

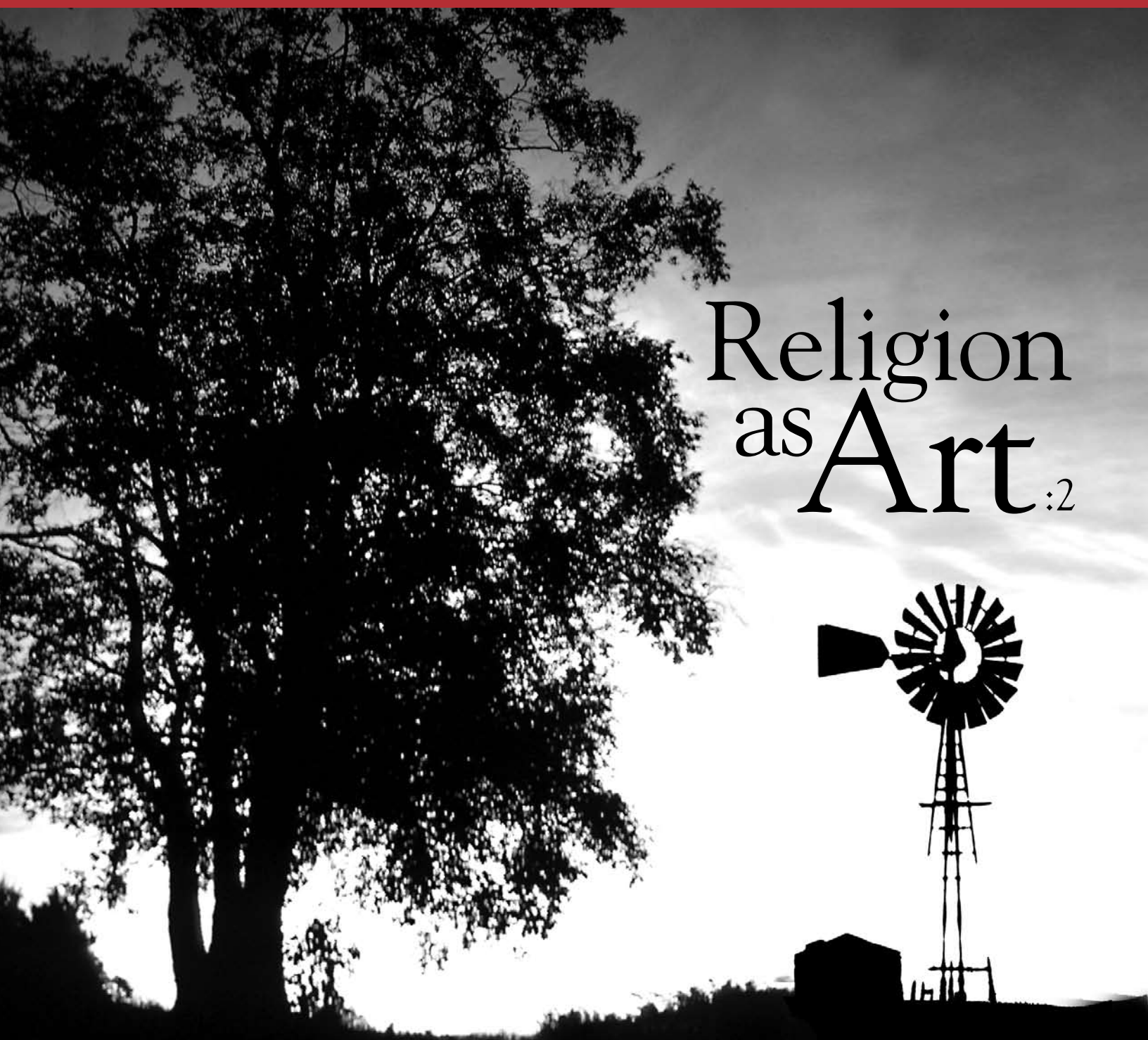
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Religion as Art :2



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Editorial | John McLarty

Religion as Art

At the end of a summer during my college days, I showed my family some pictures I had taken of our family's "farm." The 100 acres was in Sardis, Mississippi, 50 miles south of Memphis, near our favorite water-skiing lake. But our most vivid memories of the farm did not feature glorious runs on glassy water, but days of pulling kudzu out of the watermelon patch or months of digging holes for a fence line around the property. The clay was brick hard. The temperature was often in the hundreds, with 90 percent humidity. Other memories

included vicious horseflies and miserable chiggers. The "farmhouse" was classic rural Mississippi—a singlewide with a tall television antenna erected in a futile attempt to pull in Memphis programming.

When I showed my pictures, my youngest sister questioned my truthfulness. Had I really taken these pictures on our property? There was nothing in her experience at the farm that connected with the wonder and radiance of the photographs.

But the sun at six in the morning really was that soft and luminous. And the sweet gum trees east of the barn really did have a light, feathery silhouette at that time of the day. My camera did not lie, but it told a truth that could be seen only through a sharp and disciplined focus.

One way to make sense of spiritual life is to think of it as art. Through a deliberate and disciplined focus we learn to see aspects of reality that are obscure to the untrained eye.

Thy bountiful care, what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.

From the hymn, "O Worship the King," lyrics by Robert Grant

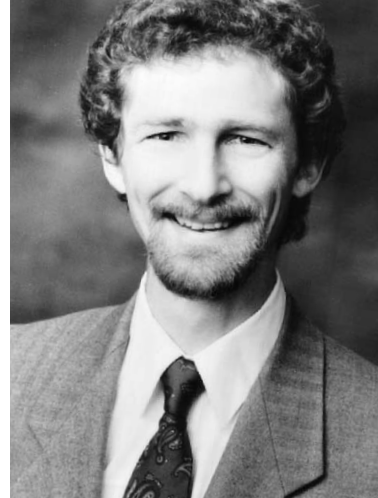
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that we too easily fail to notice—the sweetness and light that flow from the ordinary interactions of solar energy, atmosphere, and gravity. When we learn to see as Grant does, we will catch hints of wonder nearly everywhere we look. And we will become agents of hope and healing in response to "the rest" of reality.

A primary responsibility of *Adventist Today* is to report on challenges and difficulties in the Church. This is the job of an independent news journal. Every institution—religious or otherwise—needs the corrective of a free press. But because reporting on errors (alleged or actual) is at best only pulling weeds, we also publish articles designed to foster spiritual life.

In the world (and in the Church) you can always find kudzu, chiggers and horseflies. As responsible citizens we must address these problems. But at the same time, to remain healthy as persons, we must pay attention to the "artists" who can help us to see more than the mess.

As we enter a new year, I invite you to partner with us as we work for a more effective and transparent church structure and a more focused and enlightened church membership.



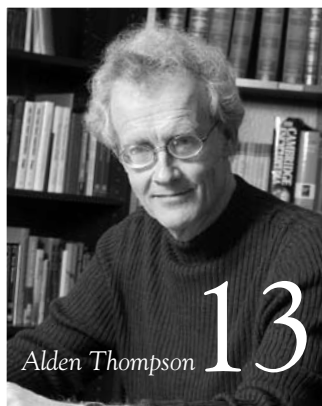


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▲ Brenda Maldonado flew to Louisiana to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.



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FIFTH GENERATION

I recently completed reading John McLarty's book, *Fifth Generation* (Abstracted in *AT* March/April 2005). It is the best, most refreshing and compelling, formulation of Adventist belief that I have ever read. I had been looking for a resource to give a Jewish friend who has requested a book on Adventism. This is it. I'm ordering a dozen copies to give friends and family for Christmas. Thanks for what you're doing for *Adventist Today* and thanks for this book.

