* people believe, but also on *how* they believe and on what kind of people they *are* deep down. It is very much a matter of identity.

I want to briefly focus on one important postmodern characteristic that has a very close relationship to the shaping of the identity of many more or less postmodern Adventists. Postmodern people value *diversity*. Unity is primarily thought of in terms of (local) communities and relationships, of communities of individuals who have their own opinions and their own truths. It is a unity *in diversity*, and this has ramifications in the areas of doctrine, as well as lifestyle and individual ethical decisions. But *there is something beyond that*. Postmodernism also *values diversity within our own selves*. The postmodern person is, in many ways, a *fragmented* person.

The postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) introduced the metaphor of the archipelago to characterize human thought and life. We do not inhabit a solid landmass, with clear borders, he said, but our life rather resembles an archipelago with scattered islands, with only here and there a small strip of land between them. Commenting on this, Dutch scholar Richard Brons preferred to replace the archipelago metaphor with that of a volcanic landscape that has been formed by the fiery stream of the lava of our reflections, and has then been solidified into clots, but is constantly being visited by the vigorous eruptions of all kinds of events that we experience.¹⁴ Both metaphors make the same point: the diversity and fragmentation of who we are—of our identity.

The idea of multiple identities is today widely accepted as something that is both real and basically positive. Some political parties in my country frown at the concept of “dual nationality,” since they contend that a person can only be loyal to one country and to one set of political ideals.¹⁵ The realities of large-scale immigration, and, in particular, of the experiences of

second-generation immigrants, have, however, resulted in the fact that many eagerly receive a new passport, yet also want to retain that of the nation they, or their parents, or one of them, may have left, but which is still an essential part of who and what they are. Today, it is much more readily accepted by many that having dual nationality does not necessarily result in conflicting loyalties, and may actually not be such a negative thing.

There is a growing awareness that human beings cannot be defined by just one aspect of who they are. For instance, we have a particular nationality that sets us apart. Yet, we may feel that we are just as much defined—or even more so—by our ethnicity, or our gender. Many feel that they are to a substantial degree also defined by their occupation or profession, their hobby, or their sexual orientation. They may find it at times difficult to bring all these aspects together, and may live their life in various “compartments.” They may be a totally different person at home—as a mother or spouse—than at work among colleagues, or when engaged in sports with friends. They may have different sets of



HENRI MATISSE / GREEN STRIPE (MADAME MATISSE)

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friends and acquaintances, even different sets of moral standards, depending on what compartment of their life they happen to be in. If one were to ask Jacques Derrida, a key postmodern philosopher, the simple question, “How are you?” he would often reply with a counterquestion, “On what floor?” He liked to compare his life with a house, and a regular visitor might meet him on different floors and in different rooms. His mood and interests would tend to vary, depending on “what floor” of his life he happened to be at that moment.

When I grew up, my world was to a large extent divided into Adventists and non-Adventists. That to me—and to most people I knew in church—was the one, single identifying factor. All other elements of my identity and that of others were far less important. Today, I have—at least in this respect—become much more postmodern. Being a member in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is still an important part of who I am, but it is just one of several key aspects. I am also defined by myself and by others by the fact that I am an adult married male, a husband and a father, and a retired pastor, a theologian with particular views, a Dutchman with a political leaning somewhat to the left of the spectrum, a lover and author of books, someone who has travelled widely, etc. These various elements that define who I am may be configured in different ways, depending on where I am and whom I am with. One thing is sure: as a more or less postmodern person,

I am much more “fragmented” today than I used to be. What is true for me, I think is valid for many more or less postmodern Adventists at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Postmodern people are living between two poles. They are part of the global community. They travel and experience other cultures. They communicate with the entire world. They use the new social media and belong to several virtual communities. Through the Internet, they gather information and pick and choose what they like and find useful. The Internet and other aspects of contemporary communication technology in themselves are significant factors in the development of individual and, by extension, of corporate identity.¹⁶ But, paradoxically, postmodern people are very much interested in what happens locally, in the community of their choice, where they feel welcome and accepted—whatever way they look and irrespective of the opinions they hold.

The postmodern Seventh-day Adventist still appreciates that he is part of a global faith community. But his first priority is closer to home. His concern is not primarily with a smooth functioning of the bureaucracy of the higher echelons of the Adventist Church (the General Conference, division, union, and to some extent, even the conference). He will be looking for a local church that fits with his spiritual interests and where he feels at home. He will subscribe to the main tenets of Adventist doctrine, but will claim the freedom to interpret these according to his own convictions, and may well put question marks behind some of the traditional Adventist views. He wants to be respected by other Christians and non-Christians, and wants to see that his church treats others with respect. He will not fight if his views meet resistance or spend a lot of time in debate about doctrinal minutiae. Chances are, he would rather retreat to the fringes or quietly leave altogether, if he does not get the space his postmodern identity requires.

Many more traditionally inclined church members and leaders will find it difficult to deal with this situation. They are convinced that these postmodern Adventists are simply in danger of losing their Adventist identity, and may pull others with them. Their message is one of revival and reform, lest we are corporately adversely affected by the dangers of this postmodern relativism.

I am convinced this is not an adequate reaction. The first priority for twenty-first century Adventism is to help moderns and postmoderns to understand and respect each other. Postmoderns need to realize that the postmodern position has weaknesses, and that not everything from the past should be “deconstructed.” They must also realize there is a propositional element to Truth that must be safeguarded; that we need a new Adventist apologetic.

But those who are solidly “modern” should at least study the phenomenon of postmodernism. They may discover that many postmodern ideas are actually much closer to the message Jesus of Nazareth preached than they had previously thought. And they may find that many postmoderns, in and outside of the church, have much to contribute to the Adventist faith community that, from its inception, has claimed to have a message for the head, but also for the hand and the heart. Postmodernity, I am convinced, presents us with challenges, but also with major opportunities, if we allow the Spirit to lead us into the future, that—and here speaks the postmodern—is at once very uncertain but yet very certain! ■

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Brotherhood

Because It's All About Us | BY LOREN SEIBOLD

To begin, one of my favorite stories.

A businessman hails a taxi at the airport. "I'm late to a meeting at the Consolidated Industries building. Can you get me there quickly?" "I'm your man," the driver says. "I've got fourteen brothers, and we're all taxi drivers in this city. No one knows this city better than we do." He takes off wildly, squealing tires, dodging traffic. The businessman turns a little pale, but he only complains when the driver barrels through a red light without slowing. "Don't worry," the taxi driver tells him. "My fourteen brothers and I go through the red lights all the time." The businessman is only slightly comforted by this, until they approach a green light, and the taxi driver slams on his brakes. "What—?" splutters the businessman, "Why are you stopping at a green light." "Because you never know," says the taxi driver, "when one of my brothers is coming."

I am large, I contain multitudes.

—Walt Whitman

It may not seem an especially original insight, but it is one that, unless attended to, will trip us up: each of us is the center of his own universe. My knowledge of and interest in others expands concentrically out from me. Expressed graphically, it would show a wobbly circumference, for while I'm most interested in myself and my closest friends and family, I also have some mild interest in the POTUS and a few celebrities. But even they'll be most accessible the more they're like me, and I'll see them (again, this seems obvious, but it is obscured by the near-

universal illusion that each of us is perfectly objective) through my own experiences.

To illustrate: As you listen to the casualties of any of the current wars, which figure commands your attention? The few thousands of your own countrymen lost, or the number (somewhere in six figures) of the enemy's? Most Americans value, almost without thinking about it, the lives of the several thousand killed in the World Trade Center far above the lives of the hundreds of thousands of "foreigners" killed subsequently. You'd have a hard time making the case that God has the same prejudices.

All that I believe, political and religious, gets

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is the center
of his
own universe.**



arranged around me. Hang out at a political rally, and you'll quickly see that the world should be organized according to what we believe benefits us. Attend most any church and you'll get the same. What do people need? What we have! If we have a recipe, that's what everyone should be hungry for. If we feel com-



**It's not
The Time
of Trouble
until it
happens
to me.**

passion, they need what our tender hearts are bleeding over. If we have a plan for how to make life go better, there's no point in our listening to yours.

And so all humanity falls into one of two groups: those who are with me, and those who should and ought to be with me but aren't—yet.

A caution: we must curse this prejudice temperately, for it is nearly impossible to avoid. We are tribal at our core. It is impossible to comprehend the needs of the whole world, so we must concentrate our efforts. It's easiest for me to assume that what is in my interests is also in yours, or else suspend interest in you altogether.

The great thinkers have always tried to get us to wrestle with this. "Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee," wrote John Donne. "I am large, I contain multitudes," says Walt Whitman. And from Martin Luther King Jr.: "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

While the Old Testament allowed God's people the privilege of salvific isolationism, the New Testament opens the door. All people become valuable, not just my people. The biblical consensus is that "red or yellow, black or white, all are precious in his sight." Yet how hard—how next to impossible—it is to be that inclusive! I can say that God loves everyone as much as he loves me, but surely he under-

stands me and my kind a little better than those people on the other side of the world babbling in foreign languages!

Which is illustrated nowhere better than in our Seventh-day Adventist eschatology.

Caedite eos.

Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius.

Usually translated,

*"Kill them all, and let God sort them out."*¹

—Abbot Arnaud Amaury,

before the massacre of Béziers

When James Bond gets into a car chase, he jumps drawbridges, crashes through fruit stands, and leaves trucks and cars rolling, spinning, and bursting into flame in his wake. We follow just one figure in the chaos: James. If this were real, he'd have caused hundreds of deaths. The consequences never bother 007; in the next scene he's in a white dinner jacket with a bimbo in a low-cut dress, when he should be in prison for aggravated mayhem.

This is fiction, but we do something similar in our eschatology. Take The Time of the End, in which Seventh-day Adventists, approximately one-fourth of 1 percent of the world population, become the central players. All of God's actions revolve around our little group and its issues. Billions suffer plagues, war, persecution, and the breakdown of society. But all eyes are on us and our happy ending. The rest? Extras. They don't enter the story proper. Let thousands be murdered in the Sudan, thousands more in the Congo, ten thousand starve in Asia, a tsunami wipe out a million heathens at a blow: it's not The Time of Trouble until it happens to me.

You will look in vain through the 1844 narrative for any inconsolation over the idea that most of the world's inhabitants (other Americans, and the billions in the rest of the world) were about to be lost without chance of appeal. Fortunately that changed, but not until those believers had adopted a belief called

The Shut Door. Though it was later repudiated, psychologically there's still some of The Shut Door left in us.

If we really believe what some of us have said—I mean with a deep, passionate conviction—that only those of us who are Seventh-day Adventists or a decent facsimile thereof are going to be saved in the cataclysmic horror show that is about to begin, there would be two consequences. First, we couldn't sleep at night. We'd be out warning everyone, and the last thing we'd be worried about is keeping our academy open or building up a strong staff in Silver Spring. Then shortly after that, we'd realize there's no conceivable way the other 99.75 percent of them will get shaped up in time, and we'd question the reasonableness of a God who'd let The Time of the End turn into such a hugger-mugger.

Ergo, we don't really believe it. It might help us sort a few myopic opinions, but it's not at all useful to explain God's relationship to a world so irreducibly complex that were this belief true, the earth and most of the people on it are guaranteed to burn like a termite-tunneled tenement.

**It's the dance, it's the dress,
she's a concept, more or less.**

—Donald Fagen, "At Century's End"

The most memorable thing about the first evangelistic series I participated in was the nightly après-meeting discussions about "interests." Interests were the people who had read our flyers and showed up. Anyone listening in who was unfamiliar with the process would have been puzzled, for we talked about the interests in only one dimension: their acceptance (or not) of the doctrines we offered them. We didn't even need their names, as we read the cards they'd filled out at the end of each meeting. "This one accepted the Sabbath, but doesn't understand the state of the dead."

