

NEWS

ANALYSIS

OPINION

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**RECONFIGURING**  
the Adventist center

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# NOTES from the editor

## Right or Humane

■ JOHN MCLARTY

Teenager John Walker went looking for a way of spiritual life that was purer and more authentic than what he saw around him in middle-class Washington, D.C. He found Islam, the religion of submission and authority, and submitted to the teaching and discipline of the holy community. He was captured in Afghanistan, fighting with the Taliban.

Walker may face charges of treason, but he was only doing what he thought was right. He was doing what the holy book—The Koran—and the holy community required: fighting the infidel. While many Moslems decried what the Taliban did, the Taliban saw themselves as simply being obedient. It wasn't their idea to destroy all the art works in the national museum in Kabul; it is what God decreed in the Koran. It wasn't their idea to limit education and medical treatment for women. The Koran required it. The Koran came straight from God through the prophet, and every word is equally unchangeable and authoritative. The Taliban took for granted that what was right (according to their book) must automatically be humane.

While we are properly critical of the Taliban, we can learn some lessons from their experience. We have a better book, vastly better. But our book—the Bible—can also be used to foster inhumane behavior if we regard every word as equally unchangeable and authoritative. In one place, for example, our holy book requires that Sabbath breakers be executed. This command is never rescinded. So why do we boldly repudiate capital punishment for those who pick up sticks on Sabbath? We believe that God, through his Spirit, has taught us better.

Jesus directed his followers to "take no thought for the morrow" and said, "if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out." So why don't we trash our PDAs (electronic planners), close our savings ac-

counts and retirement plans, and then head to the hospital for eye surgery? Because we ask more than simply, What does the Bible say? We ask, What is God saying? And in seeking to discern God's voice, we ask, Is it humane? We check our understanding of Scripture by considering its effect on people.

The Bible tells us that a suspicious husband can require his wife to drink a bowl of dirty water, and regard her as innocent of adultery only if she doesn't get sick. We do not follow that practice, however, because it is inhumane (unsanitary, unjust, crude, unscientific and ...). We don't cut this passage out of the Bible, we simply allow humane considerations to override the directive.

For fundamentalists the question, What will this do to people? is beside the point. The fundamentalist (Moslem or Christian) declares, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." Even if one's reading leads to harm for one's own family. A fundamentalist's under-

**The Bible tells us that a suspicious husband can require his wife to drink a bowl of dirty water, and regard her as innocent of adultery only if she doesn't get sick.**

standing of the "plain meaning of Scripture" cannot be assailed by any consideration outside the text itself.

Jesus said to the fundamentalists in his day, "You search the Scriptures because you believe that in them you will find eternal life ..." And eventually those devotees of Scripture committed the ultimate act of obedience: They killed the Lord of Glory.

Adventists are "people of the Book." Our serious engagement with the Bible has led us to oppose slavery and war, to advocate the Sabbath, and to

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## Progressive Adventism

I so appreciate your magazine and especially liked the feature "Progressive Adventism" in volume 9, issue 5. It gave me hope. As a non-Adventist who has visited Adventist churches here in Wisconsin looking for a church home, I have come to the conclusion that many "lifers" have no idea how strange the traditional and obscure trappings can seem to the outsider. I have been scolded for wearing a wedding ring and earrings, subjected to scary sermons about "how the US gov't created AIDS as a conspiracy," and told that a "special bible" is necessary to really see the SDA truths. As an RN I found the AIDS rant very frightening. There is also a website for a SDA retreat that suggests that fresh air can cure Alzheimer's Disease. When I wrote to the NAD about my concerns, I got nowhere. I was astounded when I learned that the SDA church does not ordain women. I again went to the NAD over that and was passed around for 6 months from frightened staffer to frightened staffer.

I think there is a core of unique, wonderful spirit in the SDA community but I believe it will take a lot of Mr. Taylor's "Progressive Adventism" to clear out the off-putting cobwebs. Very few people can or will leap the hurdles of quaint 19th century religiosity to find that core. Thanks so much for your magazine.

**Jennifer Enright-Ford**  
Oconomowoc, WI

## NYC Ministries

Thank you for your article about Adventist Metro Ministries (AT Sept/Oct 2001), and also the fine editorial about their efforts and more support needed. I am in constant contact with Janice Wright and know their story well and the challenges they

face, mostly financial as you are well aware. . . . I look forward to each AT, and devour them. I love every issue.

**Karen Kotoske**  
Palo Alto, California

## Paradoxes

As usual, I was struck by the many paradoxes found in your latest issue (Sept./Oct. 2001). In the article on the women's ministry director, I couldn't help but wonder if the real reason for abusive relationships in the Adventist and similar fundamentalist-type churches isn't a correlation between religious/spiritual abuse and spousal and other types of interpersonal abuse. One needs go no further than the article on the WWC president for an example of institutional abuse.

Kevin Paulson correctly points out yet another paradox—the Adventist church wanting to have it both ways in regards to its historic stand on the papacy. On the one hand evangelists and others continue to proclaim it (though one has to wonder what kind of person is attracted by this message—perhaps some of those abusers mentioned above) and the

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publishing houses continue to publish the books written by its great promoter among Adventists, perhaps because no one in the church really

knows what to do with this woman that they can't live with and can't live without. On the other hand, this teaching is a public embarrassment which church organizations for their own reasons feel compelled to "smooth away."

I also have to wonder why Ervin Taylor in the name of "progressive Adventism" wishes to cling to what he obviously sees as a seriously dysfunctional belief system and community. Would it not be healthier simply to move on?

**Harvey Brenneise**  
East Lansing, MI

## Gospel Without Strings

I read with interest . . . "The Gospel Without Strings Attached" [AT, March/April 2001]. It was well written and so timely. Yes, the "blessing is for those who read and hear these things." . . . Men of past ages knew and rejoiced in the good news of the gospel and were not ashamed. Why should we who proclaim we know all the truth not know full assurance of our salvation . . . and how we stand right with God? . . . Let us continue to hear more in this timely magazine. . . . [The gospel] shines brighter and brighter as the cross of Christ is exalted, so let us take courage in times like these.

**Eddie Mabley**  
Aldergrove, British Columbia

## Note to readers

Several readers were inquiring about the authors of "Beating Up on Upbeat Music" which ran in the Sept/Oct 2001 issue of AT. The following is some biographical information on the authors. A professional singer of classical music, Charles Reid lives in Union, NJ, and serves as the minister of music for the Hoboken Faith Community Fellowship. Karl Sandberg is a family physician and Christian songwriter living in Ola, Arkansas.

### Send Letters to the Editor:

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# Reflections on the North American Division Year-End Meeting

■ ELWIN DUNN

In late summer 2001 I was invited to become a member of the Executive Committee of the North American Division (NAD) of Seventh-day Adventists. It was an honor to be asked to join such an elite group, and it was nice to be asked. But while I had served on the Southeastern California Conference Executive Committee for some years, I was also board chair and publisher of *Adventist Today*. Would people view this as a conflict of interest, or was it an opportunity for the values represented by *Adventist Today* to be shared with the NAD church leadership?

The Division year-end meetings were to be held Oct. 28-31, 2001, at the General Conference (GC) headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

We arrived at the General Conference headquarters Friday afternoon Oct. 26, after the offices had closed. I knew there would be significant activities over the weekend preceding the first NAD meeting, and I had counted on getting information from the headquarters. So I asked a security guard who happened to be near the door, but he said he didn't know. There seemed to be no one around who could help.

Just then Don Schneider, president of the NAD, came out the door and greeted me. He shared his personal copy of the agenda; gave me directions to the Sligo Church, where the

first devotional meetings would be held the next day; and was really very helpful. I found more gracious help on Sabbath morning in locating Roy Branson's Sabbath School class and the worship services at the Sligo Church, and still more on Sunday at the division meeting.

Two major issues confronting the division committee were not new, but the committee members needed to resolve the problems.

First, the regional conferences, to which ethnic black churches belonged, had set up their own retirement system, completely separate from the church's retirement system, in January 2000. The NAD voted approval for the formal and legal separation which will result in these conferences managing their own retirement plan covering their employees. People speaking on behalf of this action said that the regional conferences' plan will be considerably more generous to and beneficial for their employees than the present NAD retirement plan.

Second, a task force committee, under the chairmanship of George Crumley, presented a lengthy and complex report that, if ultimately put in place as presented, would dramatically change the way in which all the church's employees would be compensated. Their recommendations included an evaluation process that would cover all employees, from the

division president to part-time salaried employees. The compensation package for all individuals receiving any form of compensation by a church entity would be "transparent" to their respective governing committees. The NAD executive committee voted to approve the overall "concept," along with the selection of a number of committees, to be named by Don Schneider, whose responsibility would be to develop a coherent and balanced approach to the many competing interests involved.

Higher education remuneration also presented thorny issues, which were ultimately referred (put off until later), as well. A number of conference presidents expressed a strong desire to see some sort of cap, or maximum pay, established—possibly the amount received by the GC president. While no deadline was voted, it was implied during the discussion that the working committee's recommendations would be available for action and possible acceptance a year from now.

Yes, serious and difficult issues were presented and discussed; yet, at no time was there anything said or done that did not reflect the dedicated concern by all participants for the completion of the task left us by Jesus—namely, sharing the "good news of salvation." ■

## Call for Articles

The North American Division of the church has voted to study the current pay scale for ministers, with a view to increasing the salary of pastors of larger churches. *AT* is seeking articles from a variety of viewpoints on this topic. If you are interested in writing for us, please query us by e-mail at: [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com).



