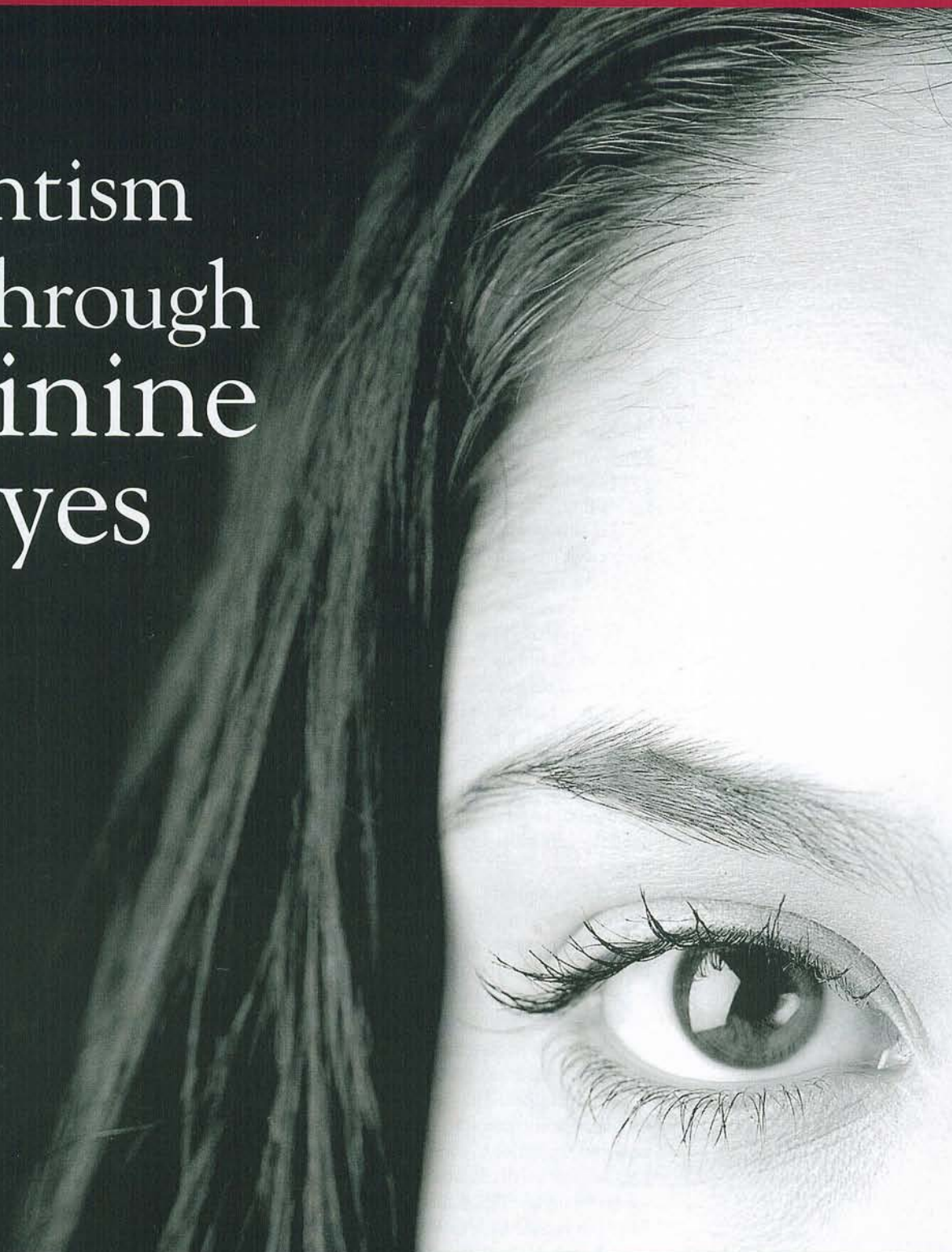


\$5.00

adventist today

may | june 2005
volume 13 issue 3

Adventism Through Feminine Eyes



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Editorial | John McLarty

Listening to Women



My daughters wanted the door between the chicken yard and the duck yard fixed. I meant to get around to it. I intended to ask my son to work on it. I thought fixing it was probably a good idea. But the door worked, sort of. And there were a lot of other items needing attention like fixing the pump in the fish pond in my greenhouse, transplanting the roses in my flower garden and working on our recalcitrant tractor, which we need for pasture maintenance. Then my wife and daughters went out of town for a week. I had to feed the chickens and ducks. I fought with the door between the pens. The second day I fixed it.

My wife and I sometimes disagree on the relative importance of various repairs and improvements around our house. Some of those differences are rooted in her femininity and my masculinity. Others result from our different experiences. There is not a distinctly feminine perspective on broken doors between chicken pens and duck yards unless women are the only ones who use the door. There is not a distinctly male perspective on a broken heater fan unless the male never drives the car in which that fan does not work.

My own projects will always receive a disproportionate amount of money and time unless I embrace the discipline of attentive listening. On the other hand, if I cultivate a high regard for the women in my home and listen to understand and not simply as a prelude to rebuttal, my wife and daughters are more likely to receive my help.

In the Adventist Church, the highest offices are all held by men. Most ecclesiastical decisions are made by individual men or by committees of men. This means the unique concerns and insights of women will likely play a secondary role in assigning money and personnel and in making policy.

I am not opposed to male leadership. I smile indulgently at those who argue that if we simply replaced the males in these positions of influence and authority with females, the subsequent decisions would be better. The decisions would be different, for sure. But better? Maybe. Women are not better than men, but they are different. We see the world through

different eyes. We experience God, church, marriage, parenting, and education in distinct ways. If those who make decisions are going to adequately serve the whole church, they must somehow attend to what God reveals through women as well as through men.

The best way to include the wisdom of women in the decisions of the church would be to increase the percentage of women in the circles of power. We need more women with the credentials of ordination and the status of denominational executives. We need more women on committees charged with major decision-making.

Adventist Today advocates including more women in the formal leadership of the church. While we work toward that end, we are committed to helping the church hear the voice of women.

This issue of *Adventist Today* features four articles by young women from Union College. Theirs were the best of more than fifteen articles submitted by students at Union College. (A special thanks to professor Chris Blake for encouraging his students to write for publication.) We also include articles by women who have been shaped by professional education and broad life experience. These women address significant

» In the Adventist Church, the highest offices are all held by men. Most ecclesiastical decisions are made by individual men or by committees of men. This means the unique concerns and insights of women will likely play a secondary role in assigning money and personnel and in making policy.

issues in personal spirituality and church policy. Their professional expertise and life experience can help the church see more clearly. Their counsel points toward higher fidelity in following Jesus, if we will listen.

Until more women are seated at the committee tables and in the executive chairs of the denomination, the least we can do is listen attentively. Together, we can make the church better for all God's sons and daughters.



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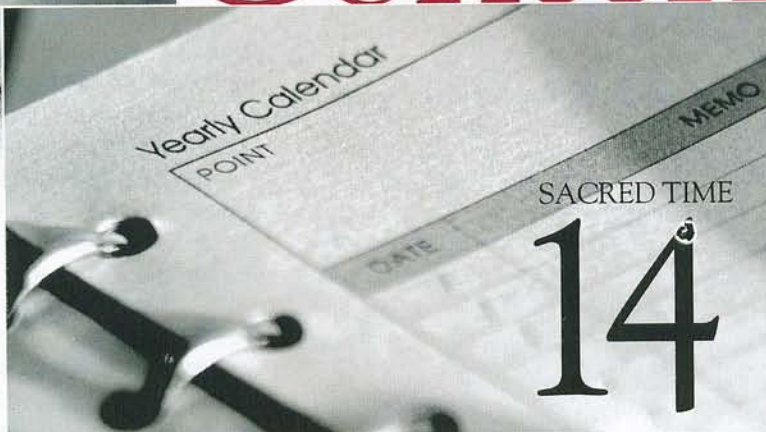
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adventist today (ISSN 1079-5499) is published bimonthly by Adventist Today Foundation, P.O. Box 8026 Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Periodical postage paid at Riverside, California, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *adventist today*, Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Copyright © 2005 by Adventist Today Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.

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letters

READERS RESPOND

ONE CONFERENCE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Are we sure Jim Brauer—Conference President—is not other than a Seventh-day Adventist? There are several possibilities after the written statement, “If you insist on the degree of change called for in this proposal, you ought to resign and start your own church.” (AT Jan/Feb 2005). Somewhere in this statement, I missed God’s voice asking us to come and reason together.

Jim Brauer fits better as one voicing the Fourteen Fundamentals in following the Prophets (Mormonism) First: The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything. Fourth: The prophet will never lead the Church astray. Fifth: The prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time. (A sample of the fourteen: by Ezra Taft Benson.)

Jim Brauer may be the only conference president able to sit back and pontificate in the manner of speaking “ex-cathedra.”

We have pushed out more age groups from the Seventh-day Adventist Church with endless mistakes. We do not need those so insulated from the congregations believing they not only have the right to say, “Love it or leave it,” but also are held in honor within the church.

Steven C. Schroder
Assistant to the Evening Dean
Heald College Roseville Campus, Calif.

CONFERENCE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

While reading through the letters to the editor (AT Jan/Feb 2005) I was caught by the reply from Jim Brauer. The first part is pretty standard, then he indicates that Conferences are not the channel for congregations to access the General Conference. Furthermore, if you do not like policy as is (we are not talking about doctrine), get out, because our policy is God-given. Now in the final paragraph the twist turns into meaningless jargon/babble. His mission as Conference President is “sharing Jesus and helping local churches be more responsive and effective in their own communities.” I am guessing this is to be done without finances on the local level.

Dick Larsen | Via the Internet

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

Reviews of Mel Gibson’s “Passion” often cite passion plays, which are relatively rare in North America. More familiar to Adventists raised Catholic are the Stations of the Cross, enacted in the passion plays and the movie. One of the Stations of the Cross is Veronica’s Veil. In the movie at one point a woman appears on screen going about her domestic chores, seemingly unconnected with the rest of the plot. I guessed she was Veronica, and sure enough on the Via Dolorosa she takes off her veil, wipes the bloody face of Jesus with it, and tries to give him a drink of water. In a passion play she would then display the veil to the audience, showing the face of Jesus imprinted on the cloth like the Shroud of Turin.