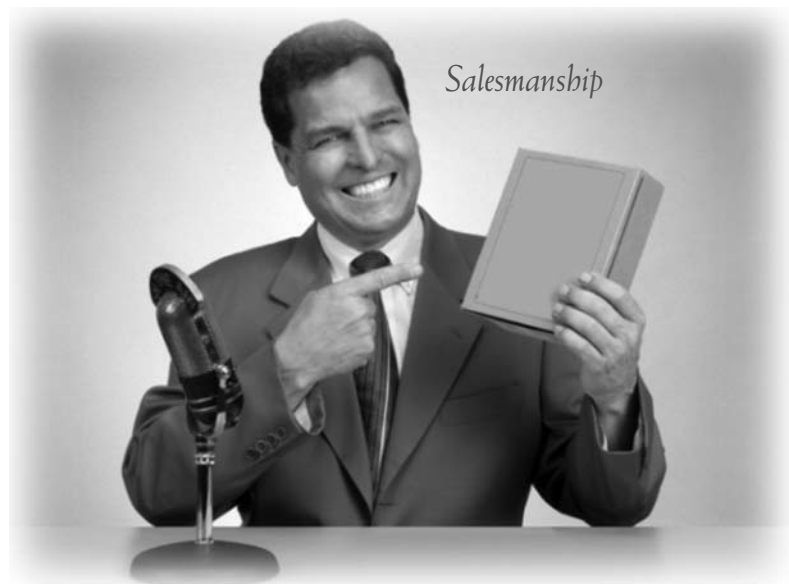
Now, it would be entirely false (and down-

right unkind) to say the evangelistic team had no genuine interest in these people. We were totally sincere in our desire that they should accept our message. But because we focused mostly on their deficiency—as it turns out, just their deficiency of what we had to offer—it wasn't a well-rounded concern. We would gladly pull them into our institutional embrace. But if they refused us, we had no further obligation to them as fellow creatures unless we hoped to nab them at some later date. We've only so much attention to give, and we give it to the people who might be persuaded to buy what we're selling.

Never mind that humanity is so complex and diverse that what's obvious to us isn't to 99 percent of the rest of the world. By making their acceptance (or not) of our product the focus, we dehumanize them just a bit. People become concepts. For it is impossible to listen—really listen, human to human—if the goal is to make the sale. (And no, it doesn't much matter how sincere you are in your belief that you're right and they're wrong.)

This is why, by the way, so many don't stay. The evangelists are masters of the sale, but like

**It seems to me
that Jesus's
"Follow me"
differs in
fundamental
ways from our
"Come to
the altar."**



marketers of diets and exercise equipment, getting their customers to use the product isn't their job. We deliver the goods to you. What you do with it is up to you. In our case, there's a community you've got to fit into in order to make the

I defy you
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an example
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technique.

beliefs work for you, which is far more difficult than getting baptized. But by that time, the good salesman is in the next city. And the church community really isn't in the acceptance business anymore: we can hardly stand one another.

Years ago, I read a book that attempted to analyze Christ's method of winning souls. It was sourced from the Gospels, and many of the principles were good ones. Jesus did, in fact, do kind things for people and teach them about God and ask them to put their faith in him. The problem was that it boiled down the Jesus experience to the evangelistic program of an evangelical church. Jesus pursued people like we pursue people: to get them in. He did good things for them so that they'd come to church. A good thing, evidently.

But all the strangeness, all the surprise, the nose-twisting, gut-punching, pulling-the-rug-out-from-under-us of the biblical encounter with Jesus disappears. Jesus gets civilized, domesticated, made respectably American, a good citizen and businessman. True, he helps people, but he has a reason: he's trying to add them into an orderly suburban church where they can hand out bulletins, park cars, sing praise songs, and give offerings. There's no danger, no challenge,

date. But The Savior of *All* Humankind, even the most despicable parts of it? Not exactly.

It seems to me that Jesus's "Follow me" differs in fundamental ways from our "Come to the altar." It's the difference between a mentor and a membership card. One is dynamic, the other settled. One is a process, the other a graduation. Jesus's church grew organically, chaotically, like a weed seedling that takes you by surprise each time you look at it. I defy you to find an example of Jesus employing a sales technique. He showed up, told the truth, and people followed.

The surprising thing is not how often he says "Follow me," but how seldom. Jesus could have done altar calls all over Palestine, and had enough church members to shout down the Barabbas crowd and storm the Jerusalem bastille. He didn't. He nabbed a few people, who were from the start followers, not theologians or bishops, which is why he warned them they might have to follow him right into death, and some did.

So we distill Jesus Christ down to a list of boring things to be believed, and discipleship into denominational franchises that by their very existence show how poorly we get along and hence what crummy Jesus followers we are. Is it any wonder people are wary of us?



no upsetting the world, no mystery, no walking blindly into the future. We've tamed Jesus. He's a megachurch pastor, a reach-your-full-potential seminar presenter, a Republican political candi-

**World is crazier and
more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural.**

—Louis MacNeice, "Snow"

Nearly every doctrinally defined entity believes that God is holding everyone else responsible to conform to its beliefs. Billions of religious adherents think that about their beliefs, just like we do about ours. It only occasionally crosses our minds that the incredibly varied human experience makes what we believe impossible to implement with the specificity we'd like to see.

I've often wondered: What could a Sunday law possibly mean for at least six of the world's seven billion people? What significance do

details like avoiding pork mean to those billions who haven't enough of anything to eat? Driving forward into the future with those as your neon directional signs means being far off the road where most people are.

And that may be just fine with some of us. However, don't be surprised, then, when no one pays attention. They're so far out of the discussion that we'll never, ever reach them with these points. Sadly, that may be just fine for some, too. Which begs the question: Is what we're advertising for everyone? Or, like the US Marines, do we just want a few good men? Is salvation big or little? Is going to heaven common or rare?

I had a discussion once with a man who told me that I and the rest of the church were falling far short of the ideal, as evidenced by our unsanctified diets, inadequate Sabbath-keeping, and damnable open-mindedness about other Christians. He cited Matthew 7:13–14 to say that only a very small number would ever be saved—and they would be those who believed and lived like he did. (This being among the least attractive arguments for heaven I've ever heard.)

But when Jesus spoke of the straight gate and the narrow way, did he mean to say that only a very small number of the billions on earth would be saved? If so, it was an odd conclusion to what preceded it. Listen:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matt. 7:7–11 NIV)

God is trying to shove the gift of life at us, and no one will take it? Jesus is opening the door and inviting us in, but we can't find the entrance? What a bizarre picture! My experience is that nearly all of us are, each in his own dysfunctional way, ringing heaven's doorbell vigorously, even if we don't know the secret passwords to get in.

Add to it that Jesus is knocking on my heart's door, too (Rev. 3:20), and it's odd that so few of us would pass through it.

So, how many will be saved? Jesus says elsewhere, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full" (Luke 14:23). We've always assumed he's got a pretty big house, which suggests he's going to save a passel of us. Then there's the parable of the ten virgins, which could mean that exactly 50 percent of us will make it. Or, if "straight is the gate and narrow the way and few there be that find it," only a select few.

Take your pick. As for me and my house, we believe (deeply, with all our hearts) that Jesus didn't die on the cross for a few picky eaters and religious prigs.

**Where sin increased,
grace increased all the more.**

—Rom. 5:20 NIV

Consider this: it's been to The Church's profit (and I'm speaking here of every denomination, not just the one I'm part of) to keep salvation difficult. It's built into our business plan. Why should you come to *our* church if you can get it in *any* church, or maybe even without a church at all? So, we've kept a tight hold on salvation. We say the world has to accept Christ, but really we mean Christ *and* a whole bunch of our own stuff that we've hung on him. The reason people don't understand righteousness by faith isn't because we don't preach it, but because we don't practice it. We all say we believe in grace. But we act like grace is for the people who shouldn't need it.

I submit to you that we've been stingy. What we were supposed to give away by the truckload, we've doled out in dime bags—after cutting the product with twigs of theology, broken bits of liturgy, and sweepings off the denominational floor. And maybe because we've been so damnably selfish, God is giving it away through

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other channels, without our even realizing it.

I hope so, because as much as I like all of you, to spend eternity with just Seventh-day Adventists (conversing, presumably, about our good diets and what damned fools those Sunday keepers were) sounds excruciating. If there's no end to life up there, and you're all I get to hang out with for eternity, I'm going to need a steady supply of Trenta-sized lattes. I was hoping for a more diverse mix of people; some folks with whom I don't fully agree, who can stretch my thinking in new directions. Hindus, Moslems, maybe even newly ex-atheists. Some of those sheep not of our fold.

But what about there being "none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10 KJV)?

The only hope I have that heaven won't be as boring as the average Sabbath School class is the possibility that not everyone will need to know that Name to benefit from its power. My evidence is thin, but there is a passage in Matthew where Jesus says many will come to his kingdom "from the east and the west"—code for heathens—"and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11 NIV). An odd statement. What would the heathen have in common with our patriarchs? Here's an idea: like the patriarchs, they've experienced God's grace. These heathens got it quite without our

assistance, but until that moment didn't know whom to thank for it!²

Now, that sounds like an interesting heaven. Honest people from everywhere and every time mixing it up, and exploring all kinds of deep stuff about God that they had previously but lightly sensed in the spiritual wind, felt through relationships, touched upon while truth-seeking, seen ghosts of in their dreams, and now at last they're making the acquaintance of the one behind it all.

I don't know how God would justify saving people who don't know him. I'm just grateful that I don't have to be the judge of the universe. But given what scripture says about grace, I can't imagine that God is as parsimonious with it as we've been.

I'm trying to say that this whole business of God and salvation can't be just about us, or it is merely tiresome nonsense. I'm trying to say that God has a tower view of everywhere and every time, and he sees the world as big and as complex as it really is. I believe, if he's any kind of God, he's going to be reasonable in his judgments. Not random. Not petulant. Certainly not exclusive. Mostly, I'm trying to say that God is lavish with grace. Poured out and running over. Something like this: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' and let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:17 NIV). ■

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1. Literally, "Slay them all. God will know His own." cf. 2 Tim. 2:19, "The Lord knows those who are his..."
2. The rest of the passage isn't complimentary to us good church members: "But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12 NIV).

WOMEN'S



Ordination Conversation

The State of the Ordination Conversation

| BY BONNIE DWYER

There is a component that not only wants to block ordination of women ministers, but to also undo ordination of women elders.

—Randy Roberts

In January 2013, when the Theology of Ordination Study Committee met in Laurel, Maryland, the setting of the proceedings, just outside of Washington, DC, inspired a couple of comments that seemed to help change the tone of the conversation from sharp disagreements to more thoughtful reflection. Describing that committee's proceedings at the annual meeting of West Coast university and college religion professors, April 5–7, were committee members Kendra Haloviak Valentine, John Brunt, Chris Oberg, and Randy Roberts. Their accounts of the meeting provided some background on a process that has been mentioned frequently in the church press sans details about the session papers and conversation.

Kendra Haloviak Valentine, chair of the department of biblical studies in the HMS Richards Divinity School at La Sierra University, began the overview with the basic structure of the three days of sessions. Each began with extensive prayers and a devotional before the presentation of papers—seventeen in all. On the last evening during the January meeting, the TOSC chair, Artur Stele, suggested spending time in small groups (organized alphabetically). Kendra Haloviak Valentine said one of the most meaningful moments for her came on the last morning of the session. As Stele opened the meeting, he reflected on the committee's work and said it had also led him to think about the Washington, DC, area where so many people are starving for the bread of life, and yet “here we are spending all our ener-

gy discussing who gets to distribute the bread.”

John Brunt, senior pastor of the Southern California-based Azure Hills church, said committee members represented both ends of the theological spectrum, and that they were told over and over that their goal was to reach consensus. On the first day, there were many speeches about the need to be nice to each other, and he wondered why so much time was spent on that. By the second day, he understood. He told of a moving response given by Denis Fortin, outgoing dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at Andrews University, to a paper that suggested any hermeneutic that included movement toward change was just plain wrong. As a new American citizen, Fortin stood to object. In this place where the Emancipation Proclamation has just been celebrated, he said, if the paper's theory was correct, slaves would still be slaves.

Another significant moment for Brunt came following the devotional that was given by Kendra Haloviak Valentine, the only presentation by a woman during the three days of meetings. She had spoken about the woman at the well in the book of John, and the next day one of the committee members said that he had been moved by her presentation and wished he could participate in the ordination of a Kendra, but if he were to do so, his whole biblical world would fall.

