

# adventist today

VOLUME NINE | NUMBER TWO | MARCH/APRIL | 2001

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Churches

## Ethnic churches in north america

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Terry 5000 509  
JEHLER Curt 289 M  
Gary 1407 Brook Lin  
Gary & Juanita 14  
Ted 1018 Whitman  
JENIG Paul & Carr  
William E Rt 3 Box  
JENIOSFELD 5 413

Netherlands  
Antilles 599  
Bonaire 7  
Curaçao 9  
Saba 46  
St. Maarten 5  
New Zealand 64  
Auckland  
Wellington  
Nicaragua 105  
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# NOTES from the editor

## Changing Churches

■ JOHN MCLARTY

When I arrived in New York as a Bible worker at the New York Center immediately following seminary, I attended a church on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Sermons were in German, and translation was offered in the back two or three rows for the few of us who did not speak German. Of course, everyone in the church spoke English. Nearly all of them had been speaking English longer than I had been alive. But there was no doubt about the congregation's identity. This was the German New York Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Five years later I was called to develop an English congregation in this church.

It was not easy for these old Germans to cede their church to a young, non-German congregation, but they did so with amazing grace. The language and hours of worship changed. We remodeled the basement and the sanctuary, bought a new organ, voted in non-German elders, deacons, Sabbath School superintendent, treasurer. Probably the most momentous change was our name. When people were looking in the Yellow Pages for a church, they were unlikely to be drawn to The German New York Seventh-day Adventist Church. But how do you persuade people who have forty to eighty years of personal investment in a particular church identity to buy a new identity?

The old Germans deserved enormous respect. After all, they had invited us into their church home and provided the financial and human resources to operate the church during the years of transition from German to English. But we had to have a new name.

I found my answer carved in stone on the front of the church: Haus der Advent Hoffnung. House of the Advent Hope. Since we were in a neighborhood full of Catholic, Episcopal and Orthodox churches we voted for a new name that fit our neighborhood and connected with our German heritage: Church of the Advent Hope. It worked, and we developed an English-speaking, young

adult church.

Ethnic transitions. They are hardly ever easy. It is never a simple matter to distinguish between the essentials of faith and accretions from culture. But as difficult as it is to change the ethnic identity of a congregation, there is another ethnic divide that is perhaps even more complex and emotionally charged, and that is the divide between generations of recent immigrants.

What happens when parents from the old country confront the Americanization of their children? To what extent should the church be committed to preserving the values, traditions and mores of the old country among children who are, in every respect except their family of origin, ordinary Americans? How can the "old ones" be expected to make fine distinctions between what is cultural and what is universal when their own identity is under constant assault from the alien and domineering culture of America? If the church does not support the family values of these parents, why would the parents support the church?

On the other hand, how can young people who have grown up in this country be expected to maintain their loyalty to a church which makes no meaningful distinction between its cultural identity and its core identity as a Seventh-day Adventist church? These kids attend American schools, speak the American language, wear American clothes, absorb American attitudes. If the church of their parents represents an alien culture, a fading culture, then how can we expect the children to embrace it?

These are not easy questions. But they deserve our attention. As America continues to diversify, these are questions that we as Adventists will confront with increasing frequency.

The old Germans at Advent Hope handled the transition with amazing equanimity but only after all of their children and grandchildren had gone elsewhere. I hope that the newer ethnic churches (and the graying Anglo churches) will not wait that long. ♦







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**adventist today** reports on contemporary issues of importance to Adventist church members. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for writer's guidelines. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2years) for individuals \$18 for students \$40 for institutions (Payment by check or credit card. Add \$10 for address outside North America.) Voice | (800) 236-3641 or (909) 785-1295 Fax | (909) 785-1595 E-mail | [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com) Web site | [www.atoday.com](http://www.atoday.com)

**adventist today** (ISSN 1079-5499) is published bimonthly for \$29.50 per year (\$18 for students, \$40 for institutions) by Adventist Today Foundation, Calkins Hall 225 La Sierra University, Riverside, CA 92515. Periodical postage paid at Riverside, California and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adventist Today, Box 8026 Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Copyright © 2001 by **adventist today** Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.



## Homosexual Change

I was very pleased to read the articles in AT on Homosexual Change Programs: What really happens? And That Kind Can Never Change! Can They? in the January, February 2001 issue. I appreciated the kindness with which Calvin Thomsen closed his article.

I have a close friend who is homosexual and has been anointed and prayed for, but without change. He is celibate, but the Adventist church does not use his musical talents. Some members ask, "If he is not practicing why does he call himself homosexual?"

We are not frightened by a heterosexual single person, but bring in a single, celibate homosexual person and somehow our fears and prejudices overtake all our Christian principles to be accepting, kind and loving. Some are afraid that the homosexuality will "rub off on the children." My friend has brothers and sisters with children who dearly love their uncle. There are no fears of molestation or that his sexuality will rub off on them. But outside of his family and friends, and within the church, he meets fears and prejudice.

I also know a man like Carol Swinyar wrote about. He lived a heterosexual life, then changed to a homosexual life style, and now again is heterosexual. This does not mean that others can do the same. A very small percentage of homosexuals become lasting heterosexuals. Many Christians say "nothing is impossible with God," that might be so, but many times He chooses not to work the miracle. Paul prayed for his infirmity to be taken away and God said "no." I long for the day when there will be more love and acceptance shown to those who are different, among us.

**Ellsworth Wellman | Yakima, WA**

## Change Ministry

I deeply regret your editorial decision to present Calvin Thomsen's article as a "feature" story in Adventist

Today [Jan-Feb 2001]. Thomsen's article might have been better presented as a "personal opinion" story — he is simply proffering personal opinions.

Furthermore, I believe that your decision to offer this story as a "feature" without caveats or warnings is irresponsible. Your editorial decision to offer options pre-

sented in this story as viable alternatives for standard health care and practice will endanger lives. Your editorial decision also places you outside of the accreditation and ethical standards

hopefully embodied by Seventh-day Adventist institutions which train physicians, therapists, social workers, counselors, and other helping professionals.

As you know, there have been fewer than five studies of so-called "reparative therapy" (a term I find very offensive) that have allowed for independent professional peer review.... Because the specific Adventist history on this issue is so compelling with respect to the many Adventists abused by the church-supported programs of Colin Cook, this deletion by Calvin Thomsen — and you — devalues the experiences of many. Furthermore, because you are a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and are aware of this history, I find your silence complicit....

Calvin Thomsen certainly has a right to offer a personal opinion, but his paper suggests a legitimacy to the issue that doesn't exist and a shockingly uncritical review of the "research." I would ask both of you to acquaint yourselves with the standards of care for gays and lesbians accepted by the helping professions. I also believe that when a personal opinion is issued beyond normative ethical standards of care, your readers deserve a fuller disclosure.

Certainly, there are isolated case reports of changes in sexual behavior. Human sexuality is not an isolated

component of personal identity and there are many complicating issues. However, I would be very careful in extrapolating a handful of case reports. In the largest research study to date (a study allowing independent peer review by Shidlo and Schroeder), researchers are following 150 "reparative therapy" participants. This

**Your editorial decision to offer options presented in this story as viable alternatives for standard health care and practice will endanger lives.**

program will follow these participants for 10 years. After several years of follow-up, a preliminary report has been issued. 5 of the 150 have altered sexual behaviors, 0 of the 150 have altered sexual orientation.

For the sake of preventing further harm and cruelty, I feel ethically bound to share this information. I hope you share my concerns. In the meantime, may we continue to remember that the centerpiece of our lives is not sexual orientation, but rather, the support of full human dignity in a walk with Jesus. May we never jeopardize this journey for anyone — gay or straight.

**Ben Kemena, MD | Denver, Colorado**

## Charismatics

I appreciate Dr. Ford's objective discussion and evaluation of the charismatic movement [AT Nov-Dec 2000]. I would agree with much of what he says. I have personally been blessed by certain aspects of the charismatics, e.g., the emphasis on praise and worship. About 20 years ago I received the experience of praying in unknown tongues in the quietness of my own private worship time and it has meant to me a way of praising God when words simply fail. This experience opened up new doors of knowing God for me, and several of



my friends noticed a difference in me after I received this blessing from God. I think that the contemporary praise and worship music that is solidly based on scripture has been one of the greatest of all gifts that the charismatic/pentecostal movement has given to the Christian movement. Practically all denominations, including the SDAs, benefit by this new spirit of worshipping God with more freedom and joy. I agree with Dr. Ford that there are indeed excesses in the charismatic movement but that it has made some permanent contributions to the body of Christ that have influenced the lives of untold millions for good.

**Thomas E. Durst | Via the Internet**

## Denominationalism

I appreciated the tone of [McLarty's] article ["Why Bother With the Denomination?" AT May-June 2000] and it was well written. I can sense a need to connect the gospel of Jesus Christ with the moral code of heaven and give our people more of the reasons for being a Seventh-day Adventist. . . This article should be sent to all pastors.

**Frank Hill | Via the Internet**

## Conservatives, Liberals and Plagiarism

Thank you, sir, for such an important article. While I am still not in understanding of the philosophical balance trying to be achieved, I do appreciate what the academic problem represents. Also, I understand the pressures placed upon a conservative in a liberal environment.

Apparently, our teacher in this case has been fired for his policy on plagiarism. His policy is nothing new to academia, and it is like that which many other institutions follow. Plagiarism can destroy credibility in one's work, and students need to know that their actions have consequences. In the working world, plagiarism is frowned upon even more.

Our schools must protect their intel-

lectual integrity if they wish seriously to be taken by the rest of the academic world. Why, Adventist administrators ask, are we not ranked highly? It is because intellectual honesty is lacking in such areas. Also, I understand the pressure of the conservative in the liberal world. He must contend against many who would call him ignorant or be threatened by his forthrightness and logic which counters theirs. Tolerance is extended to all, but not to the conservative, because he is, by their definition, intolerant.