Ted Hamilton, M.D.
Vice President
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» Yes, the system of tithing needs to be reviewed now and then and adjusted as needed, just like the wage scale needs periodic adjustment.

Yes, the system of tithing needs to be reviewed now and then and adjusted as needed, just like the wage scale needs periodic adjustment.

John Scharffenberg, M.D.
North Fork, California

CASUALTY OF TITHE DISCUSSION

I'm a pastoral casualty for publicly discussing tithe. Two years ago I was fired from Florida Conference for ambiguous reasons which include false rumors of an affair.

Within weeks I was informed by three church leaders (a GC officer, Union leader and a Conference president outside Florida) that they were convinced I was fired for publishing two months earlier a document on tithe. This document, "The Local Church: The Most Important Institution on Earth" discussed issues similar to those raised in David Newman's article. The GC officer even challenged me to "recant" the paper and "everything will be fine."

This is the Holy Grail of the organization. Touch it and you disappear. Evidence? It's the reason why author Fred Numbers is a "pseudonym for several pastors." And where now is David Newman?

The topic has been "under study" by the administration for the 35 years of my ministry. Who in their right mind believes that a 100-year-old organizational model is "perfect" for the 21st Century? For it to change, administrators must vote to terminate their careers. What are the odds?

Fred Numbers is dead right, i.e. "we have only two choices: change or go extinct." The extinct prophecy is winning the day unless many very courageous pastors and leaders "stand for right though the heavens fall!"

Terry Pooler
Pastor

Sabbath Grace Fellowship

www.sabbathgracefellowship.com

(Tithe paper is available on this Web site)

NEWMAN ON TITHE PAYING

Several points need to be considered in Newman's article [published on the *AT* Web site]:

1) He states ministers are underpaid based on their educational level. I believe this has yet to be proved. I have seen no evidence to support that statement.

2) It has been said by some that Ellen White gave tithe directly to ministers in need of it. This is not true. It is said she gave tithe outside of the regular channels. This is to be questioned. She gave it through regular channels. Check with Elder Ed Reid of the North American Division who has researched out this point.

3) Mormons have a fast-growing church, it is pointed out, and they have no paid clergy. They send people out two by two without wages to do work for the Church. Is not the worker worthy of his hire? So why compare the SDA system with the Mormon system?

4) It was said we should give our members the freedom of where to pay their tithe. The very sentence above states we do just that - "We do not make tithe paying a test of fellowship."

5) We are not really a congregational system. If we were each church would be a law unto itself. A conference being independent would not make us a congregational system.

Scam Artist Targeting Adventists Arrested

It has happened again. Twenty-five years after the Donald Davenport loan scandal, unwary Adventist church members in Southern California and elsewhere became targets for a smooth-talking investment promoter from Florida. Responding to promises of high returns with “absolutely no risk,” made by Jamaica-born Winston George Ross, 57, of Apopka, Florida, some 250 people across the United States were bilked of more than \$4 million. According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Douglas A. Axel, Ross was tried and convicted last July in a Federal court in Los Angeles on charges of mail fraud, wire fraud, and money laundering, and on November 7, 2005, was sentenced to 155 months in prison. He was also ordered by U.S. District Court Judge Manuel Real to pay back \$4.3 million.

It all started out so innocently. As told in a telephone conversation by one of his Adventist victims, Dene Tyler, member of the Pacoima, California, church, Ross was recommended by the pastor for his reputation as an investment adviser. Ross was introduced to the congregation by the pastor; then, in a series of “seminars” Ross conducted, attendees were told how to incorporate themselves in order to lower income taxes they would pay on investment proceeds.

Ross represented himself as an Adventist and began each of his meetings with solemn prayer. At first he brokered investments from individuals, sending the money to other investment programs. Then he set up a “10 percent Program,” in which he guaranteed returns of at least 10 percent a month for 15 months. For larger sums of \$100,000 or more he would pay 12 percent a month, and for \$300,000 it would be 15 percent, every month.

This sounded to Tyler almost too good to be true, and she deliberated for three months about participating. She had some money resulting from the sale of a house and wanted to invest it wisely. She talked to the pastor, who assured her he was convinced of its value and planned to invest himself; and she engaged in earnest prayer

for guidance. Ross, along with other Adventist pastors from out of state, made repeated visits to the church to keep the fervor going. Other members were mortgaging their houses; one even took on a \$300,000 credit-card debt. Finally Tyler “took the dive,” turned over her money, and for a couple of months began to get the promised returns. She was still uneasy, however, and tried to dissuade questioning friends from participating.

The day came, however, when Ross was not getting enough new money to make the promised payments on the old notes, and the scheme collapsed. Tyler discovered she was left holding the bag.

I asked Tyler what she thought in retrospect about her prayers for guidance and the faith she had put in the pastor. She was philosophical about it. “It was my own fault,” she said. “I should have known better. Maybe this experience will help me give some advice to other people.” At least she didn’t have a mountain of credit-card debt. In the meantime she must find a job and try to get her life back on track again.

Others in the church may not take the situation so lightly. Some question whether pastors ought to be better educated in finance if they expect to counsel parishioners. And some who sought guidance in their daily prayers have begun to think more critically about the “inner voice” they listen to. For all who lost so heavily, the question looms about how quickly this con artist, once out of jail 13 years from now, will be able to regain his fortunes enough to pay them back, court order or not.

While Ross found rich hunting grounds among Adventists, he did not overlook other faiths. Records show that in Alabama, he wooed Church of Christ congregations with similar pious posturing, and they too subscribed to his schemes. Now they, too, have occasion to consider whether some kind of inborn greed may have colored their perceptions of “what God wanted them to do.”

When efforts were made to contact the Adventist pastor in Southern California through his voicemail, there was no response.

Responding to promises of high returns with “absolutely no risk,” made by Jamaica-born Winston George Ross, 57, of Apopka, Florida, some 250 people across the United States were bilked of more than \$4 million.

Members for Church Accountability:

FALL CONFERENCE IN LOMA LINDA

The Fall Conference of the Members for Church Accountability (MCA) was held at Loma Linda, California, on the last Sabbath of October 2005. It was attended by about 100 persons, most from the Southern California area, but some from as far away as Colorado and Texas.

The purpose of the meeting was to address the roots of the stagnation of membership growth in the North American Adventist Church and the recurring financial misadventures in church administration.

After welcoming the group and outlining the scope of the meeting, George Grames, M.D., a local nephrologist and founding member of MCA, read from a recent issue of *Christianity Today* where John Ortberg, the teaching pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, described the absolute necessity of transparency and openness in financial and administrative matters for a church, so as to inspire the trust and credibility that is essential for parishioners to feel safe in bringing people to Christ.

He was followed by Dick Sheldon, M.D., a pulmonologist and intensive care specialist, who read from a speech by the president of Loma Linda University to the General Conference Session in St. Louis in July 2005, titled "Integrity, a 21st Century Imperative." This discussion of the ideals that should underlie all secular and, especially, religious organizations presented a standard that may be more honored in proclamation than in practice.

Stewart Shankel, M.D., a nephrologist and medical educator, reviewed the advice of Ellen G. White on the goals of organization within the Adventist church. The prophet and early leader of the church was especially critical of church leaders who exercised "kingly power" by insisting on ultimate control. She felt that "every member should have a voice," and that organization should not be a stumbling block to spreading the

gospel. She indicated that businessmen should direct business, and ministers should be freed from business responsibilities, so that they could preach, pastor, and win souls.

In an illustrated lecture on organizational change, Bob Krone, emeritus professor of systems management at the University of Southern California and a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the School of Business of La Sierra University, Riverside, California, provided "The Theory of Performance Improvement," and outlined how to achieve the Pareto Optimum, where "many are better off and no one is worse off." He illustrated how to get the information needed to achieve this goal by using the Ideas Unlimited Group Survey Method. He distributed a paper for his Target No. 1, which was: "If you had complete control of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, what would you change?"