Loma Linda University Church Senior Pastor Randy Roberts told of the questions that came to his mind during the committee's session. First, he said, given the sheer size of the group (over a

hundred people), how is anything going to happen? Then, he wondered how the group had been constituted. He said he overheard some of the committee members saying they wondered why they were on the committee, because they had no special training or background pertaining to the issue. Given that some of the most strident voices in the church are on the committee, Roberts worries that a consensus will be difficult to reach. After a paper was presented on a theology of ordination, he said one participant said that the paper needed to include three Old Testament references to when ordinations were undone. "There is a component that not only wants to block ordination of women ministers, but to also undo ordination of women elders. And they are pretty energetic," Roberts said. However, Roberts, added, this is the way the church does business, and it is an important process. All the people have come with a passion and conviction, wanting to do as God would have us to do.

Chris Oberg, the senior pastor of the La Sierra University Church, said that an appeal had been made to come to the meeting with a sense of openness. She said she wrestled with that challenge, noting that of course we all want those on the other side to be willing to change their minds, rather than changing our own.

It was also reported that several world division presidents went to the microphones to ask for clarification about how the work of their study committees would be integrated into what the General Conference committee is doing. It is not yet clear exactly how that is going to work. The leaders of the committee said it was important to have the members of TOSC get started with their work and become acquainted with each other. Waiting until after the division committees have completed their papers would have made that difficult. Oberg said that she had a sense that the divisions are doing really good work, and she is looking forward to hearing their reports.

Jon Paulien, dean of the Loma Linda University School of Religion, moderated the panel,

and he mentioned what he had heard about the process at a meeting of the Biblical Research Institute. He said that people who felt passionately about the topic were chosen deliberately for the TOSC. The divisions were asked to study the topic because it was felt that the work that had been done in the past, such as at Camp Mohaven in the 1970s and later by biblical scholars from the United States, and that the world field needed to get involved. He said that his understanding was that multiple reports were likely.

Haloviak Valentine said that at the TOSC there was no sense that work done in the past is informing what is being written now. "We are not understanding our own history," she lamented. She did note however, that the General Conference Department of Archives, Statistics, and Research has posted the papers from the '70s and '80s on their website.

Angel Rodriguez presented a paper on the theology of ordination in which he noted that the word *ordination* is not even used in the original language in the New Testament. There was sharp disagreement by someone who suggested that if he would use an Adventist hermeneutic, he would see that it is in the King James Version of the New Testament. Committee members said that Rodriguez, the former director of the Biblical Research Institute, was quite taken aback by the suggestion that he was not using an Adventist hermeneutic.

The next meeting of the TOSC is in July 2013. Oberg predicted that it will be the significant meeting as the topic moves from simply a theology of ordination to a discussion of women's ordination. ■

Bonnie Dwyer is the editor of *Spectrum*.

**We all want
those on
the other side
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Perspectives on Ordination—*Divergent Views in the Spirit of Unity* | BY GARY BURNS AND C. RAYMOND HOLMES

How could two brothers in the faith, both waving the banner of the Reformation, *sola scriptura*, and sharing an elevated regard for the supreme authority of scripture, come to very different conclusions on the matter of ordination of women? Our love for one another drove us to open our Bibles and open our hearts and minds together, in prayer, to seek to understand the other's reasoning and

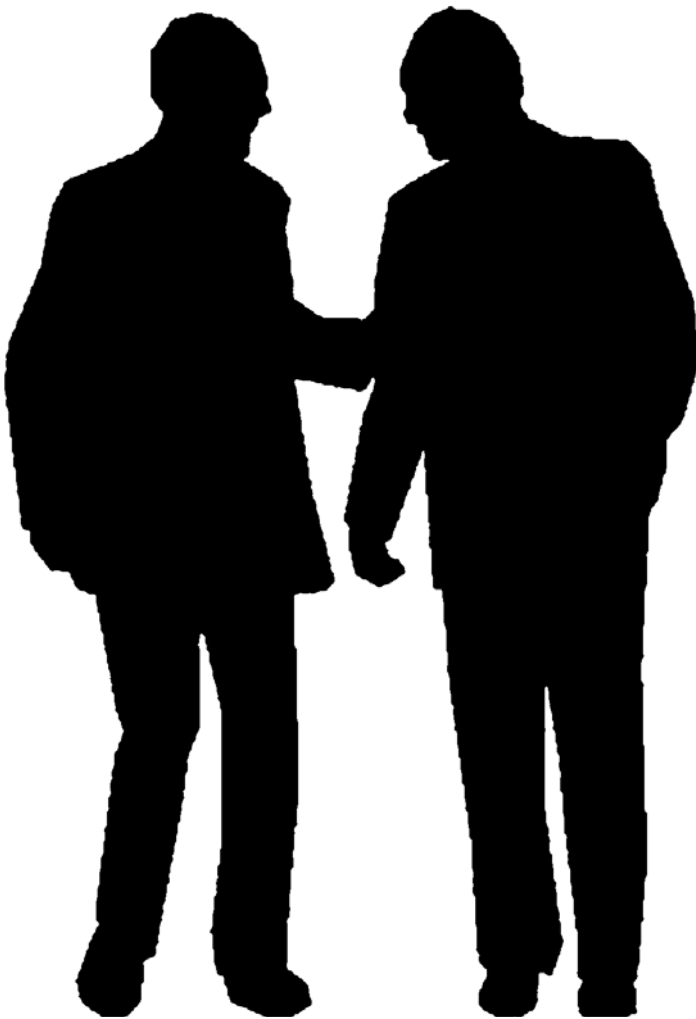
perspective and, ultimately, the will of God.

So, we met together as friends to study prayerfully the relevant texts on the subject of ordination. Debate was never considered, as it is by nature combative. Rather, we posed probing questions of one another to gain clarification and to understand the heart and soul behind the position held. As a result, we gained a greater appreciation for the other's point of view. As we closed the first session with prayer, both of us realized that at no time did we ever get the sense that either one of us was trying to convince the other of our position. We felt we were onto something! We wished the whole church could share in the blessing.

As we studied, it seemed as though God was redirecting our thoughts—not to theology, hermeneutics, and exegesis, not to arguments for or against but, rather, to the process. Why was the Lord leading us this way? It seemed obvious to us that how we come together is as important as what we come together about. So, this article is about our hearts.

How We Feel

Ray: Every summer, at the Michigan Camp Meeting, I enjoy the privilege of participating in the solemn ritual of ordination. The annual experience leaves me with mixed emotions. I rejoice with the men who are set apart for ministry, and I feel sad, too. Sad, because a friend of mine quietly and unobtrusively joins us for the ritual, even though she, herself, has never been so recognized. I have told her of my sadness and, also, of the fact that I find it impossible to change my point of view respecting biblical authority and hermeneutics as they relate to ordination. I have begun to feel more conscious of the hurt that exists on the part of many women. I'm



sorry for that. If I were to write my book, *The Tip of an Iceberg*, now, I would change some things—not the basic content, but the way I say them.¹ She confirmed that some of my statements hurt. I regret that deeply. I never want to hurt anyone. That was not my intent, but unintended consequences are still consequences. So, we had a moment of heart-touching-heart. I was almost tearful as I asked her forgiveness.

The feelings came back when I attended the Theology of Ordination Study Committee meeting in Maryland in January 2013, because there also were women in ministry there. I made a point to seek them out and speak to them personally, and that's why I made the statement, in my final remarks at the committee, that we have some repenting to do. I meant two things: not only do we need to rescind the action that caused all this agony, specifically the 1975 action allowing for the ordination of local women elders, because the action is in conflict with 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:5 and Titus 6:2, but we also need to repent, personally, for the agony we may have caused others. I think we all have some repenting to do, on both sides.

Gary: My entrance into pastoral ministry came later in life as my second career. At that time, the conference had just begun a process to prepare their pastors for ordination. We were each assigned to excellent mentors. Several times a year, we met as a group and followed a curriculum designed to prepare us for pastoral leadership. Among us was a woman who knew, as did we all, that she would receive all the training and all the preparation without ever completing the process by being ordained, nor could she ever hope to move beyond the entry-level pay scale for a pastor.

After four years, those of us who completed the requirements met with the conference ordination committee, along with our spouses. A few months later, all but one of us was ordained—even though I felt she had the best



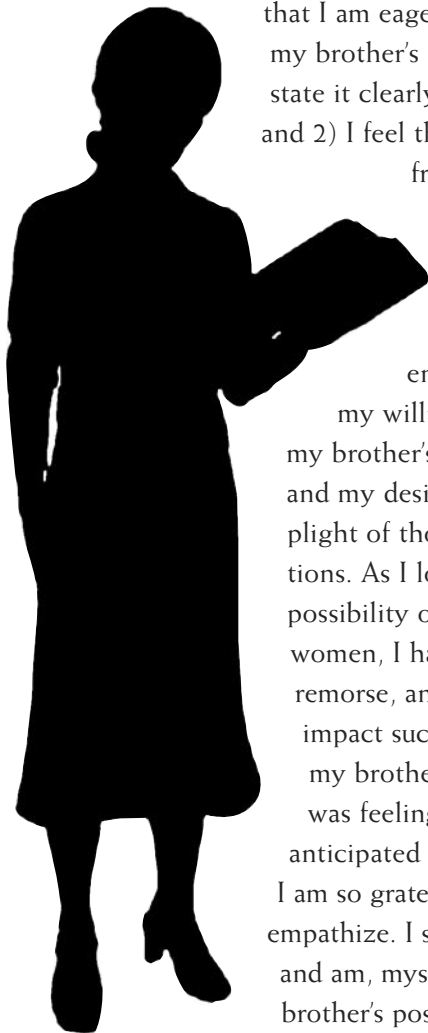
I felt we
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repent not
only of the
official
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and attitudes,
on both
sides.

—Gary

record of us all. That troubled me deeply.

Shortly after that, I attended the 1990 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana, where the North American Division brought the request to do what I thought was equitable and right for my counterpart and others like her. I was devastated, not only by the vote to deny the request but by the response to the request from the delegates on the floor. Following the session, I shared my perspective with one of the chairs of the discussion. I felt that, in effect, what we had done as a church was go on record that if, indeed, God had and was calling women to pastoral ministry, we would not recognize his calling. I felt we needed to repent not only of the official action, but also of our actions and attitudes, on both sides.

**Debate
was never
considered,
as it is
by nature
combative.**



Ray: How can we deal with the differences if we can't get past our feelings? I have sensed sublimated hostility and anger on both sides. Recently, I was associating with a group whose opinions I share. I didn't say much because I was feeling uneasy—not with the informational content of what was said, but with the underlying feelings. Somehow, we have to get past that.

Gary: Something has happened to me through our process of seeking God's will together that I recently just realized. I had been intellectually aware of a transformation in my thinking, but I became emotionally aware as I participate in discussions where I attempt to explain and show respect for the position of those who oppose the ordination of women, even though I don't personally share that

position. I am surprised by two facts: 1) that I am eager to speak up on behalf of my brother's position and am able to state it clearly and quite convincingly, and 2) I feel the same hostile pushback from those who do not agree with my brother's thinking. Some, at times, convey a sense that they feel threatened and even betrayed by my willingness to show respect for my brother's thoughts and feelings, and my desire to empathize with the plight of those who share his convictions. As I look to the future and the possibility of a decision to ordain women, I have emotions of sadness, remorse, and hurt for the personal impact such a decision would have on my brother. When I realized what I was feeling, it surprised me. I had not anticipated it.

I am so grateful for this new capacity to empathize. I still have lots of questions and am, myself, not convinced of my brother's position, but I appreciated

learning new things and incorporated some into my thinking.

Ray: That is the manifestation of a miracle that comes by faith, faith that God can change us at such a fundamental level.

Gary: Because of my association with so many women in ministry, I understand and appreciate their experience. I attended grade school with some who are now ministers, and taught and baptized others. At least two are now ordained in the Pacific Union Conference. My heart would also be saddened for their sakes if the vote went the other direction. I have to admit I also would be saddened for myself, but my feelings for others are equal on both camps.

Ray: I feel the same way. I think that's part of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, love that manifests itself in all the other fruit of the Spirit.

Gary: I believe it's a miracle of grace and evidence of growth in the fruit of the Spirit, for which I am unworthy and forever grateful.