A university which stifles dissent and does nothing to stem the tide of plagiarism in a serious way will not succeed. It will have turmoil. The result which WWC sees should be expected by them.

**Gerhard Lieberschidt | Via the Internet**

## Turmoil at Walla Walla

I believe that the sensationalistic language of the article hurts the credibility of *Adventist Today's* reporting and significantly tilts the bias of the article toward Jensen. An example:

"[the history department] unleash a torrent of extra-curricular accusations against Jensen with all the fury of a human scorned..." The rich use of loaded words here and analysis mixed with factual reporting tends to skew the report. The rest of the article is rich with other examples, but it's late and I don't feel like posting them all.

Most people will see this as a "news" article because of its general tone and might not make the distinction between the author's own opinions on the issue and the objective facts he is reporting. If you think I'm full of bunk, tell me so, but it seems to me that this article really should have spent a bit more time in the editing phase.

**Ted Swinyar | Via the Internet**

## WWC NOT at "War"

I am truly saddened by the article regarding Walla Walla College. I feel that the author slanted the information—definitely. I have made several phone calls to the college and truly, there maybe some unhappy people, as is always the occasion. But "Turf Wars and Turmoil" Far from the truth! I just returned from an Alumni meeting with representatives of the Administration and Alumni and there is no War and Turmoil! Sensational journalism—that is what the author of this article was looking to create.

I feel that Adventists Today to maintain its reputation of honesty and fairness to its readers should disclose the fact that the author of the article, Dennis Hokama, is also a friend of the professor in question's wife, and that they both attended the same Japanese church in Los Angeles. That tells me a lot about how the article could have started and was slanted in favor of the professor.

The College is within their legal rights to not retain faculty any time during the first three years—for whatever reason. The college

**A university which stifles dissent and does nothing to stem the tide of plagiarism in a serious way will not succeed.**

administration decision is not cause for "War" as you have portrayed the situation. SAD SAD journalism.

**Dorothy Patchett  
Former Walla Walla College Board  
Member for 14 years.  
Via the Internet**

### Send Letters to the Editor:

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# Shootings in Adventist Institutions

◆ JAMES STIRLING

**O**n February 26 of this year a gunman strode through the doors of the Seventh-day Adventist Clinic in Tamuning, Guam, looked up his estranged wife, shot her and another nurse who happened to be nearby, then sought out the business manager and shot him. The assailant was a former worker at the clinic who had been laid off as part of a downsizing effort. He had also been treated at a mental health unit of the clinic, then released shortly before his rampage. He was stopped only because one of his intended victims grappled with him over the gun while a SWAT team from the local police department entered the building. They dispatched him with bullets, fatally wounding him. The clinic remained closed for a week while its 200 employees tried to cope with the tragedy.

Only a week or so later, on March 8, another Adventist institution on the other side of the planet, an office of the Adventist Development and Relief Administration (ADRA) in Southern Sudan, was similarly invaded, this time by rebel soldiers bent on a political mission. They shot two of the workers and took four others hostage.

Institutional shootings have become almost commonplace. We are no longer surprised when postal workers go berserk with guns or schoolchildren in public schools target classmates. While there is very small likelihood that any given institution will be subjected to such frightening treatment, that it should happen at all makes everyone uneasy. Where will it happen next?

In the Sudan incident, political instability has been a fact of life for years. People there have watched the warring factions of Moslems and nonMoslems and of farmers and pastoralists and urbanites, and remembered the long history of intertribal animosities. Foreign countries have intervened on one side or the other with supplies of ammunition, and attempts

of relief agencies to supply food to starving villagers have often been thwarted by rival military groups which commandeered the food shipments to sell for arms. People work there in a high-risk atmosphere. ADRA workers there are supposed to be shielded from political strife, because of their humanitarian and nonpolitical stance, but they still recognize the possibility of danger.

But Guam is a United States protectorate and presumably low-risk. The clinic attack was motivated by purely personal feelings. Discontent, rage, grief at the loss of his wife to divorce, all played a part in the gunman's urge to kill.

How should Christian organizations respond to dangers like these? World Vision, an international relief and development organization, has prepared a World Vision Security Manual to guide its workers in dealing with security risks. They point out that "ensuring the absolute security of all World Vision staff is simply not possible. Ultimately, in faith, we must depend on God to sustain and protect us." They recognize that in the present era, "conflicts are seldom fought between professional armies, but rather between terrorists, criminal gangs, ethnic cleansers, and gun-toting drunken teenagers." The attacks are increasingly from within the communities the aid organizations have come to serve.

The first of some 15 "security policies" adopted by the World Vision to reduce the vulnerability of its field staff is the creating of what they call a "positive security profile." This means that the aid organization should try to anticipate the attitude and response of the local community and the government to its mission, policies, and principles, then, depending on the circumstances, either keep a quiet, low-key profile or take steps to communicate the chosen profile to the

community and the government.

Other policies proposed in the manual include tips on safety when traveling, safety measures in residences and offices, and suggestions on what to do in emergencies. They place much emphasis on developing situational awareness, and knowing

**Institutional shootings have become almost commonplace. We are no longer surprised when postal workers go berserk with guns or schoolchildren in public schools target classmates.**

the history and culture of the region, including customs and religious dynamics and traditions.

So how could security measures like those proposed in the booklet have helped the ADRA workers and the clinic employees? In the Sudanese case, the fact that official government troops seized the facility and abducted the workers indicated that somehow ADRA's stance as a humanitarian agency was misinterpreted by the army commanders who sent their men with guns to storm the compound. Two of the ADRA workers have been released, following an official request from the president of an adjacent state, Kenya, and other high-level negotiations are going on for the remaining two. For the clinic at Guam, it would seem reasonable now for the administration to institute security measures like those used by schools and banks in this country, with requests for identification for visitors and "hot-button" panic alarms at strategic places.

We hope they won't really need such measures. But while our missionaries are willing to take risks for the Lord's work, it seems reasonable that we should limit those risks as far as we can, then trust him for continued help. ◆



# The Westminster Good Samaritan Seventh-day Adventist Church

◆ JOHN A. RAMIREZ, JR., WITH PASTOR IRA LAKE

**T**he Westminster Good Samaritan Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in Orange County, California, is often pointed to as one of the best multicultural churches in the Adventist fold. Pastor Ira Lake leads a pastoral staff of six, who together mirror the diversity of its members. The following is the summary of an interview I held with Pastor Lake:

**AT:** How did this church become multiethnic?

**Lake:** Our church formed as a result of a merger in 1994 between the Westminster Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Good Samaritan Church. Today we have a unique church, different from all others across North America and the entire world. This multicultural church is home to first- and second-generation American, Japanese, Vietnamese and Spanish congregations and a host of other races and nationalities.

**AT:** How has the attendance at your church been affected by this ministry?

**Lake:** First I would like to say that our attendance has not fallen off, and by that I mean, white flight. We attract quite a number of visitors from week to week. Some come through natural curiosity, while others come because of being invited. Through it all, there is a sense of family and acceptance which brings people from all walks of life to fellowship with us.

**AT:** A large segment of your congregation is made up of young families, many of which are mixed marriages. Is this intentional?

**Lake:** True, we do have a lot of families and young couples, including mixed marriages. But this is due in part to the openness and acceptance that is a big part of our church's spiritual makeup. God has called all believers in him to genuinely love and respect

people, regardless of race and ethnicity. And when people know that they can be free to be who they are, and that they will not be judged or looked down upon for who they are with, they will feel an atmosphere where young and old alike will thrive.

**AT:** There are various ethnic groups worshipping on your grounds at the same time as your main service. How does this reflect on your goal for cultural integration?

**Lake:** The various ethnic groups worship at the same time because we believe that each group should do everything it can to preserve its heritage. Most of those who worship outside of the main service do so because of language preferences. The main worship service is comprised of second- and third-generation Adventist immigrants and visitors, while those who attend the other ethnic worship services are mostly first-generation immigrants. What we have decided to do to promote oneness and unity is to periodically schedule joint worship services, as well as participate together in all quarterly communions. Also, all baptisms are done within the context of the main worship service. This we believe helps to promote togetherness and not the you-versus-me mentality.

**AT:** Where does your church board stand in relation to the current rumors of a black conference within the Southern California Conference?

**Lake:** We have not taken up this issue as a church so far. But we are determined to continue down the path that will allow us to remain united and continue in this multicultural ministry.

**AT:** Would you class your congrega-

tion as being mostly fundamentalist, liberal, liberationist, or apathetic to such concerns?

**Lake:** We are a mixture of traditional Adventism and contemporary Adventism. And within our worship service you will find the harmonious blending of various views and styles. We do

**We are a cultural collage of many races, with a neighborhood warmth and touch. We have found how to coexist, to work and worship together, in peace and love.**

wrestle with the issues of traditional Adventism and liberalism amongst ourselves, and yet in spite of these potential walls of separation, we are proud of the fact that we are learning how to work out our differences. We do love and generally respect each other.

**AT:** What has been your most persistent problem?

**Lake:** The persistent problem we face is the potential for divisiveness. We continually try to foster a spirit of oneness, togetherness and understanding amid the diversity of our many cultures. We have language barriers, music preferences and home-of-origin differences.

**AT:** What are you doing to deal with this problem?

**Lake:** The key in our thinking for achieving unity and understanding within our church family is ongoing communication on every level within the organizational structure of our church. We try to spend as much time

**Continued on page 10**



# Adventist Women Clergy Convene In California

◆ KITT WATTS

**m**ore than 120 Adventist women in ministry met for a three-day retreat sponsored by the North American Division, April 1-4, at Pine Springs Ranch in the Southeastern California Conference. Duane Schoonard, an associate pastor at the Collegedale Adventist Church in Tennessee and an associate director of the NAD Ministerial Association, organized the event with the assistance of Debra Brill, NAD vice president for ministries.