By assuring anonymity (and confidentiality) he elicited responses, which clustered around making the organization more efficient by eliminating either Unions or local Conferences, and a redistribution of tithe income by allowing more discretionary use by the local congregation.

Larry Downing, the senior pastor of the White Memorial Church in Los Angeles, has worked with Bob Krone in seminars and teaching programs. Dr. Downing pointed out the primacy of the local parish. This was where decisions for Christ were made. This was where the money to support the organization came from. He pointed out the "backwardness" of some Conference officials who say, "We're here to help you—now let us tell you what to do." The concern of the local parish for "gospel" and of the administration for "doctrine" is illustrated by the pastors' responses to Pacific Union Conference President Thomas Mostert's recent book, *Hidden Heresy*?

Bob Krone then asked for the audience to respond to Target # 2: "What is the most important place for needed changes in the church?" There were 152 responses: Accountability in one form or another came up on 64 of the responses. Behavior Practices accounted for 24, and Changes in Church Structure, 23. Other areas accounted for the remaining responses.

Members for Church Accountability

Dr. Frank Knittel, former president of Southern Adventist University and former chairman of the La Sierra University English Department, as well as a successful businessman, has interacted closely with the Adventist Church administration and educational departments for more than 60 years. For the malaise he sees affecting the North American Division, which comprises seven percent of the Adventist membership while contributing more than half of its financial support, he had eight observations and suggested remedies:

1. Uncertainty as to which truths are essential to salvation. Clarify which are the most fundamental beliefs and emphasize these in evangelistic meetings.

2. Soggy and Unproductive Bureaucracy. Leaders have an obligation and duty for parishioners, who contribute the money, to know where “every penny” goes. Either the Union or the Conference layer should be eliminated, without moving any of these persons to other places within the organization.

3. Ballooning in every layer of administration. Committees are formed that diffuse responsibility. The General Conference (GC) president and all department heads should be responsible to laypersons who have access to all of the data.

4. Most GC department heads are “professional travelers” of minimal effectiveness but who incur inordinate expenses. He suggests eliminating most departments and reducing the remaining ones to a third of their present size.

5. “Shifting Incompetence” by moving ineffective personnel around rather than eliminating them. He would like to see “term limits” for all GC and Union officers.

6. Ethnically divisive churches expand bureaucracy and growth by membership transfers, but with few new members. He would like all churches to welcome all members, regardless of racial and ethnic backgrounds. He applauded his own local community in his early efforts to learn to speak English.

7. “Hemorrhaging” of young Adventists by making tuition in Adventist schools so “abhorrently expensive” for laity, while at the same time giving generous subsidies for clergy. He suggested allowing laity to use their tithe for tuition.

8. Too much local parish money goes to “higher administration.” He would like to set limits on this and have complete financial transparency.

Knittel feels that if local groups organized to bring a plan to the local Conference constituency meeting, it might have some chance of succeeding.

Ron Gladden, a graduate of Southern Adventist

University, has been ministerial secretary of several conferences and was Church Planting Director of the North Pacific and Mid-America Unions until 2004. He is now the director of Mission Catalyst Network, a parallel ministry with headquarters in Vancouver, Washington. He emphasized that any successful state, business, or church is organized around “core values.” While there needs to be a supporting organization to advance the core values, there should never be any doubt as to the primary purpose of the organization.

With maturing of a Church organization there is an increasing tendency toward “Institutional Drift”, where the priority shifts from the “Spiritual” to the “Corporate.” He quoted Dr. Lyle Schaller who said (somewhat tongue-in-cheek, perhaps) that shrinking mainline Protestant churches had as their main, unspoken purpose “to give aging white men jobs.” He said that there was a further drift in importance from the “local church” to the “Conference.” He repeated that the pulpit and the baptistery are in the local church. There is a further drift from the “grandparental role” to the “parental role.” Parental control is proper for young, immature children, but grandparents are available for advice and support, while allowing independence of the maturing children.

Gladden reemphasized the concept that the “system determines the outcomes.” If the system doesn’t change, then the outcomes won’t change. He illustrated the constitutional inability of the United Methodist Church to change, with the result that it loses more than 200,000 members each year. He quoted an unnamed Adventist Church administrator who said that his denomination would change “when it becomes (financially) bankrupt.”

Gladden said that in order for the Church to be revitalized, it must: 1) Refocus everything on the mission; 2) Trust local pastors to make decisions; and 3) Move to a “grandparental” model.

He concluded by referring to Matthew 11:12, where Jesus seems to suggest that his followers would take forceful measures to advance the kingdom of God.

A question-and-answer period followed, in which individuals related their personal feelings and directed some questions to the panelists. Most attendees agreed that the meeting was conducted in a good spirit and that while change in Church structure would be difficult, it was not impossible.

The Web site for the Members for Church Accountability is www.advmca.org. The Mission Catalyst Network Web site is www.missioncatalyst.org.

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North American Division Year-end Meeting Report

The 2005 year-end meeting of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists met during the last weekend of October in Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., while, just a few miles away, public media were announcing Special Prosecutor Fitzgerald's indictment of Lewis Libby, an assistant to Vice President Cheney.

The news reporters' feeding frenzy associated with that event lent, by comparison, a sense of total calm and reflection to this NAD quinquennial meeting. Inasmuch as the senior administrative officers of the North American Division are elected at the time of the General Conference, leaving the balance of NAD leadership positions to be named at this meeting, there were no real surprises.

In his opening remarks, Don Schneider, Division president, set forth a series of initiatives that the Church in North America must implement if it is to move forward effectively. These include:

- Young people must be involved meaningfully in our Church.
- Dramatic changes have occurred in the world of communication in recent years. All levels of the Church need to take advantage of this ability. From television (Hope Channel), Adventist filmmakers, to the Internet, unparalleled opportunities are offered.
- Local church congregations are the backbone of the Church. If we can connect all members in ways that lead to deeper personal involvement, both Church and members will benefit. These benefits include personal Bible study and increased outreach and community involvement, and ultimately, better attendance and support in both time and resources.
- With members being more strongly attached to their Church and to one another, sharing the good news of salvation can become even more successful.
- The process of making this happen needs to involve appropriate and responsible leadership at all levels of the Church. When leaders show greater

inclusiveness and practice only the highest standards of ethics, integrity, and accountability, they will inspire member confidence.

- While the NAD contains a much smaller proportion of total world Church membership than in the past, it remains the economic engine of the denomination. Impartial benevolence by all members remains as important as ever in the sharing of the Good News.

New Positions

Even as two of six vice-presidential positions were eliminated as a fund-saving measure, R. Ernest Castillo, former Secretary of the Pacific Union, was selected to fill an open vice-presidential position. Other new personnel included Carla Baker, from the Southwestern Union, to the position of Women's Ministries; Russell Burrill, head of evangelism training at Andrews (NADEI), remaining in that position and adding the responsibility of Ministerial Director. Joann Herrington, from Union College, assumed leadership of Children's Ministries, and Carolyn R. Forrest, from the Florida Conference, became an associate secretary.

Investment Policy

A major change came in the Investment Policy arena. Prior to the voted change, the process was governed by authority granted to a denominational entity. The new policy changes from a hierarchical one to one based on the type and quality of expertise used in investment management, as well as the total value of the investments involved. This change will enable all levels of the Church, from a single church to the largest institution, to use the ability of experienced staff to hold and manage their funds.