# SDA Creationism: End of the Flood Model and a New Era of Dialogue?

■ ERVIN TAYLOR

**O**n October 17-22, 2001, scientists and other scholars from many Adventist centers came to Loma Linda, Calif. for the annual meeting of the Biblical Research Institute Science Council (BRISCO), held in the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) quarters on the campus of the university. Not a public meeting, the conference was intended to "provide materials for discussion from a range of viewpoints and expertise," according to the booklet containing the abstracts and papers to be presented. In order to stimulate free and uninhibited discussion, attendees were counseled to "keep this material confidential." In deference to that request, this account from an *Adventist Today* reporter omits the names of most presenters. The meeting was organized by Dr. Ben Clausen, research scientist at the GRI.

According to one very conservative member of BRISCO who attended and presented a paper, the meeting was "historic" because the discussion represented a strong shift away from trying to include all or most of the geologic column within the time of the Genesis Flood. This individual was heard to comment that the shift may be described as the "collapse of the traditional SDA Flood model," which has opposed a model in which the geologic column forms more gradually during the thousands of years since the Creation event. The speaker saw an "incipient paradigm shift" occurring among orthodox Adventist geologists and argued that we must "ask new questions."

Clausen emphasized that the biblical record did not really support the old assumption that the Genesis Flood was responsible for all or most of the geologic column anyway; it did not have to be laid down in a single event. However, in their view, such a para-

digm shift would not necessarily require them to accept a time scale of millions of years of Earth history. Both agreed that some Adventists would settle for as much as 300,000 years for the formation of the geologic column, rather than the former view, based on theological rather than scientific grounds, of something closer to 10,000 years. It should also be noted that several Adventist scientists have no problem with the standard scientific understanding that the fossil record was being laid down for more than 500 million years. Dr. Ariel Roth, a former director of GRI, expressed his concern whether Adventist Flood geology can "survive the onslaught of science."

Another speaker noted that efforts by conservative Christian geologists to support the short time span for the geologic column have sometimes led them to produce "studies that focus on isolated data, a myopic view of sedimentary rates, [and] purposeful ignoring of contrary data" resulting in "a very inaccurate picture of the past."

Those not familiar in detail with the evolution of Adventist theology may not be aware of the central role that "the Flood" has historically played in defining traditional creationism, as well as its broader role in the development of contemporary Protestant fundamentalism. University of Wisconsin historian Dr. Ronald Numbers, a former Loma Linda University faculty member, in his widely acclaimed and award-winning book *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism*, has reviewed in great detail the important influence of Adventist apologetics

on the shaping of the modern fundamentalist "Creation Science" movement. One of the hallmarks of "Creation Science" is its advocacy of a recent (less than 10,000 years), worldwide Flood.

The source of this view in modern times can be traced in large part to one individual, George McCready Price (1870-1963), who in turn was influenced by the Adventist prophet, Ellen G. White. Price, who received no formal education in geology but who read widely in the geological literature of his time, was a firm believer in the validity of Ellen White's views on Earth history. She, like most conservative Protestants of her era, believed in a recent creation of all living things some 6,000 years ago and a worldwide Flood not long after. This dating of Earth his-

**One presenter presented a copyrighted paper that proposes a means of salvaging the current Adventist Flood model by considering the role of nonevolutionary stratigraphic ordering mechanisms on a habitable earth.**

tory was based on genealogical lists in Genesis 5 and 11 which appeared to have chronological significance, and the dating was widely accepted by theologians like Archbishop James Ussher. He is best known for the detailed dates from his chart that were printed in the margins of some editions of the King James Version of the Bible; hence, some readers assumed that those dates were "biblical."

In his writings, Price propounded a critique of the scientific basis of stan-



dard geology—insisting that the Flood described in Genesis laid down in one year essentially all of the thousands of feet of sediments representing the geological stratigraphic column and the fossils embedded in these sediments. Price also insisted that the “order” observed in the arrangement of sediments and fossils was artificial, and even a satanic delusion to advance the cause of evolution.

Warren Johns of Andrews University, another speaker at the BRISCO meeting, traced “The ‘Evolution’ of [SDA] Flood Geology.” He pointed out that Adventists had rejected standard scientific geology and even dissented from the views of many conservative Protestants who interpreted the “biblical Flood” as a local flood in the Near East, and accepted the abundant scientific evidence of long geologic ages. In contrast, following White and Price, Adventists aligned themselves with the short-chronology school. Johns noted that beginning in the 1950s, over the vociferous objections of Price, Adventist scientists like Harold Clark who had benefited from formal education in various scientific fields were able to modify the church’s orthodox position and accept the reality of the structure of geological stratigraphy. However, with Clark they retained the view that a single, worldwide, recent Flood was responsible for all of the fossil-bearing sediments on Earth. The GRI was formed by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) to ascertain scientific evidence that the church’s view was correct. It is also helpful to note that many orthodox Adventist scientists—even the former director of GRI, Dr. Robert Brown—have long held that the age of the universe and of the rocks on Earth are on the order of billions of years, just as the scientific evidence indicates.

At the 2001 BRISCO meeting, comments from several presenters and participants indicated that they can no longer maintain the concept that most, if not all, of the fossil-bearing sediments on Earth were deposited in one year. At most only a few strata could have been formed by the Flood. What about the other strata? When and under what conditions were they

formed? That will certainly be the subject of future BRISCO meetings.

One presenter, Richard Peters, a Loma Linda University graduate student in geology, presented a copyrighted paper that proposes a means of salvaging the current Adventist Flood model by considering the role of nonevolutionary stratigraphic ordering mechanisms on a habitable earth. He views current Flood geology as using a “grossly apologetic methodology” and states that his approach is “designed to overcome the tendencies to arbitrariness pervasive in creationist geology and paleontology.”

Dalton D. Baldwin, emeritus professor of Christian theology at Loma Linda University, in a paper entitled “Did God Design Lion’s Teeth?” considered what appears to many Adventists to be a major problem with accepting long geological ages and evolutionary processes, whether called theistic evolution or progressive creation. This is the problem of “death before human sin.” Baldwin suggests that “apparently it was not possible for God to design an ecological system in which the byproducts of plant life benefit animal life and the byproducts of animal life benefit plant life, without the destruction of life being involved.” His conclusion? “God’s design would include death before there was any human sin.”

In all, 17 presentations were made at BRISCO, involving topics ranging from specific geological studies, geological interpretations from a “philosophical” perspective, discussions of the relationship between theology and science, and anthropological and paleontological discussions; to a presentation by Lowell Cooper, a vice president of the GC and chair of the GRI board, entitled “Faith and Science

Will Be the Focus of Adventist Dialogue.” His presentation reported on the decision of the GC leadership to hold a series of discussions on “faith, science, and the church’s understanding of the biblical account of creation.”

This GC initiative is designed to in-

**Dalton D. Baldwin, emeritus professor of Christian theology at Loma Linda University, in a paper entitled “Did God Design Lion’s Teeth?” considered what appears to many Adventists to be a major problem with accepting long geological ages and evolutionary processes, whether called theistic evolution or progressive creation.**

crease “clarity regarding the Adventist understanding and witness about the biblical account of origins” and to facilitate “open communication among theologians, scientists and church administrators.” About 80 individuals will be asked to attend the first meeting, currently scheduled for August 2002. Cooper was asked why church administrators, who are neither scientists nor theologians, need to be present at such a meeting. His answer was that the administrators who attend can appropriately communicate the conclusions of the group to the general church membership.

The booklet containing the abstracts and papers for the meetings noted that the information and ideas in the documents were not necessarily endorsed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Geoscience Research Institute, or even the presenters, but were meant to provide materials for discussion.

The cover of the booklet contained a jigsaw puzzle design with some of the edge pieces detached. It was not explained whether this symbolized that the puzzle—traditional Adventist understandings of geology—were coming together or falling apart. ■



# The IBMTE: An Image to the Beast?

■ EDITORIAL STAFF NEWS

In September 2001, the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) officially adopted policies of potentially far-ranging consequences for all GC institutions of higher education. In North America this includes Andrews University, the seat of the SDA Theological Seminary; Loma Linda University, the home of the denomination's School of Medicine; and Oakwood College.

Among other things, the newly approved "Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education" provides that members of the IBMTE committee can: (1) conduct periodic examinations of each religion/theology faculty member with respect to "the candidate's commitment to the church's fundamental beliefs, with particular emphasis on Seventh-day Adventist distinctive teachings;" (2) require that the faculty member under review submit to the committee an autobiographical essay focusing on his or her spiritual journey, their published and unpublished writings, student and peer evaluations, and a written "statement of his/her commitment to the church's fundamental beliefs, with particular emphasis on Seventh-day Adventist distinctive teachings;" (3) screen new religion faculty candidates for theological correctness; (4) require new religion faculty to "have a minimum of five years of pastoral experience" and to "have been ordained/commissioned to the gospel ministry;" (5) have the authority to demand the termination of current religion faculty members who fail to win "ecclesiastical endorsement" by the IBMTE committee, and (6) require that all faculty teaching at least half-time religion/theology courses must hold current ecclesiastical endorsement or "under review" status.

Following the promulgation of the IBMTE handbook, a firestorm of pro-

test and opposition has erupted at several North American Adventist institutions of higher education. The procedures that were used to develop the document have been called into question. Two individuals—Gerald Winslow, dean of the Faculty of Religion of Loma Linda University, and Joseph Gurubatham, president of Home Study International/Griggs University—both of whom had raised various questions concerning the initial draft, were removed from the original IBMTE board. Appointed in their place was the dean of Southern Adventist University's School of Religion, an individual widely regarded as espousing very conservative and restrictive administrative policies. Drafts of the document were not widely circulated for comment. A highly placed official of the North American Division was overheard to have stated that the final IBMTE product "makes no sense."