The retreat attracted women pastors, chaplains, evangelists, religion teachers, Bible workers, conference departmental leaders, and students from every union in North America. In addition, ten women pastors and theology students flew in from Australia to attend. The GC Ministerial Association also sponsored one theology student from each college in North America.

"This is the first comprehensive

gathering of Adventist women in ministry in ten years," said Kit Watts, director of the La Sierra University Women's Resource Center. NAD President Charles Bradford convened a group of about 35 in the late 1980's in Takoma Park, Maryland. In 1991, a group of women clergy organized their own retreat at Glacier View Camp in Colorado. Later, Elizabeth Sterndale, director of Women's Ministries for the North American Division, brought together a group of women pastors in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Guest speakers for the Pine Springs Ranch retreat included Dr. Madelynn Haldeman, retired associate professor of New Testament Studies at La Sierra University; Elizabeth E. Platt, professor of Old Testament at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Iowa; and Wanda Davis, director of pastoral care for Florida

Hospital in East Orlando.

Seminar presenters included Hyveth Williams, senior pastor of the Campus Hill Church, on leadership

**The retreat attracted women pastors, chaplains, evangelists, religion teachers, Bible workers, conference departmental leaders, and students from every union in North America.**

styles; L. Jean Sheldon, assistant professor of religion at Pacific Union College; and Heidi Ford, associate editor of "Women of Spirit" Magazine.

Other highlights of the retreat included high quality worship events with music, skits, and readings, and three hours of free time each day during which the women could get acquainted, hike and rest. ◆

## The Westminster Good Samaritan

**Continued from page 9**

as possible worshipping and fellowshiping together. We try to involve everyone in the decision-making levels of our church, and that is another key component to fostering unity and inclusion.

**AT:** What would be your words to an individual who might be curious about attending your church?

**Lake:** When you visit this unique congregation you will get a foretaste of things to come in the Adventist church. We are a cultural collage of many races, with a neighborhood warmth and touch. We have found how to coexist, to work and worship together, in peace and love. We invite you to come and

share in our joy.

**AT:** What tips can you pass on to other ministers and leaders in dealing with ethnic tensions?

**Lake:** None of this is ever possible without divine intervention. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 that we may be one is definitely being fulfilled within our church family. The Holy Spirit becomes the active agent in this

process of fostering unity and togetherness, and yet we have a part to play as well. Only by willingly submitting ourselves to Christ and to the influence of the Spirit can we make our differences become inconsequential. ◆

*For more information on the Westminster Good Samaritan Adventist Church visit their web site at <http://www.westminstergoodsam.org>.*

### [ L E C T U R E ]

#### Second Richard Hammill Memorial Lecture: Dr. Ronald Numbers

Dr. Ronald Numbers, University of Wisconsin, Madison, will deliver the second Richard Hammill Memorial Lecture. The title of his lecture will be "The Quest for the Historical Ellen G. White."

Date: Sabbath, May 26 Time: 3:00 p.m.

Place: Campus Chapel @ LLU University Church, Loma Linda, California.

This lecture will be jointly sponsored by the Adventist Today Foundation and the Association of Adventist Forums. For additional information, please contact Erv Taylor via email: [editor@atoday.com](mailto:editor@atoday.com) or [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com)



# The Trumpet of Jubilee

◆ MARYAN STIRLING

How could Daniel not have known why he was in Babylon? How could he not know how long the Hebrews were to be captive? He spent all his adult life in Babylon—a captive, a eunuch—and never knew why. Until he found a scroll with Jeremiah's prophecy on it. Then he knew the time of exile was nearly over. "Seventy years," Jeremiah said, they were to be far from home.

And the reason they were in Babylon was that the land had never been given its Sabbatical rest. The law asked the people to rest on the seventh day of every week, and they did. Why wouldn't they? Everybody likes a day off. But the jubilee system said that the land should rest every seventh year. The actual dirt should have a rest. A whole year was to be a Sabbath. It was holy. They couldn't plant their crops or prune their vines or fill their barns with hay. It was a time to read books and think long thoughts and spend quality time together.

They heard the plan. They knew it was the Lord's voice on Mt. Sinai that told Moses to tell all "the people of Israel" to observe a whole year of Sabbath rest.

But they didn't know what to make of it. It was so impractical. It would be a waste of time and money.

Still the Lord was serious. It was the way they were expected to live in the land that flowed with milk and honey. The seventh-day Sabbath was only "Part A" of the system of sevens.

It wasn't all the Lord had in mind. After seven seven-year cycles (forty-nine years) came the "Year of Jubilee," the fiftieth year. Slaves would be set free, debts forgiven, land that had been sold returned to its original owners.

God said they should "hallow" the fiftieth year. "It is a jubilee, it shall be holy to you." The crops that grew

voluntarily in the seventh year and the fiftieth year would be for the poor people. The debts of the poor were to be freely forgiven.

The "Trumpet of Jubilee" was to sound on the Day of Atonement (tenth day, seventh month) in the year of Jubilee. That was the moment of release and restoration, a celebration of love and tender regard. A generous spirit would be nurtured. The nation of Israel could have been a portrayal for all the world of what the loving Creator is like.

It seems like a world-class tragedy that they never did it. What might have been their state of health if the food they ate came from land that had lain fallow every seventh year?

And what might have been their grace, if once in every lifetime, the trumpet of jubilee had proclaimed liberty to the captives, the canceling of debts large and small? On the Day of Atonement, the very day their sins and debts were forgiven, they'd forgive their debtors. Living out the Lord's Prayer! It would be second nature for them to traffic in grace.

The second advent could be anticipated as part of the Sabbath system-of-sevens:

Six working days and then a Sabbath Day. Six years and then the sabbatical year (seven years). Seven cycles of seven years (forty-nine years) and the Year of Jubilee (seven weeks of years). Six millennia of chaos here and then the second coming.

"Then commenced the Jubilee," Ellen White wrote of the eschaton, "when the land should rest." (*Early Writings*, page 35.).

The seven-year cycle was so important to the whole story of life on earth, that when the Hebrews ignored it, they had to spend seventy years in exile and captivity in Babylon. That enforced rest made up for the seventy cycles that had been neglected. It was that important to

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the Creator. He couldn't just let it go.

The captivity is clearly predicted by the voice of God on Mt. Sinai.

"Then the land will be laid waste and your cities will be in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it." Leviticus 26:34, 35. And the sad story is told as history in 2 Chronicles 36:21. "The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah."

The whole story is complicated by a variety of calendars and a variety of charts to be studied. There seems to be no possible way to predict the date of the coming advent.

That's not what jubilee is about. But it does suggest that we're in the time when the coming of the Lord is near. Good news! Somebody bring out the ram's horn and get ready to sound the "Trumpet of Jubilee!" ◆



# why have ethnic churches?

S H O U L D N ' T   W E   A L L   B E   O N E   I N   C H R I S T ?

◆ DENNIS HOKAMA

**W**hat exactly are “ethnic” churches, and why should they exist? Shouldn’t we all be one in Christ? Political correctness forbids admitting it, but for many, ethnic churches are probably perceived as a parochial analogue to government affirmative action programs for the disadvantaged, tinged with a bit of racism. This patronizing, guilt-ridden attitude is held by many within the ethnic churches themselves. I know this, because as a lifetime member of Japanese churches, I have repeatedly heard this sentiment expressed and even argued by influential church members and pastors within the Japanese churches. If insiders think of themselves that way, then it seems likely that such sentiments must be more prevalent outside the ethnic church.

Although “ethnicity” includes a cultural component in its meaning that the word “race” does not, the two terms are so highly correlated that most definitions of ethnicity inevitably use the word “race” as nearly synonymous. Merriam-Webster defines “ethnic” as: “of or relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background.”

But let’s be honest. When you go to an “ethnic” church, you will know it even before the first word is spoken, or you see what they serve at potluck, because most people attending will be of a racial stock that is non Caucasian. These different ethnic peoples will of course have different-sounding names, customs, languages, and life experiences that further serve to differentiate them from typical members of the Caucasian churches.

In a literal sense, all churches are ethnic churches because there can be no such thing as a church that

does not use the framework of a particular culture as its intellectual foundation. But to use it in that way would trivialize the term “ethnic church” to the point where it means absolutely nothing and might as well be expunged from our vocabulary.

The term “ethnic church” can have meaning only if we restrict its use to a relativistic one. We commonly use it to refer to a church that specializes in serving those of an ethnic or cultural background different from the dominant culture of that particular religion. But the dominant culture and language of a religion can change over time. A language that might be dominant in one generation might theoretically become “ethnic” after the “revolution.” This means that the term “ethnic church” is dynamic rather than static; relative rather than absolute.

## The First Ethnic Church

When seen in this light, the phenomenon of the ethnic church is not a peripheral issue of Christianity, but goes to the very heart and soul of what Christianity is all about. For the Christianity of today is not a descendant of the dominant mother church in Jerusalem headed by James the Just and the apostles of Jesus. Quite surprisingly, it must trace its spiritual-theological ancestry instead, to the ethnic church started by Paul, the apostle to ethnic peoples, also known as Gentiles.

The raging issue in the first century, as recorded in the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles, concerns the legitimacy and nature of ethnic churches. The dominant cultural milieu within which Christianity was born was Judaism. All of the original apostles were thoroughly Jewish in their culture, and they found it impossible to separate their Jewishness from their belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

An analysis of the book of Acts reveals that the



mother church in Jerusalem had merely tacked a belief in Jesus onto Judaism. As Acts 21 shows, they continued to worship in the temple as before and expected good "Christians" to continue making all the traditional Jewish animal sacrifices.