Which brings me to a neglected aspect of Mel Gibson’s movie. The Shroud of Turin is a relic. Veronica’s veil was once a relic. Pilate’s wife supplies the two Marys with fluffy white towels to mop up the copious blood which Jesus shed while being scourged. That blood was being collected for a reason—veneration in churches like the other relics. Luther started the Protestant Reformation as much over relics as over indulgences.

One other point, often passed over. In the Bible, Satan’s presence in Gethsemane is never mentioned, but the visit of an angel to strengthen Jesus is mentioned. Mel Gibson’s movie neglects this angelic visitation, but features Satan. Perhaps this is one more example of how evil is often more entertaining than good.

Jim E. Miller | Madison, Wisconsin

KEVIN'S QUANDARY

Thank you for your kind letter and I am pleased to renew my subscription, which lapsed some time ago. At the time it appeared that the articles were not hitting on things of interest to me. The present issue with the so believable story of “Kevin’s Quandary” (AT Jan/Feb 2005) sparked my interest because of the unchristian treatment he received at the hands of some “church leaders.” I have recently become interested in homosexuality and wonder if this is one of the manifestations of the sin of Adam passed on to his children, us. Paul has given us a picture of how far the race had fallen in Romans 1:23-32, and homosexuality is prominently mentioned. As such, can it be any worse in the eyes of God than unrighteousness, fornication, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, debate,

deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, and on and on? Homosexuals are people afflicted with the sin of Adam manifested in sexual disorientation, and they deserve no worse or no better treatment than the rest of us who also bear telltale marks in our character of Adam's sin. We all have a cross to bear. Their cross to bear is to not participate in homosexual practices. Jesus covers the repentant sinner with His righteousness and took the death penalty in our place. In the eyes of God homosexuality is no worse than the other covenant breakers. And we have no right to treat them any differently. It falls under the admonition to Love God and your fellow man.

Edwin W. Reiner, M.D. | San Diego, Calif.

CULTURAL ADVENTISTS

I find much of the writings of Clifford Goldstein helpful, but I do have a problem with his problem with cultural Adventists. I'm not just sure how he would define cultural Adventists, but I am glad they are in our church. Is our church a retreat for sinners or a hospital for saints? Do we feel that those who disagree with us are not authentic Adventists? If so, we might take out many so-called tares; and maybe others would class us as cultural Adventists. I think we challenge each other's views, and I think that is a good motive for studying and knowing what we really believe. I am 89 years old, and maybe Goldstein would class me as cultural since I don't agree with all he writes.

Janice Schilt | Via the Internet

GOLDSTEIN ON CULTURAL ADVENTISTS

I found odd the comments of Clifford Goldstein on cultural Adventists. I do understand the dismay which some converts find with cultural Adventists. I converted 27 years ago, and that is how I felt. But then again, I was unchurched at the time and was raised Catholic in a community that largely ignored which church you went to. In contrast, Clifford Goldstein was/is Jewish, and the traditions of cultural Jews are even stronger and more enduring than those of cultural Adventists. Nonobservant cultural Jews retain their identity for generations and are a substantial and distinct portion of the

Jewish people. How can Mr. Goldstein say that cultural Adventism is "a concept that makes no sense to me"?

Jim E. Miller | Madison, Wisconsin

ENROLLMENT GAINS REPORTED

Being an alumnus and former teacher at La Sierra University, I looked for a mention of LSU in Dr. Stirling's article and was disappointed. I received the following information from the registrar at LSU: While the head count is down 38, La Sierra's FTE count was up 27. While we generally quote the head count when people ask about our enrollment, the FTE count is what really counts! Since the FTE is the number that is more important, it seems worthy of mention in Stirling's article. The article commented (in red) "For the rest of the Adventist colleges the enrollment news was not so cheering." Well, this is not the feeling at LSU, where there is a cheerful feeling! Twenty-seven FTEs amounts to a sizable financial increase.

Walter S. Hamerslough, Emeritus Professor
Riverside, California

» Homosexuals are people afflicted with the sin of Adam manifested in sexual disorientation, and they deserve no worse or no better treatment than the rest of us who also bear telltale marks in our character of Adam's sin.

Editor's reply: We are happy to hear that according to the registrar La Sierra's head count was up. However, we took our figures from the official summaries published by the North American Division Department of Education, the most recent at the time of publication. These listed the FTE for La Sierra beginning in the fall of 2003 as being 1,633, and in the fall of 2004 as being 1,619. That was a drop of 14. (The head count was down 16.) Somehow the registrar's optimistic figures for the fall enrollments did not get reflected in the official tally.

Continued on page 6

letters +

READERS RESPOND

Letters policy

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Adventist Today welcomes letters to the editor. Short, timely letters that relate to articles appearing in the journal have the best chance at being published. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. In publishing letters, AT does not necessarily endorse the views represented, but believes in giving voice to differing viewpoints. We prefer messages sent on the Internet, addressed to atoday@atoday.com. Please include your complete address and telephone number—even with e-mail messages. Send postal correspondence to Letters to the Editor, *Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026.

WHO IS BIASED?

In reading through the last issue of *Adventist Today* (Nov/Dec 2004), it was rather amusing for me to see in the letter from Russell Burrill when he accused AT of being biased. I have only read one of his books, *Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches* or something like that, and found it very biased.

Dick Larsen | Via the Internet

RON GLADDEN'S NEW DENOMINATION?

Somehow I must have missed something in an earlier issue of *Adventist Today*. In the letters to the editor of the November/December issue Russell Burrill mentioned Ron Gladden's new denomination. Has Ron Gladden left the Adventist church to start his own denomination, or did Ron just do something that Elder Burrill did not approve? I have really appreciated Ron's contributions towards making our church more user-friendly and relevant, and I never heard him disagree with our basic doctrines; in fact, the seemed to discourage attempts to undermine them.

I respect your ethics and integrity in printing letters that are critical of what the magazine does. By the way, this publication helps me keep my sanity in this hotbed of Adventist conservatism and legalism where I live in SW Virginia and southern West Virginia.

Henry Miller | Via the Internet

Editor's reply: As described in some detail in the July/August issue of AT, Ron Gladden does not disagree with the church's doctrinal statements, rather, he endorses them and expects that those who ally themselves with his Mission Catalyst program will also do so. His difference with the church is mainly in structural elements and the distribution of tithe money.

THE HEALTHY CHURCH

Gary Fraser wrote on this subject (AT Jan/Feb 2005) explaining, mostly from a health perspective, why the "ceremonial laws" for cleanliness were given to the Israelites at Sinai. Many were instituted to protect the health of the wanderers in the wilderness, as it must have been very difficult under such circumstances. However,

in setting forth some of the laws concerning childbirth, the quarantine period for new mothers giving birth to male children was twice as long as for female children. If that was only for health, did God know something about the sex of infants that is not known today? Or that following a longer menstrual period she had to offer a "sin offering"?

The dietary laws were most effective in preventing any association with the pagans. Keeping kosher laws, still practiced in Orthodox Judaism, is extremely difficult and time-consuming. Middle Eastern customs even today require that strangers must be welcomed and offered food, the hospitable gesture almost universally practiced. If the dietary restrictions were faithfully followed, that would have prevented any association whatsoever with other than their own people.

Should we read the Old Testament laws as *Prescriptive* rather than *Descriptive*? Isn't the New Testament the final and last word for Christians? Paul set new guidelines for the Christian church in his separation of clean and unclean foods, thus reinforcing his position, repeated in his letters, particularly in Romans 2, where he says that Christ has broken the barriers that used to keep them apart from the Gentiles. Is there anything that could separate one culture from another more than their food—the "breaking of bread" together?

Elaine Nelson | Fresno, Calif.

YOUR SPECIAL ISSUE

March-April 2005, was great! Each article was well done—fresh and provocative, worth sharing and keeping. I have only one complaint—no by-lines. You must have had a reason, but it would help me personally to know who's producing what!

Raymond H. Woolsey | Via the Internet

Editor's Note: As announced on the cover of the March-April 2005 issue of *Adventist Today*, the entire issue was written by our editor, John McLarty. Each article was an excerpt from his forthcoming book—which is due to be published this summer. For more information, please visit us online: www.atoday.com

Report on Monterey Bay Academy Lawsuit

In the January/February 2004 issue of *Adventist Today* we reported on the lawsuit filed January 11 of that year against Monterey Bay Academy, an Adventist school near Watsonville, California, and two of its former teachers, stemming from alleged molestations involving the teachers and five former students.

After lengthy delays the case was scheduled for trial in August, 2005. Following three days of mediation, however, the case was settled the preceding June 2 with a judgment of 3.5 million dollars, according to a report in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* of June 4. The church admitted no guilt.

An important part of the settlement, according to Joe Scully, the plaintiffs' lawyer, was that the church would make significant policy changes in its

school system to ensure that similar abuses would not be allowed, but that abuse allegations would be listened to and dealt with. The General Conference Web site since 1995 has carried the statement: "We recognize the global extent of this problem and the serious, long-term effects upon the lives of all involved. We believe that Christians must respond to abuse and family violence both within the church and in the community... We believe that to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and potentially extend such behavior." The outcome of the case is a solemn reminder to everyone connected with the youth program of the church to heed this policy.

The settlement of the case prompted other news media to recite abuse cases in other Adventist schools in California and nationwide.

Marcus Wesson Conviction

In the March/April 2004 issue of *Adventist Today* we reported on the arrest of Marcus Wesson in Fresno, Calif. for allegedly murdering nine people, all daughters, granddaughters, or nieces of himself. According to an Associated Press report, his case came to trial June 2, and on June 17 the jury reached a verdict of guilty on nine counts of first-degree murder and fourteen counts of raping and molesting seven of his underage daughters and nieces. At the penalty phase of his trial, on June 29, the jury recommended the death penalty for him. Formal sentencing is set for July 27.

The case was of interest to the Adventist church because Wesson had had some contacts with the church earlier in his life, even working as janitor for the Soquel camp meeting for two seasons. While he apparently had not joined a local church as a member, he was reported to have preached daily to his family, weaving a dogma of polygamy and incest from his own interpretations of the Bible and Adventist beliefs. His children, all home-schooled, thought of him as indeed a Seventh-day Adventist. Prosecutors of the case said Wesson had assumed an authoritarian stance and ruled his family like a clan.

Article Call

ADVENTIST STUDENTS; NON-ADVENTIST SCHOOLS

We are looking for reports and creative pieces about the experience of Adventist young people on non-Adventist campuses. Tell us about organized Adventist groups or the life of an individual student (like yourself). Describe the relationship of students to local congregations. Write about academic challenges, religious freedom in an academic setting, personal spirituality or how you integrate romance, grades and money. We publish short articles, 500 to 1400 words long. E-mail your article as an attachment to editor@atoday.com. Query to the same address.