At a recent meeting of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies in Denver, there was essentially a unanimous vote of those members present to send a carefully crafted communication to GC authorities, asking them to delay the implementation of the provisions of the IBMTE. It is reported that faculty at both Andrews and Loma Linda Universities view the adoption of this handbook as having the potential to create incredible mischief. It is considered as a vote of no-confidence by the GC in the ability of deans, chancellors, presidents and boards to hire and maintain qualified faculty. Others see it as casting a chill on theological discussion and scholarship, not only on the campuses impacted but also in the church as a whole.

Active efforts are currently underway to mitigate the effects of the IBMTE for North American institutions.

Reportedly encouraged by General Conference President Dr. Jan Paulsen, a consultative process has been implemented in the North America Division to study how institutions geographically located in North America, including those officially under GC authority, can take advantage of a provision in the procedures for each division to establish its own boards and guidelines.

## Commentary

With this action, the GC appears to have created its own version of a "Holy Office" (a name once applied to the Catholic Church's Inquisition), dedicated to conducting the equivalent of a theological biopsy of Adventist theology and religion faculty. It might be suggested that the closest analogue to this action is the efforts of certain members of the Curia of the Roman Catholic Church in

**The idea of the need for the IBMTE was developed during the regime of former GC President Robert Folkenberg, who was widely known for his attempts to centralize power in the GC.**

Rome to exercise control of individual members of various theology faculties at Catholic educational institutions, especially in the United States. This recent GC action can be interpreted as representing a radical departure from the historic Adventist tradition of theological diversity and debate, one that avoided credalism and refused to concentrate ecclesiastical or doctrinal control in the hands of a few. It tramples on the dynamic Adventist understanding of "present truth." Instead, it makes normative what are current doctrinal understandings as interpreted by a small group of church administrators.



# Accreditation Blues Turn Rosy at AUC

■ JAMES STIRLING

Recognition by an official accrediting body means a lot to a college today—pride of accomplishment, respect from alumni, and most of all enrollment of savvy students who expect to list their college degree on their resume at job-seeking time. Accreditation time is therefore cause for anxiety at private and public colleges, a time when they have to account for what they have done and hope to do. This past year several Adventist colleges have undergone the rigorous inspections that their accrediting agencies scheduled.

One of these was Atlantic Union College, in South Lancaster, Mass., not far from Boston, reporting on its web site. After some suspenseful days and weeks it finally got the nod from a committee sent by their accrediting group, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), on November 9. The accreditation was particularly sweet in

light of the many dire predictions that have been made about the school's expected demise.

In a story in *Adventist Today* about AUC two years ago (July/Aug 1999) by Dennis Hokama, crediting information from Karen Nugent, *Worcester Telegram* reporter, the imminent collapse of the school was predicted by a former administrative assistant. However, the school has survived to date and has registered a 13 percent gain in student enrollment, now at 568 students. AUC is a member of the Colleges of Worcester Consortium, Inc., a group of 14 higher education institutional partners that collaborate in providing student access to cross-registration privileges, library access, and career services.

Besides its general arts and sciences curriculum, AUC is proud of a new high-tech program they have

Accreditation time is therefore cause for anxiety at private and public colleges, a time when they have to account for what they have done and hope to do.

begun—Certified Professional Training in Information Technology (CPTIT), preparing students to become professionals in Microsoft systems engineering (MCSE) and in the programming of Oracle, Novel, and Cisco systems. The NEASC committee assured the school that their ten-year accreditation granted in 1998 was to be continued, with another site visit scheduled for the fall of 2002. ■

## The IBMTE continued

The idea of the need for the IBMTE was developed during the regime of former GC President Robert Folkenberg, who was widely known for his attempts to centralize power in the GC. Following his fall from power, there was widespread expectation that the IBMTE proposal would die a natural death if it was ignored. However, Folkenberg's dubious legacy has been continued by the director of the GC Department of Education, Humberto Rasi, who is reportedly advancing the agenda of the IBMTE as part of his efforts to create a "united church." Loma Linda University School of Medicine faculty member, John Testerman, recently circularized his evaluation of the potential implications for his university if provisions of the IBMTE were implemented. In his view, the IBMTE provides an open invitation for witch hunting, establishing a precedent for nonpeer review of university faculty by church

administrators that could easily be extended to other university schools and departments. Most importantly, upsetting the denomination's delicate balance of centralized versus decentralized control, it gives GC administrators for the first time the power to directly interfere with personnel decisions at the individual institutional level. It will make it difficult for the school to recruit high quality professional candidates for religion faculty positions. Candidates will know that church administrators with little theological sophistication and knowledge of scholarly issues will be scrutinizing them, with their jobs on the line at each periodic ecclesiastical review. Testerman argues that "IBMTE provisions will exclude new religion faculty applicants with an academic rather than pastoral background. Had the pastoral experience provision of the Handbook already been in place, it would have prevented the hiring of such notable Loma Linda University faculty as A. Graham Maxwell, Ivan Blazen, Carla Gober and Gerald Winslow, to name a

few. This provision will make it difficult to maintain a strong, academic theological faculty."

The IBMTE has the potential to poison the congenial working relationship that now exists between university administrations and the GC in ways that could easily lead to a break between the two entities, ironically making more likely the very outcome that the writers of the handbook thought they were preventing. The IBMTE process will distract the faculty, administration, and boards of our universities from their prime mission into an involvement in what may be prolonged, ugly, and divisive conflict. Most serious is the potential long-term effect of endangering the institution's accreditation because it allows an external entity to interfere in established institutional processes for hiring, evaluating, and firing faculty. Finally, it usurps the authority and prerogatives of the deans, chancellors, presidents, and boards and bypasses faculty handbook provisions that provide guidelines and due process for faculty termination. ■



## THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY: An Interview With Ed Christian

■ JOHN MCLARTY

**MCLARTY:** Give me a two or three sentence description of ATS.

**CHRISTIAN:** The ATS is an organization of centrist Adventist biblical scholars who affirm the teaching and leadership of the Adventist church and covenant to study the Bible as believers rather than skeptics. Beyond that, members are free to hold and argue a variety of opinions. (For example, some ATS scholars favor the ordination of women, and some oppose it.) About forty ATS scholars are also members of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies (ASRS), so there is a good deal of overlap between the two groups, and I for one consider many ASRS scholars who are not ATS members as friends. Our aim is not to separate ourselves from supposedly "heretical" scholars, as some claim, but to have a forum where serious scholarship from our perspective can be shared and discussed. As editor of the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (JATS), I should also point out that while ASRS does not have a journal, JATS has been publishing Adventist biblical scholarship for twelve years. (For information, contact [ats86@email.com](mailto:ats86@email.com)).

**MCLARTY:** It seemed to me that the ASRS meetings were almost exclusively about theologians talking with other theologians. The ATS meetings appeared to me to be more about theologians talking with interested lay people. Is this correct?

**CHRISTIAN:** There are actually two ATS meetings: one professional and one general. (You attended the general meeting.) The ATS professional meeting was held on Thursday, November 15, 2001, in Colorado Springs. The general meetings were held on Friday and Sabbath at the Denver South Seventh-day Adventist Church.

ATS believes scholars have a duty to share their findings with church members in a way they can understand. There are a lot of church members who have a deep hunger to study and un-

derstand the Bible, and for them the ATS general meetings are a real treat. Usually these meetings focus on one theme, such as the latest Adventist studies on Daniel or Revelation, or hot issues in Adventism, and people often drive for hours to hear the best Adventist scholarship on these topics.

We hold the professional meetings on Wednesday and/or Thursday, and the general meetings on Friday night and Sabbath.

To give you an idea of what our professional meetings are like, here is a list of some of the presentations: Kenneth Mulzac, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines. "Socio-Cultural and Religio-Psychological Dynamics of the Church in the Philippines"

Jiri Moskala, Th.D., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Theology, S.D.A. Theological Seminary, Andrews University. "The Nature of the Laws of Clean and Unclean Food in Leviticus 11: Recent Discussion"

Greg A. King, Ph.D., Professor of Biblical Studies, Pacific Union College. "Genesis 1-2 and Evangelicalism's Elastic Boundaries"

Gerald A. Klingbeil, D. Litt., Professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Director of Research Institute/Theology Faculty, River Plate Adventist University, Argentina. "Between Law and Grace: Ritual and Ritual Studies in Recent Evangelical Thought"

All of these presentations were labeled as "ATS" sessions in the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) program guide, though they were open to all ETS members. Some were quite well attended. A year ago, when Fernando Canale talked about Open Theism, the room was packed.

Several of us prefer to speak at regular ETS sessions, rather than at ATS sessions, as some ETS scholars avoid ATS sessions. I've been doing this for three years now. This year I spoke on

the biblical support for the annihilation of the wicked, and about a hundred non-Adventist scholars came.

**MCLARTY:** Why are the ATS meetings held in conjunction with the meetings of the ETS rather than with the AAR/SBL meetings? Just what is the relationship between ATS and ETS?

**CHRISTIAN:** Speakers at the ETS meetings take a variety of views, but they all take the Bible seriously. They wrestle with it, they argue about what it means, but they also want to submit to it. Many of the ETS members take an inerrantist [verbal inspiration] position with which few ATS scholars are comfortable, and many take a Calvinist approach that puts Adventists on edge, but there is a brotherhood of believers that opens to embrace Adventist scholars, and we appreciate that. There is a great need for Adventist scholars to interact with these people, learn from them, and share with them.