It was Paul, the Outsider Apostle (because unlike the others, he had never known the historical Jesus), who first tried to differentiate the essence of the gospel from the swaddling clothes in which it was wrapped. He made the isolation of gospel from culture his life mission. That is the inner logic of ethnic churches:

"When I am with the Jews, I seem as one of them so that they will listen to the gospel and can win them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles, who follow Jewish customs and ceremonies, I don't argue, even though I don't agree, because I want to help them. When with the heathen I agree with them as much as I can, except of course that I must do what is right as a Christian. And so by agreeing, I can win their confidence and help them too.

When I am with those whose consciences bother them easily, I don't act as though I know it all and don't say they are foolish; the result is that they are willing to let me help them. Yes, whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Jesus and let Christ save him. I do this to get the gospel to them and also for the blessing I myself receive when I see them come to Christ." (I Cor. 9:20,21).

But not everybody can be comfortable as a cultural chameleon. The apostles at headquarters and the mainstream conservatives were troubled with Paul's

## The Ethnic Solution

The answer, it turns out, was none of the above. They settled upon an apparent double standard for Jewish and Gentile Christians that ultimately satisfied no one (certainly not Adventists). The Jewish Christians were to go on keeping the law of Moses as before, but the ethnic converts were exempted from all Jewish requirements except for food offered to idols, meat of strangled animals, and fornication. And so a great gulf was fixed between the mother church in Jerusalem, and the ethnic churches. There was no unity even in practice. This double standard, it seems to me, can be most parsimoniously reconciled on the basis of cultural relativity from God's point of view, assuming that James the Just was not misguided.

The two cultures may have been relative, but not necessarily equal. Paul, writing toward the end of his career, proclaimed: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16).

The Greeks were the ethnic people of Paul's day from the Jewish perspective. Today when preachers quote this text in their sermons, they have a tendency to mumble the last two phrases of it because it betrays our humble spiritual ancestry: The mighty modern Christian church sprang from just an "also"; Ishmael rather than Isaac.

The dominance of the Jerusalem church and Jewish culture was forever eclipsed after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Paul's orphaned and beleaguered

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relativistic attitude toward that which many saw as absolute. The first General Conference, the so-called Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15, was convened specifically to address the problem of ethnic churches. Were they legitimate in God's eyes? If so, where should one draw the line between being Jewish and just being Christian without being Jewish?

The Council accepted the legitimacy of ethnic conversions in God's eyes because of testimony that the ethnic converts had experienced the same outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Jews had experienced, despite the fact that they were not keeping Jewish ceremonies. What did this imply in terms of God's will? Did the Gentiles now have to start keeping Jewish ceremonies, or did it mean that Jewish Christians could stop troubling themselves with Jewish ceremonies?

ethnic churches grew up to become the dominant model for modern Christianity, rather than the church of the Apostles in Jerusalem. The last had become first and the first had become last.

The disappearance of the Jerusalem church has allowed the Gentile church to represent their practice as universal and monolithic, but the record of Acts 15 and 21 shows that this is simply another case of the winners writing history. So even as Conference officials speak, sometimes patronizingly, about the "problem of the ethnic church," the world church, and the Christian world itself, stand on the shoulders of Christianity's first ethnic churches.

The process that brought about that great transformation has not stopped. Paul did not and could not eradicate cultural barriers to salvation for all peoples for all time (and some would argue that he was blind

**Continued on page 12**





# why have ethnic churches?

Continued from page 11

to some in his day). Culture is dynamic and continuously evolving. Believers of every time and place must relate to the gospel from their own cultural perspective in order to make it their own.

Missionaries find it hard if not impossible to separate the essentials of salvation from their own unique environment or culture. This inevitably results in the direct or indirect preaching and teaching of their own culture along with the gospel. This mixing of culture with gospel results in the creation of additional barriers to salvation for those of a different culture than the missionary, at the same time that it lowers the barriers to salvation for others of the same (or similar) culture.

So what is the solution? Stripping salvation of all its cultural adornments is not a solution. For religion would then become a lifeless, artificial, inhuman thing. We must, after all, speak in some language, follow some customs, and celebrate or commiserate with each other's joys or sorrows in some ritual.

**If God is neutral with respect to culture, then salvation must not only be possible within one's own culture, but preferable. It is preferable, because the God of culture is also the God of economy. Why throw away something only to be forced to reacquire the equivalent thing at a great cost of time and effort?**

If God is neutral with respect to culture, then salvation must not only be possible within one's own culture, but preferable. It is preferable, because the God of culture is also the God of economy. Why throw away something only to be forced to reacquire the equivalent thing at a great cost of time and effort? This inefficiency is magnified by many fold because such a convert also loses credibility within his own culture when trying to evangelize the people of his/her former culture.

A few people may feel alienated enough from their own culture that they may be happy to abandon theirs and start over all again. Too often, perhaps, such alienated beings are praised and idealized as model converts. But being in such an alienated state of self-loathing can hardly be considered normative, let alone praiseworthy, even for a heathen. The historical solution has been to encourage each people to celebrate their salvation in their own culturally unique ways by making sure that there is a church serving as

many unique cultures as is practically possible within each geographic area.

Many who strongly believe in ethnic churches consider it significant that the first recorded miracle after Jesus' departure was the miracle of "tongues" at Pentecost (Acts 2). The miracle of tongues enabled the disciples to preach the gospel in the language of "every nation under heaven." The presence of ethnic churches representing "every nation under heaven" can be seen as our way of reenacting the miracle of Pentecost today in the same way that the Adventist church's commitment to the medical ministry is a reenactment of Jesus' healing ministry.

## Ethnic Churches and the Incarnation

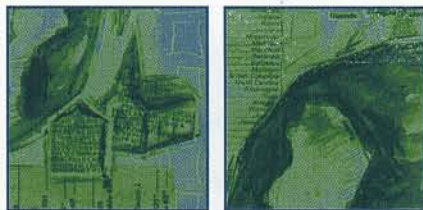
Those who would argue against ethnic churches overlook the obvious fact that while God may be culture free, people are not, cannot and, I would argue, should not be. It is good to have ethnicity and culture, for without it, man would remain a savage doomed to

reinvent the wheel each generation. If God is unprejudiced and desires salvation for all, then he cannot be satisfied so long as there are environmental or cultural barriers to salvation for any group. Ethnic churches are justified because God is not willing that any should perish merely because they refract life through the prism of any particular culture or ethnicity.

The phenomenon of the ethnic church can be seen as an extension of God's never-ending outreach toward man that is epitomized in the Incarnation itself. God revealed himself as human, rather than a Martian, because we are humans, rather than Martians. And so he must reveal himself to be an ethnic person, for we are all ethnic people. But even the ethnic church cannot break down all barriers. In the final analysis, it is the function of each member within each church to break down that final barrier to salvation by customizing it to meet the needs of every individual, rather than merely the sexual, age, economic, or philosophical class to which the individual may belong. ♦

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# Korean or Adventist?

ONE KOREAN'S STORY

◆ DAE S. RO

In Korea many years ago, during the war with China, some Seventh-day Adventists held a Revelation Seminar that attracted the attention and eventual conversion of a young Korean woman.

When the pastor set a date for the baptism of the new candidates, this woman, though pregnant, was so excited about joining the church that she chose to participate. Soon after the baptism I was born, and I admire the enthusiasm and commitment that my mother is still holding for the Adventist church.

I grew up in her church, and when I came to the U.S. to study law in a southeastern state, my family and I looked up the local English-speaking Seventh-day Adventist church. But we didn't go often; we really weren't made to feel welcome. When we visited two other churches—the Korean Presbyterian Church and the Korean Methodist Church—it was a different story.

Where we were not getting any personal or public gestures of hospitality from the Adventists, at the Korean-speaking churches we received one or more invitations every week. And more than that; we were offered practical assistance—money—during those difficult years of law school.

Although serving others always should be our first principle, many times we, as sinful human beings, forget the Golden Rule and wait to be served by others first. In that community, it was the Korean churches, not the Adventist church, which exemplified that principle. What more can I say about why my ethnic identity was more important to me than my denominational affiliation?

I know that receiving or not receiving a warm welcome from someone else should not be a deciding element in my service to the Lord. But how can I serve if I am not welcome? I could remain in the church as an anonymous member for, say, a few decades. But spending years or decades as “just a member” would be a large waste to myself and to the church community, where the Lord needs the help of every member. During my years in that college town I was offered ample opportunities to be

active in church programs at the Korean churches.

At the present time I have been attending off-and-on an American Adventist church near Tacoma, Washington. In this place I found a true human relationship in the Lord. In fact, I have found all I have been waiting for in a church. The very first day we visited, late in 1997, my family was invited home by one church member. Even though we are the only Koreans in this church, we have been welcomed. Some might say this church is “too liberal.” But I believe Jesus was liberal when he was communicating with Gentiles and indigents and handicapped, sick and troubled peoples.

**I know that receiving or not receiving a warm welcome from someone else should not be a deciding element in my service to the Lord. But how can I serve if I am not welcome? I could remain in the church as an anonymous member for, say, a few decades.**

Should ethnic likeness be a major factor when we select a church? Should ethnicity be more important than doctrinal beliefs?

When we as members of a minority can't find an Adventist church like the one I am now attending, then we are forced to choose between an English-speaking but unresponsive congregation in which we would remain strangers (while we are already strangers in the larger society), or finding a church with people more like us who will make us feel at home, regardless of creed. How much better it would be to find both ethnic compatibility and denominational identity in the same congregation! ◆

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# youth in ethnic churches:

H O W   D O   Y O U   K E E P   T H E M   A T   H O M E ?