Ray: I've been through this before. I suppose remnants of my experience, of leaving the Lutheran Church, are still there in my consciousness and now are beginning to emerge again with respect to this issue. It was a struggle. I hated to leave that congregation. All along, I was aware of the fact, I supposed, that because I was a pastor I was not the only one involved in this crisis. My whole church was involved. Wonderful colleagues in ministry, personal friends with whom I prayed and shared in Bible camps—all of them were involved. And I kept thinking, how are they going to feel? Am I going to hurt them profoundly by betraying them, abandoning them, and moving? All of that was a part of the picture. That was on the feeling level, not the doctrinal or theological.

I don't like to have conflict. I don't like to have negative feelings between some of my colleagues and I; but, at the same time, this is why I'm torn. The Word of God tells me not only to preach the Word, but to guard the truth—protect it. And so I'm wrestling, thinking, how can I do this? And this is the motivation for my recent paper.² How can I help this church arrive at a solution that is biblical but doesn't hurt anybody, that instead supports, affirms, and encourages women in ministry?

Gary: That motivation is not so much a motivation for truth as much as it is a motivation for the Body of Christ. That speaks volumes.

Ray: I love the church. When I say that, I don't mean the organization but the people...the people.

Gary: You have a pastor's heart.

Summary

Ray: We should not be overly concerned about the amount of time the church needs to come to a consensus. If we rush to a conclusion that is not satisfactory to the whole church, we risk alienating people. My wife, Shirley, and I were talking about this whole, agonizing process. "You know," she said, "I think I'm coming to the place where I'm beginning to understand that this whole process is necessary for the church, under God's guidance. It's part of the cleansing that is also a part of revival and reformation. Maybe the church has to go through this agony in order to be cleansed. Jesus is coming soon. What does it mean to be ready, or to get ready?" (In the corporate sense, she was saying.)

We need to work together as the Body of Christ. We need to work through this thing together, and allow the Spirit to lead us in community to the place he wants us to be.

Gary: I'm reminded of that familiar quote in *Christ's Object Lessons*: "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."³ Christ was ever cognizant of the community in which he was serving and how his actions would be perceived and interpreted; he adjusted his actions and words, based on place and time, not only to protect his ministry and mission but, also, to protect the hearts of the people.

We need to be like him, not only in character, but in our methods and practice. And becoming like him is not something we do; it is something we receive. We cannot conjure it up, we cannot craft it, we cannot determine to have it; we can only receive it. "For it is God who works in [us] both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13 NKJV). "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). God is the one who accomplishes this through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who produces his fruit in us. We're talking about heart work. "It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses."⁴ If we consent!

Where to Begin

What we've really been talking about here is spirituality, because we've been talking about being concerned with feelings and hurt and souls and a desire to not lose any. If everyone came together with that passion, to not lose any in the process, we would go about it differently.

The best place for all of us to start is at the foot of the cross. At the foot of the cross, there is no rank or position. Every-

Becoming
like [Christ]
is not some-
thing we do;
it is some-
thing we
receive.





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thing we hold precious and dear to ourselves must be let go. It is the place of complete and total surrender, and where all are on equal ground. ■

Gary Burns is a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist. His mother,



Hazel Burns, recently retired as an associate pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Kettering, Ohio. Walter Wright served as his senior pastor/advisor in an unprecedented relationship between the Ohio and Allegheny West confer-

ences. For the past ten years, he has ministered as director of communication and editor of the *Lake Union Herald*, and director of native ministry for the Lake Union Conference. He received a Master's degree in Religious Education from Andrews University in 1998. Though he never attended the seminary, he has been mentored in pastoral ministry by seminary professors and seasoned pastors such as Doug Kilcher, Don Jacobsen, Walter Wright, and Ray Holmes.

C. Raymond "Ray" Holmes was born of Scandinavian heritage



aligned with Martin Luther, though he did not come to a living faith until his early 20s. After earning a master of divinity degree from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, he served as a pastor in the Lutheran Church until discover-

ing the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He earned master of theology and doctor of ministry degrees at Andrews University. His book, *The Tip of An Iceberg*, discusses the biblical authority and interpretation that underlie the role and ordination of women in ministry. Since retirement, he has served as "senior" pastor of Christ Community Church in Bessemer, Michigan, and affirms women in ministry, who often share his pulpit. Holmes has been appointed to serve on the General Conference Study of Ordination Committee.

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Biblical Reconciliation Teachings Applied to the Women's Ordination Conflict | BY BRUCE BOYD



The discussion on women's ordination in a Seventh-day Adventist context is not new. Theologians and other leaders have written papers and published articles and books on the topic.¹ The issue has been addressed at various administrative levels and official actions have been taken.² Regardless, the issue of women's ordination continues to attract wide attention in our discussions.

While many hold strong positions on this issue, inspired writings seem not to give it nearly as much direct attention as some would wish. What if the Bible does not provide the convincing theological traction needed in this

area for a decisive, universally accepted conclusion for the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church? The Bible does not always address our current issues with powerful, unequivocal statements. And, regardless of how much scholars and other leaders deny manipulating or bending the text for their purposes, there is a strong temptation to decide what is "best" and then find ingenious biblical supports for our decisions.

The 1995 Utrecht General Conference featured debate and action on a motion to give world divisions the right to decide whether or not to ordain women to the pastoral ministry within their territories. Just weeks

before that session, I was at Andrews University to defend my doctor of ministry project on reconciliation and conflict resolution. Immediately before my defense, I was given a last-minute briefing that included counsel to dodge any questions on women's ordination from one of my degree committee members who was coincidentally scheduled to make a major presentation on women's ordination at Utrecht. I was advised something to the effect that the issue of women's ordination was a theological matter and that my research was on a different plane.

I accepted and followed the advice, which was probably a helpful course to take in avoiding distraction during my defense. However, biblical directions for reconciliation and conflict resolution are certainly relevant to the discussion on women's ordination and to any theological dispute, for that matter. This may be especially true where biblical illumination on an issue seems less than crystal clear.

Gauging the Conflict

Consider the current intensity of our women's ordination dispute through the lens of Speed Leas's five "Levels of Conflict in the Church."³ These levels move from simple, easily resolved disagreements to complex, war-like disasters. While there are a number of identifying characteristics for each level, the two characteristics Leas considers to be most significant are the *objectives* and the *language* of conflict participants.⁴

Synopsis of Conflict Levels

At Level I, the objective of conflict participants is to work together to resolve the problem.⁵ The communication language at this level is direct and clear. Participants do not hide information from each other and they tend not to slant information to their own advantage.

At Level II, the objective has moved to self-protection. Participants are cautious as mutual trust decreases. Participants will speak with each other without much hesitation, but their language becomes more guarded. It leans toward generalizations and may include cloaked insults and jokes with some sting.

At Level III, the objective becomes victory. "I am right, you are wrong. I am good, you are bad. I must win, you will lose." The language is emotional and purposely misleading. It is often laced with exaggeration or personal attack. At this

level, people begin grouping into loose factions.

At Level IV, the objective is to punish, wound, or expel opponents. Factions solidify and hope fades that opponents will change. The good of the subgroup is elevated over the good of the whole. Antagonists detach from each other, not communicating directly if they can avoid it. Trust and mutual respect drain away. The language appeals self-righteously to grand principles and tends to ignore specific issues. Criticism of opponents' positions is usually coupled with personal attack. Level IV conflict can result in the ejection of leaders, the exodus or expulsion of factions, and the ending of major ministries. Outside intervention is desirable.

At Level V, the objective and language focus on the destruction of the enemy. Outside intervention is imperative.

Conflicts are generally best resolved early and at the lowest level possible. When a dispute reaches critical heights, the level of the conflict needs to be reduced for healthy resolution to take place. As the level of respectful communication and mutual understanding is raised, restorative conciliation becomes possible. This is much more likely to happen where participants are keeping biblical peacemaking teachings and applications running in their minds as a backdrop to all other considerations. Being "right" is not necessarily God's way to righteousness or peace.

Estimate of Women's Ordination Conflict Level

To what level has our women's ordination dispute arrived? It is not easy to identify conflict levels precisely because conflicts do not always move through the levels predictably and because of the somewhat porous bound-



aries between levels. Also, there are sometimes wide differences in attitude and approach among conflict participants who are on the “same side.” With that said, it appears that denominationally the conflict is at a fairly high Level III with some tilt toward Level IV.

While most conflict participants still seem to be at least somewhat willing to engage on the specifics related to the ordination of women, the language on both sides has taken on the sound of Level IV. Participants appeal strongly to eternal principles in support of their positions. Those for immediate women’s ordination speak of justice and basic human rights. Those against the immediate ordination of women speak of God’s desire for church unity and worldwide denominational harmony. Only God knows whether these appeals to grand principles are of the “self-righteous” variety.

Another Level IV element in the conflict is the sentiment that nothing is likely to change in the General Conference position and that no amount of time spent in further study or discussion will make much, if any, difference. This position was voiced in discussions related to the 2012 actions voted by four separate union conference constituencies in favor of ministerial ordination without regard to gender.⁶ There has been talk that the “rebel” union conferences, and presumably their leaders, could be punished in some way. There has also been talk about a need for a change of General Conference leaders.

On October 16, 2012, Seventh-day Adventist world leaders attending the General Conference Annual Council voted a response statement to the ordination-related actions taken by the union conference constituencies. The Annual Council statement strongly disapproves of those actions and states that they are not legitimate.⁷ It points out that planned current and future theological studies and deliberations are preparing the way for the world church to deal with the issue of women’s ordination at the next General Conference ses-

sion.⁸ It urges the dissident union conferences along with all other Seventh-day Adventist organizations to carefully consider the implications and possible results of taking actions that contradict standing decisions of the world church at General Conference sessions.⁹ And, it asserts that the world church in General Conference session holds the highest administrative authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁰ Significantly, the Annual Council statement does not announce or call for any punitive action toward the offending union conferences. This blend may be an attempt by world leaders to halt the conflict climb and even to begin decreasing its intensity.

Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution Basics

For the purposes of this work, conflict is “a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires.”¹¹

Conflict Opportunities

Most Christians associate conflict entirely with sin, pain, and loss. This is unfortunate because differences in purpose and opinion that frustrate goals and desires frequently open doorways to advancement and breakthroughs in learning, planning, creativity, and healthy relationships. When God is allowed to guide the conflict resolution and reconciliation process, conflicts can lead to extraordinary blessing and spiritual growth (for examples, consider Genesis 32–33; 2 Kings 6:8–23; Daniel 1; Acts 6:1–7; 15:1–35).

It would be helpful for Christians to see conflicts in a more positive light. Indeed, conflicts provide Christians with definite openings to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31–11:1), minister to opponents (Luke 6:27–31; Rom. 12:17–21), and grow in Christlikeness (2 Cor. 12:7–10).¹² When conflicts are seen as potential opportunities for good to be grasped under God’s guidance, instead of hazards to be avoided or threats to be attacked, there is much more likelihood of lasting resolution and growing goodwill.

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Conflict Catalysts: Diversity, Misunderstanding, and Sin

There are at least three major catalysts for human conflict.¹³ The first is our diversity, which stems from God's creation of this world. God's amazing design specifies that we multiply with a vast and growing variety.

Humans are exceptionally diverse in their personalities, experiences, goals, methods, priorities, preconceptions, beliefs, values, customs, traditions. . . Our differences and preferences, many of which are neither right nor wrong, add immeasurable richness to our human experience. God's breathtaking diversity in creation is a major ingredient in most, if not all conflict.

Misunderstanding of words and intentions is a second basic catalyst of most conflicts. With the complexities of communication, it is surprising that there are not more misunderstandings. During conflicts, miscommunication, accidental or intentional, is so common that misunderstandings ought to be expected. Perhaps this is why the apostle James advises that we "be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19 KJV). Focused listening and understanding skills are generally more helpful for resolution and reconciliation than powerful logic or persuasive presentations. Noted Mennonite conflict consultant David Augsburgers underscores the power of careful listening: "Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable."¹⁴ This is especially true during times of conflict.

The third catalyst of human conflict is our basic selfishness, which has continued and darkened since the sin of our first ancestors. Jeremiah suggests that we can barely begin to understand how deeply "deceitful" and "desperately wicked" we are in our innermost selves (Jer. 17:9).¹⁵ The stories of nearly all Bible characters reveal them selfishly enmeshed in multiple conflicts, often with damaging and even destructive results. Our sinfulness is like a deadly gravity automatically pulling our conflicts toward disaster (Rom. 3:23; 7:14–20).