The relationship between the ATS and the ETS is generally cordial. ATS is officially an allied organization, not a part of ETS. As such, the ATS makes a single yearly payment to the ETS which allows as many ATS members to attend the ETS meetings as care to and guarantees ATS a room in which to hold its meetings. The meetings are advertised in the conference program and open to ETS members. ATS members are not ETS members unless they actually join ETS and pay dues, and only a few do that. Some ETS members are nervous about the ATS because they consider Adventists cultic. Others are nervous because they consider the ATS and Adventist position on biblical inspiration too liberal, as few if any ATS members believe in verbal inerrancy (as distinguished from the inspiration of the biblical teaching and revelation). Most, however, of the 1500 theologians who attend the meetings accept us without question as brothers and sisters. It's great to hear fresh ideas, meet top scholars whose work we've



# ADVENTIST SOCIETY OF RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS: Adventist "Core" discussed

■ JOHN MCLARTY

**T**he Adventist Society of Religious Scholars (ASRS) held its annual meeting in Denver, November 15-17, 2001. The theme of the meeting was "The Core of Adventism." The attendance averaged about 75, with people coming and going throughout the conference.

Presentations ranged from a paper on the Trinity in early Christianity by Keith Burton of Oakwood College, to a presentation on how our articulation of theology might be shaped by a mission to Moslems, to a paper by Ginger Harwood of La Sierra University and Bev Beem of Walla Walla College on spirituality among early Adventists.

A broad range of perspectives was evident in the presentations; the question-and-answer sessions following papers could be quite intense, but what struck me was the spirit of collegiality. I did not sense that theological battles lines had been drawn. To me as an outsider, ASRS seemed to function as a demilitarized zone for Adventists involved in professional religious scholarship.

One of the most striking discussions of the conference arose in connection with the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE). The IBMTE is a scheme for providing centralized denominational supervision of all theology and ministerial teachers in Adventist universities around the world. The discussion focused on how the group should respond to the IBMTE. Should they vote a strong statement

opposing the Board? Should they try to describe a process which would honor the publicly stated intent of the Board while seeking to modify some of its more objectionable characteristics? Should they simply try to stall implementation?

I heard much that I expected about this intrusion of the General Conference (GC) into the governance of colleges run by union conferences. Scholars were told that the North American Division was drafting its own plans regarding the certification of religion faculty in its colleges. Faculty at GC institutions (Andrews University, Oakwood College, Loma Linda University)

then appealed for their peers not to abandon them, arguing that "what happens to us in the short run will come to you in the long run." What surprised me was that not a single person had anything good to say about this program. No one. Perhaps there was secret support for it, but no one spoke out loud expressing the slightest support for this GC Board action. And the group present included people from the Adventist Theological Society and others with well-earned reputations as conservatives within Adventism.

Sabbath afternoon, Erv Taylor and I attended the concluding meetings of the Adventist Theological Society (ATS). The tone of these meetings was quite different from the ASRS. Where the ASRS appeared to be an open forum for

the exploration of ideas, the ATS meetings were designed to promote a particular viewpoint. The feeling was polemical against ideological opponents who were not present. The audience was assumed to be in agreement with the speakers. Most of the audience was laity.

The theme of the ATS gathering was

**I heard much that I expected about this intrusion of the General Conference (GC) into the governance of colleges run by union conferences.**

creation. And the papers were designed to provide support for the traditional Adventist reading of the book of Genesis. I heard parts of three presentations. Each of them featured ideas that have been current for a long time. They were not adventuring, they were reaffirming. A number of scholars spent time at the meetings of both ATS and ASRS.

ASRS is a gathering of Adventist religion scholars primarily from North America. They hold their meetings in conjunction with the annual convention of the Society of Biblical Languages and the American Academy of Religion. Kendra Haloviak of Columbia Union College accepted the presidency of ASRS for the coming year, taking over from the outgoing Keith Burton of Oakwood College. ■

## ATS interview

learned from, and make friends from seminaries around the country.

**MCLARTY:** Where will ATS hold its meetings next year? The ETS/ATS meetings will be Nov. 20-22, 2002, at the Regal Constellation Hotel in

Toronto. The location of the general meeting has yet to be announced.

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*Ed. Note. The Adventist Theological*

*Society (ATS) holds its annual meeting in connection with the Evangelical Theological Society. As mentioned in the above article, Erv Taylor and I visited their Sabbath afternoon sessions in November, 2001. I wrote Ed Christian, editor of The Journal of the Adventist Theological Society (JATS) and asked for more information. ■*



# Who Watches, Who Cares?

## Reflections on a Symposium at Loma Linda

■ DENNIS HOKAMA AND JAMES STIRLING

It is an old saying that people who forget their past may be condemned to repeat their mistakes.

The symposium, "Who Watches, Who Cares?"—featuring eleven speakers at the youth chapel of the Loma Linda University Church—revisited seven events involving financial disasters of the church. It was the first public meeting of the Members for Church Accountability (MCA), cofounded by Drs. George Grames and Stewart Shankel and centered in Morrison, Colorado. The "financial misadventures," as James Walters stated in his introduction, include the Davenport investments, the Harris Pine Mills, the Fuller Memorial Hospital, the Family Enrichment Resources, Robert Folkenberg, the Shady Grove Hospital, and the Boston Regional Medical Center. The aim of the meeting, according to Walters, was not merely to rehearse the mistakes but to see if by analyzing the patterns of misconduct church leaders and concerned members could avoid allowing such things to happen again. The key, Walters said, would lie in improving the financial accountability of the church and its institutions and returning "responsibility for directing church financial policy to church membership."

The details of these affairs have been spelled out through the years in issues of *Spectrum* magazine and *Adventist Today*. Each of the cases was reviewed briefly.

William Coffman related how Donald Davenport, a physician turned investor, borrowed millions of dollars from at least 27 Adventist institutions, high-level and influential church leaders, and individual members before filing for bankruptcy in 1981. His tactic was to give church leaders lucrative "finder's fees" and preferential rates of annual return as

high as 80 percent in order to get them to influence institutions and individuals to lend him money. He used this to buy properties that were sometimes secured by multiple "first" trust deeds on a single piece.

Douglas Hackleman described how the Harris Pine Mills was donated to the church in 1951 and helped thousands of students work their way through school on many Adventist campuses—only to go down in bankruptcy in 1986 through mismanagement. Even while its assets exceeded its liabilities by millions of dollars, the legal proceedings cost the church not only the business enterprise but also an additional six million dollars.

George Grames, president of MCA and emeritus professor in the School of Medicine at Loma Linda University, outlined the Fuller Memorial Hospital case. In 1977 three administrators of this Adventist hospital located in South Attleboro, Massachusetts, assumed major ownership as individuals—with money contributed by Fuller Memorial Hospital—of the Pawtucket Institute of Health Services, a nearby nursing home facility. Five years later they sold their "interest"—for which they had paid \$1.00 each—to Fuller Memorial Hospital for \$640,000, with the blessing of the union conference president. The three men profited greatly from their positions on both sides of the transaction. Grames asked, "Why would church leadership participate in a financial scheme that permitted Fuller Hospital administrators to financially exploit the hospital?"

The case of the Family Enrichment

Resources (FER) was discussed by Richard Sheldon. This program was organized in 1997 by the General Conference as an effort to replace the Home Health Education Service in supplying direction and resources for literature evangelists. Harold Otis was named manager. The new program envisioned the production of animated Bible stories to give colporteurs another way to sell their products to the general public. A Canadian company called Blue Duck proposed to make seven of the videos at a cost of \$15,000,000. A scheme to raise this money was proposed by Blue Duck: take funds from the church to invest in supposedly high-interest-rate international financial instruments. Several hundred thousand dollars was advanced through the Columbia Union

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Conference to the Canadian firm; but none of the promised results were realized. The church suffered a very large net loss and called a halt to the scheme.

Glenn Foster took up the case of Elder Robert Folkenberg, former president of the General Conference. Folkenberg allowed himself to become obligated to a private businessman named James E. Moore to the extent that he began using his office as president to further the in-



terests of Moore. Despite being repeatedly warned, Folkenberg refused to disclose this conflict of interest until litigation by Moore forced it into the open.

The complicated case of the Shady Grove Hospital in Rockville, Maryland, was described by Dennis Hokama. This facility is owned and operated by Adventist HealthCare, one of five Adventist health systems. Shady Grove came to national attention in late 1999 because it was suddenly on the verge of losing its accreditation after a surprise investigation by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) prompted by an article in the Washington Post alleging shabby patient care. Most of the incidents seemed related to mistakes and oversights caused by overworked, understaffed nurses. But what began as a scandal of shabby patient care, soon became a scandal of alleged financial mismanagement and lucrative compensation being paid to executives. Despite their very high pay—amounting to hundreds of thousands to several million dollars—the system they were running was having financial difficulties and was apparently unable to take adequate care of its patients.

Gary Marais related the story of the Boston Regional Medical Center in Massachusetts. He was once the chief of cardiology at the New England Memorial Hospital, which became the Boston Regional Medical Center. This hospital was founded in 1899, in accordance with Ellen White's wishes; and it also became home to the New England Memorial Church in 1952, and 13 years later the Greater Boston Academy. The hospital began to run into financial difficulty in the early 1990's, and due to incompetent and indecisive management, possible conflicts of interest, and negligent supervision by the board of trustees, it was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1999. The church and the academy were lost, along with the hospital.