◆ M A R Y   S O N G

In 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul spoke of his goal for the organic unity of the Christian church. He compared it to a human body, which has many different organ systems functioning to sustain the whole. To make the "body of Christ" work effectively, the differences among church members should be engaged to work together harmoniously. In America today we see two kinds of differences that need this kind of harmonizing: ethnic and generational.

When I was in college I belonged to a small Korean-speaking Adventist congregation. Because I was the oldest of the "youth," I was delegated to become their "leader."

Feeling desperately inadequate, I reluctantly came to church every Sabbath with a loosely defined program that emphasized discussions among the youth group rather than any solid presentations. I recall appealing to the kids to just come to church. Even then, I sensed the increasing apathy the youth were feeling towards it. It seemed to me that one of the best ways to keep youth in the church is to have enough of them there so they will feel they have friends who share their religious background.

Spiritually limited though that approach was, I felt I could offer no other incentive since my own theological understanding was so underdeveloped. Today, after much research and earnest discussion with dozens of youth pastors, I am coming to realize that this is a growing and dominating issue among the young people of the church. We are being torn between a world of religiously dogmatic parents and a world of rapidly increasing moderationism and naturalistic applicationism. We are also probing into the depth and meaning of our personal spirituality and realizing that we are sadly short of divine intellectual blessings.

In a Korean church, this rift is exacerbated by the language barrier that creates an even larger obstacle to understanding. There are many young people who can communicate with their parents only minimally, so spiritual dialogue is severely limited. Consequently, parents resort to the easier language of legalism to define religious piety for their children. Today, young adults are becoming aware that their religious consciousness is quite superficial and sometimes goes no further than a list of do's and don'ts. As a result they often leave the church, feeling that its doctrines are antiquated and one-dimensional.

According to Pastor Mike Kim of the Loma Linda Korean Church, the survival of Korean churches is seriously in question. Immigration from Korea is rapidly decreasing, and the young second-generation adults are leaving the mother church in droves. Pastor Kim expressed to me his sense that young adults don't find religion exciting within the current structure. He feels that they desire a less rigid, more welcome dialogue and fellowship, unlike what they find in the traditional forms of worship. However, they are not even attending the English-speaking non-Korean churches and are rather opting to skip out on church altogether. Despite their integration into American society generally, their mind-sets are so culturally based they find it difficult to adapt to American churches.

And what of their parents, first-generation Adventist immigrants? They tend to become isolated from the dynamics in the rest of the church, somewhat as though their culture was a tourniquet restricting their communication.

My father came from Korea more than 30 years ago as an Adventist. I found his input extremely insightful. He wrote to me in a letter, "Why does a young Korean leave his parents' church? And furthermore, why would a young person want to go to an ethnic church? A. Perhaps he does not have the same conceptions of faith, life and value systems that his parents feel. Somehow it was not passed down to him. B. Being born in this country, he might find himself in an identity crisis and perceive himself to be absolutely American. He speaks English without any accent, yet the people around him will never see him as such. C. There is not enough support for him in the Korean Adventist churches. He needs role models within the church. However, the first-generation parents have already established their niche, they have created a better life here in American than they could have in Korea. These young people, then, are disenfranchised and are left to compete with the general society without their church to support them."

In all these speculations, I hear my father echoing the desire of the first-generation church to reach out to their youth, but being unable to relate to them. Nevertheless, my father also contributed honest and realistic reasons for why the young people have neglected their cultural churches. Both my parents have often expressed their frustration at the communica-



tion gap between young people and the older generation in our church.

What can we do to resolve this separation, when it stems from something as formidable as language and culture barriers? And most importantly, what can we do to halt this deadening of the spirit of the young adults who are so rapidly leaving the Adventist churches?

The good news is that there is a quickening of the pulse, an awakening, occurring in many of us whose connections with the church were becoming very attenuated.

One day recently I discovered a new church in Los Angeles called the Upper Room Fellowship. Suddenly, I found myself at the door of individuals who were not afraid to question the condition of the church, and still more individuals who dared observe that our Korean churches are in dire need of repair. With these people that God has placed into my life, I have shared critique after harsh critique of the people of our church, only to love them more for their value to make the church a better place. It is a swiftly developing church full of young people who are no longer unicultural nor simply comprised of one generation of worshippers.

In a conversation with Pastor Sung Um of this Upper Room Fellowship, I found myself entirely rejuvenated with hope for the fate of our Korean churches. We were frank and honest in our assessments of the clash in religious perceptions between first-generation Koreans and second-generation Korean-Americans. According to Pastor Um, the indoctrination of the dogma of the church was

discouraged young people, "If you're just sick of dogmatic religious rules and want to leave the church, good!" There is reason for that feeling, he continues to explain, because that is not what the gospel is all about. It's utterly the opposite. The gospel is full of joy and constant probing and questioning and praying and inspiration. He strives to redefine everything the young adult philosophically and theologically perceives about the Adventist church. "I am not interested in promoting 'Adventism,'" not because I don't believe in it, but because I do believe in the real Adventism," he stated.

I think this approach can apply to all Adventists. We must strive to free ourselves from the self-inflicted bonds of doubt, criticism and condemnation and open ourselves to listening and inquiring of our Creator for his boundless wisdom.

Ethnic churches within the Adventist fold tend to be secluded from the others, largely because of linguistic and other cultural barriers. If only we could find a way to overcome them it could intensely enhance each of our spiritual journey of all of us.

There is much speculation on the future of ethnic churches in America. I firmly believe that if Christians can do more to share their spiritual experiences with one another, in and out of their familiar settings, they will benefit in personal growth and maturation. It is always exciting for me to learn about cultures and experiences entirely different from my own. However much immigration may ebb and flow, linguistic diversity will always exist. There-

**Pastor Um approaches the jaded skepticism of the young adults with complete candor when discussing the shortcomings of our parents' religious indoctrination. He tells his discouraged young people, "If you're just sick of dogmatic religious rules and want to leave the church, good!"**

applied too strongly upon the children of these Korean churches. Thus, there is an equally strong reaction against this limited application of our religion. However, unlike the typical frustrated skeptic who "throws up his hands," Pastor Um suggested that we rekindle in our young people a keen and understanding appreciation for the Bible. Throw out the Adventist dogma that our parents crammed down our throats—for a second—and help them rediscover the novelty and ubiquitous truth in the dusty depths of the Bible itself. Pastor Um declared that the veracity of the Adventist message will ultimately shine through biblical literature if it is indeed the truth. He apparently trusts profoundly that this message will break through.

Pastor Um approaches the jaded skepticism of the young adults with complete candor and sometimes humor when discussing the shortcomings of our parents' religious indoctrination. He tells his

fore, my suggestion is that Adventist churches engage in more occasions for exchange among one another. I've observed in a few Adventist communities that churches tend to hold monthly picnics or yearly family sports days on the weekends or camping trips open to all. Perhaps this could become a more common practice amongst the entire gamut of cultural churches, whether they be Hispanic, Japanese, White-American or Black-American.

There can be big rewards for such increased communication and involvement among Adventist churches. Jesus said, "Love one another. If there is this love among you, then all will know that you are my disciples." And the unchurched and lonely will want to join in that fellowship. ♦

*Mary Song graduated from the University of Chicago in 1996 with a B.A. in Biology but decided that writing was her true passion. She is currently taking English literature classes and pursuing a career in journalism.*





# What the Indian Adventist Church did for me

WORSHIP IS THE MOST POWERFUL CULTURAL EXPERIENCE THAT YOU HAVE.

♦ RAJINI DIXIT

Religion is an intimate experience. For you to be part of a church community, (not just showing up at church but actually participating in its life), you must share a great deal of trust and common ground with others. It is personal. It involves vulnerability. Few people would share their thoughts about life, death, and sin with strangers. It's much easier to share your feelings with people who you can relate to, people who understand your experiences and where you are coming from. That is one of the key ingredients of the successful growth that ethnic churches in North America are experiencing. That is what ethnic churches are built around.

When I started going to the Southern Asian Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, it was completely and totally against my will. I was 14 at the time, and my parents basically forced me to leave my multiethnic church family in Baltimore and find a new "home" with a bunch of Indians. I was completely against the change. I did not think I could relate to "those people" who were "fresh off the boat." I didn't like the clothes, music, or food and didn't see myself as having anything in common with these people, but I went anyway. However, over that last 13 years, I have come to realize how much I would have missed out on and what a different person I would be if I hadn't grown up in an Indian church.

What positive contribution do ethnic churches offer to the lives of their people? To truly understand, you'll have to know what it's like being a minority. What the "American majority" doesn't realize about being a minority is that you always stand out. In school, at work, and in social settings, no matter how well I dress and how fluently I speak or articulate an

argument, I will always be a little bit different. It doesn't matter how much I feel I have conformed to American culture, or how the American culture conforms to my ethnic standards of beauty, or that conformity is only skin deep. When the conversation gets personal, my significantly different cultural background always makes me stand out.

Although sometimes it's fun to make a statement, it's no fun when everything you do is a statement. If I feel like wearing Indian clothes to work or school, I am making a statement. At Indian church, I'm just wearing clothes. When I speak up in an academic or religious discussion, as the only representative present from my cultural group, I'm often speaking for my country. Imagine the burden of measuring my words so carefully, and analyzing every idea that I share, against norms for my culture. When I am with a group of Indians in deep discussion, my opinion is just that—an opinion that doesn't speak for anyone else but me. It's amazing how much more you can delve into a topic, when you don't have to account for cultural differences.

The cultural divide is so deep; it penetrates even the lines of friendship. For example, when I had conversations with some of my closest American friends, they found it hard to understand why my parents made a big deal about dating around. They thought it was funny and rather peculiar that my grandparents don't speak English. Growing up, they couldn't understand how the smell of curry permeated my clothes and hair. How could food be so pungent that it left such a strong odor? It's hard to feel comfortable with who you are and where you came from, when you are always trying to fit into a culture that is not completely yours.