One of the common places our sinfulness exhibits itself is in the demands we make during conflict. When our desires, even good desires, become demands, they are usually selfish. (Unselfish demands are associated with defending God's reputation or protecting people who are being mistreated.¹⁶) Significantly, it appears to be impossible to become angry unless one or more of our desires have become covert or overt demands. Conflicts are invariably rooted in demands that are often flagged by

words like "ought," "must," and "should." Destructive conflicts are associated with this ordered sequence of verbs: desire, demand, judge, punish.¹⁷ Martha's unhappiness with Mary (Luke 10:40–41) and Joab's murder of Abner and Amasa (2 Sam. 3:27; 20:10) are mild and extreme examples of this sequence. Layers of conflict demands can mushroom and fill much of the space in our hearts, space God asks us to reserve for a trusting friendship with him.¹⁸ In conflict settings, it would be best if most of our demands could be returned to their earlier desire form and examined.

Giving God standing "permission" to bring our basic selfishness to mind during conflicts is helpful.

Our sinful tendency is to pin conflict blame to others. Instead, Jesus instructs us to search for and remove *logs* from our eyes so that we can see clearly enough to remove *specks* from our opponents' eyes (Matt. 7:3–5). Reconciliation and conflict resolution are much more likely to occur when we take complete responsibility for our negative attitudes and actions early.

Conflict Issues: Substantive and Interpersonal

Conflicts can orbit around substantive issues, interpersonal issues, or both. Substantive issues, sometimes called material issues, can be phrased as questions that need to be answered before conflict resolution is possible. Among other things, they can involve: **principles** (Paul and the Galatians: *Is a strict keeping of the law the pathway to salvation?*); **applications** (Participants in the Jerusalem Council: *Do Gentiles need to be circumcised in order to become Christians?*); **methods** (Moses and Zelophehad's daughters: *Where sons are absent, may daughters inherit property in order to keep it in the family?*); **traditions** (Jesus and the Pharisees: *Is it permissible to eat food*



with unwashed hands?); **facts** (Aaron and Miriam opposing Moses: *Does God speak only through you or does he speak through all three of us?*); **goals** (Joseph's brothers at the pit: *Shall we let Joseph go free or shall we get rid of him?*); or **rights** (the prodigal son's father and older brother: *Is it fair to celebrate the return of the prodigal son?*).

Interpersonal conflict issues are connected to negative feelings and attitudes that conflict participants have toward each other. These could include various combinations of irritation, embarrassment, fear, anger, jealousy, dislike, disdain, disrespect, rejection, judgment, hatred, prejudice... Interpersonal issues can flow from participants' beliefs that they have been mistreated, or from how participants imagine their opponents are viewing them, evaluating them, criticizing them, or planning to mistreat them.

In most conflicts, both interpersonal issues and substantive issues are present. Where this is the case, interpersonal issues almost always must be dealt with first for a lasting positive outcome.¹⁹ In other words, healthy interpersonal reconciliation is a prerequisite to wholesome conflict resolution. This fact is of vital importance!

Lost Sons

An excellent example is found in the story of the lost sons of Luke 15. The repentant younger son stumbles home with a genuine, heartfelt confession and his father runs to offer complete acceptance and forgiveness. Interpersonal issues between them are dealt with and the substantive issues will obviously be resolved. But later, in a painful exchange between the father and his older son, interpersonal issues remain unresolved. The older brother chooses to argue angrily and bitterly about his rights while his father pleads for interpersonal reconciliation. We are left with no hint that the older brother moves away from proving his self-righteous substantive positions to sincerely addressing the interpersonal issues that separate him from his brother and father.

Christians in conflict too often mirror the

angry older son. Interpersonal issues are frequently ignored or denied while substantive issues get most or all of the attention. This probably happens because interpersonal issues are considered to be sinful. Many of us, including and perhaps especially those with leadership positions, find it difficult to take responsibility for our sinful contributions to the conflict. We protect our reputations and become blind hypocrites. Interpersonal issues are best dealt with before all other considerations through prayerful, humble confession (Prov. 28:13; Luke 15:17–21; James 5:16), through careful, caring correction (Matt. 5:23–24; 18:15–20), and through the miraculous gift of forgiveness (Matt. 18:21–35; Eph. 4:32).

Overlooked Widows

When interpersonal issues have been dealt with, the way is opened for careful, collaborative negotiation between the reconciled parties. A mutually agreeable and long-lasting resolution of substantive issues becomes far easier to attain. This is what happens in Acts 6:1–6, where the Grecian Christian Jews are deeply offended by the perceived and perhaps actual unfair treatment of their widows by the Hebraic Christian Jews. This conflict appears to be serious enough to have split the early church.

Fortunately, the overworked apostles, who are probably considered to be members of the Hebraic faction, refuse to ignore the conflict or to be insulted. Instead they deal with it immediately, apparently listening respectfully and carefully without defending themselves. The interpersonal issues are sorted out and the way opens for resolving the substantive issue: *What is the best way to fairly and consistently meet the needs of our widows?* God inspires his leaders to propose a creative new ministry method for doing his work more effectively. Interestingly, in a huge gesture of trust and goodwill by the Hebraic Christian Jews, all seven members of the new ministry team seem to come from the Grecian faction, as is evidenced by their Greek names. The seven are entrusted with the important task of caring for all Christian widows.

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Amazingly, there is unanimous approval from both factions for this solution. Coming out of this conflict, the church is wonderfully united, energized, and motivated. And at this point, many priests, who have been observing the new movement from the outside, are finally convinced of its authenticity and join the increasing flood of new believers.²⁰

A Pauline Approach

It appears that the apostle Paul has the reconciliation of interpersonal issues in mind when he writes these instructions:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. (Col. 3:12–15 NIV)

Food Offered to Idols

Perhaps a strategy used by Paul in dealing with a conflict over food offered to idols could inform us as we grapple with our conflict over women's ordination. Paul speaks directly to the conflict over food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:23–31, and he seems to have it in mind along with other current areas of controversy in Romans 14.²¹ The substantive issue in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 asks: *Is it permissible for faithful Christians to eat food that has been offered to idols?*

We need to notice that the major emphasis of Paul's approach is on dealing with the interpersonal or relational issues swirling around this conflict.²² His first objective is that the believers embroiled in this conflict treat each other with the utmost respect and care. Paul opens in 1 Corinthians 8 by observing that having knowledge ("having the truth," "being right") can be problematic because it is so often associated with arrogance and pride (verse 1). He follows this by reminding his readers that our fullest knowledge is at best only partial (verse 2), implying that all believers, perhaps especially those who consider themselves to be the most knowledgeable, need a large dose of growing humility.

In the related Romans 14 passage, Paul warns both those who are opposed to eating food offered to idols,

etc., and their opponents who are comfortable eating food offered to idols not to judge each other (verses 1 and 13). He strongly cautions those in the first group not to be harsh or condemnatory, and those in the second group not to be contemptuous or condescending (verses 3 and 10). Further, he warns both sides to treat the other as family ("brothers"), remembering that God is the only judge and that God will ultimately evaluate each conflict participant by his divine relationship criteria (verse 10). Speaking to both groups, Paul admonishes, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way" (verse 13). He continues, "We pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food" (verses 19–20).

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul continues the discussion of food offered to idols begun earlier in that book. In chapter 8, Paul has clearly addressed the substantive issue by stating his belief that there is absolutely no sound theological argument against eating food offered to idols in places where believers do not consider it to be an act of



worship (verses 4–8). Picking up on this in chapter 10, he bridges back to the interpersonal issues when he declares, “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor” (verses 23–24). Paul’s conflict solution for those who have no guilt eating food offered to idols is to eat it freely with unbelievers and, presumably, with fellow Christians of the same opinion (verses 25–27). At the same time, he tells them to abstain from eating it when they are with Christians who disagree with them, because of their care and respect for these fellow believers (verse 28, see also 8:4–13; Rom. 14:13–15).

Principles and Applications

Interestingly, Paul’s substantive position seems to slant away from the action of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20), from warnings to the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira (Rev. 2:14, 2:20), and perhaps from the stand of Daniel in his conflict with Nebuchadnezzar over the food Daniel was to eat (Dan. 1). It is obvious that Paul does not believe his position on food offered to idols is going against any basic Christian principle, just as he does not consider his position on circumcision to cut across such a principle. To him, these are clearly areas of application.²³ The book of Acts and Paul’s own writings make it clear that many of his Christian contemporaries disagree with him, considering these to be areas of unchanging principle.

To Paul, the wisest applications are flexible, determined by various current factors. In the area of circumcision, he is frequently dealing with Christians who consider the practice necessary for salvation. This belief goes contrary to a universal Christian principle, and here Paul is unequivocal, taking an unbending stand. Yet, in spite of his very strong language on the topic in Galatians and Philippians, Paul does not forbid circumcision, which is an application issue when it is not considered a means to salvation. In one

situation, perhaps to avoid criticism and distraction from his mission to share the gospel, Paul has Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).

As we have seen in the area of food offered to idols, Paul advocates a split application practice.²⁴ Where people feel that eating food offered to idols is an act of false worship, he states that it should not be eaten. In other places where people do not consider eating food offered to idols to be an act of worship in any way, Paul advises that it ought to be eaten thankfully without questions (1 Cor. 10:25–30). He concludes this section with the well-known admonition: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (verses 31–11:1).

Toward Resolution

Is it right for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to ordain women to the pastoral ministry? When we are ready to deal with this substantive issue, we need to consider some related questions. Is this conflict directly over principle and not application? If principle, which principle or principles? Are some principles subordinate to other principles? Or, is this conflict over the application of principle? If this is an application issue, what approach do the times call for? Consider the fact that during his life Paul does not seem to think it is the right time to proclaim freedom for slaves (Eph. 6:5–9), even though he pens the ringing words of Galatians 3:28. What is currently the best application approach to further the gospel in the various situations in our world field? Does the application need to be the same in every area for every member of our world church? We have seen that there is little, if any, record of Paul taking a universal approach to application situations.

So, is it right for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to ordain women to the pastoral

**God’s
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ministry? Before and while we answer this question, we could deal with our interpersonal issues. We could allow God's Holy Spirit to remind us that we are family, and that those ties are of exceptional importance to him and to us. As continual recipients of our Father's unselfish kindness and love, we could let the Holy Spirit empower us to respond in kind with supreme love to God and unselfish care for each other. We could ask God to help us see the multiple logs in our eyes before we go after specks. We could repent of and confess uncaring attitudes, demands, and attack words or actions. We could climb down from the soapboxes we love and better learn to listen carefully and caringly to each other. We could give each other the benefit of the doubt and bathe all of our exchanges with a genuine and growing respect. We could gently confront those we consider to be in error, knowing that we might be wrong because we are fallible. We could accept God's miraculous gift of forgiveness and let him teach us to forgive others as we wish him to forgive us. We could be optimistic and expectant during all conflicts, including this one, because, while conflicts are often painful, they are opportunities for our Father to teach us things of importance and to grow us in delightful ways to be the people he has designed us to be. ■

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2. Actions were voted at General Conference Sessions in 1990 and

1995. Actions in 2012 include those of the Northern German Union Conference, the Columbia Union Conference, the Pacific Union Conference, the Netherlands Union Conference, and the General Conference Annual Council. For some indication of Ellen White's opinion about official church actions designed to resolve theological disagreements see her letter 29, 1889, in *Manuscript Releases*, 15:150.

3. Speed Leas has spent over forty years as an Alban Institute senior consultant to churches and synagogues. During that time, he has dealt with numerous religious controversies and divisions, and has acquired an international reputation as an expert on conflict resolution.

4. Speed Leas, *Moving Your Church Through Conflict* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1985), 20.

5. *Ibid.*, 20–25.

6. In order of their votes, these union conferences are the North German Union Conference (April 23), the Columbia Union Conference (July 29), the Pacific Union Conference (August 19), and the Netherlands Union Conference (November 11).

7. Annual Council Counsel Action 132-12G. *Statement on Church Polity, Procedures, and Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Union Actions on Ministerial Ordination*. PRE/PREXAD/GCDO12AC to TNCW-12AC, 2 (2012), 2.