For most of the audience, the litany of institutional mistakes was not new; but they had come to hear what could be done about it. The

next speakers spoke to this issue.

W. Arden Clarke, a retired minister who has written on church governance, proposed that what is good for civil government should be good for churches as well. The axiom that "no one can govern well without the consent of the governed" also applies to the church. He urged that lay people get organized and first take control of the selection of their conference leaders. At present, too often the conference officials are selected by higher-up administrators who expect that their slate of candidates will be approved by the constituents. His proposal is important, Clarke argued, because leaders are beholden to those who got them into office; and they cannot be held accountable to the membership until a change is implemented. The radical reformation in church government

brought about by the 1984 North Pacific Union Conference laymen is cited as an example of what can be done to make the church accountable.

Because so many people are attracted by get-rich-quick promises and high-interest business ventures, there will always be confidence men and women ready to take their money. When church officials in various capacities get involved in such schemes, it is even worse because they betray not only a public trust but also a church trust. People who experience such betrayal may become disillusioned with the church itself.

Stewart Shankel presented a prescription for meaningful church accountability. He argued that the main problem is not a lack of policy to protect the church, but rather

poor implementation and enforcement of policy. It is awkward for anyone to rebuke or chastise colleagues in a pyramidal organizational structure. Shankel proposed the creation of an effective check-and-balance system, beginning with selection of an ad hoc lay advisory committee. Members of this committee—first appointed by local church boards, then nominated by conference, union, and division committees—would be selected for their

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expertise in the area of specific concern. This committee would be empowered to investigate any area of alleged irregularity in any church operation and have the right to suspend any activity they perceived to be against the best interest of the church until the issue could be brought before a proper body for resolution. Their independence from the organizational structure of the parties being investigated would presumably give them more freedom to be objective. The committee would then dissolve, or work with church leaders for a solution, depending on the findings of the proper body.

If eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, it is also the price concerned church members, lay and clergy, must pay if they love their church enough to keep it honest and open. ■



# From core to community: RECONFIGURING the Adventist center

RICHARD RICE

**W**hat is the key to Adventist identity? What is it that makes us what we are? Most Protestant groups, including Seventh-day Adventists, seek their identity through doctrinal definition, an approach that can take several different directions. One is the quest for clarity and precision. Early Christian leaders drew sharp lines between acceptable and unacceptable concepts of the nature of Christ, for example, and they put teeth in their actions by anathematizing those who held rejected views.

Besides greater doctrinal clarity, Christians— theologians, ordinarily—sometimes seek improved doctrinal organization. They examine the way the church's various beliefs are related to each other, and they distinguish between more and less important Christian doctrines. The quest for a "core" suggests this approach to Adventist identity. The "core-periphery" metaphor, many think, represents a decided improvement on a doctrinal "string-of-beads" that merely lists or numbers our beliefs.

Adventists are known for their distinctive beliefs, their extensive mission work and energetic evangelistic endeavors, their enormous investment in health promotion and education, to a certain extent for their public service, and in some circles for their political activities (temperance and religious

liberty). According to William Johnsson, a unified worldwide organization is one of the features that makes Seventh-day Adventism "a miracle church."

The most promising approach, however, has never been an object of extensive attention among Adventists; yet it has the potential to transform every aspect of our church and its life, and it can help us meet some of the most pressing problems facing the church today. This is to emphasize the role of community in Christian existence.

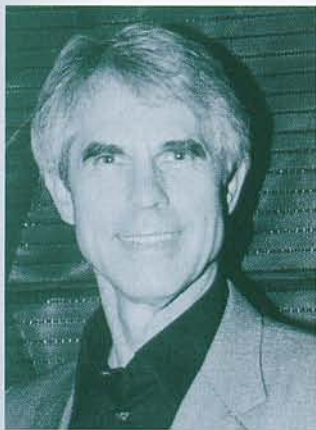
Some years ago I talked with a Jewish rabbi

about how to communicate a religious heritage to young people. It is a challenge facing every religious group, and one he and I both felt keenly as parents and clerics. The rabbi told me that whenever he explains what it means to be a Jew, especially to an audience of young people, he emphasizes three basic elements: believing, behaving and belonging. Judaism involves all three, as he describes it; but the most important is belonging. To be a Jew is first and foremost to belong to the Jewish community—to connect your life to the life of the community, to make the community central to your identity. On another level, it involves following a way of life, observing various traditions and forms of worship. And then, perhaps on a third level, it involves accepting the truth of certain doctrines.

I wondered how the three "B's" he talked about apply to the Adventist church. Is Adventism primarily a matter of believing or behaving or belonging? For Adventists generally, believing and behaving would be strong candidates for first place. The idea of truth, as in the expression "present truth," plays a prominent role in Adventist history. Behaving also makes an important contribution to Adventist identity. We are widely known for distinctive standards of diet and dress, for Sabbath-keeping, tithing, and various forms of Christian service. Just where belonging fits into the Adventist picture of the church is unclear. It is certainly less prominent than either believing or behaving. In the thinking of many Adventists, I suspect, it hardly shows up at all.

We have not developed an extensive understanding of community, and we have never made Christian community an essential element in the way we identify ourselves. Yet this is precisely where our quest for identity should begin—not with doctrines or lifestyle, not even with our witness to the world—but with a careful examination (to accompany an intense cultivation) of what it means for people to exist as the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit; of what it means for us to live together in faith, hope, and love.

Why place community, belonging, at the center





of our identity? Because this is what the earliest Christians did. As the apostles describe it, being a Christian is more than believing and behaving, it is a matter of belonging, too, and this is the most important element of all.

The New Testament is through and through a testimony to the importance of the church. Most of the documents in the New Testament are addressed to various Christian communities, or their representatives. Paul's letters, for example, are directed to specific groups of believers—Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. Revelation was sent to several churches, or Christian congregations, in Asia Minor.

Not only is the church the social reality *behind* the New Testament, but the church is also the most pervasive theme *in* the New Testament. In one way or another, the life of the church is related to every aspect of its thought. This is particularly true of the way it describes salvation.

According to the New Testament, the salvation that Jesus Christ makes available to us involves two new possibilities. One, of course, is the possibility of a new relationship with God. God forgives us and restores us. On the objective side, we are adopted into God's family. Thanks to Jesus' work, God treats us as his very own children, and we

ers into the embrace of his own relation with God. He makes available to his disciples the love that radiates between the Father and the Son—the endless circle of affection that is central to God's life, the affection that is God's life. The same love that unites Father and Son in eternity also connects the Son with the disciples and the disciples with one another. The fellowship of believers thus becomes the means by which God's love is manifest in the world. The creation of community, then, is indispensable to the work of Christ; and the inner dynamic that holds the community together is the key to its identity.

Once we have established the importance of community to our identity, the next step is to find a way of configuring Adventism that reflects this New Testament emphasis. This requires us to look carefully at the various metaphors for church—both those that appear in the Bible and those that influence our denominational heritage.

A growing body of scholarly work indicates that metaphors do more than describe our experience; they structure it. Our experience is metaphorical through and through. As the title of one well-known book puts it, we live by metaphors. Three ecclesial metaphors in particular deserve our attention—army, business, and family.

The image of the Church militant has a long and

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have all the legal privileges and inheritance rights that natural children have. As Paul asserts, we are "heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ" (Rom 8:17). On the subjective side, we have a new experience of God. Jesus' personal connection to God surpassed anything human beings had known before. He spoke to God as openly and trustingly as a little child speaks to its parents. He addressed God as Abba, an expression of familiarity and affection like "Daddy" or "Papa." Furthermore, Jesus taught that the same relationship he enjoyed with God is available to us. We can think and speak of God as he did. We can come to God openly, confidently—without a trace of fear.

Besides a new way of relating to God, Jesus also makes possible a new way for us to relate to one another. According to the "farewell discourses" of the fourth Gospel, Jesus wants to bring his follow-

influential history in Christianity. Its roots go all the way back to the Old Testament, with its stories of Israel's conquest of Canaan and her subsequent struggles with surrounding nations. The apocalyptic books of both Old and New Testaments are filled with military imagery. Daniel and Revelation contain scenes of enormous battles and immense destruction. For some people, warfare became a way to serve God.

Adventists have never glorified military conflict—we have a history of conscientious objection—but we apply military imagery to all sorts of church activities. We conduct ingathering "campaigns" and evangelistic "crusades." Our youth program is called the "Missionary Volunteer Society." Members of the Pathfinder Club wear

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# RECONFIGURING the Adventist center

uniforms, achieve different ranks, salute each other, and march in formation. And many of us grew up singing stirring military songs like "Soldiers of Christ, Arise," "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "The Captain Calls for You," and "Sound the Battle Cry."

Sometimes we think of Christian service in military terms. Several years ago a church paper reported the appointment of a certain denominational employee to a position that involved major challenges and considerable inconvenience. When asked for his reaction to this new assignment, the man would only say: "I am a good soldier, I am a good soldier." As far as he was concerned, the request was an order from his superiors. It was beyond question or discussion. Like a good soldier, he did what he was asked without complaining.

Economic symbols, though less dramatic than military metaphors for the church, are enormously influential among Adventists. They portray the church as a commercial endeavor, or a business. If the first concern of the "army church" is conquest, the primary concern of the "business church" is productivity.

Behind these economic metaphors lie the ideas of divine expectation and human accountability. God deals generously with his people, and he requires a great deal from them in return. Nearly half of Jesus' recorded parables involve farmers, merchants, or householders striving for financial gain. The best known is the parable of the talents, in which a man entrusted his property to three servants, left on an extended journey, and on his return called them to account for their work. To the two who had labored faithfully and turned a profit he said, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21). The servant who neglected his responsibility and had nothing to show for the master's trust in him was severely punished.