Disaster Relief

Conference speakers spent a large block of time describing not only what has happened to our Church and its members during and after the recent natural disasters, but also what we've done collectively and individually to make a difference. The largest and most obvious single area of devastation, New Orleans, had 11 Adventist churches, with more than 2,500 members. Only

North American Division Year-end Meeting Report

one church remains habitable, with about 155 members still attending. Major devastation occurred elsewhere, with damage still not totally determined. Not only are these and many others of our church facilities affected, but as has been portrayed by multiple news organizations, homes, jobs, and whole populations have disappeared.

Adventist Community Services was able to help many, with its principal service areas located in Mississippi and east Texas. The Sabbath offering of the council was dedicated to hurricane relief.

Rededication

While the official reason for meetings such as this involves responsible governance of our Church in North America, the glue that makes us what we are continues to ooze from our pores! The speaker for Friday evening vespers was remarkable. David Ring, a 52-year-old man, born with cerebral palsy, brought us his personal story and walk with God in a truly meaningful way. All present were not only amazed but truly blessed by him.

On Sabbath morning we heard a report from Barbara Taylor, a highly successful businessperson who was instrumental in planting a church near the Aspen-Vail-Breckenridge ski areas. She shared how she and her church were effectively reaching out to those who are often turned off by traditional Adventist methods.

Truly, Paul's letter to the Ephesians teaches us that we become part of God's kingdom by his grace, and not by our works. These individuals exemplify what God does for us.

During his Sabbath morning homily, Elder Jan Paulson, General Conference President, shared how we are all pilgrims on a journey to a promised land. As Abraham of old journeyed, so do we, unlike so many in this world who have no home, no hope, and no future. We know our goal and expect to reach it soon. Responding to Elder Paulson, all who lead in this division rededicated themselves toward this goal.

Communication

The Hope Channel was clearly the only media group present. The Division's presentation of its involvement in North American disaster relief, primarily through Adventist Community Services, along with the Conferences and Unions located in the hurricane-damaged areas, was televised for

immediate presentation. The material was later shared with 3ABN, however.

Clearly, it is the belief of many leaders that Web communication is the wave of the future. For some years, Tagnet (described as a Web site in a box) was a way for Church organizations at all levels to interface on the Internet, to the extent that the NAD has paid the maintenance expenses involved. This format is a fixed one, and it does not allow any latitude for individual churches to change the content.

» Alienation of people leads to loss of their confidence, decreased giving, and ultimately, disbelief that the Church really matters. Ultimately, in this era of rapid and instant communication, the Church must develop and creatively use new ways to reach members and the public. NetAdventist.org appears ready to bridge part of the gap.

However, *NetAdventist.org*, a member of ASI, located in Fallbrook, California, has developed a new format that operates "seamlessly," to the extent that it allows "streaming" content, not only from an individual church's Web site, but also from multiple area churches. It coordinates the content while maintaining and coordinating activity scheduling. As it brings content from different levels, it does so in a way that is "dynamic," i.e., constantly updated and fresh, so that to the user it appears to be a direct part of the Web site's content and process. The individual church can use a variety of templates for its presentation and can change content as well.

The Pacific Union has been so impressed, it has agreed to pay the setup fee and the first three months, at \$35 per month, with the Southeastern California Conference, as an example, paying an additional three months of the cost—six months in all.

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North American Division Year-end Meeting Report

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The program as demonstrated by this group was truly impressive. Among others, Richard Osborn, president of Pacific Union College, spoke with admiration and appreciation for what these people have accomplished. He believes it will be a major stride forward for the Church.

NAD Committee

The final agenda item, presented at the recommendation of the Union presidents, was intended to reduce the size (currently about 350 members) of the NAD Executive Committee. This prompted the strongest floor discussion of any brought before the body. The Union presidents reasoned that since the meeting is primarily one to confirm and finalize policy issues affecting the Division, there was little need for lay, local pastor, or teacher representation, since they were not policymakers. Doing so would reduce the size of the Committee by approximately a third, thus cutting the expense of holding the meeting and leaving greater funding for “more important items.”

Interestingly, the issue of who pays is not as obvious as it would seem. Save for those individuals in leadership positions in either the NAD or General Conference itself, all others, as representative of some other entity in the Division—whether a university president, hospital executive, denominational employee at any lower than Division level, and/or a layperson from a given Union—expenses of their participation are borne by the organization they represent. These expenses may be direct, such as travel and housing, plus their pay and benefits, which continue to accrue while out of their given post. In sum, only a small percentage of the total cost is borne by the North American Division.

One needs to appreciate the hierarchical organization of the Church to appreciate the view voiced by the Union presidents. When a member or church would like to do something different than “normally” done, it is given to understand by Conference officials that “policy,” set by higher organizational levels, does or does not allow such a change. Yet it is the contention at the Division level that any changes in policy come about because lower levels of Church organization have requested the changes. Thus, the Division and General Conference are only serving as “collating” agencies and do not “set” policy.

With that mindset, and since the Division is only coordinating the process, there is no need for

broad input, ie., no need for lay, local pastor, or teacher input, since they are represented at the lower organizational level!

When this perspective is carried to its conclusion, it is no wonder most members in the pew see little evidence of “transparency” in the way the Church is run.

With the exception of one Union president who rose to support the proposal as presented, everyone who rose to address the issue (primarily laypersons and teachers) spoke against the motion to approve. The proposal was tabled for further study, to be brought back five years hence!

Commentary

This year-end NAD meeting was smoothly conducted and, while clearly scripted, set an example for any constituency meeting that might be held in North America. The tone of the meeting, clearly influenced by the recent weather-related disasters’ effect on the Church and many of its members, promoted the process of rededication for those who lead in the NAD.

The changes adopted in the Church’s investment policy will be particularly beneficial to smaller church entities. The caveat, of course, is in the implementation and process; for, while too much oversight stifles innovation, inadequate safeguards create dangers.

There is a need to reduce the number of attendees at this meeting, but unless a way can be found to maintain openness and transparency to Church members as to how the Church is run, doing so will only serve to further alienate those very members. Alienation of people leads to loss of their confidence, decreased giving, and ultimately, disbelief that the Church really matters.

Ultimately, in this era of rapid and instant communication, the Church must develop and creatively use new ways to reach members and the public. *NetAdventist.org* appears ready to bridge part of the gap.

Two issues were not addressed, however. Roscoe Howard, Secretary of the NAD, described the issue of “balkanization,” the ongoing tug-of-war that separates people into particular ethnic groups, even while we state our goal of “living as one people” in the New Earth. The other deals with “relevancy,” keeping the Church relevant to all members, but particularly to its youth and young adults. Proposed solutions to either of these have been difficult to apply.



Analysis | John McLarty

Financial Irregularities at 3ABN

Fifty thousand dollars is less than half of one percent of Three Angels Broadcasting Network's (3ABN's) annual revenues, but the absence of an entry for this much annual rental income in the television ministry's financial statements caught the attention of the judge presiding over a challenge to its exemption from property taxes by Franklin County, Illinois. This was just one of the irregularities cited by Judge Barbara S. Rowe in her January 28, 2004, ruling against 3ABN in a tax case in which 3ABN had claimed tax exemption as a religious organization. The judge instead ruled that 3ABN was a closely held business run by the Shelton family and did recommend granting tax exemption for a few square feet of office space used by 3ABN chaplains.

In a July 2005 *Liberty Magazine* article by attorney Lee Boothby critical of Judge Rowe's decision, Boothby focused on the criteria used by the judge to decide whether 3ABN formally qualified as a religious organization under Illinois law. He did not address the question of whether 3ABN was a properly governed nonprofit organization.