Why “Pastoral Affair” Is An Oxymoron: Thoughts On Clergy Sexual Misconduct

Headline: STATE HIGH COURT
ALLOWS TRIAL IN CHURCH-
STATE CASE: THE CASE OF A
FORMER MINISTER SUED OVER
HIS MARRIAGE COUNSELING,
Star Tribune (Minneapolis, Minn.) August 16, 2002.

The text of the article continues:

“The [court’s] unanimous decision allows Steven R. Odenthal to pursue a negligence claim against Lowell Rideout and possibly the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Odenthal and his wife, Diane, sought counseling in 1997 from Rideout, their minister at the Minnetonka Seventh-day Adventist Church. At some point, Rideout and Diane Odenthal began a romantic relationship, according to court documents. Steven Odenthal and his wife later divorced, and Rideout divorced his wife and married Diane Odenthal.”

Because of their moral and spiritual authority, pastors are not allowed the luxury of having “affairs.” Affairs can happen only between equally powerful, consenting adults. When a pastor becomes romantically involved with a parishioner, it is not properly considered an affair. Instead it is a blatant breach of ethical standards. This violation of ethical standards then becomes a legal liability.

Similarly, it is not appropriate to call a romantic relationship between pastors who work together an “affair.” Using the term “affair” suggests equal responsibility for both parties. However, one pastor usually has more authority, prestige, or power than the other, and therefore is ethically obligated to set the appropriate professional boundaries. The relationship may or may not lead to legal liability, but the moral and ethical issues remain the same. And the wide extent of damage that ensues from such a relationship is difficult to exaggerate.

The victim—and the subordinate party should be seen at least in part as a victim—may experience feelings of betrayal, anger, self-blame, depression, and fear. The “junior” parties in these relationships are subsequently more vulnerable to many types of victimization, such as exploitative or abusive relationships. They are at increased risk for self-destructive behaviors such as eating disorders and substance abuse, and for sexual dysfunction. An unplanned pregnancy may lead to abortion and its aftermath. Spiritually, she or he may lose faith or feel betrayed by God.

The families of both parties are profoundly affected by the abuse. The spouses often feel humiliation, self-blame, and rage. The children are

wounded. Having a role model who engages in sexual misconduct jeopardizes the children’s healthy sexuality. The pastor’s family may face significant economic loss. Spouses and children may feel let down by God. Often it seems everything they’ve been taught is hypocritical, and they may choose to leave the church.

Parishioners are also devastated. They feel betrayed by the pastor they have trusted as an example of right doing. Often they are embarrassed by the scandal. Because they do not understand the true dynamics of abusive relationships, some congregants will blame the victim, causing discord and division in the church.

The pastorate in general is another “victim” of clergy sexual misconduct. All pastors suddenly become suspect. Pastors themselves often experience a heightened sense of vulnerability when one of their own betrays the sacred trust.

Finally, the world church suffers because of clergy sexual misconduct. There are the obvious economic impacts on the church. Typical awards to victims of clergy sexual misconduct are in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. More importantly, clergy sexual misconduct mars the image of God in our church and diverts attention away from Jesus.

If we want the church to be a truly safe place for healing and growth, we must address the issue of clergy sexual misconduct. A first step toward eliminating this scandal from the church is to examine the causes of such misconduct.

Published research on the causes of clergy sexual misconduct is scant. One study (Birchard, 2000), notes three factors that ministers themselves have identified: (1) boundary ambiguity associated with the pastoral role, (2) absence of awareness training by the institution, and (3) problems and needs in their everyday lives.

Boundary ambiguity includes the idea of not knowing initially what particular activities or behaviors are appropriate with subordinates or parishioners. Clergy are often called to be a part of parishioners’ lives when they are fragile or needy. Appropriate ministry to people in this state of high emotionality requires a delicate balance of warmth, openness, and appropriate structure. Pastors can easily misinterpret parishioners’ gratitude as romantic attraction because of the intimacy of the interaction. This sense of intimacy is an intrinsic part of the helping relationship, but it can cause confusion if not correctly understood. It is always the responsibility of the person with the greatest

power in the relationship to maintain appropriate boundaries. These boundaries may be emotional boundaries or physical boundaries, such as not doing home visits alone and not holding counseling sessions even in the church office unless another person is present in the building.

A second condition leading to clergy sexual misconduct is the lack of misconduct awareness training. If annual training in misconduct prevention were required of all pastors as a condition of continued employment, pastors would know which behaviors are acceptable and which are not, and they would be aware of strategies to prevent violations.

The third condition associated with clergy sexual misconduct is personal problems and needs of pastors. The human condition is naturally full of stressors: the arrival of a new baby causing loss of sleep, a wayward teenager, financial strain, illness or conflict in the extended family. To whom can the pastor go when faced with life's "normal" difficulties, let alone issues such as feeling attracted to a parishioner? With or without administrative encouragement, pastors and laity can work together to create the support systems that pastors, like everyone else, need.

One way to conceptualize the everyday needs pastors experience is to use Maslow's framework of human motivation. Once basic physiological needs are met, Maslow suggests safety needs become the crucial motivators of human behavior. This includes both physical and psychological safety needs. Do pastors have a safe place to be themselves? As public figures, pastors must be able to handle frequent criticism. However, too much criticism, even if "constructive," leaves pastors vulnerable because of their need for "safety."

The next level of need is love, belonging, or intimacy. Because of their unique leadership role, pastors may have a more difficult time achieving appropriate love and intimacy in their homes. Congregants sometimes feel entitled to telephone their pastor at home any time of the day or night. When pastors share this view, it leaves the pastor vulnerable. There is no protected time for personal devotion (decreasing intimacy with God), for family life (decreasing intimacy with their children) and even personal and sexual intimacy with their spouse. Under these conditions, pastors may find their greatest opportunity for intimacy with church members or coworkers. This is obviously dangerous.

Pastors can protect their intimate time with God and family by announcing the hours when they would welcome phone calls and by using answering machines to screen calls. Pastors should make no apologies for taking care of themselves and their families in these ways.

Perhaps the single most effective strategy for preventing sexual misconduct is for pastors to take a searching inventory of their primary intimate

relationship. No matter how scary or painful the venture, pastors must ask themselves: "Has the spark long gone out of my relationship? Are sexual encounters with my spouse few and far between?" If the answer is Yes, the pastor is at risk. If pastors cannot "fix" this lack of intimacy themselves, they should get professional help. A licensed counselor, social worker, or psychologist can help them work through difficult issues. Even if the pastor's spouse is not willing to go to counseling, the pastor should still go. In time, the initially reluctant spouse will generally respond to counseling efforts and will eventually go. It is important for the pastor to be absolutely honest with the therapist. They must address any sexual addiction issues, including pornography, straightforwardly.

When intimacy needs have been met, Maslow theorizes that self-esteem needs become the most important motivators. One practical way for church members to help their pastor avoid clergy sexual misconduct is to express appreciation. People need messages about both the person they are (being loveable) and the things that they do (being capable) to raise self-esteem. Offer messages to your pastors about their positive traits and about their performance. To avoid romantic connotations of these messages, have more than one person sign notes offering affirmation. Pastors themselves can foster a culture of appreciation by affirming their members.

Maslow argues that if a person's needs are met this far up the pyramid, they may move on toward self-actualization, being the best they can be. Sexual misconduct becomes unlikely because the other needs are taken care of and the person has the ability and desire to operate with the highest ethical and moral standards.

Scripture supports the idea that with God's intervention, we can be more than we envision. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." Ephesians 3:20 (NIV). Having the highest ethical and moral standards certainly fits within God's plan. Clergy sexual misconduct does not. We can all help to prevent clergy sexual misconduct and must play a part in its confrontation. We must work together as church members, church administrators, and individual pastors to create safe churches in which to worship, praise, heal, and grow.

Dr. René Drumm is chair of the Department of Social Work and Family Studies at Southern Adventist University, in Collegedale, Tenn. She is currently doing research on domestic violence in the Adventist church.

» One way to conceptualize the everyday needs pastors experience is to use Maslow's framework of human motivation. Once basic physiological needs are met, Maslow suggests safety needs become the crucial motivators of human behavior. Do pastors have a safe place to be themselves?

When Darfur Reached Out Its Helping Hand

It was about 9:30 a.m., and I had just successfully pulled myself out of bed. I meandered downstairs to the computer, wearing my flannel pajama pants and a V-necked T-shirt. Yearning for some intellectual stimulant, I sat down at my laptop, logged onto the Internet, and began my scan of the six newspapers I like to read daily. *Is this what I've turned into?*

"I'll start with the *Washington Post*," I said to myself. As I scanned the various articles, I began to reflect. *What am I looking for?* During the prior 2½ years, I had achieved everything I thought I wanted. I graduated president of my class, got a job working on nuclear submarines, took up residence in a beach-front home overlooking Puget Sound, and got my European

Africans, killing and maiming the men and boys, ransacking food supplies, blocking help attempted in the form of international aid, and setting fire to villages. Emily Wax, of the *Washington Post*, reported that the Janjaweed have also been carrying out systematic campaigns of rape against African women in an attempt to humiliate the women and their families.¹

The Sudan government has specifically denied genocide is involved, and that what's taking place is a matter of internal conflict with the rebellious African faction.

Today's Happenings

The current situation is bleak. Various sources report an estimated 2,000,000 people have left their homes in the wake of violence. Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps have been constructed for the refugees and offer a moderate source of protection. They are filled with family members who have lost loved ones, and it has been estimated over 60 percent have seen a family member murdered.² Brian Steidle, a contractor for the State Department and a former Marine, wrote in the *Washington Post* after visiting Darfur:

"Every day, women are sent outside the IDP camps to seek firewood and water, despite the constant risk of rape at the hands of the Janjaweed. Should men be available to venture out of the camps, they risk castration and murder. So families decide that rape is the lesser evil."

Women who are raped are often left to bear the brunt of unwanted pregnancies. Adding insult to injury, these women are often ostracized by family and community.³

The World Notices

So who's helping? I wanted to see what the world is doing about it. While the world has recognized that the current atrocities are horrible, some debate exists as to whether it is actually "genocide."