Economic metaphors lead us to quantify our activities. Adventists have always been great counters. Ministers and members are constantly encouraged to be productive in ways that can be quantified. Growth is the major priority of the business church. We regard increases in membership and financial contributions as principal indices of denominational progress.

We can see the influence of economic metaphors in various actions of the General Conference. Consider the document approved at

the 1996 Annual Council, entitled "Total Commitment to God: A Declaration of Spiritual Accountability in the Family of Faith." As our denominational leaders see it, the church must operate on sound business principles, and responsible management must assess its performance. To do that we need instruments that will help us to quantify our objectives, collect data and draw appropriate conclusions. With these in hand, we can make the changes we need to run God's business more efficiently.

A third cluster of metaphors for the church arises from an area of life quite different from the battlefield or marketplace. It portrays our relation to God and to other Christians by invoking the closest ties that join human beings together—husbands and wives, parents and children. The family is the New Testament's most fundamental and pervasive metaphor for the Christian community.

A central element in this metaphor represents God as a parent. Isaiah 9:6 contains the expression, "everlasting father." Psalm 103 compares God's compassion for his people to a father's care for his children (103:13). The Bible attributes to God maternal functions as well. God is the one who gave birth to her people (Deut 32:18), who brings to them the blessings of the breast and womb (Gen 49:25), who comforts her children (Isa 66:13), and who will never forget them (Isa 49:15). God tenderly cares for her chosen people, teaching them to walk and bending down to feed them (Hosea 11:3, 4).

In the New Testament the significance of the word "father" expands, and it becomes the divine name par excellence. We find it in the greeting that appears in all of Paul's letters: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father." We also find it in passages dealing with central acts of Christian worship. Jesus instructed his followers to baptize in "the name of the Father." (Matt 21:19); and the prayer he gave his disciples begins with the words, "Our Father" (Matt 6:9).

Although we are all children of God because he created us (cf. Acts 17:28-29), we become his children in a special way through Jesus. Connecting with him connects us with the Father, and this new relationship to God brings with it a new relationship to others. The Spirit creates a new community, and this community forms one comprehensive family. In contrast to ancient Mediterranean soci-



ety, which was filled with different social strata, the Christian family acknowledges no differences in rank or prestige. "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.... There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26, 28; NRSV).

In this family there is unity as well as equality. The most important characteristics of its members are not the things that distinguish them from one another, but the things they all have in common. "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

In this family there is also remarkable openness and mutuality, each person acutely sensitive to one another's joys and sorrows. The writers of the New Testament use the word "brothers" dozens of times to address fellow members of the church (an expression some translations helpfully render as "brothers and sisters" to show that women were as much a part of the early church as men were).

Family imagery has always been prominent among Seventh-day Adventists, as we see from our traditional forms of address. We have a long history of sibling language. Early Adventists re-

sented for that purpose is a question of enormous importance. Our choice will largely determine the shape of our entire religious experience—our motives and attitudes, ideas and decisions—and most important for our purposes here, it will guide our perception of the corporate life in Christ.

Because belonging is the central element in the biblical view of community, what we need is a metaphor for church that captures its priority, and family does this best. At least, that was the choice of the Apostle Paul. To quote one scholar, Paul's use of family terminology is so frequent that "the comparison of the Christian community with a 'family' must be regarded as the most significant metaphorical usage of all.... More than any of the other images utilized by Paul, it reveals the essence of his thinking about community" (Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*, 1994 ed., p. 49).

What vision of Adventist identity emerges if we give priority to belonging, rather than believing and behaving, and take family over army or business as our guiding metaphor for the church? And what would this vision do for us?

Central to the work of Christ is his creating a community whose members care for each other in ways that reflect God's love and who then project that loving life in the world. This view of Christian

**I wondered how the three "B's" he talked about apply to the Adventist church. Is Adventism primarily a matter of believing or behaving or belonging? For Adventists generally, believing and behaving would be strong candidates for first place. The idea of truth, as in the expression "present truth," plays a prominent role in Adventist history.**

ferred to each other as "brother" and "sister," rather than "Mister" or "Misses." Ellen G. White is known to generations of Adventists as "Sister White."

The Bible uses many other metaphors to describe members of the Christian community, but none are more influential than the three we have examined. As Christians we are soldiers in the Lord's army, servants in the Lord's vineyard, and children in the Lord's family. Each description has a solid biblical basis, each is rich and evocative, each illuminates our experience in important ways, and each has a place in Adventist tradition. If we ignored any of them, our vision of Christianity would be diminished. Nevertheless, when it functions as a guiding metaphor for church, each leads to a dramatically different conclusion. Consequently, which of these rich symbols is best

identity takes with utmost seriousness Jesus' statement that love is the hallmark of true discipleship. It elevates texts like the following to the level of a denominational charter: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12); "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35); "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another" (1 John 3:14); "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12). I suggest that we take the sort of relationships of which the New Testament writers speak so passionately and make them the hallmark of our corporate life, then pursue the cultivation of these relationships as our

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# RECONFIGURING the Adventist center

principal concern.

What will this configuration of the Adventist center do for us? A great deal. First of all, it will align us more closely with the biblical view of salvation. According to the New Testament, our participating in the community Christ established is central to what it means for us to be Christians, part and parcel of the very meaning of Christian faith.

This configuration of the Adventist center will also have a beneficial effect on our theology. It will encourage doctrinal conversation and discourage doctrinal controversy by putting doctrines in perspective. It will remind us that the community's existence in faith, hope, and love is more fundamental than the community's attempts to give formal expression to this existence. If we trust our fellow believers, we can speak the truth in love without fearing that they will misconstrue our words or, worse, our motives. When we are committed to the community of the Spirit, we will be more sensitive to the Spirit of the community as our guide to truth. This will make us open to new insights and to better ways of expressing our time-honored convictions. It will also help us to appreciate the tentativeness of all doctrinal formulations, including the 27 fundamental beliefs. We will view this list of beliefs as a helpful description of Adventism rather than a definitive

Finally, and critically important, a commitment to community will help us respond to the most pressing challenge the church faces today in certain parts of the world—religious individualism. In the thinking of many people today, particularly young people, Christian experience is essentially private, and communal expressions of religion are secondary, if not artificial. Consequently, they have little use for organized religion. This perception poses a tremendous challenge to the church, and unless we meet it effectively Adventism faces a bleak future.

Some may wonder if reconfiguring Adventism in this way would lead us to neglect or even abandon the things that have made us distinctive. But the actual effect would be quite the opposite. It would deepen our appreciation for the distinctives of our heritage by embedding them within the life of the community. Consider the Sabbath and the Second Coming, for example. They not only refer to beliefs we entertain but also to dimensions of our unique corporate experience. Adventists meet on a weekly basis to share a sense of holy time, to experience God's presence in their midst in a special way. The anticipation of God's coming reign gives our corporate life a profound sense of anticipation. We celebrate the coming of the kingdom and commit ourselves to a preparation that involves our entire lives. The nearness of the Advent calls us to holiness in all of life and summons us to finish the work we've been given. The God who comes to

**Central to the work of Christ is his creating a community whose members care for each other in ways that reflect God's love and who then project that loving life in the world. This view of Christian identity takes with utmost seriousness Jesus' statement that love is the hallmark of true discipleship.**

statement; and we will read all 27 in light of the preface, which clearly indicates their provisional nature. When we recognize this, we can reach across doctrinal disagreement and embrace those who see things differently.

A profound commitment to community will also lead us to seek inclusive rather than exclusive views of the church's make-up and mission. Armies and businesses have little patience for variation, and still less for dissent. Families are more flexible and more tolerant of diversity. Families need structure, but they always value relationships more than organization.

us week by week and provides his life-giving, life-transforming power on a daily basis, is soon to come in glory to establish his eternal kingdom. The urgency of this expectation relativizes all other value systems and provides a basis for social criticism and constructive social action. All these features contribute to the unique character of our community, and each finds its supreme expression in the profound fellowship that unites us in the body of Christ.

The Advent movement began with an experience of profound hope. Our forebears lived out of, and lived

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# Prayer MEETING cells

GLEN GREENWALT

**T**he search for hidden al-Qaida cells of Islamic religious extremists reminds me of the religious cell I belonged to when I was a child—Wednesday night prayer meeting.

We hardly looked like a dangerous group. We numbered only about eight to ten people. Brother and Sister Roland arrived in a 1951 Chevy. Brother Roland and his wife were in their late 70s, but Brother Roland still went to work every day at the grain elevator. Sister Hogsey drove a '53 Chevy and was a recent convert. A couple of very old ladies came with Brother and Sister Roland. At times the Downers and Fritzes came, but they were farmers who lived some 20 and 60 miles out of town. The Downers were Ford people and the Fritzes Plymouth people. On occasion, Dr. and Sister Unsel came in their Pontiac. And of course the Greenwalts came, unless we were in the middle of harvest. My sister and I were always the only children who came. We drove Chevys or Fords.

I still have fond memories of those prayer meetings. The people and their cars will ever be etched in my mind. I don't remember a lot of the other people in church, but I do remember the people who came to prayer meeting. This and other small gatherings of the inner circle of the faithful would, by our prayers for the latter rain and our faithful witness to the Lamb, trigger the end of human history.