Judge Rowe noted a number of other irregularities in 3ABN's operation. According to the documents presented by 3ABN, its board of directors consisted of only four people, all with the last name Shelton and all residing on the same rural route in Franklin County. Ms. Rowe was strongly critical of 3ABN's failure to follow Generally Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP). One particular category of giving—real estate revocable trusts—was singled out as being outside GAAP. The judge indicated that she did not receive the information she needed to assess this item.

In light of controversy surrounding the 3ABN jet aircraft—leased for \$40,000 per month, not counting pilot and fuel costs and landing fees and questions about the effectiveness of board supervision at the ministry—the irregularities brought to light in the Franklin County tax case deserve attention from the Church.

It is beyond dispute that 3ABN promotes Adventist beliefs and values through its programming. There is no question about the sincerity of donors or the dramatic effectiveness of Danny Shelton as a fund-raiser and media ministry leader. However, questions are being raised about the management of 3ABN. Specifically, has the board instituted adequate accounting mechanisms to ensure that contributions are being used in the manner intended by donors?

In one instance, a donor subsidized the purchase of a piano worth \$15,000. This same piano was sold to a Shelton family member for \$2,000. Needless to say, the donor was not happy about this use of her sacrificial gift to the ministry.

Two years ago, Danny Shelton claimed that his salary was about \$50,000 per year and that of his wife, Linda, \$65,000. But these figures do not include new cars that are bought every year and maintained by 3ABN for Shelton's unrestricted use, nor does this include the fine home built and maintained by the ministry for the Sheltons. There is nothing illegal about the cars or the home, but there is the question of transparency to donors and honesty to the IRS. Is the value of the home and the cars properly reported to the IRS? Of greater concern are allegations regarding the diversion of significant amounts of cash and in-kind giving from the

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Financial Irregularities at 3ABN

Continued from page 11



» There is no question about the sincerity of donors or the dramatic effectiveness of Danny Shelton as a fund-raiser and media ministry leader. However, questions are being raised about the management of 3ABN. Specifically, has the board instituted adequate accounting mechanisms to ensure that contributions are being used in the manner intended by donors?

ministry coffers. Are these allegations true? Where is the \$50,000 per year of rental income going?

Another area of concern has been Internet sales. Does the income from Internet sales of in-kind gifts and other items under 3ABN aegis generate income for the ministry, or does this income bypass the ministry books and go to members of the Shelton

family? *Adventist Today* contacted Danny Shelton for his response to these questions, but he declined to comment because he felt we would not fairly represent him.

Since 3ABN is an independent ministry, there are two places where these kinds of concerns can be addressed: 1) The media and thus the court of public opinion, and 2) The 3ABN board. The board is charged with the governance of the ministry. For the board to do its job, it needs to be strong and independent. The 3ABN bylaws submitted in evidence at the tax trial specifically stated that the board members were not paid and did not even have their travel expenses covered by 3ABN. Of course, there was the inconsistency between these bylaws and the board members of record in the documents—all reported as Shelton family members and all 3ABN employees—but this was apparently an error on the part of 3ABN's legal team, which

did not ensure that the judge was provided with an accurate roll of current board members.

A different list is given in Kay Kuzma's 2005 book, *Mending Broken People: The Vision, The Lives, The Blessings*, where eight board members are named for the TV ministry: May Chung, a philanthropist from

southern California; Kenneth Denslow, president of the Illinois Conference; Bill Hulsey, retired CEO of Collegedale Wood Products and mayor of Collegedale, Tennessee; Ellsworth McKee, chairman of the board of McKee Foods, Inc.; G. Ralph Thompson, retired, former Secretary of the General Conference; Walter Thompson, retired surgeon and current chairman of the 3ABN board; Owen Troy, retired director of communication for North American Division; and Larry Welch, long-time friend of Danny Shelton and construction manager for 3ABN.

Walter Thompson, the board chair, has declared that the board does not attempt to exercise close supervision of Shelton's management of the ministry. They have implicit trust in Shelton's character and competence to run it.

Even if the board did wish to "rein in" Shelton, it would be difficult for them to do so. Oversight of a ministry like 3ABN is not easy. The founder is the head of the ministry. Most "founders" of Christian ministries are very strong-willed people who do not take kindly to supervision or "policies" or anything else that interferes with their drive to achieve and accomplish for the Lord, as they see it. This willfulness of Danny Shelton is highlighted by his Guam divorce. Since he and Linda lived in Illinois, why were they divorced in Guam? Was it because doing so presented fewer impediments to Danny's arranging things just the way he wanted them?

The same drive that made Danny effective in creating a \$13-million-a-year ministry from nothing makes it very difficult for anyone to hold him accountable for the way he handles money or people. Repeatedly, in our interviews with people who have ties to the ministry, they would tell us we could not identify them because they had relatives who still worked at 3ABN. They worried that these employees would suffer repercussions if Danny knew that any of their relatives had talked with *Adventist Today*. Danny is not used to being denied. He is not used to being challenged. He does not tolerate dissent within his ministry.

According to our sources, Shelton does respond to concerns voiced by donors. If you are a donor to 3ABN, you should feel free to ask pointed questions about how your gift will be managed. This kind of questions from donors appear to be their best way to encourage greater care and transparency by those involved in the financial operations of this ministry.

Putting the Puzzle Together—Or Tearing It Apart

How can we keep a world Church together? Is there common ground? I hope so. But to live together, we do have to agree on one thing—namely, that we don't have to agree on everything.

Yet often that is precisely the problem, for certain kinds of highly structured people really do worry that allowing diversity is a recipe for moral and spiritual disaster. In fact, just a whiff of the discussions in the Church soon makes clear that the debate is driven largely by two opposing convictions: one, that we need more diversity, the other, that we already have too much. Could it be that both convictions are partially correct and that either could serve to unite the Church or to divide it? I think so.

I am convinced that discovering the diversity in Scripture can allay our fears. But for many people this diversity easily appears to be contradiction, and thus their worst fears are realized. But rather than making a case for diversity from Scripture—which I have done in a variety of ways elsewhere—what I want to do here is simply focus on two modern examples, one a good-news illustration of unity, the other a bad-news illustration of fragmentation. But instead of citing a bad-news Adventist example and a good-news illustration from out there (a powerful temptation for grumbly Adventists), I'm going to pick on the Scottish Presbyterians for the bad news and go to a small Adventist church in Canada for the good news. I start with the bad.

Fragmentation of a Community

About 2,000 people live in Fearn, Scotland, on the Easter Ross Peninsula. About 500 of these are active churchgoers. Some 180 attend one of two Church of Scotland parishes; the rest belong to one or another of four splinter groups, all of them claiming to be Presbyterians.

About 30-40 attend the Free Church, which

broke away in 1843 because it wanted to be free to call its own ministers. Members sing no hymns but only chanted psalms, and they use no instrumental accompaniment in worship.

About 60-70 attend the United Free Church. They sing chanted psalms in the morning and some hymns. Singing is unaccompanied in the morning; they use instruments in the evening.

About 40 attend the Associated Presbyterian Church, which broke with the Free Church in 1989 because Lord Mackay, a member of parliament and Scotland's Lord Advocate, attended the Roman Catholic funeral services for two of his colleagues. While many in the Free Church were shocked by Lord Mackay's actions, about 30 percent of the members supported him and went with Mackay to establish the new church. These folks are the liberals, singing all hymns with accompaniment.

Finally, another 30-40 attend the Free Church Continuing, a conservative breakaway precipitated by the lax handling of a morals charge against Free Church Professor John McLeod. Like the Free Church, they too sing only chanted psalms without accompaniment.

The parish minister, John McGregor, who told me these details, said that the only time all five pastors have been together under the same roof was at his ordination in 2001.

The divisions are "ludicrous," says McGregor sadly. "The spirit of division simply seems to have become a habit. Every 30 years or so, a group just has to break away for some reason."