On September 9, 2004, then Secretary of State Colin Powell labeled the atrocities as genocide in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He said:

"We concluded, I concluded, that genocide has been committed in Darfur and that the Government of Sudan and the Janjaweed bear responsibility—and that genocide may still be occurring."³

» How could I get a hundred people from each state to contact their senator? I don't know a single person in Vermont, yet alone 100.

dream car. *I had to drive to Minnesota to pick it up!* I had money for weekend trips to Canada, Florida, or anywhere else in between. Europe opened her doors to me three times, and there are lions in South Africa and Botswana that remember me as the "one that got away." I was active in my local church. *So why did I have a hard time finding a reason to get up in the morning?*

"Nothing interesting here." Having struck out at the first three newspapers, I turned on iTunes and began to listen. Just then, I remembered the "Old Grey Lady." I quickly visited the *New York Times* Web site. An article by Nicholas Kristof jumped to my attention. I clicked on it and began to read. iTunes was playing Michael W. Smith's "Healing Rain."

I began to read Kristof's article, "The Secret Genocide Archive." I researched the subject matter. During the 1970s, tensions began to surface between the region's Arabs and Africans over the region's scarce resources. In February 2003, African Muslims, who had grown tired of chronic discrimination by the ruling Arab elitist government, rose up against the Khartoum government. Khartoum responded to the uprising by siding with and arming the local militias in their attempt to put down the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa ethnic groups.

The "Janjaweed," the government-backed Arab militia groups, have since been terrorizing the

On March 8, 2005, U.S. Senators Sam Brownback (R-KS) and John S. Corzine (D-NJ) introduced the Darfur Accountability Act of 2005. This bill calls for U.S. and multilateral sanctions against those parties responsible for the genocide taking place in Darfur. It also demands prompt prosecution in an international court of justice for those responsible, immediate UN Security Council sanctions against Sudan, and accelerated help to the African Union, which is currently providing monitors to the region.

The president of the United States Committee for Refugees (USCR), Lavina Limon, affirmed the need for action by stating:

“As Senator Brownback said so eloquently on the floor of the Senate last week in displaying the faces of genocide through selections from a photographic archive of scorched bodies, castrated men, murdered children, and burning villages, the world community needs to apologize for its complete inaction and indifference to the genocide being perpetrated by the Government of Sudan in Darfur and act immediately to put a stop to it.” Limon added, “We applaud Senators Brownback and Corzine for introducing this important legislation to increase the pressure to hold the criminals responsible for this tragedy to account. The heinous atrocities, human rights violations, and intentional starvation of the people of Darfur must come to an end.”⁵

Currently, the African Union (AU) has troops in the region as a monitoring force. “Armed with a mandate to stop the widespread atrocities in the violence-prone western region of Darfur in Sudan, a militarily weak African Union (AU) monitoring force is finding itself weighed down by a shortage of troops, funds, logistical support and communications equipment.”⁶ As of March 1, only about half the 3,320 African Union personnel promised had arrived in the Darfur region. This has amounted to about 1,000 workers monitoring an area the size of France.⁷

But what about me? I finished my research. A quote in Mr. Kristof’s article kept rolling over and over in my head.

“What will really stop this genocide is indignation,” Senator Paul Simon, who died in 2003, said after the Rwandan genocide. “If every member of the House and Senate had received 100 letters from people back home saying we have to do something about Rwanda, when the crisis was first developing, then I think the response would have been different.”⁸

3Minutes.org

I sat silently. Joni Mitchell began singing *Both Sides Now*. Thinking. 100 letters...100 letters... Rwanda...800,000 people killed in about 100 days...100 letters. I began to hear the still small voice in the back of my head. I know what the Lord is capable of if I am willing to help him. “Michael,” I thought, “it’s time to act.”

Still wearing my pajamas, I found a flood of ideas suddenly coming to mind. How could I get 100

people from each state to contact their senator? *I don’t know a single person in Vermont, yet alone 100.* Then I remembered the one thing that had been a part of my life since the day I was born. Adventist education!

A week later, the Web site *3Minutes.org* was born. This site is designed around the strategy of allowing a single person to send a pre-written letter to their Senator in a time span of about 3 minutes. In the following days I scanned the Internet looking for academy and junior academy staff I could reach. I sent e-mails to Bible teachers, social studies teachers, pastors, and principals. I next reached out to the Adventist colleges.

Theology departments, social study professors, and student unions were contacted.

I sent e-mail correspondences to the editors of the major college student publications, hoping to spread the word. I sent up a small prayer for each school before hitting the send button. The letters were now loaded with the most powerful weapon I could use. I now played the praying and waiting game. Psalm 41:1 says, “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.”

Darfur’s Reaching Hand

During difficult times in my life, I often have prayed that God would just speak out loud to me. I was too upset to hear the still small voice. Well, I believe God did talk to me that day. He chose to use a secular *New York Times* writer and a dead Senator. That day, I found an excitement that far surpassed those of flying in Lear jets and diving in submarines. A renewed sense of purpose came to me. At the same time, life suddenly became very short to me. The challenges that faced our church and humanity as a whole suddenly made me realize that my 75.6 years of life, 27 of which were gone, were not going to be enough.

At the time of this article’s submission, *3Minutes.org* had not reached its goal of getting 100 letters to each of the U.S. Senators. To be bluntly honest, the numbers fell far, far short. Now, I’m not a computer programmer, nor am I a marketer. Perhaps there was more I could have done to spread the word. However, regardless of how the Lord chooses to use *3Minutes.org*, he woke me up that day. For a long time I have seen our church suffer from stagnant growth rates and declining educational support. We entertain a general state of apathy. I’m tired of it. It’s time to face reality, focus on what’s important, and start living our lives as if Christ were coming soon. It starts with me. Will you help?

When we get to heaven, Christ will not ask us how our 401(k) did, whether we were able to afford the V6, what we believed would happen when we died, or if we ever played a drum set in church. He’ll ask us, “What did you do to bring others here with you?”

I’ve got Senator Simon’s response.

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On Being Patient

Part of me wants God to finish his work right now, with all of us on board to help. I'm a good, energetic American Adventist; patience is not one of my natural virtues.

A selective reading of Scripture could easily give someone the impression that God isn't very patient either: Sinai, the two she-bears, Uzzah, the Damascus-road lightning strike. That's a good start to a rather impatient list. Adventists know about a delayed Second Coming, to be sure, but we're inclined to blame ourselves for that anyway. So let's get on with our impatience.

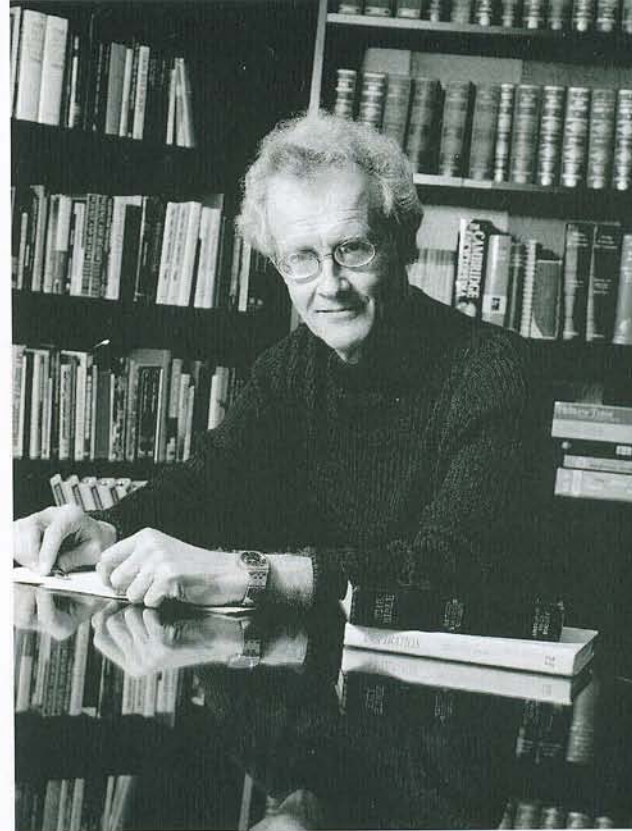
In recent months, however, God has "patiently" been opening my eyes to the significance of a series of events recorded in the book of Acts. I could even use words like "astounded" or "astonished" to describe my reaction. Even more surprising is the fact that this sequence of events includes Acts 15, the story of the Jerusalem conference, a passage I have been using for years to illustrate how the church deals with change.

My astonishment has to be seen against the backdrop of my Adventist upbringing. Somehow, I grew up thinking that God always deals in clear-cut categories. He rattled Mount Sinai when he announced his commandments to Israel. Then he wrote them on stone tablets with his own finger and directed that they be kept inside the sacred ark. What could be clearer?

I believed that the additional laws given to Moses extended up to the cross. After that, only the Ten Commandments and the health laws remained valid for us. Simple. Straightforward.

No. Far too simple and not at all straightforward.

The part about the Ten Commandments is clear enough, it seems to me. But even there, a thoughtful reading of Scripture reveals the need for careful nuancing. God prohibited murder, but mandated the death penalty for a host of crimes. He even commanded Moses to stone a man for picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36). God also ordered Israel to wipe out their enemies: "men,



women, children, and even their babies" (1 Sam. 15:4. CEV¹).

Then there are those laws which seem to come and go, even within the Old Testament itself. Moabites and Ammonites, for example, were excluded from the community of faith (Deut. 23:3-6). But Ruth the Moabitess is a striking exception, as is Naamah the Ammonite, wife of Solomon and mother of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:21). Indeed, this Ammonite Naamah is the only one of Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines mentioned by name in Scripture. And both Ruth and Naamah are part of Jesus' royal genealogy.

Similarly, Deuteronomy 23:2 excludes illegitimate children from the assembly of the Lord. Not surprisingly then, Judges 11 tells how Jephthah's brothers drove him away from home because his mother was a prostitute. His brothers knew the rules. But that same chapter goes on to describe how Jephthah became a divinely appointed judge (Judges 11:29), one of the faithful heroes named in Hebrews 11.

All that should help us understand what happened after the resurrection as God patiently nudged his people toward new truths, broadened horizons, and God's great ideal.

Must Gentiles Become Jews in Order to Follow Jesus?

According to Acts, the early Christian community tussled mightily over the question of how non-Jewish converts were to relate to Jesus' Jewish heritage. In the New Testament era, Gentiles who were attracted to Jewish theology and ethics, but not to Jewish ritual, were known as "God-fearers." Apparently, when Paul was sharing the gospel in

the Jewish synagogues of Asia Minor—and far enough away from church headquarters to feel a certain freedom—he decided that the “God-fearers” could accept Jesus directly without first becoming Jews. The practical implication? Gentiles could become Christians without being circumcised.