In the Indian church I found a group of people I



could open up and relate to. I realized that I am a part of “those people” who I had laughed at a few short months before. I’m a second-generation Indian American. My parents came to America with less than \$27 in their pockets. They eat Indian food and dress up in saris and speak with accents that are similar to “Apu” on the Simpsons. In our church, these things are “normal.” Seeing all these people with so much in common has made me appreciate the culture I didn’t value. Everything I was distancing myself from to be more American, and fit in, was embraced in this group. In this group of people, I was part of the majority.

It was a new and different feeling. I didn’t accept it right away, but as I saw crowds of people enjoying the music, food and dress, I learned to think in a different way. At the Indian church all those things that I thought were so weird and different weren’t so different after all, they were common, and they were respected. You were different if you didn’t eat Indian food or speak another language. I no longer had to hide differences from my background to fit into a group.

Ethnic churches also offer an alternative cultural instructional setting. To maintain their cultural iden-

reason we have so many denominations? Within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination alone there are conservative churches, liberal churches, high church and celebration churches. There is a place for everyone, according to his or her tastes. The weekly rejuvenation should be with fellow believers with whom we can feel at home.

Just as ethnic churches offer many positive contributions, there are also several challenges. One of the most significant issues that have risen in the second generation of ethnic churchgoers is the problem of evangelism. Ethnic churches have a remarkable ability to reach out to their own communities. However, other ethnicities may feel marginalized in this homogenized group. I found it very difficult to reach my American friends who would willingly visit my church, more to experience the Indian culture than to experience Christianity. They were always either mesmerized or dazed by being surrounded by so many Indians; they couldn’t get past the culture to see the religion that also ties us together.

Another challenge is the role of the ethnic church to future generations. Although it’s just what I needed growing up, I don’t know if I want to raise my kids strictly in an ethnic church. Each generation has

When I speak up in an academic or religious discussion, as the only representative present from my cultural group, I’m often speaking for my country. Imagine the burden of measuring my words so carefully, and analyzing every idea that I share, against norms for my culture. When I am with a group of Indians in deep discussion, my opinion is just that—an opinion that doesn’t speak for anyone else but me.

tity, a group needs a place where young people are exposed to the language, social etiquette and cultural history of their parents. Many families hope that their young people will meet and marry a spouse of their ethnicity. Some of us did, and some of us didn’t, but all of us share a true appreciation of what makes our heritage unique. Church offers a sanctuary, a haven where families can share in the joy of culture and question important religious and social issues that are tied to our culture.

Worship is the most powerful cultural experience that you have. It includes music appreciation, teaching style, dress, and most importantly, the people you share these experiences with. It surrounds and envelops all of your senses. And when you are with the people who know where you are coming from, literally and figuratively, you achieve that kind of “family” atmosphere that everyone wants from a church.

All churches have a culture, which may or may not be influenced by ethnicity. Isn’t culture the same

different expectations as to how “church going” should enhance their lives. Although a culture based strictly on ethnicity was exactly what the first generation wanted, future generations have different needs. Many first-generation immigrants define themselves as “Indian Adventist American Christians.” We may choose to place these terms in a different order, based on their importance and relevance to our lives.

So what will happen to our church in the future? Will other cultures marry in and make it another multicultural church? Or will it always be a home for weary first- and second-generation immigrants who can’t let go of their homeland? As long as people come to America from other countries, I think there will be ethnic churches to provide a place where cultural groups can worship freely and feel confident that those around them will understand their background and share in preserving their future. ♦

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# Merging Cultures in the Church

◆ F U A L A A U H . V A G A N A

**W**hen attending Seminary, a constant thought that came to me while listening to theological lectures and studying our assigned reading was how to interpret the material into our mother tongue and how to transfer the ideas into concepts our people would comprehend. I knew it would be a challenge to be faced when my husband and I returned to the local church.

One of the serious tasks for all teachers, preachers and pastors is to correctly apply principles expressed in the language and cultures of the Bible to our contemporary cultures. This exercise requires us to discern which of our cultural practices may not be ethically Christian.

Working with a Samoan-Tokelauen church in the United States we are face the additional challenges of cross-cultural communication. Which elements of our church life are genuinely Christian and Adventist and which are "missionary" or merely American- or Samoan-Adventist? And how do we hold together a congregation that is itself mixed culturally? We have a large proportion of church members who speak Samoan and understand the culture well and a larger proportion who are American-raised and understand the Samoan language and culture to some extent.

The younger generation, most of whom are American-born or raised, understand the language of their parents but speak English more fluently. The difference in language orientation is evident during the Sabbath services. The entire church meets together for the first part of Sabbath School, which is held in Samoan. When the children and youth separate for their classes they are taught in English, though there

is sometimes pressure from older members for the senior youth to be taught in Samoan.

For the divine service the members less fluent in Samoan respectfully tolerate listening to a mostly Samoan-language, traditional style of worship where the elders lead and perform most of the liturgy.

Before I preached my first sermon at our church, I was well-prompted to use as much English as Samoan by my Youth Sabbath School Class. They excitedly asked if I was going to preach in English. I made sure to apologize to the adults for using so much English, since I had heard that one of the criteria they had used while selecting their current pastor was whether or not he spoke Samoan in church.

In our culture, the afternoon youth meetings are well attended by the entire church family, including the adults. But even though these services are led by the young people whose first language is English, the meetings are conducted in Samoan. The quarterly business meetings are mostly conducted in Samoan and the young people do not seem to take an active interest in these meetings, perhaps partly due to language orientation as well as to cultural expectation. In strict Samoan culture practice, the young are expected to be seen and not heard except when requested.

To what extent the use of the Samoan language in church services affects the preservation of culture is not quite known. As the saints gather each week, the church naturally becomes a center of social life. Unconsciously perhaps, the church tends to serve as a surrogate for the 'absent' society of village and community in the islands where the chiefs reign (in support of the church, of course).

The Samoan chief system is a very orderly hierar-



chical social mechanism for conducting the affairs of the family, village and community. The chief—usually of a very large extended family—is responsible for the welfare of the family unit. In turn, his or her word is given such great respect that it is not questioned. When the community chiefs gather in their council, the paramount chief assumes the leading role in decision making.

Interfacing the hierarchical chief system with the basic organizational structure of the Adventist church can present power issues that may be very painful. If a high chief serves as a deacon and a non-titled person as the head elder of the church, the shift in leadership roles between the community and church could be a daily transition to be performed with earnest prayers for humility.

The church's primary mission is to live and teach the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Yet the people who come to worship present another need—to preserve their culture and teach it to their children. "When in America, hold on to the culture of your ancestors" is the expectation of most parents for their children.

What culture to preserve becomes a problem when church members disagree on facets of the culture itself and its relevance to Christianity. The missionaries to the Samoan islands and pioneers of the Samoa Mission prohibited Samoan dancing for church members. Today, there is a movement among many here in the United States to practice Samoan and Tokelauen dancing as part of our cultural heritage. There is heated argument from both sides of the debate.

## Interfacing the hierarchical chief system with the basic organizational structure of the church can present power issues that may be very painful.

Another controversial area is "the fine mat." These mats are an integral part of Samoan culture serving almost as ceremonial currency. Any time there is a feast, a funeral, a wedding, the arrival of an important guest or departure of a community member, or any other occasion for making presentations to dignitaries or special people, fine mats are used. These mats are woven from a local plant and are distinct from sitting mats or sleeping mats. They can be small, quickly made and cheap or large, finely woven and very expensive. A three-by-three foot mat, not so finely woven, might be worth ten dollars. A fifteen-by-fifteen-foot, finely woven mat might be worth five thousand dollars.

Generally, the mats are not used for any utilitarian purpose. They are not used as carpets or displayed as wall hangings. They are stored away as family treasures. But the Adventist Church in Samoa proscribed the giving and receiving of fine mats by its members. Recently the executive committee of the

Adventist Church in Samoa voted to remove the prohibition on fine mats, but it is still controversial. In this country, many members quietly receive and give fine mats, but not publicly.

Undoubtedly, there are also differences in the practice of Adventism among in the Anglo churches throughout the United States. This presents problems, especially for our young people and new members. For instance, most churches no longer seem to need afternoon youth meetings, while the Samoan-Tokelauen churches cannot seem to thrive without the full Sabbath schedule of meetings. Some churches engage in volleyball games on Sabbath and our young people find that an attractive Sabbath afternoon activity, to the consternation of their parents. Make-up, movies, and jewelry are still controversial issues for our churches.

To what extent, then, can the church become a social medium for enhancing our cultural practices? As the Samoan-Tokelauen churches in the United States today face the problem of how to cope with the merging cultures of the island-raised members and the American-raised members, many solutions are being explored.

The recognition of the merging cultures in the Adventist churches of today is a beginning. Acknowledging these different cultures and working through them seems to be less stressful for the members as well as the pastors than denying and suppressing their existence. Resorting to at least a bilingual and bicultural approach to preaching and teaching is inevitable in attempting to reach all members of the mixed-culture church. Perhaps the

church can sponsor Samoan and Tokelauen language, art and culture classes for the children and young people when feasible. Parents fluent in the language and culture of origin may be encouraged to speak and teach it to their children on a daily basis.

A Samoan-Tokelauen church would not really be such if it were not for its cultural values where the community, Sabbath afternoon youth meetings, Sabbath potluck feasts, gifts, long funeral services and Strong familial ties abide. Yet, diligent prayers for the Holy Spirit's guidance and wisdom in coping with the merging cultures while upholding biblical truths are essential in Adventism today. ♦

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# That “Pesky Scientific Data”: A Response to Ervin Taylor’s Review

◆ JOHN T. BALDWIN, PH.D.