8. *Ibid.*, 3.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 4.

11. Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 29. Much of this paper is indebted to the organization of biblical concepts in *The Peacemaker*.

12. *Ibid.*, 31–37.

13. Bruce Boyd, "Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Seminar on Positive Resolution of Substantive and Interpersonal Conflict in the Hazelton, British Columbia Seventh-day Adventist Church" (DMin project report, Andrews University, 1995), 1–7; Sande 30.

14. David Augsburg, *Caring Enough to Hear* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books 1982), 12.

15. Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

16. Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 310. Righteous demands are illustrated by the life of Jesus, who makes relatively few demands. Jesus dramatically cleanses his Father's dishonored temple (John 2:13–17), he publically levels stern "woes" against Jewish leaders who are smearing God's reputation and abusing their own people (Matt. 23), and when

Pharisees will not consider flexing and recalibrating their narrow Sabbath-keeping beliefs and practices to honor God and bless others, Jesus is grieved and responds with anger. He dramatically opposes them and heals a man's disfigured hand during a Sabbath synagogue worship service (Mark 3:1–6).

17. Sande, 102–109.

18. David Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002) 57-94; Sande, 100–116.

19. Sande, 81.

20. Ellen White suggests that the "credentials" proving the authenticity of our world church can be seen in a unity rooted in the growing mutual respect and love shared by our members. She makes clear that these are members who are highly diverse and who hold scriptural views that are somewhat divergent. *Manuscript Releases*, 15:149–150.

21. John C. Brunt, "Romans," *Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*, ed., George R. Knight (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), 238; Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, tr. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), 178; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed., F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1968), 173.

22. Brunt, 237.

23. Principles are fundamental truths that are always valid in every culture for each person. Because principles are theoretical or abstract by nature, they sometimes need to be interpreted carefully into concrete applications.

24. A few verses earlier in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul seems to suggest that best Christian practice in the application of principle can be exceptionally varied simultaneously in different parts of the world. Paul elevates the value of sharing the gospel above his own rights and freedoms as he explains that his approach is greatly modified by the place where he is working and the company he is keeping. "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it" (verses 19–23).

[Paul reminds]

his readers

that our fullest

knowledge

is at best only

partial.



RELIGIOUS

LIBERTY



AND



SAME-SEX

MARRIAGE



Disestablishing the Family: *The Adventist Case for Legalizing Same-Sex Civil Marriage* | BY JUAN O. PERLA

From the outset, Adventist pioneers strongly supported the disestablishment of religion, that is, the separation of church and state. The Adventist Church preserves this historic commitment by defending and promoting freedom of conscience for all, not only because it serves our personal interests but also because we believe that's what Christ has called us to do.¹

Where does this important Adventist value come from? And what can it teach us about marriage and the relationship between the family and the state?

Families are like small churches.² They are centers of moral development, nurturing, and support. They instill values and virtues that build our character and shape our conscience. Like churches, families are extra-political sources of authority that challenge and, at times, subvert the power of the state. Yet the government and the church treat these two institutions differently. Why?

In its declaration on church-state relations, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) argues that if anyone in history ever had the authority to establish an official state church, it was Jesus Christ, “[y]et Jesus never used force to advance the gospel.” The church can easily say the same thing about Jesus and the establishment of an official state family. In fact, in the same declaration, the church proclaims that “God is love” and that “[l]ove... is not subject to civil regulation.”³

This tenet of our faith and the analogy between the church and the family provide the basis for why Adventists are uniquely positioned among Christians to support the disestablishment of the family, that is, depriving any model of the family of official state status.

Religious Disestablishment Is an Important Tenet of the Adventist Faith

The story and values behind the church's commitment to religious disestablishment have something to teach us

about familial disestablishment.

When early Adventists adopted their belief and practice of seventh-day Sabbath worship, they became concerned that the Christian establishment would someday be influenced largely by a politically powerful Roman papacy in imposing the mainstream model of Christianity, including Sunday worship, upon everyone.⁴ Whether such concerns were legitimate or not is not the point. Early Adventists wisely understood the importance of separating the authorities of the church and the state as a way of ensuring the survival of their new faith.⁵

In short, Adventist pioneers feared the dangers of what political thinkers of their time called the “tyranny of the majority.”⁶ About a century later, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini coined the term “totalitarian” to describe a state that “is all-embracing” and that “interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people.”⁷ Today, we still find a variety of authoritarian regimes that officially adopt one set of values over others and try to coerce their citizens to conform to those values, allegedly to protect against political disorder and social chaos.

The Adventist Church's commitment to religious liberty is born out of and intricately connected to antiauthoritarian values because it is embedded in a distrust of a centralized authority that is capable of exercising religious control over everyone's lives. In this regard, the dissatisfaction that same-sex couples feel with the establishment of the heterosexual family as the only official state family can be compared to the anxiety that early Adventists felt toward the possibility that someday the mainstream model of Christianity, including Sunday worship, would be established as the official state church.

Fortunately for Adventists, the framers of the US Constitution understood the risks of centralizing political and religious authorities in the state. Combined with the other freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment of the US

Constitution (speech, association, and petition), the disestablishment of the church has contributed to a rich fabric of religious diversity in the United States and in other countries with similar values. Where these values are lacking, state-sponsored oppression continues to push religious and other minorities into the shadows.

Although religious freedom had its risks in the American experiment, the framers of the Constitution and the founders of the Adventist Church favored religious diversity over conformity.

Familial Disestablishment Is Consistent with Adventist Values

The arguments in favor of disestablishing the family are rooted in the same democratic values that motivated Adventist pioneers to incorporate the political ideology of religious disestablishment into the Adventist faith.

While the government and the church generally respect and defend religious differences, they have been less receptive toward diversity in family structures. Because marriage has been the traditional means for establishing a family, “[o]ne of the most obvious ways in which states—and the federal government—have established a particular vision of the family is by limiting civil marriage to heterosexual couples.”⁸ Not surprisingly, the law has been used to channel people into this established model of the family, sometimes through criminal or other social sanctions (such as laws in our history that prohibited adultery, divorce, bigamy, fornication, and sodomy).

To be fair, the government and society have gradually opened their minds to granting people substantial liberties that amount to what law professors Alice Ristroph and Melissa Murray call “free exercise of the family,” or to what Adventists would characterize as freedom of conscience, such as “rights to marry [including marrying interracially] and to divorce, to procreate or avoid procreation, to direct the education of one’s children, and to cohabit with relatives.”⁹ If churches and families are equally worthy of the state’s protection, it is puzzling, then, why the Adventist commitment or, as these two professors ponder, “the liberal commitment to religious disestablishment has never led to any similar call for familial disestablishment.”¹⁰ After all, the basis for oppressing familial and religious minorities is the same.

Just as the disestablishment of the church is not a rejection of religion or an endorsement of an immoral

free-for-all, the disestablishment of the family does not seek to abolish the family or the values for which it stands. On the contrary, it reaffirms the important role that family plays in a stable society.

In this context, the state’s role in family life would be similar to its current role in religious life; it would stay out of the affairs of both with limited exceptions. It would not impose or endorse one model of the family over another, but would seek instead to protect the freedom of all to enter voluntarily into family structures that best suit their needs, just as it protects the rights of all to adopt or abandon a church or religion in accordance with their conscience. Churches would still be free to define marriage and family for themselves, just as they’re free to choose their day of worship. Whether the state continues to perform civil marriages, civil unions, or something different shouldn’t matter, as long as it doesn’t deny access to one class of people simply because one segment of the population doesn’t approve of their model of the family.¹¹

As it does with churches, the state would protect against legitimate threats and dangers posed by harmful or destructive forms of familial arrangements (such as laws guarding against domestic violence or child abuse and neglect). The state would continue to respect the rights of churches and families to exclude from their ranks those members who do not embrace their norms and values, such as legal protections for religious employers that prefer to hire only from within their community of believers.

The church’s current theological understanding of marriage and sexuality is not a problem for supporting the disestablishment of the family, in the same way that the church’s theology regarding Sunday worship is irrelevant in the context of religious liberty. If disestablishment were dependent on theology, then the church would necessarily have to oppose the legal right to Sunday worship, because church doctrine teaches that such practice violates God’s law. Quite the opposite, the church affirmatively defends the right of everyone to worship on their day of choice.

If familial diversity like religious diversity is allowed to thrive, future generations of Adventists and other minorities will be less likely to live under the oppression of an authoritarian state that abuses its power by imposing the moral will of the many to the disadvantage of the few. This is a risky undertaking without any guarantees, but if the disestablishment of the church has taught us anything, it is that the potential reward of freedom far outweighs any concerns.

Adventists Have a Moral Duty to Stand Up for the Legitimate Rights of Others

The church's commitment to freedom of conscience is not purely self-serving. The "Declaration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Church-State Relations" states unapologetically that "[f]reedom of religion can only exist in the context of the protection of the legitimate and equal rights of others in society," and cautions that any "[l]imitation of freedom of conscience in order to protect society from...*hypothetical dangers or to impose social or religious conformity*...are not legitimate limitations on freedom" (emphasis added).¹²

The declaration goes farther and commits the church "to work on behalf of groups whose freedom of conscience is inappropriately impinged by the state," even if it results in "personal and corporate loss," because "[t]his is the price we must be willing to pay in order to follow our Savior who consistently spoke for the disfavored and dispossessed."¹³

Like many other minorities living under the laws of less hospitable governments, Adventists in different countries have suffered discriminatory treatment, criminal penalties, and violent aggression, simply because they believe and behave differently than the religious majority in those places. Even in the United States, Adventists have had to resort to the courts for protection of their freedom to exercise their beliefs without being subjected to discriminatory treatment by the state.¹⁴ As a result, the church has earned a well-deserved reputation for standing up against the efforts of oppressive governments abroad and special interest groups at home that seek to stifle the freedom of conscience of religious minorities.

Today, the leaders of the church have the same historic opportunity that its founders had—to share God's unconditional love and proclaim freedom of conscience for all. To remain silent would betray our Adventist heritage. ■

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2. Alice Ristroph and Melissa Murray, *Disestablishing the Family*, 119 Yale L. J. 1236 (2009), <http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/facpubs/73> (comparing the family and the church).
3. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Declaration."
4. Ellen White envisioned a scenario in which "in our land of boasted freedom, a Protestant government should sacrifice every principle which enters into its Constitution, and propagate papal falsehood and delusion," and "[t]he rulers of our nation...shall enact laws to bind the consciences of men in regard to their religious privileges, enforcing Sunday observance, and bringing oppressive power to bear against those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath...." Ellen White, "David's Prayer," *Review and Herald*, December 18, 1888, <http://text.egwwritings.org>.
5. Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), 442. "The founders of the nation wisely sought to guard against the employment of secular power on the part of the church, with its inevitable result—intolerance and persecution."
6. See, for example, Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1835).
7. Benito Mussolini, *Fascism: Doctrine and Institutions* 11 (1935), cited by Ristroph and Murray, *supra*, note 2, n. 30.
8. Ristroph and Murray, *supra*, note 2, 1240.
9. *Ibid* (internal citations omitted).
10. *Ibid.*, 1251.
11. Excluding same-sex couples from "civil marriage" or excluding heterosexual couples from "civil unions" is an extension of the "separate but equal" policies of the early nineteenth hundreds. Such policies have been firmly rejected in American law. See *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), and its progeny.
12. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Declaration."
13. *Ibid*.
14. In the seminal case *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963), the Supreme Court overruled the decision of a lower court that denied a Seventh-day Adventist woman her right to unemployment benefits after her employer fired her for refusing to work on the Sabbath.

The Supreme Court, Same-Sex Marriage, and Religious Liberty |

BY ALEXANDER CARPENTER, JASON HINES,

MICHAEL PEABODY, AND JUAN O. PERLA

The following is adapted from a podcast posted to *Spectrum's* website, www.spectrummagazine.org, on March 22, 2013. Alexander Carpenter moderated the panel.