The tumultuous upshot of that decision is described in Acts 14 and 15. The enthusiasm of Paul and Barnabas was countered by opposition from Jewish colleagues in Judea. But Acts 15 describes how the Jerusalem conference confirmed Paul’s decision, working through the issues until the delegates could say that their decision “seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28).

The intricacies and implications of Acts 15 deserve attention in their own right, but my point here focuses on time. The Jerusalem conference itself is typically dated around AD 49, some 15 years or more after the resurrection. But a key event which fed into the Jerusalem decision happened some eight years earlier. That’s when God sent Peter the threefold vision of all the creatures that he had declared clean (Acts 10).

Peter himself caught the point of the vision: Don’t call anyone profane or unclean (Acts 10:28). But what has astounded me recently is the realization that even some eight years after the resurrection, Peter was still traumatized by the prospect of actually being with Gentile believers. As recorded in Acts 10, when Peter entered Cornelius’s home, the first words he blurted out focused on his inhibitions, not on the joy of the gospel: “You yourselves know,” he exclaimed, “that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile” (Acts 10:28). I can almost hear Peter hyperventilating!

Sure enough, trouble loomed. The very next chapter tells how Peter ran into opposition on his next visit to Jerusalem. “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” asked the brethren (Acts 11:3). These were followers of Jesus, the Jesus who told the story of the good Samaritan, who visited with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, who took his disciples to the region of Tyre and Sidon so they could see him heal the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman.

But none of that had soaked in. Not yet, not until God sent Peter his threefold vision. Peter took that vision seriously, apparently sharing the story wherever he went, for at the Jerusalem conference he said, “You know...God made a choice...that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news” (Acts 15:7).

But bold, brave Peter could also backslide. In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul tells how he confronted Peter to his face for slipping back to his old Jewish separatism “for fear of the circumcision faction” (Gal. 2:12). In short, change comes hard, even when you’ve had a threefold vision and have shared the story with everyone in sight.

Jew and Greek, Slave and Free, Male and Female

Now let’s lay this remarkable record of foot-dragging alongside that great manifesto of equality in Galatians 3:28: “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.” Those three pairs represent the great inequalities which Jesus came to put right: race, economy, and gender.

But of those three inequalities, the only one effectively addressed in the New Testament was the Jew/Gentile relationship, and that one came about very slowly, with much pain and agony. Slavery? Not addressed effectively until the nineteenth century. Gender? As we speak.

Is God patient, or what?

One more point is notable in this connection, namely, that in the history of the human family as described in Scripture, gender and economic inequalities have a long antiquity, but the last inequality (Jew/Gentile) was the first to go, however slowly and painfully it may have happened. But it is also sobering to realize that the first one (male/female) has been the one most deeply rooted and the one most difficult to dislodge. Satan did his work well.

In short, the cross and the resurrection were world-transforming events. But in his incredible patience, God has allowed the implications of those events to unfold gradually. He’s not done yet, nor are we.

On the Eve of the 2005 General Conference

I write these words on the eve of the 2005 General Conference. I will be praying that good things, the right things, will happen at this General Conference. And only God knows what those things really are. Still, like the Jerusalem Conference, we must work through the issues until what we are to do “seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us,” even if that ‘good’ falls short of God’s great ideal for his children.

And if we do fall short of the ideal, I want to remember God’s great patience. I want to remember that through the flow of history, God’s people have never had their act together for more than a few minutes at a time. I want the gift of patience so that I might keep praying for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. And I will keep praying that my church will patiently move as fast as possible towards God’s ideal.

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References: ¹ *Contemporary English Version*. All other biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

» I believed that the additional laws given to Moses extended up to the cross. After that, only the Ten Commandments and the health laws remained valid for us. Simple. Straightforward.



Sacred Time

As a perpetual student and sometime teacher, I shape my life around the rhythm of the academic year. September is the real New Year, the time of clean desks, fresh loose-leaf and resolutions. After the dark winter months, anticipation points me towards June with its long-awaited release into the lazy hiatus of summer. I live in a part of the world where the seasonal rhythm echoes that pattern: I luxuriate in warm, sunny summer days and begin the serious business of life as the air grows chilly and the leaves change color.

Human beings need rhythm and pattern to their days. As C.S. Lewis's canny demon Screwtape puts it:

"The humans live in time, and experience reality successively. To experience much of it, therefore, they must experience many different things; in other words, they must experience change. And since they need change, the Enemy [God]...has made change pleasurable to them.... But...He has balanced the love of change in them by a love of permanence. He has contrived to gratify both tastes together on the very world He has made, by that union of change and permanence which we call Rhythm. He gives them the seasons, each season different yet every year the same, so that spring is always felt as a novelty yet always as the recurrence of an immemorial theme. He gives them in His Church a spiritual year; they change from a fast to a feast, but it is the same feast as before."

Neither the academic year nor the calendar year is specifically relevant to my spiritual life. Seeking a spiritual rhythm to my time, I'm grateful for the Adventist heritage of a Sabbath-centered week.

Seventh-day Adventists have been able to hold on to something that most Christians have lost: a week oriented around sacred time, with Sabbath at its heart. I read books like Lauren Winner's *Mudhouse Sabbath* and Tilden Edwards' *Sabbath Time* and recognize that many Christians are struggling to reclaim a gift I've had all along.

Lately, though, I've found this weekly rhythm isn't enough. I crave larger patterns, broader rhythms of sacred time. I find myself envying the liturgical year.

I grew up without even knowing there was a liturgical year. As far as I was concerned, the church year was divided into four quarters, punctuated by Thirteenth Sabbaths—which is, in itself, a liturgical year, but one notably lacking in feasts, fasts, and a sense of history. I knew Christmas and Easter, of course, but the first time I visited an Anglican church and found that it was "Third Sunday in Pentecost" I stared at the bulletin blankly. Like most Adventists and many other Protestants, I had no concept of the church year, of time shaped by feasts and fasts and days dedicated to saints.

One Wednesday evening in the middle of a long, cold winter I saw a man coming out of the drugstore with a smudge of dirt on his forehead. My mother said, "That man's Catholic. He's been to church for Ash Wednesday." This was my first glimpse into the mysterious world inhabited by Catholics and Anglicans and all the other churches who shared a common calendar. Ash Wednesday, I learned, was the beginning of Lent, the (roughly) 40-day period before Easter when some Christians—mostly Catholics—tested their spiritual mettle by giving something up, like smoking or drinking or eating chocolate. Given

that I didn't smoke or drink anyway and couldn't imagine voluntarily giving up chocolate, I didn't see any immediate application of Lent to my own life.

God gave Israel a liturgical calendar—an annual schedule of feast, fasts and celebrations instituted in the Torah. Later festivals were added—such as Purim and Hanukkah—to commemorate important events in Jewish history. The existence of such a calendar suggests that the Jews, like other world religions, recognized the need to give shape and meaning to the passing weeks and months. A regular and recurring cycle of festivals gives worshipers opportunity to pause at specified times and look backward and forward as a community.

Though most Christians believe the Jewish feasts were abolished with the coming of the Messiah, the Christian church quickly recognized that people still needed sacred time, feasts and holy days. And here's the root of the problem, the reason so many conservative Protestants reject the liturgical calendar: all these Christian holy days (including Christmas and Easter) are postbiblical, instituted by the church in the first centuries after the apostolic era. While my mother was not technically correct in telling me that Ash Wednesday and Lent were only for Catholics, she was reflecting an attitude common among Protestants.

As Adventists, most of us accept Christmas and Easter—perhaps a little uneasily, with one wary eye on the festivals' pagan origins and another on the modern commercial travesties they have become. We don't "do" Lent—though last year my pastor announced he was preaching a sermon series on the last weeks of Christ's life during the six weeks before Easter, apparently recognizing that those weeks are an appropriate time for solemn reflection. Advent, the four-week period leading up to Christmas, is generally ignored in Adventist churches too, though some Adventists celebrate it at home.

Ours is one such home. I've found that setting aside the month of December as a period for reflection and anticipation of Jesus' birth helps combat the relentless onslaught of Retail Christmas during the same period. I try to have Christmas shopping done before November ends, and to put off celebrations and parties as much as possible to the traditional twelve days of feasting after Christmas Day. We light candles on an Advent wreath during family worship in December, adding one each Friday night as our seven-year-old reads an Advent prayer for that week. Each week, too, we add new figures to the manger scene, until all is in readiness for Christmas Eve, when we place the Baby Jesus in the manger.

Lent, too, has become an important part of the shape of my year. During those six weeks—cold, dark weeks, where I live—I try to give up something I enjoy. I understand now that a fast is not about earning credit with God, but about building the discipline of self-denial that forces me to rely on

God and draw closer to him. One of my Lenten observances involves giving up reading fiction—my favorite hobby—and replacing my novels with a stack of theological or devotional books I've been "meaning to get around to." Immersing myself in spiritual reading during Lent stretches both my mind and my spirit.

After those weeks of reflection and self-denial, the springtime celebration of Easter seems far more meaningful; I have reason to rejoice in the Lord's resurrection after I have spent sacred time contemplating and drawing close to him. I visit other churches during Holy Week; probably no Adventist church will ever offer me a Maundy Thursday service during which the altar is stripped and every light extinguished till the choir is left singing in the dark, a graphic reminder of Jesus' darkest hour in Gethsemane. On Good Friday I attend an Anglican church for the three-hour service of readings and reflections on Jesus' suffering. In an ideal world I'd rise for a sunrise service on Easter Sunday, but my experiments in self-denial haven't quite toughened me to that point yet!

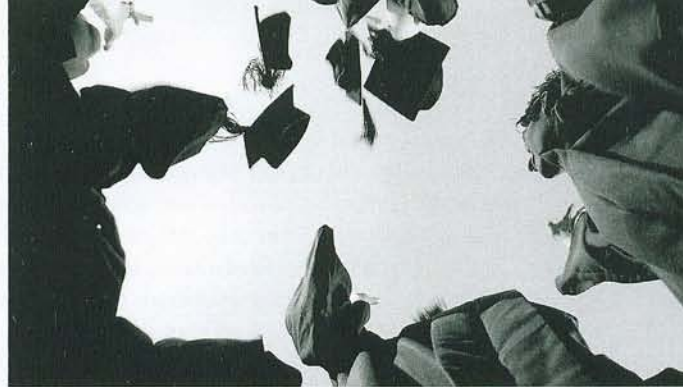
I'm a spiritual seeker, not a theologian. I couldn't sustain an argument about why it's appropriate, maybe even necessary, for me to follow the liturgical calendar of the church. I know I believe in enriching my spiritual walk with any practices that are not contrary to Scripture: as Adventists we have developed our own liturgies and traditions (the order of Sabbath service, the quarterly arrangement of Sabbath School studies) without allowing ourselves to benefit from the richness of centuries of Christian tradition. I think we're poorer for it, but I'm not about to approach my pastor and suggest he begin decking the sanctuary in purple for Lent, or observing the feasts of Epiphany or Pentecost.