Now the good news.

Building a community

A number of months ago when we were visiting former Walla Walla College students, Keith and Peggy Corbett, in Quesnel, British Columbia, Keith's secretary, Bev Haluschak, just happened to mention going to a church reunion in Sarnia, Ontario. The story intrigued me so much that I called her back for details. This is what I learned.



Alden Thompson

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Putting the Puzzle Together—Or Tearing It Apart

Continued from page 13

» What I find so intriguing about this story is that strong convictions people hold about doctrine, worship, and lifestyle have all been overwhelmed by someone's simple love for others. In other words, Brother Wood lived out Jesus' words in Matthew 7:12: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

The reunion was to honor Alfred Wood, now deceased. He was a convert to Adventism, a father of four, a chemical engineer. But most important of all, he was their Pathfinder leader. When he joined the Adventist church in Sarnia, which had a typical Sabbath attendance of about 70, he noticed that nothing much was being done for the young people. Since he had been a Boy Scout leader in his previous church, he took charge of Pathfinders. And things

began to happen. I won't take the time to tick off all the things he did to show those Pathfinders that they were important to the church and to God. Bev summarized it this way: "He simply modeled unconditional love." Typically there were about 30 Adventist young people in Pathfinders, and by bringing their friends they would nudge attendance up to about 40.

Now here is the rest of the story: A few years ago, about a year after Mr. Wood's death, some of his former Pathfinders decided they wanted to recognize him by putting up a plaque in his honor in the Sarnia church. Then they decided to contact the rest of the group and see if more could come. They got letters from four or five who could not attend. But 27 others did come back for the reunion, and, catch this: 25 of the 27 are still active Adventists. Furthermore, of the two who were not, one said: "This is what I have been

missing. I'm coming back." Think of it: 27 came back and 25 are still faithful in the Church.

When I asked Bev where they had come from, she said, "One from B.C., three from Alberta, two from Quebec, one from Newfoundland, two from Michigan, one from Florida, two from Washington, D.C. And one young man didn't have to travel at all, probably the one we would have voted 'least likely to be in the church'—most likely to be in jail! He was an elder and the youth leader in the Sarnia church."

In her last e-mail Bev commented: "Somehow Mr. Wood communicated to us what a privilege it was to serve in our church. I think he cultivated such an enduring connection to the church for me, that when the time came as a young adult that I questioned my need for the church, it was the belief that I was important to my church that kept me there until I could learn how important I was to God."

What I find so intriguing about this story is that strong convictions people hold about doctrine, worship, and lifestyle have all been overwhelmed by someone's simple love for others. In other words, Brother Wood lived out Jesus' words in Matthew 7:12: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." My guess is that if you were to talk with those Adventists who grew up in the Sarnia church, you would find remarkable diversity. But because they experienced Brother Wood's genuine human love for them as individuals, they are contributing in powerful ways to the unity of the church.

If, like the devout believers in Fearn, Scotland, we hold strong convictions about lesser matters, the Church will splinter. But when we really put God and people first in our thoughts, prayers and actions, we learn to love each other and to live together.

In the aftermath of the doctrinal turmoil of 1888, Ellen White argued persuasively for allowing a certain diversity in the Church, especially in our understanding of Scripture: "We cannot...take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can bring perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance."

She goes on to note how that unity will be the natural result when we take Jesus' two great commands with utmost seriousness: "The great truths of the word of God are so clearly stated that none need make a mistake in understanding them. When as individual members of the church, you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself, there will be no need of labored efforts to be in unity, for there will be oneness in Christ as a natural result (MS 24, 1892; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* 3:1092-93).

Alden Thompson, Ph.D., teaches at Walla Walla College, in College Place, Washington.

Responding to Hurricane Katrina: A Diary

Editor's Note: Brenda Maldonado flew to Louisiana to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Here is an edited selection of e-mails she sent home.

September 7, 2005

Dear Family and Friends,
It has been a long day! I had a wake-up time of 2:30 a.m. to make it in time to SEATAC airport. We landed in Lake Charles, Louisiana, around 4:30 p.m. and came immediately to McNeese State University, where our team of six has been assigned.

MSU has turned a recreation complex into a Special Needs Shelter, which is a shelter for people who need some sort of medical care but are not ill enough for hospitalization. Most of the staff have been here for eight days now. Some of them started off working 24 hours straight, and then 12-hour shifts since then. Others have been here almost continuously, running the command center. The strain and fatigue show on their faces, but they still exude Southern hospitality and grace.

I have been assigned nursing night shift supervisor. We are set up for up to 100 patients. Currently, we have 50.... Several doctors working here are evacuees themselves, from New Orleans. One doctor says his house was wiped out; there is no trace of it. The hospital where he worked was two stories tall, and he has heard that the floodwaters there reached above 20 feet. He thought most of the patients there perished. He is exhausted and overwhelmed, has not really allowed himself much time to think about it.

September 10, 2005

For the past 24 hours we have been dealing with a shortage of nurses. But we have managed. The patients are for the most part very understanding, but at times the stress and the strain gets to them, and



they become very frustrated. Many of our patients are separated from their families and are still trying to locate them.

This evening I was able to sit down and visit with some patients and listen to their stories. One gentleman comes from a town south of New Orleans. He is a newly diagnosed diabetic. He was feeling ill and was unable to evacuate. When the storm hit his house the water started rising quickly, and he could see its walls buckling and moving. Finally the water burst through and started pouring in. He grabbed his cat, waded outside, and threw the cat up onto the roof. Thankfully he had a ladder nearby which he put up to the house. He was too weak to climb it, but as the water rose, it lifted him and he eventually made it onto the roof.

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Responding to Hurricane Katrina: A Diary

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» Monday,
September 19, 2005:
It has now been three weeks since Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc along the Gulf Coast, and still so many people remain homeless and in shelters. Soon something else will draw the media's attention and thousands of people will be forgotten.

He spent eight hours on the roof before a boat came by and took him into town. The water was still high, so he joined others on the second story of a four-story bank building. More people joined them there over the next two days.

Obviously, the plumbing was not working, so the 20-plus people would use one bathroom until it was too gross, then move up to the next floor.

After two days a boat came by to get them, but he had to get back into the water to get to the boat. His feet had some cuts on them and had become infected from exposure to the water. We are changing his dressings and giving him antibiotics. He is very grateful to be alive....

September 12, 2005

It's just after midnight Friday morning, and the lights are down low. Our 53 patients and 21 family members are down for the night. Our Special Needs Shelter is in a gymnasium with three full-size basketball courts, and an indoor

running track on the upstairs perimeter. The cots, beds, and mattresses are mostly in the middle of the cavernous room, with some beds lining the curve of one wall. There is not much privacy, and the few belongings of these patients are under or around their cots. When a patient needs to be examined we drag over a couple of privacy curtains to place around the patient....

Things are not easy to come by even here, so far removed from the actual devastation. The huge influx of people is tapping out the local supplies. At 9 a.m. we sent in multiple prescriptions for our patients to a local pharmacy and at 10 p.m. tonight we still have not received them. Computers are going down, supplies are running low. Several pharmacies are giving patients a two- to four-week supply of their medication for free. Other pharmacies are not giving any kind of break....

At any given time you can see six to eight people wearing purple smocks moving among the patients. When I first arrived, I assumed they were nursing assistants. I have learned that most of them are state or city employees, many of them drug rehab counselors. They told me that their employment contract stipulates that in an emergency or disaster they are mandated to show up and be assigned in any capacity deemed necessary.

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Responding to Hurricane Katrina: A Diary

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For the past 11 days, these men and women with no previous health care training have been working with the nurses here, receiving a crash course in patient care. They have been performing bed baths, assisting people to the bathroom, making beds, comforting, and gophering. They have done an outstanding job!