Carpenter: *Three Seventh-day Adventist attorneys join us for a discussion of religious liberty, gay marriage, and the Supreme Court. Juan Perla has a background in human rights, and recently wrote "Disestablishing the Family: The Adventist Case for Legalizing Same-sex Civil Marriage" for Spectrum's website (reprinted in this issue on page 69). Jason Hines is a frequent Spectrum columnist, and Michael Peabody runs the ReligiousLiberty.TV blog.*

There are two cases of interest before the Supreme Court. One comes from California and deals with Proposition 8, which rejected the constitutional right to same-sex marriage. The second comes from New York and challenges the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that requires the federal government to deny benefits to gay and lesbian couples married in states that allow such unions. Why should Adventists care about the Supreme Court's opinion on gay marriage?

Peabody: There are a number of preliminary issues, of course, that the Supreme Court will be deciding, and one of them is whether or not the Republican party in the House of Representatives has the ability to step in for the executive branch when the executive branch declines to defend the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that was signed in 1996 by President Clinton. A similar issue exists in California, where the governor of California is declining to defend Proposition 8, which amended the constitution to prohibit same-sex marriage. The question is whether or not a private organization that promoted Proposition 8 banning same-sex marriage can step in for the governor and defend Proposition 8 when the governor declines to do so. If the Supreme Court says that these parties do not have standing, then those two cases will likely disappear and go back down to the lower

courts and ultimately have to be handled legislatively by the states, with regard to Proposition 8, or Congress will need to address how it's going to handle the Defense of Marriage Act.

But there's another issue. When Proposition 8 was passed, it actually reversed a Supreme Court decision in California that legalized same-sex marriage, and found that it was constitutional. The proposition advocates actually changed the constitution to prohibit same-sex marriage. So, that decision ultimately went back to the California Supreme Court, once the voters had voted in Proposition 8. Ken Starr, who was advocating in favor of Proposition 8, said that when voters in California make a decision, the right of a people is inalienable to vote, to change the constitution through the amendment process. The people are sovereign, and they can do very unwise things that tug at the equality principle. Essentially what Starr was saying was that the people of California, the voters, have an inalienable right to take away, potentially, an inalienable right from others. So, when you're looking at Proposition 8, you can look at it in terms of the basic same-sex issue, but you can also look at it in terms of what it means to have rights removed by vote. Do the people of California have a right to take away the rights of their neighbors? Are our rights really rights, or are they something that can be eliminated through the tyranny of a majority? Looking at the way the polls are going, Proposition 8 probably wouldn't pass today. What does that mean?

Another issue is what basis the Supreme Court will use to make a determination on same-sex marriage. If the Supreme Court makes a determination that Proposition 8 meets the lowest rational basis standard, which simply means that there was some kind of reason for it, and therefore it stands, then the rights can be limited and be taken away, based on a very low standard. However, if

the Supreme Court applies a compelling state interest standard to Proposition 8, that would require them to meet a much higher standard of proof before taking away that type of a right—because it wasn't essentially a property right, it was a due process issue—then it could also stand for other rights; there would need to be a compelling state interest. That's what we've been arguing for in a number of religious liberty cases as well, saying that when individuals have a religious accommodation that needs to be met, the state needs to demonstrate a compelling state interest in order to take away those kinds of rights.

Carpenter: *I'm glad you're highlighting the question of majority/minority rights. I think that helps us frame this within the historic Adventist perspective—as minority Sabbatharians, how do we relate to these issues?*

Perla: Michael did a great job in summarizing the issues of these two cases. I'll focus on the other side of the equation, which is the legislative process by which rights are conferred. The establishment clause in the First Amendment is a way of legislating a right that people have in the United States. It's also a limitation, primarily a limitation on the government, to intervene in the establishment of a religion. That's an important concept to put our minds around—what that means to us as Adventists, and why that matters to us, and what happens with the way that the government continues to treat the family.

For a very long time, the government has been able to regulate family life in and of itself, because it's a family. But if we draw a comparison to the way that the government treats churches or religions, the government says, "We're not going to regulate churches as churches, or religions as religions; we're going to instead allow people to organize themselves in groups, in communities, that best fit their model of what is a right religious and church environment." The government will intervene to prevent harmful conduct within that context.

That's an important distinction that comes out of the First Amendment establishment clause and the free exercise clause. If we accept for a moment the analogy that I make in my article for *Spectrum* that families are like churches—they're essentially small churches—then we begin to wonder why we think that the government should be able to regulate families as families, instead of allowing people to organize themselves into the small groups that best fit



their sense of what the right model of organization is, what the right model of family and child raising is, and then allow the government to intervene to prevent harmful conduct within those organizations. I think that's an important issue that doesn't get discussed very often in the debate of same-sex marriage, because it's focused on what the reality is under the law.

There is no amendment in the Constitution that says Congress shall not write laws that interfere with the establishment of a family; there is no such disestablishment. But that doesn't mean that we can't conceive a world in which we could allow families to do that, in which we could trust ourselves and organize ourselves into social familial units that meet our sense of conscience and morality. That's another side of this. Cases dealing with the same-sex marriage issue actually open up the discussion for us to think about how we organize ourselves in a society, and to say, "Well, you know what, this is already happening." We would be blind if we didn't know that there are different models of the family already operating in society, whether they're recognized or acknowledged as legitimate family structures by the government, they exist.

**Why should
Adventists care
about the
Supreme
Court's opinion
on gay
marriage?**

—A. Carpenter

Examples include single-parent homes, or arrangements in which divorced parents share custody of the children, and these children end up having four parents, if you will, their biological parents and their stepparents if all four parents are still around. Some have no parents, and are raised by aunts and uncles, or by grandparents. We already have family structures in which same-sex couples are raising children. Now it's a matter of whether the government is going to say we're not going to recognize these family structures as worthy of getting a family license, or a marital license, granting them the same rights as other family structures have, which would basically amount to the establishment of the heterosexual marriage as the only familial structure that the government recognizes, or at least recognizes above all else. Or, do we use the opportunity to begin expanding the definition of what is considered a family, and what we are willing to allow people to do for themselves? That's the issue that I wanted to bring into the conversation, because I think that it has been missing in a lot of the debate within the church, as well as broader society.

Carpenter: *Jason, you've been writing on this online and you're working on a PhD in religious liberty. How interested are you in the Supreme Court cases, and why should Adventists care about it almost as much as you?*

Hines: Of course I'm very interested in it, and to add to what Michael and Juan have already said, I think there is a counterintuitive notion of the free exercise of religion that has to be addressed here, a reason why Adventists should be wary about the arguments that we make in the public square in relation to marriage. The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion. Along with the establishment clause, it creates what many scholars have called a tension around the idea of religion as a right. The counterintuitive notion is the idea that if churches—and much of the support of Proposition 8 was promulgated by churches, including members of the Adventist Church, and this is a religious liberty issue because of that connection—if churches are going to argue that the government should support their idea of what a marriage is, it opens the door to the government to now regulate churches in a way that would be unprecedented.

Once you allow a government to step in and legislate your particular definition, it leaves you with very little in

the way of protection when the government now wants to step in and define other religious issues. Let me tie that to something else. I am a firm believer that we have two types of marriage in America: civil marriage and religious marriage. The problem is that many churches don't agree with me about that. Their own ideology says that marriage is one thing, and they want the government to step in for what that one thing is. That's all well and good until the government wants to step in and define something else, in which you now have a definition that is different from the majority. For example, the Adventist Church does not greatly differ on how it defines marriage, but it has great difference about how it would define a term like the Sabbath. So, we have to be very, very careful when we say that we want the government to help us regulate our own particular doctrinal beliefs, because then we leave ourselves no standing when the government says, "Well, not only do we want to regulate *this* doctrinal belief, but we also want to regulate *that* doctrinal belief." I find it hard to believe that we would come to the argument and say, "Define this for us, but don't define that," or at least it's an argument that wouldn't make sense to anyone, anywhere. From my perspective, this is one of the reasons why Adventists need to pay particular importance to this decision; it helps us to expand our notion of free exercise, not restrict it.

Carpenter: *Let's have a little free-for-all. What questions do you have from each other's ideas?*

Peabody: I think Juan's idea about disestablishing marriage is very intriguing. The whole point of these cases is that the same-sex couples want to participate in marriage as it exists; they simply want it to be widened. There is a secular understanding that marriage does provide stability to society. Atheists get married just as much as religious people, and there are family courts to protect the interests of children in divorce or alimony systems, there are state-funded family counseling centers, there are domestic-abuse prevention programs, etc., designed to promote that stability in society. I don't think disestablishing marriage would achieve those goals. I'm not sure that's what same-sex marriage advocates would push for.

On the issue of the church, there's an interest also within the church that churches should be allowed to self-govern and to determine who they marry, and who they do

not, and what marriages they recognize within their walls and what marriages they don't recognize. So, there are a lot of free exercise and free speech considerations that also need to be brought forward to protect the rights of churches, in places where same-sex marriage has been approved, or if it happens nationwide.

Hines: I would probably prefer to hear Juan about this, but what I took from Juan's article in *Spectrum* is being somewhat missed by Michael's critique, which is a worthwhile critique. I think he's absolutely right about the idea that what most marriage advocates in the LGBT community are looking for is not necessarily a disestablishment of marriage or a disestablishment of the family. However, I didn't think that was what Juan was talking about, either. I thought really what he was saying was that disestablishing the idea of a heterosexual normative definition of family, meaning that the types of family that fit into the idea of husband, wife, two and a half kids and a dog—that type of family—is what we want to disestablish as the definition of a family, much in the same way that we have disestablished any particular religion. That means we don't work from a foundation that only finds as religious points that are based on the omnipotence of Christ. We give credit to all different types of religions.

I thought what Juan was saying was not to just disestablish or get rid of the notion of a family, but to say that a family that is protected by law and by the society is a family of whatever kind of definition we would say, or the people decide, is a family. So, if a family is two men in a gay relationship and their kids, that's a family. If a family is two people who are divorced, their new spouses, and their mixed kids, we'll combine all that into a family if they so desire. So, the idea of the disestablishment of family is not to get rid of the notion of what a family is, but rather to expand the notion of a family beyond what DOMA did. DOMA said that marriage is one man, one woman, and therefore all these familial protections under

signs of the times...



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DOMA are based on that particular foundation. So I guess the question to Juan is, which one of us is right?

Peabody: To clarify, what I was picturing when you said “disestablishment of family” is the concept that the government will not intervene in the church to make ecclesiastical decisions, whereas in the family, the government intervenes all the time in terms of division of property, in terms of divorce, and other such issues. Would the state stay out of those aspects of marriage, or would they remain involved?

Perla: Jason, I think you’ve definitely taken away the core of what I was trying to raise in the article, so you’re right. Michael, I think you understand the article as well, but you raise some interesting questions that come out of the idea of disestablishing the family.

Let’s look at how disestablishment worked in religion. When the framers of the Constitution decided to let churches be churches, and act as churches on their own, with minimal intervention in the internal affairs of the church from the government, it was a risky undertaking. What would happen? Would we have immoral people coming up with wild notions of what a religion was, and creating and inventing religious doctrines and dogmas that might be counterproductive for society? All those risks were there. But, somehow, when we leave it up to people to figure it out for themselves, for the most part people figure it out, and churches, a diversity of churches, have emerged. For the most part we’ve stood by the idea that we are trusting individuals to organize themselves, and to set rules for themselves, in a way that governs their religious life. The government still intervenes for these sorts of things. When there is abuse of children or other individuals within a religious community, the government intervenes to prevent the harm from continuing. It’s not that there is no longer a role for government, it’s just that the role is different. The regulatory or the legislative role of the government is not to decide what is and is not a family. However, there are situations in which the government can set an outer boundary for what it will recognize as a religious institution for purposes of treating it that way under the law, but it’s very open. That’s what we would look to as guidance in the disestablishment of the family; how it worked with religious disestablishment.

There’s no reason why the government couldn’t con-

tinue to intervene. This comes up in general debates about the slippery slope of moving away from defining marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman. “What if you want to marry your dog, what if you want to marry an older, fifty-year-old man with a thirteen-year-old girl, or the other way around?” Wild speculations come up, and the issue is that in those cases, there’s something else operating: the issue of consent. Do people consent to getting into those relationships, or is there a disparity in the status of the individuals that makes us question whether or not someone is freely entering into those relationships?

But we trust people—we trust people to organize themselves in communities, to raise children in those communities, and we give them the benefit of the doubt. We can deal with the family by looking at how we’ve dealt with religious disestablishment.