Some evangelical Protestants, uncomfortable with the Catholic associations of the Christian liturgical year, have begun exploring the Jewish calendar of festivals as part of their practice. Sharing a Passover seder, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting the Hanukkah candles, may be the practice that brings shape and meaning to your year.

I don't think it matters which feasts and fasts we adopt; I do think we can deepen our spiritual journeys by adopting a sacred attitude towards the calendar. In addition to the weekly celebration of Sabbath, shaping the year around spiritual events gives me a sense of meaning and purpose that often seems lacking in modern life. I need fasts to remind me of the reality of sin and lostness; I need feasts to celebrate the goodness of God and his salvation. Sacred time reminds me of a reality beyond my Day-Timer; it brings to my daily life a faint echo of the rhythm of heaven.

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The Cliff



I fly often, but it has never been comfortable. We were fourth in line for take-off, and the woman sitting behind me kept saying the word “trooper.” She has trouble sleeping when she’s not at home, as she ever so politely allowed me to hear over the roaring engines. The noise could not cover the rest of her conversation about her son, so I heard every word from how he is graduating this May with a Bachelor of Arts in history to how he doesn’t know what he is going to do yet. He fondly calls graduation “the cliff,” which worries his mother more than a little.

But I understand his point of view. College graduation is the end of everything I know and the beginning of nothing I know.

I, too, graduate from college this May, along with tens of thousands of other traditional students who are in their early twenties and have no idea what to do after picking up their diploma.

A few weeks ago I visited an Adventist academy to recruit for my college. I stood at the front of a classroom full of seniors, answering questions about college life. When a girl asked me if it was okay to not know what she wanted to major in yet, I shared the statistic of the average student changing their major four times. A boy raised his hand.

“How many times have *you* changed your major?” he asked.

“Um...” This was not good. I have never changed my major. Apparently, I am not average.

I have wanted to be an English teacher since fourth grade, when I would assign grammar homework to my dolls, then help them apply the “I before E except after C” rule when they left their papers blank. “English Lit Professor” is written in my high school yearbook beside my senior picture as my dream profession. I have never even thought about changing my major.

So, why do I feel that when I march down the aisle with my cap and gown, I will be marching off a cliff?

Because for the past 16 years there has been no question as to what I would do next year: I would go to school. But suddenly, I have a choice. And the possibilities are without end.

The first possibility I considered was graduate school. This makes the most sense. It’s more school, which, after so many years, I’m getting pretty good at. But grad school is not the easiest path. The application process is arduous. I had to take

an intimidating test that required me to look at a computer screen for four hours. A test that gave me a word I had never seen in my life and asked me to pick its synonym from a list of five other words I had never seen in my life.

But the worst part of applying to grad school is the waiting. After I wrote my personal goal statement, perfected my résumé, requested my transcripts to be sent, and distributed my recommendation forms, I still had to wait for the universities’ decision.

And wait. And wait.

After four months of silence, even though I knew not to expect a decision before April, I started to seriously consider other options.

For example, missionary work. I was a student missionary in Poland and would love to do that again somewhere. Our denomination provides many venues to choose from. Or I could join the Peace Corps, an honorable organization. I could learn Spanish, teach English, and at the same time, cancel 30 percent of my student loans.

Other options present themselves, too. I could get a real job. I wish getting a real job was as easy as saying the words “I could get a real job.” But it isn’t, and I’m quite sure you don’t have to be a recent college graduate to know that.

All of these options involve waiting. I have to wait to hear from grad schools. I have to wait through the long application process for missionary work. I have to wait to hear from the companies I’ve sent résumés to. I have to wait on other people’s decisions before I determine my future.

But maybe that’s where I have it all wrong. Proverbs 16:9 says, “A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (NKJ). Maybe I’m focusing too much on what I don’t know and not enough on what God does know. I can plan all I want for the large abyss of unknown-after-graduation, but God is already there. He’s been there all the time.

My entire senior year I have been living with questions about next year. Why have I been looking everywhere I can for answers, when I know that Jesus is the Answer? I don’t know where I am going to be this summer or next year. But I know God does. And that’s good enough for me.

Carissa Hawronsky is a student at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska. Since writing this article, Carissa was offered a teaching assistantship at the University of North Dakota, where she will pursue her master’s degree in English.

Learning to Believe

I'm a fifth-generation Adventist on both sides of my family. So what you may be thinking right now is something about how naïve I must be. How I probably don't have any idea of what life is like in the "real world." And in a lot of ways that is true. (And by the way, I don't really mind not living in the "real world.")

However, even in fifth-generation Adventist families, [or perhaps *especially* in fifth-generation Adventist families] not everything is perfect. My dad was an Adventist pastor until I was about eight, and he gradually left the church; then my parents got divorced. Later my dad revealed to me and my siblings that he was gay, had always been, and despite his efforts, could not be otherwise.

When my dad left the church, he started telling me about the doubts he had harbored about the Adventist church through his years as a pastor. He made fun of Ellen White, making me extremely uncomfortable, to say the least. The man who had been the spiritual head of not only my family but of several churches recanted everything he had professed to believe. He drifted from church to church and at times gave up on God altogether, claiming he no longer believed that God existed.

Naturally, this made me question some of my own beliefs. Mostly, I was defiant. I did not want to believe that he was right, so I didn't think about it much. I dismissed his misgivings as bitterness because of the way he felt he was ostracized by old friends and colleagues in the church. My father's crisis of belief shook me, but not enough for me to reconsider my own faith.

Years passed in which I didn't really think about religion but took my faith and my salvation for granted. When I got to college, I could no longer take anything for granted. My relationships with friends and family changed. I wasn't the social butterfly or leader that I had been in high school. I didn't know where I fit into college, church or religion. I still loved the Adventist religion, the people in it, the doctrines that I thought were beautiful, but I felt disconnected from all of it.

While doing research for a religion class I came across a Web site made by former Adventists, and I started reading. My heart beat faster, and my throat constricted as I read the accusations that were posed: Ellen White was not a prophet; the investigative judgment teaching had no basis in scripture; the Ten Commandments, and therefore the Sabbath, were done away with at Christ's death. I was terrified. Although I didn't want to read, I sat transfixed in front of the computer screen.

After more than an hour, I finally left and called my fiancé, Michael. Fear gripped my heart like a mousetrap. I wept as I told Michael about the things I had read.

"Does this make you doubt God?" he asked me.

"No, but what if we're wrong about everything we've believed? It's scary to think that we could have all been led so far from the truth," I answered.

That Web site and the ensuing conversation with Michael led me on a journey to discover what I believed. I talked to my mother, sister, friends and teachers about why they believed in the Adventist church. I asked them if they had heard about these claims, and nearly all of them had. "So why are you still an Adventist?" I asked.

Each person had a different answer, but what it all boiled down to was that each person had chosen to believe. There is no hard proof for Christianity. We cannot be absolutely sure that there is a God or that Jesus rose from the dead. We do not know without a doubt that he will come back again.

I decided to start with the basics: Do I believe in God? I know that I have to, because without him my life has no purpose. Do I believe that Jesus died so that I could live forever? Once again, I can't know for certain, but I want to believe, and so I choose to believe. Is the Adventist church led by God? In this area I do see evidence of God's leading. I see humble, godly people all around me: my mother, my teachers, pastors and employers who are part of the Adventist faith. God is leading in the lives of the people who are leading this church.

I still have questions, but I think God can handle my questions. I have chosen to believe that God is leading in the Adventist church and in my life. In his book *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel describes the faith journey of an Indian boy named Pi who embraces Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism. Pi says that doubt has a purpose, "Doubt is useful for a while. We must all pass through the garden of Gethsemane. If Christ played with doubt, so must we. If Christ spent an anguished night in prayer, if he burst out from the Cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' then surely we are also permitted doubt. But we must move on."

I read *Life of Pi* during the time that I was searching for answers, and one sentence struck me. "To choose doubt as a philosophy of Life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation." So I choose to believe.

Angela Schafer is a student at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Exposing Ellen White



I'm not saying that our lack of Ellen-education is a good thing. I asked around my college campus to find out what students thought of Ellen. Surprisingly, most students I talked to were poorly informed.

One of the major functions of the Adventist school system is to thoroughly indoctrinate the children in the ways of Ellen White. After all, if they hear this from childhood, they will probably remain pretty much captive. And with all the ridiculous teachings from the mouth of Ellen White, the Adventist church will need all the staunch supporters it can muster." —From the World Wide Web.

I have been an Adventist all of my 21 years. My parents are Adventists, my grandparents are Adventists, many of my friends are Adventist. My grandfather is a pastor at the Azure Hills Church in Grand Terrace, California. I have attended Adventist schools since kindergarten. I learned Ellen White was a prophet and one of the pioneers of our church, but I didn't learn this at school. I was encouraged to read from her writings, and I studied some of her books. But this was all in my spare time or as part of the Pathfinder program. Not once in my educational career have I been "made" to read any of Ellen White's writings. They were not printed in our textbooks nor taught in our Bible classes! So you can imagine my surprise when I read the statement quoted above.

I'm not saying that our lack of Ellen-education is a good thing. I asked around my college campus to find out what students thought of Ellen. Surprisingly, most students I talked to were poorly informed. Many confused Ellen with other Adventist pioneers or recited "famous quotes" Ellen never wrote. Often what they "knew" turned out to be incorrect statements passed around the youth community. They shrugged off these strange quotes and beliefs as "stories" rather than helpful advice and revelations. A lot of this false information about Ellen White came from Web sites devoted to bashing Ellen and the Adventist church. These sites do not hesitate to misquote and to quote out of context.