I thank Adventist Today for carrying Ervin Taylor’s review of *Creation, Catastrophe, & Calvary*. (1) My respected scientific colleague has written an insightful, genially toned review showing a good grasp of the basic theme of the book. His halo temporarily slips when he thinks the book may have been the “product of an intellectual panic attack” due essentially to the ‘pesky scientific data.’ Happily, Taylor characterizes this thought as coming from his cynical side, so he is forgiven. This response seeks to clarify five essential exegetical/theological points in his review, and to highlight two of those “pesky scientific data” about which Taylor offered no comment.

First, *Creation, Catastrophe, & Calvary* is written from the point of view of faith seeking understanding. The authors do not claim to have all the answers, nor do they suggest that the empirical data discussed rises to the level of demonstration or direct proof.

Second, Taylor correctly pinpoints the core theme of the book which can be illustrated by David Lane’s quotation in the book: “If the general theory of evolution and a historical fall of some kind are both historical facts ... then human death preceded the entrance of sin into the human race, and cannot be its penalty. ... Theistic evolution ... destroys the basis of the doctrine of Christ’s substitutionary atonement and redemption of sinners” (p. 114). If the substitutionary death of Christ is true, the fossil record must be accounted for by alternate processes for producing the geologic column not over millions of years, but rapidly, for example, by God’s global flood (2) subsequent to the sin of Adam.

Taylor does not quarrel with the logic presented above, but questions the need for this core message of the book by noting that the argument is theologically based upon a “‘blood atonement’ process, ignoring the number of alternative explanations of the Christian salvation motif.” Frankly, other theories of atonement are ignored because, as far as I can determine, they are, in one way or another, all righteousness-by-works schemes rejecting the concept of the imputed righteousness of Christ as legal fiction. For this reason they all fall into a category of

gospel other than that preached by Paul and taught in the Bible as a whole. (cf. Gal 1:8-9; Rom 4:1-8).

Third, Taylor questions the claim that the Bible establishes a causal relationship between Adam’s sin and animal and human death. Taylor asks: “What indeed is the ‘biblical claim’ on this point? More to the point, is it a ‘biblical claim’ or a claim developed within a particular fundamentalist-oriented hermeneutic?” I must, however, ask what is the role of a biblical claim for Taylor? Elsewhere, he concurs with Gerhard Hasel that the Bible itself claims creation week was composed of seven literal twenty-four-hour days. However, Taylor indicates it is a leap of faith for us today to regard this biblical claim as actual history. (3) So how does ascertaining the actual biblical claim help us when the claim can be so easily overridden by contemporary interpretations of science?

Fourth, Taylor finds “fascinating” (translation: “incredible”) the breadth of meaning derived from Revelation 14:7c. However, notice the distinctive language used to describe the ground for our worship of God: “... worship Him who created heaven, earth, the sea and the fountains of waters” (Rev 14:7c). This phrase, found in Exodus 20:11 and repeated in Ps 146:6; Acts 4:24; 14:15, is prefaced in Exodus with the cosmogonic words “For in six days the Lord made. ...” Because the pattern established in this quartet of texts assumes the six-day creation, the same phrase appearing in Revelation 14:7c would also assume the six-day creation. Of course, this end-time conclusion is extremely significant in light of 21st-century evolutionary theory.

Of equal importance is the final phrase “and the fountains of waters” (Rev 14:7c). Here the angel breaks radically from the phraseology used in Exodus 20:11, and by David, the believers, and Paul and Barnabas, by replacing the fourth-commandment terminology, “all that in them is,” with the surprise phrase “fountains of waters” in the context of a message of judgment. The fountains of waters include “the fountains of the deep” (Prov 8:24, 28, 30; Gen 7:11), and recall a previous time of divine judgment when the fountains of the deep were broken at the global flood. This constitutes a profound encourage-



ment for us to take seriously not only the message about the pre-advent judgment, but the reality of the Genesis flood. Thus, the phrase “fountains of the waters” may constitute an endorsement by the resurrected Lord of the reality of the global flood.

Fifth, Taylor denies, contra Richard Davidson, that, “‘worldwide’ would mean the same thing to an ancient Near Eastern writer that it now means to a modern reader.” However, Davidson masterfully develops the significance of the treatment by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, a professor at the University of Chicago, and other scholars, regarding the implications of the Hebrew term *ma’b’l* as the undoing of the global creation order of day 2 of creation.

Turning now to the “pesky scientific data,” we find that it can cut both ways. According to Holmes Rolston III, the geologic column shows that the general theory of evolution is filled with “predation, parasitism, selfishness, randomness, blindness, disaster, indifference, waste, struggle, suffering, death” (p.28). How is the goodness of God impacted were he to create by an evolutionary process involving millions of years of predation, etc.? If Christians accept the suffering- and death-filled macro-evolutionary process as God’s chosen way to produce new life-forms, then that “pesky scientific data” clearly imply a God with a demonic face unworthy of worship. This particular theodical difficulty constitutes one of the most important issues urgently needing discussion within the Adventist community.

A second set of freshly discovered scientific data discussed in *Creation, Catastrophe, & Calvary* indicates the need to revise evolution’s conventional regional, basinal depositional model of the Paleozoic portion of the geologic column in North America. The data does not prove a global flood, but is presented as an illustration of the need to widen regional forms of catastrophism. “Pesky” field data published by Elaine Kennedy, R. Kablano, and A. V. Chadwick, (4) indicate convincingly that in the Paleozoic area studied, the Tapeats may have formed in water as deep as 840 feet (p. 117) rather than in shallow water as per the conventional view. This scientific discovery becomes additionally interesting in relation to the research by Arthur Chadwick noted below.

From his database of more than half a million “pesky” measured paleocurrent directions at 15,615 localities in the North American Continent, Chadwick infers that throughout the Paleozoic, sediments of all types and depositional environments moved persistently west and southwest across the North American Continent in mega continent-wide trends (p. 122). (5) Considered in light of the deep-water depositional activity associated with the Paleozoic Tapeats Sandstone, the paleocurrent data suggest the image of a moving sea. This points for the first time beyond regional, basinal boundaries to

some form of aquatic catastrophe of continent-wide dimensions. In this instance, the “pesky scientific data” is not inconsistent with what might be expected from an aquatic catastrophe on the scale indicated in Scripture.

In conclusion, the current Adventist Christian community needs to heed the call by Fritz Guy for community-wide dialogue. (6) Theological and philosophical concerns needing attention include issues such as the relations between macroevolution and the goodness of God, the gospel, the Sabbath, the Fall, hermeneutics, worldview, open theism, and whether Satan is a real being or an allegory or parable. Scientifically, we need to address challenges such as the extent and content of earth history, varves, ice core readings, glaciation, the earth’s magnetic reversals, radiometric dating, an adequate flood model(s), and so on. If we intentionally avoid such discussion we will repeat the Anglican intentional avoidance of the theological issues of Darwin’s theory of evolution documented by Gregory Elder. (7) This means that all the theological implications as well as all the scientific challenges need to be placed on the table for thorough, meaningful, respectful discussion pursued, if possible, to some form of consensus. *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary* provides one small step toward this goal. ♦

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#### Notes

1 The full publication and complete title information regarding the book is as follows: John T. Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe, & Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000).

2 For purposes of proper nomenclature in speaking of the flood, the Bible indicates that Noah did not send the Flood, God did. Although it takes a bit of nerve to do so, scholars and theologians would well serve discussions about the Flood by referring to the event by its biblically implied name, “God’s Flood,” rather than by calling it “Noah’s Flood.” The latter name continues to invite ridicule, whereas, referring to the flood as “God’s Flood” might invoke more respect for the event which it highly deserves.

3 R. Ervin Taylor, “Re: Hasel: The Days of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal Days or Figurative Periods/Epochs of Time?” *Origins* 21:2 (1994): 63.

4 See their article entitled, “A Reassessment of the Shallow Water Depositional Model for the Tapeats Sandstone, Grand Canyon, Arizona: Evidence for Deep Water Deposition,” *Geological Society of America Abstracts With Programs* 28, No. 7 (1996): A-407

5 See his article called, “Megatrends in North American Paleocurrents,” *Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists Meeting Abstracts* 8 (1993): 58.

6 Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1999), pp. 159-160.

7 On this see Gregory Elder, *Chronic Vigor: Darwin, Anglicans, Catholics, and the Development of a Doctrine of Providential Evolution* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996).



# The gospel without strings attached

◆ TIHOMIR KUKOLJA

**h**ans K. LaRondelle, Raoul Dederen, Hans Heinz, Roger S. Evans and Will Eva made the November 2000 issue of *Ministry* into an outstanding publication.

Under the theme "Luther's Gospel Then and Now" they questioned the assumptions of the Joint Declaration On the Doctrine of Justification, a statement signed by representatives of the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation on October 31, 1999—482 years to the day after Martin Luther published his 95 theses that gave birth to the Reformation.

The Declaration claims that "a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics in spite of remaining differences of language, theological elaboration and emphasis." (1) The *Ministry* authors challenged this assumption, asserting that the Reformation and Catholic traditions remain divided by two irreconcilable concepts of justification. Consensus could be reached only if one side involved in dialogue seriously compromised its own fundamental beliefs regarding the nature of human salvation.

As the *Ministry* writers questioned the possibility of a genuine compromise between the two opposing views of salvation, they spoke with clarity, unseen for a considerable time in our official publications, about the forensic, objective, synthetic and legal nature of justification, and distinguished it from sanctification, as taught by Paul and understood by the Reformers. Moreover, although they never mentioned it by name, the concept of the completed atonement at the cross was clearly manifest in their articles; for the alien righteousness of Christ, completely imputed to the believer through faith, implies the necessity of the atonement that was completed once and for all in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

After reading this defense of the historic gospel I was perplexed: Did the November *Ministry* herald the long expected breeze of change in the church's attitude towards the gospel? Or will our denominational administrators patronize the effort by calling it a private adventure of a few individual scholars whose isolated opinions do not represent the overall view of the church? By now, the November *Ministry* would have no doubt upset some within the church establishment, especially those pragmatics who are eager to defend denominational unity even at the expense of the gospel. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder how far the gospel will go this time in the Adventist church. Has the Adventist church finally matured enough to face the challenges of the gospel without prejudice?