At one memorable prayer meeting/conference book sale, we watched a movie of Martin Luther. The church was full that night. That same night the Catholic church in town burned to the ground. I remembered thinking that the end was certainly coming now. It didn't, but my uncle (who is not an Adventist) helped plumb the new church. He said he was completely baffled by how many small rooms were in the basement of the church. Of course those of us who went to prayer meeting knew. We knew all about the imprisonment and torture of the saints who cried out from under the altar. The last time we went to prayer meeting as kids, only my mother, my sister, and I were the ones who showed up. My father was in another town working. I am not sure where the pastor was. As we sat out in the car waiting for the saints who never showed, my sister and I made

our last and finally successful appeal to stop having to attend prayer meeting. There was no one our age who had to go to prayer meeting. The singing was slow and off key. We knew all the testimonies by heart. The prayers were always by the same people. Besides, we studied the Bible every day in school; so we should be excused. Despite the obvious drawbacks with prayer meeting, I still believe that small cells of committed believers could, like the early disciples, "turn the world upside down." My own commitment to the Christian faith is kept alive by those words.

Recently I started attending again on a regular basis the Wednesday-Night-Service. I was recruited by my wife, who was recruited by a repairman who came to the house to fix a piece of furniture. The group is small and we meet in an upstairs room of a private house. We talk about our week. Sometimes we get a Bible to check on some question we are discussing, like what was the name of the woman who drove the spike through the Canaanite general's head. We eat from the fruit and cookies or cake John's wife sets out. Mostly, we paint.

John, the host, is a furniture repairman by day and a Lutheran pastor by weekends. Mark works in construction and volunteers a great deal of time to keep the symphony going in the small town of Pendleton, Ore. Carley Ray, who is perhaps the most accomplished artist of the group, works at a local hardware store, checking the customer's membership cards as they enter. Cheryl is a part-time teacher at the local community college. My wife is a counselor, and I am looking for work. We are not great by the world's standards. John paints mostly cliffs; Mark does streams; Carley Ray sticks mostly to horses and trees; Cheryl has done a flower, pigs, and an Indian cliff house; my wife paints mostly flowers; and I draw people.

Despite our average lives and abilities, our little group has caught the attention of the local press. Twice our group has been featured in the local newspaper, something that never happened in all the years I pastored and taught. Mostly the paper is interested in the dynamics of a group of middle-aged

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# My journey in ADVENTIST education

PAUL M. STIRLING

I am a product of Adventist education, from first grade through college. I preserved that heritage for other students by teaching in Adventist schools both in America and in Africa, for thirteen years following graduation. When I no longer felt compelled to teach, an Adventist college provided retraining for a new career, which I am pursuing today. Eventually the circle of Adventist education was complete when I was appointed school board representative for my local church and later served as board chair.

Those teaching years were turbulent. I was young, energetic, and overqualified, by my own assessment. The education courses had encompassed not just a B.S. degree, but a master's as well; and the state of California had issued a lifetime teaching certificate, certainly a measure of confidence in this education.

I was hired to teach a multitude of upper grade classes, including band, at a large junior academy about an hour's drive north of San Francisco. There were five constituent churches, meaning that the five nearest churches helped subsidize and govern the one school. Several school-owned buses provided

daily transportation for the students, and the bus schedules dominated the school day. It soon became apparent that a teacher who had a school bus driver's certificate could provide great transportation for a student field trip and save the school the expense of a hired driver. Needless to say, I soon got my certificate.

So why was it so hard for me to grade papers and prepare lectures on time? How could a teacher be popular and yet demand good

workmanship? And why did well-behaved children turn unruly and disrespectful in the classroom?

Fortunately, there were several older teachers on the staff who provided the "street-smart" finishing instructions for my career, including: what to do when a student blew all the mirrors out in the restroom with an M-80 firecracker, how to avoid being the target of a love-lorn student acting out a youthful fantasy, and how to keep a school board member supportive even when it was necessary to discipline his rebellious son.

After seven years of teaching the same subjects at the same school, I realized it was time for a change. A new principal had taken over, and the working relationship was strained. How exciting, then, to get personal attention from the General Conference, with the offer of a high-school/junior college level job at an Adventist boarding school in Ethiopia! Seems a college friend had gone to Kenya to teach and had put in a good word for me to the principal of the Ethiopian Adventist College.

Teaching and living at the Ethiopian school seemed much more intense than in the States, even though most of the students and staff were devout Adventists. The country was stabilizing after a communist-style overthrow of the government, in which teenagers and young adults were the agents of violent change. Rigid communist ideals of supply and demand were translated into rationing of everything from sugar to tractor tires. People were removed from a seminomadic lifestyle of herding cattle and thrust into communes to work on and manage state farms exceeding 350,000 acres, growing cotton and other cash crops for the government.

Ethiopian Adventist College, with its rural location far from any big city, was viewed as a "safe haven" for high school students to live and work. For the teachers, the typical assignment included a full day of classroom instruction followed by a full afternoon of supervising student labor for the school garden, farm, or industrial departments. Staff meetings occupied one evening a week. Sunday work was expected both from students and faculty, and all students had to work. A weekend away from campus was a rare treat for any faculty family. There was no local school board, and the principal and business manager were colleagues who were my age. Our salaries came from the General Conference, so we did not worry about staff cutbacks if enrollment declined.

Years later, coming back to the States was a major letdown, made especially painful when no teaching job was available. Shop teachers had become computer technology experts, and I was computer illiterate. My career in teaching was over. Fortunately, funds were available to return to school, and after three years and two summers of agonizing effort, at 40 years of age, I earned an engineering degree from Walla Walla College. I have worked since





then for the U.S. Navy at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in the state of Washington.

Some years after starting this second career, I was asked to serve on the board of the local Adventist elementary school as a constituent church representative. The most difficult courses of my Adventist education were about to begin. At the first board meeting, a fellow member announced that he wanted his daughter and all the girls in the school to be able to wear shorts when they wanted to. Confrontations among board members and pastors resulted from that campaign and reoccurred many times for two years, finally resulting in the school's adopting a school uniform for all students. During this time, one of the local pastors got into a major argument with the principal and subsequently pulled his three children—all students—from the school. This was a financial and political blow from which the school has not yet recovered.

During my two years as board chair, preservation

frustrate and ruin the efforts of the most experienced teacher. Too often, the teacher must sink or swim alone in this pool of uncertain friends or foes.

5. Public school teachers have solved the problem of vulnerability—they have a union, one of the strongest in the nation. Teachers may be terminated for moral and civil crimes, but not because a student or board member thinks someone is too old or ugly. Salaries are competitive with other disciplines because of teacher activism and solidarity.

6. An Adventist teachers' union could be a source of stability. An active teachers' union in an Adventist school would serve to discipline both the teachers and the administration to hold professional standards high. A principal or minister would think twice about berating a first-grade teacher if a possible outcome would be total shutdown of the school because all the teachers walked out. Most school budgets would not survive hiring substitutes for all classes, and most parents would storm the school to resolve the prob-

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and mentoring of teachers took priority. Teachers were easy targets for board members determined to avenge a perceived insult to their child. After hiring a middle-aged teacher and seeing him labor fruitlessly to lead the minds and hearts of unsympathetic students, I could see why school boards go after the young, energetic, and self-confident graduates, just like I was so many years ago.

Now that I have seen Adventist education from the perspectives of student, teacher, parent, missionary, and board chair, some of my conclusions are as follows:

1. Adventist schools seem to develop as individual educational ecosystems, influenced to a great degree by local ministers, ambitious board members, and hard-working parents. There does not appear to be much interaction by these persons with teachers at Adventist schools in other geographical areas. No combined or accumulated wisdom of ages is available for running a local school.

2. Adventist teachers for the most part do not stay in the profession for a 30- or 40- year career. Many leave primarily because of frustration with administration, school parents, low salary, nonperforming students, and possibly religious burnout.

3. Many of these teachers were energetic and resourceful and would have been a strong asset to the field and the church if they had they stayed on and developed their career.

4. Most teachers are vulnerable to career-stunting forces soon after taking on their first assignment. A single determined student of any age or grade, working with supportive friends and doting parents, may

lem at once.

7. A sabbatical of at least several months off with pay should be given any teacher reaching 10 years of service, then again after twenty years. The wisdom of these experts is more valuable than the energy of the beginners.

8. Sincere praise and moral support from the parents and churches will go far to heal the wounds of low pay. The final step in a teacher's discouragement is very often the feeling that, along with low pay, there is low or no appreciation.

9. Every profession has underperformers or nonperformers. With age often comes a slowing down of energy and enthusiasm. So how do we help teachers who don't move forward with their profession? The local conference, which thrived off their energy when they were young, should ensure that a suitable career move is achieved which benefits from their experience and wisdom. And that is another reason for the assistance of a teachers' union.

The Adventist system of schools has meant a great deal to its youth in preparing them for careers in the workaday world, but it has meant even more to the corporate church in creating a sense of community and belonging. The individual teachers who keep it going deserve better recognition than they have received so far. We can do better. ■

*Paul Stirling is an engineer employed for 10 years by the U.S. Navy in Bremerton, Washington. Because of his experiences in teaching in SDA schools and school board administration he has a strong interest in the welfare of the school system and especially of the teaching personnel.*



# Prayer MEETING cells

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people who are not professional artists, but who are making a difference in the local art scene. They want to know what inspires and motivates our group.

Well, first and foremost we are drawn together because we all share a passion for art. We are very different in temperament, education, and even religious affiliations; but these differences are transcended by our love for art. Passionate people get noticed. Second, our group receives strong encouragement from John to attend. He emails and even calls if we miss too many times in a row. More importantly, he never harangues but talks passionately about the art we are doing. Third, friendship is more important to the group than even our art. The goal of the group is not to produce great art, even

or talents in order to endure such a boring job. Little did I know that she worked only to afford her art. I had no idea that this apparently ordinary, gray-haired woman was so interesting or talented. Now I wonder whenever I see someone, what talents and gifts lie within this person. The gospel is all about setting people free and restoring them in the image of the creative God.