When I began my own exploration of anti-Adventist Web sites, I was upset. Some sites claimed Ellen was a false prophet and that the Adventist church is steeped in lies. The sites even provided quotations from Ellen White's books and writings to prove these points. At first I was heartbroken, not

able to even think straight for hours. Then I decided to do what I had learned to do in my Bible classes in high school: do my own research and come to my own conclusions. In addition to the critical sites, I checked out sites that answered the critics. My study renewed my respect for the ministry of Ellen White.

One favorite accusation of the anti-Adventists is that if an Adventist renounces belief in Ellen White they are "thrown out" of the church. There have been a few cases of people in authoritative positions being asked to leave their positions because of their views on Ellen White. They were not, however, "thrown out" of the church. The church took action to preserve the beliefs of the church but not to remove these individuals from membership in it. It is not too much to ask that educators and church leaders believe in Ellen's inspired writings. People in roles of power in any religion should have faith in their own roots and beliefs.

"Seventh Day Adventism cannot survive without Ellen White. Once an Adventist realizes that she is a false prophet, other Adventist doctrines go one by one." This common belief is held not only by non-Adventists, but by a lot of our youth as well. But I don't believe that without Ellen there would be no Adventist church. If God didn't speak through Ellen, there would be some other way for us to learn. But we do have Ellen, and her writings are helpful and accurate. Perhaps in the past, the writings of Ellen White were read frequently and studied by people of all ages in the church. But now Ellen has become something of a ghost in our education and church system. Our own younger generations are unaware of her statements and predictions and the wonderful and interesting things she wrote. It is sad that Ellen is not taught adequately in many of our schools. We need to pull her back out and teach her messages to our members.

I believe Adventists of all generations should discover for themselves what Ellen White wrote in her books. Younger Adventists who are unaware of Ellen's actual statements should be exposed to the real Ellen White.

Jenann Elias is a student at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

The Fan in the Window

It's late August, and our church is holding its annual weekend retreat at our lakeside Seventh-day Adventist youth camp. The pine chapel is sweltering inside, even though it's 7:30 p.m. and the outside temperature has already dropped ten degrees due to our northern clime. One lone fan sits on the floor, spinning its blades in a futile attempt to cool the room. Its breezes offer relief to only the five or six individuals lucky enough to sit close to it. The rest of us are fanning ourselves and trying to concentrate on the speaker, despite the heat. Then someone pushes back his folding chair, walks over to the fan and unplugs it. He places it in the open window pointing out and replugs it. Within minutes, cool outside air is streaming in through the other windows, and all of us feel relief.

I relate to that little, hardworking fan. I love the Lord and I want to spread around his cheer. My Christian worldview is like a keel that provides me ballast during the hard times and gives me joy when I ride the waves. I want to share these benefits. But am I just spinning my blades like the fan at the beginning of the meeting, or am I actually effective as a witness for Christ?

Take this week, for example. In the past 7 days I've taught the kindergarten Sabbath School, purchased a baby shower gift for a young mother who no longer regularly attends our church (but used to), and babysat my friend's kids so she could attend her Episcopal catechism class for new converts.

I squeezed in exercise 3 days, personal worship 2 days. I sat on the school board of our local Adventist school and contributed \$20 to the appreciation gift for our principal. I took time for an afternoon tryst with my husband. Earlier in the week I worked with him on our budget. I picked up a 7th grader for his ski lesson (which we pay for, along with our own boys' lessons), and skied with my boys and him afterwards.

I had lunch with a friend I hadn't seen in a while and listened to her bare her soul about her 12-year-old's obsessive/compulsive disorder. Twice I woke up early, had a little talk with the Lord for 10 minutes, then fell back to sleep. I've talked with him a lot in the car on the way to or from my sons' school and appointments. I tutored after school. I read to my boys from *Champions of the King: The Story of the Apostles* (a Review and Herald publication) three separate nights and tucked them into bed with prayers and a kiss five of the nights. These things are fairly usual occurrences.

More unusual was the opportunity to travel to an out-of-state wedding with my college-aged niece, who is newly engaged. I tried to drop little tidbits of reality into her concept of marriage without tarnishing the euphoria of young love. At the bed and breakfast

where we stayed the night before the wedding, I fell into discussion with the proprietor and found out that she, a non-Adventist, is sending her two children to an Adventist elementary school. After I identified myself as an Adventist, I asked if she was happy with their experience. She mostly definitely was.

I asked if she had noticed any conservative tendencies towards dress, confiding that "just as there are different-flavored Baptist churches, local Adventist churches have differing attitudes towards appropriate Christian dress, with the smaller country churches usually being the more conservative." I weathered a story about painted fingernails. Across from me sat Adventist Education Exhibit A: the lovely, well-spoken collegiate wearing tiny studs in her ears and sporting an engagement ring. The hostess noticed the ring and commented. Later she asked if I'd like to snowshoe with her before the wedding. I accepted her offer and we spent an hour conversing about what we hoped for our children.

Also during this week, I've had a disagreement with my husband. Twice I've been intemperate and have read into the wee hours of the night. "Mom, are you having a bad day?" asked my 9-year-old at 7:15 a.m. the next day. During this week I've walked the fine line between gossip and "sharing a prayer request" when I told a mutual friend about the above 12-year-old's obsessive-compulsive difficulties. My kids have reminded me twice in the car on the way to school, "Mom, we haven't said morning prayer!" I also blew one-third of the year's clothing budget for myself at one big sale. And I ate at a restaurant with my family on Friday night, instead of our normal candlelit dinner.

Am I demonstrating "unusual effectiveness" in my spiritual life? I don't know, and I'm not sure the Lord wants me to know. Couldn't that be construed as pride if I were *sure* of the efficacy of the above (positive only, please) actions? I try to "offer my daily life as a fragrant offering to God," but I often wonder if I should be doing more...like starting an Adventurer's Club or leading a Crown Financial Ministries small group. In the meantime, I do things like mismanage time and overstep budgets. But I also take time to enjoy my husband. I get hugs from my son, who thanks me for being a good mom and "listening to me in my sad times," and appreciative comments from friends.

In a way, I'm working out. Just like my time at the gym, I'm working out my salvation (the choices of my daily life) in fear and trembling (the tension of not always knowing if am I choosing the best). And I pray, "Lord, help me be effective. I want to be the fan in the window."

I relate to that little, hardworking fan. I love the Lord and I want to spread around his cheer. My Christian worldview is like a keel that provides me ballast during the hard times and gives me joy when I ride the waves. I want to share these benefits.



In Need of Our MOTHER in Heaven

The rich, almost salty scent of dark coffee had already begun to cling to my clothes.

Signature brown and dark green surrounded me. I was in my favorite place: the “Women’s Issues” section at Barnes and Noble.

I pored over page after engaging page, so inspired I didn’t even need the nearby lattes to speed my heart. The book I was hungrily consuming addressed the particularly damaging effects of sexual violence in the cinema and proposed bold action: protests, demands for refunds at movie theaters, any kind of disruption, to heighten awareness of the problem. I was in awe.

While I was reading, two young women about my age perused the section behind me. I was absorbed and didn’t pay much attention until one comment caught my ear.

“Look at this,” I heard one of the women say to the other. A faint acidity was in her voice. “All I have to do is submit to my husband and I’ll be happy.” Then, the crisp sound of a rejected book sliding back into place on the shelf.

With the “Christian Inspiration” section behind me, and “Women’s Issues” before me, I was struck by and stuck in the chasm between the two realms. Why do I, a Christian woman, have to reference the secular world for affirmation of my womanhood? Why must I shun the “Christian Inspiration” section just to avoid being boxed into a role that proposes to convert me into something between perennial child and Stepford wife?

I’ve spent much of my life wishing I’d been born a boy. “Why would you want to be a man?” my grandmother asked when I expressed my feelings on the matter. “They have to work all the time.” That was precisely what I desired. I wanted the freedom, the responsibility, the physical power, the connection with life and God that boys inherit and girls merely observe.

As I transitioned from girl to woman, I encountered a new problem. I developed menstrual cramps so severe that I vomited once a month from the pain. Holding my hair

back with one hand and clutching the bathroom sink with the other, I had to ask myself, *Can I talk to God about this?* After all—God is male.

When I was a sophomore in high school I dated a guy who espoused a very traditional, “biblical” view of gender roles. He used 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, to prove that all feminists were on the wrong track. Fifteen years old and completely unprepared for such a confrontation, I just blinked and waited awkwardly for a change of subject. When that relationship finally dissolved, I became a feminist.

I also embarked upon one of the darkest spiritual periods of my life.

If God loved women, I reasoned, why would he tell them to keep silent in church, to place themselves beneath their husbands, to learn in obedience with “all submission?” Why did God make me a woman when I so obviously didn’t fit these aptitudes? Maybe God didn’t love women—at least, not as much as he loved men. Maybe women weren’t supposed to matter as individuals. Maybe feminists *were* wrong. After all, they were demanding equal rights in society when they couldn’t even obtain them within the church. Maybe God wasn’t so good after all.

I had so many doubts—and no one to take them to. Of course, the usual abundance of advisors was available: male pastors, male counselors, male religion teachers. But hearing from men explanations of the “safety” of biblical gender roles is like hearing about the “benevolence” of racial slavery from white plantation owners in antebellum South. It’s easy to dismiss another’s concerns when you’re in control of what she’s concerned about.

The problem is not the goodness of the men in control. The problem is with a system that places men in control in the first place.

Here and there a little resolution would work itself into my life. I managed to maintain my identity as a Christian. Then, years later, I found myself in even greater need of solid, spiritual, feminine guidance.

My boyfriend at the time confided in me that he’d struggled with pornography both before and during his relationship with me. I felt numb—devastated—wounded. He told me he was willing to stop, and that he wanted to stay together if I did. I still loved him and wanted to try to mend what had been damaged. I quickly found that I couldn’t sort through my feelings alone.

I visited a counselor. A very kind, very Christian, very male counselor. Most aspects of life have more to do with humanity than with gender, and anyone can understand these commonalities.

This counselor helped me a lot. But eventually the simple fact that he couldn’t offer a feminine perspective became obvious.

During one conversation, he leaned toward me. “Kate, what your boyfriend did—I don’t know what the female equivalent would be—an addiction to romance novels...”

I didn’t hear much after that. Because of what my boyfriend had seen and done, I felt as if my purity had been tarnished—as if some spiritually sexual part of me had been raped. Romance novels are an absurd comparison to pornography. And most women would have known that.