Tonight I am working with a brand-new crew of nurses, and we are short two. Each nurse is taking a load of 10-11 patients scattered throughout the gym. They are volunteers from California, Missouri, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Washington. Back home, they work in critical care, emergency department, public health, cardiac ICU, neonatal ICU, and surgery. Here, they cheerfully do whatever needs to be done.

September 16, 2005

The patient census at the McNeese State University Special Needs Shelter continues to drop every day. This is a great thing! It means that people are getting reunited with loved ones, or they are finding places to live. A couple of times a day an ambulance crew that has been assigned to us has been taking people to the airport or to the bus station.

Monday, September 19, 2005

It has now been three weeks since Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc along the Gulf Coast, and still so many people remain homeless and in shelters. Soon something else will draw the media's attention and thousands of people will be forgotten....

Here in Lake Charles, Louisiana, there are close to 3,000 people in the Convention Center, and about 300 people in the arena. Daily almost 10,000 meals need to be provided for these people; think of the laundry, basic health care, and hygiene. Over 900 children have flooded this school system alone. Initially there was a great outpouring of donations for the evacuees, but contributions and volunteers are declining with time. This is just one city. There are hundreds around just like this one.

Already contributions and volunteers are waning. Both are still desperately needed. Normalcy will not be found in these areas for months and years to come. Even though the medical needs will continue for a while, volunteers are now needed to help cook, serve, provide child care, volunteer at the schools, clean up, build, and much more. Be a part of the solution by donating of your most precious resource, your time! It will be the most gratifying work you have ever done.

September 20, 2005

Evacuation mode...again!

As Tropical Storm Rita has approached the Florida Keys and turned into Hurricane Rita, the command center here has been a flurry of activity. This afternoon, plans were solidified to evacuate our shelter up to the safety of Shreveport, Louisiana.

Along with evacuating our evacuees from New Orleans, we will also assist in evacuating a small hospital an hour south of here in the town of Cameron. Tomorrow, another Northwest Medical Teams nurse and I will go on a bus to Cameron to bring the 17 evacuees currently staying at the hospital back here to Lake Charles. We will then board all of our evacuees onto buses and they will be transported to the Bossier Civic Center in Shreveport.

Three of us will remain behind in case of any unexpected arrivals or needs. I have learned so much, and I never realized what all is involved with this type of management. The Lake Charles Office of Public Health and the Department of Social Services have done an incredible job of pulling this all together and making everything happen in a very efficient way. All communities should take note and prepare as well as they have here.

September 21, 2005

A Chaotic Day.

I would have to rate it as one of the most stressful and exhausting days of my life. It was a scorching 100-degree day with 75 percent humidity, as we loaded four buses full of personal belongings, medical supplies, water, patients, and staff. We kept receiving conflicting reports about whether or not we needed to take along cots, and whether or not we would have a large truck for the baggage. There was also confusion about how many ambulances were available for the evacuation. Patients were coming and going for their dialysis treatments. We also had to complete vaccinating everyone with Hepatitis A and Influenza vaccine.

It was wonderful to have the 11 fresh people from Northwest Medical Teams who had come to replace us. The new Team leader, Sara, did a wonderful job of handling all of the unexpected crises. The scheduled departure time of 12:30 p.m. turned into 2:30 p.m., before the caravan of four buses, eight ambulances, and six private cars headed north to the safety of the Bossier Civic Center.

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Responding to Hurricane Katrina: A Diary

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For us who stayed behind, the job was not complete until we received our dialysis patients from their treatment and had them safely loaded into a van and an ambulance to follow the caravan.

September 22, 2005

In the Nick of Time...

Sandy, Joe, and I were scheduled to fly out Friday, September 23, the day Hurricane Rita was projected to make landfall. We decided to see if we could change our flight plans to an earlier time....

Even in the early morning hours the small Lake Charles airport was crowded with people trying to change their flights and get out of town. I approached the ticket counter with a sickening feeling. The ticket agent agreed to put me on standby, but as she was doing so, she was surprised to find a seat available on the 7 a.m. flight. Then she found a seat for my second leg from Houston to Seattle. I was in disbelief but offered thanks to God for this little miracle. Just after I cleared security they closed the airport. Ours would be the last flight out of Lake Charles Airport. I boarded the plane with a sigh of relief and thanksgiving on my lips!

September 30, 2005

Reflections of Louisiana...

I have been home a week now, and so many emotions have gone through me. For the first few days home I was glued to the news. The impending arrival of Hurricane Rita consumed me, as I thought of new friends in Lake Charles and Shreveport....

I remember a conversation I overheard. Randy was talking to his girlfriend on the phone. "You don't understand!" he said. "I plan on traveling light from now on. I never knew how much stress I had over dealing with all of the stuff that I had." When I spoke with him later he insisted the hurricane had done him a favor in destroying his "stuff" so that he wouldn't have to deal with getting rid of it or managing it. He told me how freeing it was to have all of his worldly possessions in a couple of small bags. He wanted to never again accumulate things just for the sake of collecting. It was like a weight around his neck. He was enjoying his newfound freedom in traveling light!

I made a commitment a few years back to this mantra, "traveling light," and this is what allows me to do short-term mission trips such as this. I still have some work to do at home in getting rid of some more "stuff;" it accumulates so fast! What is weighing you down and keeping you from doing things that impact humanity? There are better things in life than collecting things that break, rust, or get blown away by storms. I challenge you to give "traveling light" a chance!

*Blessings to you from a fellow traveler,
Brenda Maldonado*

Brenda Maldonado is a volunteer nurse with Northwest Medical Teams International, a Christian disaster response organization, whose mission is "to demonstrate the love of Christ to people affected by disaster, conflict and poverty." Contributions can be made at NWMTI, P.O. Box 10, Portland, OR 97207, or at their Web site, www.nwmedicalteams.org.

The Tyranny of Worthy Causes – 3

AVOIDING IMPOSTERS

Our hearts ache each time a news report exposes yet another fraudulent “charity” posing as a benefactor of recent hurricane victims.

“Opportunistic philanthropy” has been with us for a long, long time, but it strikes us with particular repugnance during times of real need. Little wonder that the chairman of the Federal Emergency and Relief Agency (FEMA) was forced to resign, when it became clear that he, in effect, had been fiddling around while New Orleans churned.

To paraphrase Paul in Romans 5:20, “Where money abounds, fraud and graft abound even more.” And though Americans have traditionally congratulated themselves as more accountable in business and charity matters than their counterparts in the Third World, those of us who have lived and worked in both worlds realize that the problem of graft is universal. The only differences are that graft tends to be pettier and more openly solicited in the Third World; better concealed and more massive in magnitude in affluent cultures.

How, then, to avoid being taken in by opportunistic “doers of good”? The following five rules have helped me identify (and avoid) them.

First, how does the organization respond when asked to produce documentation about its use of funds? An honest, efficient organization on the rise will generally supply the information without qualm or quibble and sometimes offer to supply additional verification. Beware of those who dodge and wheedle.

Second, is the organization ostentatious, rhetorical, self-congratulating, and demonizing of others in its statements and advertising? Does it tend to elevate itself as righteous and its critics as demonic? With graft generally come arrogance and self-exaltation.

Third, is the organization open about the compensation and benefits (direct and indirect) it pays its leadership? High compensation packages (especially partially hidden aspects) can belie an organization’s do-gooding claims.

Fourth, does the organization show preference to

family members and relatives in its hiring? When grandpa is the founder, son is the president, and the grandkids are doing the grunt work (perhaps for higher than prevailing wages,) red flags should, and must rise.