Back in prayer meeting as a child I learned about more than end-time signs. We were a practical group of people who believed that we should live every day as if it were our last, but plan and work as if the world had no end. I would like to add one bit of advice to this list. We should also paint, go to concerts, read good books, write poetry, garden, take walks in the woods, or do whatever excites and energizes our creative likeness to God. Only then

**When I was a young pastor, my head elder suggested that more people would come to prayer meeting if we met in the park in the summer to have a picnic and play baseball in addition to our Bible study. This wise man also suggested that Jesus told stories instead of preaching seminary sermons. Magically, our church grew from three often-fighting families to over 50 people in a year's time!**

though we are encouraged weekly by John to get something ready for one show or another. The goal is to help each other grow as artists by support and positive criticism. The fruit, cakes, teas, and juice also help. We are cared for as whole people.

Perhaps none of this sounds very important when balls of fire are falling on major cities, personal freedoms are being curtailed in the name of national security, and religious believers are being searched out by the government and betrayed by friends—all of which sounds aw(e)fully much like the scenarios we rehearsed in prayer meetings as a child.

Obviously, art can never replace the gospel; but the gospel is conveyed through changed lives. When I think of Carley Ray, I am reminded of Paul's statement that before he knew Jesus as the Christ, he thought of Jesus as an ordinary human being, but after he knew Jesus as Christ, he no longer thought of anyone as ordinary. Before attending the art group, I knew Carley Ray only as the woman to whom I showed my Bi-Mart card in order to enter the store. I use to think she must have few interests

can we truly be free and secure.

You may not be an artist, but there are other possibilities for meeting with others to care for your soul. Some very close friends of mine are poets, and they meet weekly with a writing group. I have other friends who love cooking and meet during the week to delight in new culinary creations. Other friends belong to a reading group. Another friend leads a group of divorced men who get together to eat, talk, and play games. When I was a young pastor, my head elder suggested that more people would come to prayer meeting if we met in the park in the summer to have a picnic and play baseball in addition to our Bible study. This wise man also suggested that Jesus told stories instead of preaching seminary sermons. Magically, our church grew from three often-fighting families to over 50 people in a year's time!

And this gospel shall be preached in all the world, and people shall begin to live as they will in the kingdom, and then the kingdom shall come.

*Glen Greenwalt is an artist and a theologian. Email: greegl@hotmail.com.*



# The Chosen

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responded to him with sympathy or admiration or love.

But it wasn't just a lack of women in the Sanhedrin. It was centuries of a male, power-oriented approach to prophecy. They skipped over Isaiah 53 as irrelevant. They picked up on the Messiah's power and glory.

"He hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations ..." They knew right where to plug that in! What could they do with "he was oppressed and afflicted..." No wonder they didn't know him when he came.

On the other hand, we can picture women studying different words. He's a tender plant. He gives his back to the smiters. Thou shall make his soul an offering for sin. Wouldn't women have locked onto that? We'll never know. But we do know that Anna studied. And she saw him in the temple, eight days old. A tender plant. And a bell went off in her head. That's HIM!

You wouldn't want to be ridiculous enough to say no women ever rejected him. There must have been some who did, but where's the record of it? And through the centuries since the men rejected the Son of Mary, council after council has met and debated and—all too often—rejected him again. Rejected his truth, point by point. And nearly always, no women's voices were heard. Who knows what might have been the history of the world if women hadn't been barred

from the councils?

Check out the memorable debacles of our own church. The 1888 rejection, the Davenport fiasco, the scandals of greed and political ambition. In all these stumblings, major decisions were made by males, with the barest of token presence of a woman or two. In 1888 that one woman who participated put up a valiant fight. But the men prevailed, and she told them again and again in the years that followed, with all the authority that God had called her to, that they had rejected Christ! Once more, he was "rejected of men!"

No wonder there's enmity between the devil and the woman! From Eden-lost to Eden-restored, women have battled him for their children. They've put up the most effective resistance-gentleness. Doesn't he know where his cause would be if women were given equal voice with men in the church's policy decisions? Could it be that's why he's fighting so hard to keep women oppressed, silenced, disenfranchised, discouraged with the church?

Wouldn't it be astute of the men if they decided to share their power with us? A gentler, more relationship-oriented viewpoint might produce better plans. Plans made with feminine input might have more appeal for the female majority in the pews who aren't currently responding with great enthusiasm. At the very least, sharing the power would give them a royal opportunity to share the blame! ■

*Adapted from Ponderings, December 1989, pp. 13, 14. Used by permission.*

## Right or Humane

Continued from page 2

build hospitals and schools in Africa. But we have not been fundamentalists. Contrary to Paul, we have allowed a woman to exercise authority over men. We have reinterpreted New Testament passages that picture eternal torment for lost sinners and passages that suggest we should work seven days a week. We have corrected a "spiritual" disregard for the body and advocated health practices.

But sometimes our obsession with doing "right" has done damage. Our teaching about a "perfect remnant at the end of time" has tormented many for their entire lives. Some, based on Ellen White's words against "drugs," have rejected lifesaving medical care. And congregations have been poisoned by fierce battles over theological nits.

The explosive growth of the Adventist church in the Third World will bring us increasing political and social influence over the next 30 years. I pray our influence will prompt people to do right—tell the truth, resist corruption, honor God. And I pray that when Adventists shape a country, there will be an upsurge in education, freedom, art, public health and opportunity—in short, that life will be more humane. ■

## Reconfiguring

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out, the powerful conviction that Jesus will come soon. A few decades later, Adventists began to grasp the importance of living by faith, of trusting their salvation entirely to God's grace. We have been seeking ever since for better ways to understand and experience salvation as God's gift, independent of all human achievement. The time has now come for Adventists to contemplate the brightest star in Paul's famous constellation. The Christian life is above all a call to love. It calls us to respond to the love that permeated Jesus' life, and to let the Spirit send that love flowing through us, shaping our sentiments, our values, and our commitments, enabling us to uphold, encourage, and embrace one another. This love is the power that creates the Christian community, the Church, and makes it the instrument by which Christ extends his own love into the world. In connection with that love, faith and hope, too, will find ultimate fulfillment. ■

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# The Chosen

M A R Y A N S T I R L I N G

**"b**et you're proud of me, Mom!" Paul's cute, cute card snickered, gamin-faced. "It was the first time I ever picked out a mother—and I sure did a bang-up job of it!"

Something with the logic of it struck me, I guess, and I couldn't forget it. It comes to mind sometimes when our place is beginning to look more or less like Christmas. Not Mothers' Day. Christmas is the right time to remember it, because someone actually did pick out his mother, once. It hasn't been done since, and it hadn't been before. God chose a girl to be his mother.

That girl's the star of the Bethlehem story. A girl who grew up in a little place. Carried water. Swept the floor. Learned gentle ways and strong values. She didn't guess—never could have guessed—who was watching her, or why. He was looking all over for a mother. Not trying to find a mother for his children, as Joseph was, but picking out a mother. Trying to choose one, from among the Jewish girls of the line of David. Joseph chose Mary, and so did God! He decided to trust her gentleness, her intelligence.

He would lay down all his power—be fragile, toothless, dependent, his memory wiped blank—for her to teach him to walk. To teach him to talk, in the only language she knew.

Her love was the first human love he knew. Her touch. Her voice singing him to sleep. Her arms swinging him in the ecstatic dance of a young mother celebrating the wonder of her baby boy.

She gave him many mothers. Ruth. Bath-sheba. Sarah. Rebecca. Leah. He was part of all of them. She must have felt them, over her shoulder, joining in the nurture of a baby who was the God of Abraham and Sarah.

She gave him all his human fathers, too. David was her father, hers to bestow on him. The seed of Adam, Jacob, Judah was her heritage and her offering. Her gift, the body in which he worked out our salvation. Through that resolute, risk-taking woman he became the Son of Man. As Sojourner Truth pointed out, "Man

didn't have nothin' to do with it!"

The Bethlehem part of the Christ event strikes such a note of acceptance. Of welcome. And a wild, high note of joy untamed, unspeakable. He really came to us! "Wasn't That a Mighty Day!"

With the weeks and months, bones grew and teeth erupted as they should because of nourishment he drew from Mary's strong young body. He walked and ran and regained a tiny fraction of the mobility and power he had laid aside. The folk wisdom Mary knew became his world-view. His presuppositions were the ones she implanted. She made him human, molded him in Jewish thought patterns. In her love he was safe to risk reaching out to humankind.

But in time the safe world of Mary's gentleness opened to a world of prickly things. Smirks and insults. Rough and tumble. Work and weariness, and hard places to lie down at night.

It escalated with the years, until the prophecy was fulfilled: "He was despised and rejected ..." And the rest of the prediction also proved to be so very true: "He was rejected of men."

There's once when "men" has to give up its generic sense! It was men, literally, and quite apart from women, who made the deadly decision.

You wonder what might have happened if the Sanhedrin had been half women. Would they have condemned him? We can't know. It was a men's club. But, in all the Gospels, is there a story, or a hint of a story, of a woman who did him any ill at all? I can't recall any.

The Pharisees were after him, and the Sadducees accosted him and set their traps. And the governor and the Roman king and the rabble, with their sticks and stones. But the women we know from the Bible all

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