Peabody: Exactly. In societies as they exist now, all those relationships are in place, and they’re not illegal, as long as it’s a consenting relationship, so I don’t feel that this changes anything.

Perla: Absolutely. What it does, is change the extent that the government is deciding that the only structure worthy of being recognized under the law as a family is the structure that comes out of a heterosexual marriage. To the extent that the government is doing that, it is propping up that relationship, that model of a relationship, as *the* established model of a family.

Hines: This is something of the issue in the DOMA case, in *United States v. Windsor*, where you have this idea that a familial relationship would give you a certain outcome if it were heterosexual, but it is not, and therefore the government creates this difference by putting forth that definition. That issue is almost exactly the reason why I think Section 3 of DOMA is going to be deemed unconstitutional, because you have an existing relationship: a lesbian couple that is married in New York, according to the laws of New York. Of course the federal government doesn’t do marriage, but the couple is being treated differently as it pertains potentially to a tax issue because the government is not recognizing their marriage as a marriage, even though it is as much of a marriage as it can be, and is legal. This is an example of the government establishing some

kind of norm for what a family is, and the idea of the disestablishment of a family would take that type of distinction away.

Peabody: If DOMA is overturned, then the federal government won't have that definition anymore, and essentially what Juan is talking about would become the federal rule, wouldn't it?

Hines: I think that's right. Michael, you made a good point that if we remove the barriers, then we don't have to necessarily establish an affirmative disestablishment of the family, in the way that we have an affirmative disestablishment of religion, but I don't know that Juan was ever talking about doing it affirmatively. However, I think you can accomplish the same goals by removing the discrimination, just like you could by asserting the idea that we're disestablishing the family. But, I want to bring it back to the DOMA section of the gay marriage case, because I think it is an exact example of the type of thing that Juan is talking about. There's something the government has propped up that says, "This is what a marriage is," and if we're going to "disestablish the family"—that's a really provocative way to say it—what would happen if gay marriage were allowed? We'd have to respect a broader notion of what a family is.

Perla: Right. My argument is a bit provocative and needs to be to get people thinking about the issue in a different way. It doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing issue; it doesn't have to be only heterosexual couples that can get married, and therefore, other same-sex couples or other relationships feel left out, and it doesn't have to be also just heterosexual couples and same-sex couples. Because they're being recognized legally by the government, the risk for then asking churches or religious schools, "Why are you treating people differently? Why are you treating gay couples differently when they're both equally recognized by the law?" becomes a little bit trickier to explain away. Keeping in mind that we now have

interracial marriages, it seems a little more difficult to justify a church saying, "Well, we're not going to deal with this, just because we don't like it." Certainly, they still could.

But if we just say, "The government doesn't get to define what is a marriage, or what is a family; we as individuals can trust ourselves to define that for ourselves within a religious community, within our familial relationships." Then, the issue of freedom of conscience begins to operate more obviously in this situation than when we don't talk about disestablishing the family. We're still asking the government to play a role in endorsing one, or two, or whatever number of models of the family are involved. That's where the issue of freedom of conscience really gets triggered because we're saying we trust each other, and our conscience to do the right thing—in religion and in the family. Where we begin to push the boundaries into something harmful, then there is a role for the state to intervene.

DOMA is a perfect example of that. Consider this from a religious perspective to see exactly what the establishment clause is getting at. For example, if the federal government decides one day that only religions that recognize the Trinity as the truth will be recognized as a church under the federal government for tax-exempt purposes, but any church organized under state laws that doesn't believe in the Trinity won't receive the same treatment, that would be a violation of the establishment clause, because the government can't establish a definition of religion or church, and can't intervene in the state's ability to define that for themselves. The issue becomes if the states can define marriage one way or another. For example, in California, if people decide that they don't want marriage to mean more than one man and one woman, does the federal government now get to intervene by telling the state it can't do that? That's where other parts of the Constitution begin to operate, which is what is happening in the California case on Prop 8, issues such as equal protection, and substantive due process.

**Are our rights
really rights,
or are they
something that
can be elimi-
nated through
the tyranny of
a majority?**

—M. Peabody

Carpenter: *Michael, what key ideas should Adventists pay attention to in the overall arguments? Are there phrases or concepts that could really impact the future of religious liberty?*

Peabody: I think that any oral argument at the Supreme Court level is really just the judges trying to argue for their position in front of the other judges. They've all viewed the briefs, they've investigated these things, so what the judges say may be an indication of how they're going to rule, or it may not be. Key phrases include "rational basis test," "compelling interest," and "substantive due process," which you should watch for. These are the issues that will affect us directly, a lot more directly than the idea that same-sex marriage can be legalized. The surrounding issues on this case in terms of expansion or contraction of rights and whether voters can make these kinds of decisions are humongous, and that's really what we need to be paying attention to.

Hines: I absolutely agree. The question of legality for gay marriage is not as huge a question for the Adventist Church. In every place where they legalize gay marriage or gay civil unions, they've been very cognizant of the free exercise of religion, and making sure they protect the churches that will always have the right to, hopefully, make the decision for themselves about which marriages they will perform and admit and which marriages they won't. However, you are going to hear things about rational basis, levels of scrutiny, and things like that.

Perla: Right. Other language that the Supreme Court justices may be using to describe a suspect class may be something to listen to. That may be an indication of how they're thinking about what level of scrutiny and what level of review they should use when dealing with same-sex couples. That issue came up back in the California Supreme Court decision when San Francisco began issuing marriage licenses. The good thing about it is that the US Supreme Court actually has some jurisprudence, some case law that it can look to for guidance.

Also, from a general citizenship perspective, I think Adventists should care about these things. It's not just about what's happening in this case that impacts each of us directly, but, like the General Conference's church-state relations declaration states, what is it about these cases that "impinge on the legitimate rights of others"? As a duty, we've told ourselves in this declaration that we are going to

stand up for the legitimate rights of others, even if it represents a personal or corporate loss to the church, and to us as Christians. So, there's more to this than just "How is this going to affect my religious liberty?" It's also about how we put our freedom of conscience values on the line to make sure that other people's freedom of conscience is respected, even when it may represent a loss to us.

Carpenter: *Are all of you convinced that a pro-gay ruling would be a loss for Adventism, a neutral event, or a gain for our ideas of freedom of conscience?*

Peabody: It really depends on how the court writes its decision. It could be a gain for religious freedom, or it could be a loss for religious freedom, just depending on how it's worded.

Hines: I agree with Michael. If there is language in the opinion that gives the impression of the government's ability to intrude on religious groups, or on minority groups in general, then although this would be a great thing, in the midst of a decision that supports marriage equality, it's going to be a little troubling.

Perla: To add to that, our understanding of whether or not this opinion is a loss or a gain is subjective, and will be context specific. Whenever that decision comes down, we may think to ourselves as Seventh-day Adventists, "This is a loss, this is a gain." But this may not be the same way that two or three, or even one generation of Adventists later may consider that opinion. It may be that in a generation or two, Adventists will look at that opinion and say, "That was a gain," or the other way around. So, it's context specific for ourselves whether it's going to be a gain or a loss. But from my perspective, I figure that expanding freedom for my neighbor can only be a gain for me, and can only be an addition to the welfare and wellbeing of society. I think that we can feel very comfortable as Adventists to be part of a process that expands liberty and freedom of conscience to other people who we may not always feel like we can relate to because down the line, that may change. We can feel proud and excited to be in a country where liberties and freedoms are expanded, and not the other way around.

Carpenter: *With that idea that we may not even know what this means ten years from now, it's time to put your name to a prediction.*

We come out of a prophetic tradition here in Adventism, so here's your chance. What will happen in June 2013?

Peabody: Tough question. I like what A. T. Jones said: the question isn't who's right; the question is, what are the rights? My gut feeling is that the Supreme Court is probably going to refer the issue back to the states, on the grounds that the parties before it don't have standing. That will then allow the process to take place at the ballot and initiative level, and the Court won't make a determination that will affect same-sex marriage nationwide. But that's my gut feeling, and I could be wrong.

Hines: It's getting harder and harder for me to see how there isn't a double win on both these cases, for the reasons that I touched on earlier. I think it's going to be hard for the court to say that the federal government can distinguish the federal benefits that it gives to two different legally prescribed marriages—that's the DOMA case. And, I just find it hard to believe that a gay couple legally married in New York and a heterosexual couple legally married in New York have different marriage benefits from the federal government. I'm not sure how you get around that, based on the principles of equality that are scattered throughout the Constitution. In the same way in the Prop 8 case, it's difficult for them to say, at least for California, that Proposition 8 should be upheld to overturn the decisions of the lower courts there, because they fell into a procedural problem. The right has been extended, and then the voters took it away. At the lower court, the supporters of Prop 8 did what I think could only be described as a horrible job of trying to explain the reasons why you can take a right away, at least in this particular context.

I think the court is going to strike Section 3 of DOMA in *United States v. Windsor*, and then be, for lack of a better term, judicious, with the Proposition 8 decision. They will either restrict it to just California or the "eight-state solution," where it would only affect California and the other states that have given either gay marriage

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or civil unions to the gay community that lives in those states. I don't think that the court is going to do a broad sweep, and legalize gay marriage everywhere, although I will say that I would prefer that, but don't think that they will go that far. I think that they are going to be judicious and measured in the decision, as far as Proposition 8 goes.

Perla: I agree on DOMA and Section 3. It's very hard to defend that at this point, with states legislatively redefining marriage within their time and space. So, I think it's hard for the court not to turn around and look at that. The issue of standing is important, and the court has the opportunity here to punt this issue back to the legislatures at the state level, and could even punt back to Congress on the issue of DOMA. But I can't imagine the court doing that, at least not given the players that are on the court. I think that there are four justices on the court that everyone feels pretty good about ruling in favor of granting same-sex couples the same marital rights as heterosexual couples. That leaves a few swing votes, particularly Justice Kennedy, who was the author of the *Lawrence v. Texas* opinion that struck down antisodomy laws. Then, we see Chief Justice Roberts, who has shown that he cares about the legitimacy of the institution of the court and his own legacy, and trying to be on the right side of history on these big issues. So I think there is going to be some internal discussion about whether or not the court should hear the merits of these cases, and I think that they are going to go for it.

On Prop 8, I anticipate that they will either go for the eight-state solution that Jason just described, or make a general, sweeping fifty-state solution, in which they say, "You know, we can't continue to treat people this way, and the time has come and gone for when we could exclude people from civil institutions on the basis of a subjective classification." Look out for the issue of gender discrimination that is a part of this Prop 8 case. A lot of people don't talk about it, but I think it is important, and it may speak to some of the more conservative members of the court from a legal perspective, that it doesn't have to be about sexual orientation; you can decide the same-sex marriage issue also just based on gender. If that argument appeals to one of the members of the court, you might see that push the court over into a fifty-state solution. I think Justice Thomas is a wild card; we shouldn't put him solidly in the anti-gay marriage category, given his own marital experience of being in an interracial marriage, and having been nineteen

years old when *Loving v. Virginia* came down, which struck down antiscegenation laws. His dissent in the Lawrence case shows that he seems to think it's silly for the states to be preoccupied with treating homosexual couples in a particular way. Whether or not he's willing to use his authority and power as a member of the court to advance the cause of freedom for this particular group of people is still open to debate, but we should watch for that. There's a chance he might be a supporter in the end.

Carpenter: *Thank you for your discussion.* ■

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Running in God's House

By Laine S. Cronk

Today I went running in God's House
down the aisles and around the pews
zigzagging in the stained-glass sunlight
and the silent dust floating reverently
above the altar

My mother was not there
to interrupt my laps, my perspiration,
with Holy Fear of a spanking
my friends were not there to copy me
in my sin
and the angels—

I don't know. Do they have any reason
to stay in God's House when no one's there?
Does God himself sleep on an upholstered pew
or play with the lights?

Perhaps he appreciates runners
as long as it's not between 9 and 2
on the day of worship—because on that day, he
and the angels
need the aisles to run their own laps
around us as we pray and sleep
on those upholstered pews

Laine S. Cronk lives in Northern California, where she



finds creativity spurred both by the lovely
landscapes and by the endless imaginations
of the children she works with at an after-
school program.