Although many Adventists may regard the gospel so distinctly featured in the recent *Ministry* as indeed the liberating and reassuring good news of Scripture, it is not the gospel often advocated by the mainstream, let alone traditional Adventism.

According to Paul, the Reformers and the November *Ministry* writers, justification by faith stands for the most literal righteousness of Christ, exhibited in the qualities of his perfect obedience, manifested in his life, death and resurrection experience, and as such entirely imputed to the undeserving repentant sinner despite his indwelling limitations, inadequacies, shortcomings and failures. It is forensic, objective and legal because it is credited to us "apart from observing the law" and apart from any other works, rules, regulations or advancements of character (Romans 3:28, 4:6.). In short, justification is the lifesaving act of God, accomplished through Jesus Christ on behalf of the undeserving sinner.

Is this the gospel we have been hearing from our denominational pulpits, reading in our official church papers or receiving via our international satellite networks? Or, have we become accustomed to another gospel, though seemingly alike, but still different enough to provide a convenient diversion towards human works, just as the creators of the Council of Trent decrees did several centuries ago? Otherwise, how could the Adventist church still maintain that the denominational views about the phased or stretched atonement, character-dependent investigative judgment and final justification of God's character through the sufficiently perfect obedience of God's people—all of which make salvation dependent on the believer's performance—complement to the truth of the objective gospel?

Moreover, if the gospel were truly our priority, why wouldn't we let the gospel challenge our system of cherished beliefs? Why is such deliberate care taken that the substance of our unique doctrines remain intact? How much honesty is there in ignoring cognitive dissonance between the gospel and certain distinctive beliefs of ours, while in the process the global Adventist community remains confused and less confident of what the gospel truly stands for?

To explore these questions, let's briefly consider the three most influential sources of truth in the minds of many Adventists worldwide: writings of Ellen G. White, the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guides and a recent phenomenon, global satellite evangelism.

"God requires now what He required of Adam, perfect obedience, righteousness without a flaw, without



shortcoming in his sight. God help us to render to Him all the law requires." (2) "Christ came to this earth and lived a life of perfect obedience, that men and women, through his grace, might also live lives of perfect obedience. This is necessary to their salvation." (3) These are only two among many questionable statements written by Ellen G. White on the issue of salvation. If this were possible I would like to ask Ellen G. White what else did she mean with the statements such as these, if not that the believer is saved with the infused righteousness just as much as with the imputed one?

The editors and writers of the Sabbath School Quarterlies, an influential means of shaping the spiritual awareness of Adventists worldwide, continue to infuse the same logic into their weekly pamphlets, although in a more ambiguous way. This is achieved by selective and repetitious over quoting from the writings of Ellen G. White and equally repetitious usage of assumptive and unqualified jargon that would often leave a gospel loving Adventist wondering about the real intentions of the SSQ editors or writers.

Consider the ambiguity of the statement published in a recent quarterly: "God wants to do more than just proclaim us righteous (forgive our past sin). He also wants to make us righteous (restore us). Through the grace and power that Jesus bought for us at Calvary, we can live out His character." (4) It is true that grace will empower the believer for the life of sanctification exhibited in the life-long process of character shaping according to the likeness of Christ. But one wonders if this was what the author meant, just as much as one wonders about the intent of the following thoughts published in a 1997 Sabbath School Study Guide: "When we sing 'There's power in the blood,' we do not actually mean there is literal power in the blood. The power comes from the fact that, because Christ suffered the ultimate penalty for our sins, he is now able to purify us from all sin. The gift of redemption through Christ is always associated with the gift of holiness. The blood represents the way God has chosen to save us through Christ's death and cleansing power." Indeed, I would like to ask the Sabbath School Quarterlies' authors what else do they want to impress upon the minds of the readers?

Similar ambiguities have been very much a part of the messages broadcast globally via satellite by the Adventist Global Communication Network in the church's ambitious attempt to evangelize the world in recent years. One wonders if our global televangelists are in the business of proclaiming the gospel of salvation or impressing the global audiences with the amazing truths of our 27 Fundamental Beliefs. It is simply not enough to climax the presentation with a few slides passionately depicting Jesus with outstretched hands, if the gospel was absent or only vaguely present throughout the entire presentation, or tacitly confused with human sanctification.

For example, here's a quote from a NET'98 satellite event: "God's government will be judged and His char-

acter tried in the lives of his friends.... Apparently God's friends here on earth can live in such a way —through the deeds of love and mercy and kindness—that when their records come up in judgment their Forever Friend above is glorified and exonerated." (5) If the character of God was not adequately vindicated in the life and death experience of Jesus Christ our Representative, how dare we think we could do a better job?

If the Lutherans who signed the Joint Declaration On the Doctrine of Justification are in crisis over justification by faith, as the November *Ministry* convincingly suggested, so are the Adventists. It is because, like the creators of the Council of Trent decrees, the Adventist church too continues to amalgamate the human processes of sanctification with the divine act of justification. Also, as long as the church continues to treat the authority of Ellen G. White and some of our distinctive doctrines (such as the investigative judgment and atonement) as if they contained the unquestionable truth, the church has no other choice but to continue drifting from one crisis to another.

However, the church is not at liberty to make adjustments to the gospel so that, cosmetically improved, it may suit our ideological concepts. The integrity of the church and its mission in the days to come does not depend on how skilled it will become in maneuvering through the challenges our distinctive beliefs will continue to face. Ultimately, the integrity of the church will be tested by its honesty towards the integrity of the gospel, for no church or movement has ever been given a commission other than to preach the gospel without strings attached. The success of the gospel message in the Adventist church this time depends on those ministers, evangelists, teachers, scholars, and writers, editors and lay members who treasure the gospel above the loyalty to any ideological concept. For all of us the first step should be to stop hinting at the gospel and start preaching it deliberately and without apology. ♦

*Editorial note: Jesus saves! It is the editors' conviction that salvation is so grand no single model or metaphor can explain all that God does when He saves. We hope this article will prompt others to explore the wonders and mysteries of salvation. Query us with your ideas.*

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*Notes and References: 1. Raoul Dederen, The Joint Declaration On the Doctrine of Justification - One Year Later, Ministry, November 2000 2. Selected Messages, Book 2, page 380 - A Work of Purification Needed. 3. Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, March 15th 1906, Article: A Holy People. 4. Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, Proverbs - Wisdom To Live By, October 14 - 20, 2000. Lesson 3 - What I Am Versus What You Think I Am. Authors: Virginia Davidson and Ernest H.J. Stead 5. NET'98, Dwight Nelson, Sermon 14, How To Tip the Scales and Beat Your Audit.*



## I, Mary

◆ DIANNE BRITTON

Through the still sleeping streets I make my way towards the temple. I love the temple in the predawn stillness. It seems my best chance of hearing God. How I long to hear him speak forgiveness to my soul. Isaiah's words ring, mocking in my ears: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." Scarlet sins I know.

There is no silence in the courts this dawn. Already, Jesus, the young new rabbi, sits teaching. I know of him by reputation. He turned water into vintage wine, fed 5,000 with next to nothing, restored a man to health who had spent 38 years of his life staking his faith on a superstition. I slip up behind a pillar where I can see and hear, but not be seen. I have heard his reputation for being a friend of sinners, yet I dare not venture into his presence. Shame prevents.

A commotion draws the crowd's attention. It parts like the Red Sea to a small mob of men dragging a woman obviously caught in the wrong bed, hair down, head uncovered, scanty clothing with which she desperately tries to cover herself. Already, a few of the men cradle stones in their hands. Wait, I know some of them—Scribes and Pharisees—men who know my address, men I do not want to know I'm here.

One face is missing. His face. He knew my childhood history—"A father to you," he said. An answer to my longing heart. In his presence I felt chosen, alive. Subtly his attention changed. He spun his web around my heart. Ensnared. Seduced. But who would believe me—a nobody—against him—a priest. It was not far from him to the others. The others, now dragging her to Jesus.

I catch a glimpse of her face and see my own mirrored there. Hers retains an innocence I lost long ago. She does not belong in the clutches of these men. And where was he? The Law of Moses clearly states both parties were to be

stoned, not that stoning was even in vogue any more.

I know the answer. This is a set-up. The other party escaping out the back as the woman was dragged out the front. My worst nightmare played before my eyes.

With haughty arrogance the Scribes and Pharisees fling her at Jesus' feet. "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

Clever. Either way, they have him. If he says "set her free"—he's disregarding Moses. If he says "stone her," they accuse him to the Romans. Either way, she loses.

As if deaf to the accusations, Jesus bends down and silently begins to write in the dust. Annoyed at his casual indifference to their status and their question, they urge their query. "What do you say?"

Jesus straightens, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

The woman cowers further, awaiting the first blow. Jesus calmly resumes his writing on the ground. From my secluded vantage point, it looks as if he is writing in code, his position such that only one at a time can truly decipher his writing. In rank order, beginning with the oldest, each presses in to see. I study their faces. Exposed. Just like the woman. They slink away, each man's robe erasing the record carved in the dust. Jesus continues writing. The last accuser leaves. The last stone drops. Only the woman and Jesus are left. Abject misery in the presence of absolute mercy.

Tenderly, Jesus claims her eyes. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

I strain to hear her response. "No one, sir,"

"Then neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more."

I leave. White as snow. ◆