At that moment, more than ever, I wished I could see God as Mother rather than Father. I

needed Jesus to take the form he talked about in Matthew 23 and gather me under a wing. I needed God to be as protective of my wounded heart as the mother bear robbed of her cubs in Hosea 13. I needed to be special enough to be sought out, like the piece of silver a woman lost and found in Luke 15. I needed a feminine Spirit to comfort me. A woman!

But because the Seventh-day Adventist Church has seen fit to place a higher value on cultural male-dominance than on the individual female, almost no women enter the ministry in leadership roles. And so, I was left alone, feeling misunderstood, unloved, and alienated.

I want to see God as something other than male. I want to see a reflection of God in the mirror. I want to believe that woman is exactly one half the image of God (see Genesis 1:27), and that every dirty joke, every demeaning comment, every catcall, every rape hurts God as much as it hurts me.

To see and think this way is difficult. And that’s okay; life never promised to be easy. What discourages me is not the difficulty, but the ironic fact that a church whose “pen of inspiration” was held in a feminine hand does so little to right the wrong.

Kate Simmons is a student at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

» If God loved women, I reasoned, why would he tell them to keep silent in church, to place themselves beneath their husbands, to learn in obedience with “all submission”?

Why did God make me a woman when I so obviously didn’t fit these aptitudes? Maybe God didn’t love women—at least, not as much as he loved men.

Philanthropist's Son Calls for Financial Reform in Church

For 85 years Karl Koppel was a dream come true for the Adventist church. During his 105 years of life, the low-keyed East Coast industrialist donated more than \$13 million to the Adventist church.

But that dream is becoming a nightmare for the church. Koppel's son, Al, now a spry 86 and retired, has written a book that meticulously lays out how Seventh-day Adventist Church Trust Services took advantage of his father's failing mental powers during the final years of his life and mismanaged his family's multi-million-dollar bequest of land.

Sour grapes? An heir slighted?

Apparently not, for the author—the sole surviving son of the Hungarian-born Karl Koppel—has in his turn contributed millions of family money to the very church whose Trust employees he so roundly criticizes.

"It's nothing personal," Dr. Koppel says. He's writing out of concern for the credibility of his beloved church which has been significantly ill-served by its Trust Services program for the past 50-or-so years.

"My goal in publishing this book, titled 'Truth Decay,' is not to get even or pay back anybody or any church organization," says Dr. Koppel. "My goal is

to bring change within the church. We can do better than we have for our older members who want to leave substantial gifts and estates to their church."

Dr. Koppel spent his entire career as a dentist in an office just a few blocks from the Adventist church's former general headquarters in Takoma Park, Md.—hence the title of his book, a play on "tooth decay." During his forty years of practice (1945-1985) Koppel says he found the vast majority of Adventist leadership to be decent, reputable people who paid their bills and kept their appointments.

But the church's Trust Services program has hurt the reputation of the church immeasurably in North America, through its manipulation of the elderly and its mishandling of vast sums of money, because its officers were lacking in business savvy or were loaded down with too many other responsibilities. Though apparently there has been some improvement since the 1990s, Koppel says much more needs to be done.

"Many or most of these men are either pastors or attorneys before they become trust officers and often come to the job with little experience in business,"

Koppel says.

Koppel believes that while the Trust Services has indeed funneled millions of dollars into church coffers, it may well have alienated scores, hundreds, or even thousands of family members who might otherwise be in the church today.

Koppel is well aware of a pervasive public relations campaign by the Trust Services program to improve its image. He quotes liberally from articles published in denominational journals—then shows how the church's performance falls woefully short of what is promised in its public relations pieces. For example, Koppel shares at least two firsthand accounts of recent situations where administrators unambiguously counseled him and his family not to give substantial sums to local congregations. Yet, at that very time, a director of the General Conference Trust Services published a lengthy article in *Ministry* magazine, promising that the Trust Services program was now the "friend" of local pastors and was encouraging donors to remember local churches in their wills. Koppel says that from his personal perspective of 50 years, the *Ministry* article totally misrepresents the truth. Trust officers continue to set as their primary goal the funneling of cash and assets to conferences and unions.

According to Koppel, "The best possible outcome would be for this book to become required reading for every person in, or contemplating entering, Trust Services. If these men and women could truly understand the heartbreak that comes as a son or daughter—who are the church of tomorrow—watches their aged parent being manipulated to give more and more money to the 'unrestricted' coffers of the church, change could come overnight. If they could feel the anger that comes as vast estates are liquidated for a fraction of their real value, so the church can get its money quickly and trust officers can get their promotions—they'd think twice.

"I don't think these men and women lack empathy for the aged or are devoid of a sense of perspective. What has happened is that a lot of pressure is placed on them to produce money—lots of it—fast. Until this changes and Trust Services becomes an empathetic 'service' to the physical, spiritual, and financial needs of members, it will continue to alienate members and create strife and scandal. I hope this book will help move the program in the right direction."

Edwin Schwisow is Director of Development of Adventist Today. He worked with Albert Koppel in the writing of the book.

One Book, Two Reviews

The Book: *Truth Decay: A Call to Remove the Culture of Secrecy and Mismanagement That Infects the Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

Albert C. Koppel, DDS.

Portland: LifeScape Publishing, 2005. Available from the author at akoppel@bellsouth.net, \$6.00 postpaid.

Reforming a Dysfunctional Adventist Administrative Culture

This volume relates the experiences of an Adventist layman, a retired dentist, in his dealings with representatives of a local and union conference administrative apparatus of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the mid-Atlantic states region of the United States. The principal subject matter is the management (or mismanagement) of several trusts set up to receive property valued in the millions of dollars donated to the church.

This is not an arid academic treatise considering abstract scholastic principles written by a disinterested observer. Using his own experiences, the author expresses forcefully the frustrations of an Adventist layman deeply committed to his church but profoundly disappointed by the way church bureaucrats conduct much of its business. He is also deeply troubled by the disrespect exhibited by many clergy leaders toward laymen interested in understanding how the church actually works.

The purpose of the author is not to discourage contributions to the work of the Adventist church. On the contrary, he wants “more—not fewer—church members to feel comfortable entrusting their God-given assets to our beloved church.” However, he is convicted there exists a pervasive and systemic clergy administrative culture in which “secrecy, non-answers, and stonewalling” are a way of institutional life.

The book is not the protestations of a progressive or liberal Adventist. Dr. Koppel appears in its pages as a traditional, even conservative church member. His recitation of lapses in ethical behavior do not involve what he considers theological aberrations. He views the problems primarily as manifestations of a dysfunctional administrative ethos among clergy bureaucratic elites in the North American Adventist church.

In his view, the core elements of these problems proceed from the lack of accountability and transparency that characterize far too many Adventist administrators. The secrecy, conflicts of interest, and inappropriate business practices Dr. Koppel personally encountered have been well documented by other authors as well.

Dr. Koppel quotes correspondence from long-time denominational employees who, with sadness, concur that their experiences with “the brethren” confirm his understandings of the issues. For example, a “senior

General Conference officer” attributes some of the institutional dysfunction to those who increasingly come “to view organization as the Church, i.e. the spiritual body of Christ. We work for the organization before we work for God. It is becoming secular with religious words and phrases.”

The book concludes with a list of recommendations for improving the way the church conducts its business. Part of these recommendations deal specifically with how the church should administer trusts that members establish to convey property and other financial resources to the church. Other recommendations deal with what he sees as the core administrative problem—a lack of transparency in business dealings. A related issue is the lack of means for dispute resolution concerning church-related financial and administrative matters. Dr. Koppel believes this should be addressed by instituting mediation processes employing qualified and disinterested professionals. Finally, Dr. Koppel recommends employing secret-ballot voting at all levels in the church to permit laity and clergy to register their opinions on important issues without fearing retribution. These recommendations would

» » “[The author] views the problems he addresses primarily as manifestations of a dysfunctional administrative ethos among clergy bureaucratic elites in the North American Adventist church.”

begin to address the lack of financial and political accountability that characterizes much of the administration of the contemporary Adventist church.

From the perspective of this reviewer, the problems that Dr. Koppel details reflect a widespread and serious problem. All too many church administrators apparently will not or cannot make the necessary public admissions and adjustments. Perhaps they fear further “losses” to independent ministries. They don’t want to “rock the boat” on their watch. They are content to patch small leaks, hoping that the sinking of the ship will occur after they retire or move on to other positions higher up the administrative ladder.

Ervin Taylor is professor of anthropology, University of California, Riverside, and Executive Editor of Adventist Today.



Over the Beasts

Spring beauty splashed the park with color. As I approached the duck pond I heard a cacophony of calls. A flock of gulls hovered and bounced over the grass next to the pond. Black wing tips on light-gray wings and a black ring around the bill defined the ring-billed gulls. Moving away slightly as I approached, they paid little attention to me as they continued their conversations. I stepped behind a park sign, using it as a partial blind and watched. Armed with recent learning about gull body language, I tried to interpret.

The males, heads held high and wings pushed forward, approached other males. When the approach failed to communicate “Back off; this is mine,” the males spread their wings, flying at each other. A female bird followed each male, relaxed, fluffing and preening her feathers, sometimes tossing her head and begging for food in the courting behavior. One male gull with no female in tow would not give up. He continued to approach one couple. The female paid no attention. The male drove him off, but not very far.

Suddenly the gulls took to the air as one, calling loudly and circling the pond. I had not moved. I looked around for danger. A black truck drove by. Within minutes the gulls landed in the same spots. The lone male landed near the same couple.

Now it was tranquil. Six gull couples rested on the pond edge, each about ten feet from their nearest neighbors. Each couple had waterfront property.

All was quiet except for a few squawks from the single male whom the couple tolerated within their ten-foot property boundaries, but no closer than a foot away from the other male. A little boy ran toward the gulls. Several flew up over the water for a minute, then resettled where they had been.

I moved slowly toward the birds. They did not stir. I quietly approached the couple at the end of the pond. They watched but did not raise their heads high in the alert posture. At four feet they filled the camera frame. I clicked; then, talking softly, backed away, grateful they had allowed me so close.

Much in nature is not right. Animals attack and kill each other. Coupling is often haphazard and chaotic. Fear and competition for resources appear to rule. Yet isn't humanity supposed to rule? “You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.” Psalm 8:6-8, NIV.

We talk of protecting the environment. Why destroy the art of God? Yet maybe God intends something more than simply preserving the status quo. Perhaps he intends us to be so radiant with Christ's love that our mere presence among the animals creates peace and order. “The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid,... a little boy will lead them... They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.” Isaiah 11:6-9.

Aletha Gruzensky Pineda writes from College Place, Wash.