And finally, who sits on the board? By and large, the most effective nonprofits have boards consisting of independently minded individuals who are not receiving any direct benefits (money, exposure for their self-interested viewpoints, contacts beneficial to their business pursuits, etc.). The worst and least healthy boards are those who allow themselves to be seduced (in effect, bought out by charm, flattery, and other amenities) to the point of becoming rubber-stamp enablers.

Adventist Today Foundation is dedicated, through this magazine and other outreaches, to protect and preserve the “best” in Adventist culture. I invite you to include Adventist Today Foundation in your charitable giving plan this year. As most magazines of this kind, our subscription income covers only about half of our real expenses—despite a tremendous amount of volunteer assistance (thank you from our heart!).

Adventism needs an independent press to serve “without fear or favor.” This is *Adventist Today’s* goal—to help educate the Adventist culture in its ability to distinguish between the real and the fake, the scam and the genuine article—theologically, culturally, and, yes, financially.

Edwin A. Schwisow serves as development director of Adventist Today and is point person on matters related to donations and underwriting for Adventist Today Foundation. Ed retired from 27 years of denominational journalism in 2003, after forming his own publishing firm, LifeScape Publications. He writes, edits, publishes, and serves Adventist Today from his home near Portland, Ore. He can be reached by email at easchwisow@hotmail.com; by phone at (503) 668-7956.



Adventist Today Foundation is dedicated, through this magazine and other outreaches, to protect and preserve the “best” in Adventist culture.

Opposing Non-supportive Independent Ministries with a Reworked Prophetic End-time Scenario

Ty Gibson: *Abandon Ship?*

One Man's Struggle to Discover God's Special Purpose for His Church, Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1998.

The author is the Co-Director and speaker for an “independent ministry” based in the northwestern U.S. Endorsing the book was Jere Patzer, president of the North Pacific Union Conference and one not known to support independent ministries that accept tithe funds. Patzer stated that he was “personally enlightened and blessed” by reading it. The forward was written by Mark Finley, then the director/speaker of the “It is Written” telecast and now a General Conference Vice President. Finley writes that he is a “stronger, more committed Seventh-day Adventist Christian, because I have read this book.” Interestingly, both Finley and Gibson converted to Seventh-day Adventism from the Roman Catholic Church tradition as young adults, and this fact might inform readers’ understandings of how this book approaches its topic.

A reader beginning the book might be puzzled by such enthusiastic endorsements, until he or she realizes that this book was written by a leader of an independent ministry *with the specific intent of countering the appeal of independent ministries that are critical of the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Gibson says he once attended a meeting of representatives of 50 such organizations (p. 12).

In contrast to these uncooperative ministries, he clearly informs readers that *his organization* is a “*supportive* [his emphasis] independent ministry” that declines any tithe support and works in a cooperative fashion with the Adventist Church (p.77).

Summary

Gibson opens with the declaration that “for the first time in its history, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is now faced with the serious threat of fragmentation” (p. 11). (Those with longer memories or who have studied Adventist history may not entirely agree with this comment.) Throughout the book, he argues that the denomination faces a crisis involving disputes over a variety of issues— theological (e.g., “Is 1844 of any significance?”), organizational (e.g., “local congregations and conferences ignoring the world church’s vote against woman’s ordination”), and lifestyle (e.g., “dress, jewelry, makeup, mixed swimming”) (pp. 14, 101).

In Gibson’s view, while “liberal and conservative factions contend for supremacy” (p. 100), the “sense of need to remain one cohesive body is weakening” (p. 14). He argues that the problems in the church involve major issues—“compromises...scandals... theological conflicts...[and] worldliness” (p. 67). The Adventist Church, he concludes, is clearly “*not* [his emphasis] one big happy family at the present moment. The voices are many and divergent. The atmosphere is hot” (p. 101).

Some independent groups, citing these and other facts, preach and teach that the organized Adventist Church has become “Babylon” and that the time has come for a new church, purified of corrupting elements. To demonstrate to independent ministries

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Ty Gibson: Abandon Ship?

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critical of the church that they are pursuing a course that Ellen G. White would have never endorsed, Gibson outlines an end-time prophetic scenario incorporating some conventional Adventist understandings but with some new elements that Gibson says came to him “when the light dawned upon me” (p. 25). Although he quotes passages of Scripture in describing his prophetic theory, it is the writings of Ellen White that provide most of the “light” that dawned on him and to which he most often turns for his central arguments—often quoting her at great length.

The centerpiece of his view of how “end-time” events will transpire is his conviction that the literal, visible, physical entity known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church is “*the* [his emphasis] one and only ‘remnant church’ of Bible prophecy” (p. 17). He believes it is critically important for members to maintain theological, organizational, and behavioral unity within a single institutional church structure if they are to retain a “basic sense of identity [of the denomination] as the remnant of Revelation” (p. 12).

By his own admission, Gibson’s main problem in holding that position is that, in his view and in the view of nonsupportive independent ministries, a significant number of Adventists are not faithful to the church’s doctrines, mission, and message. To Gibson, they are thus to be categorized as “tares,” “chaff,” or, in one place, “goats.” Furthermore, at the present time, there is no indication that these “tares” are going to go away of their own accord. So, how will “God’s church,” i.e., the corporate Seventh-day Adventist Church, rid itself of the unfaithful and thus be purified, leaving only “faithful” Adventists?

The author says that he began to solve his problem when he realized that a distinction should be drawn between the “church militant” and the “church triumphant”—a distinction not found in Scripture but one which Ellen White makes (p. 25). To her, Gibson asserts, the current visible Adventist Church, existing as the “church militant,” is “not a church free from evil, but a church in which evils exist” (p. 52). In contrast, the “church triumphant” describes “the church at that imminent point of its history when it will emerge before the world as both a ‘visible’ and ‘faithful’ church” (p. 53).

The distinction between the imperfect “church militant” and a perfected, last-day “church triumphant” is a traditional Adventist motif. Gibson also employs a second dichotomy that has a long history in Christianity—the distinction between the “invisible church” and “visible church” (p. 46). For him, White again sets forth the clearest characteristics of these two categories. While the invisible church is composed of “faithful souls” known only to God, Gibson states that “beyond any shadow of doubt” White viewed the visible church as the “organized Seventh-day Adventist Church with its worldwide membership and leadership, operating

» [Ellen G. White’s views, as reflected in Gibson’s main thesis] “constitute yet another illustration of how prophetic figures caught up in apocalyptic speculations can come to profoundly problematical understandings of how God works in the world.”

under a heaven-ordained system of authority and discipline” (pp. 48-49). While the visible church is currently “composed of both wheat and tares, faithful and unfaithful members” (p. 49), the invisible church is “composed of only true wheat with not one tare” (p. 50). Gibson declares that it is “God’s ultimate plan to cleanse the visible church of all its unfaithful members and bring all the faithful members of the invisible church into the visible church to replace them. The end-product will be a visible church triumphant composed of only faithful, truehearted members” (pp. 50-51). A reader might well wonder how such a transformation will be accomplished. Gibson provides an answer.

Gibson combines two categorical sets to argue that White saw a future time when many Adventists who are currently unfaithful “tares” and “chaff” in

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the visible church militant [the current church] *will themselves* “take the initiative to separate from the faithful in the visible church, . . . abandon their position [in the church] and join the ranks of the opposition. . . . [By this means] the sinners in the visible church will be sifted out, leaving behind what will then constitute the long-awaited church triumphant” (p. 54). These will then be joined by members of God’s invisible church who previously were members of other Christian bodies (p. 68). This is “The Shaking” of classic popular Adventist eschatology. Thus, the old (Adventist “wheat”) and new Adventist members (all of the “wheat” from the church invisible who previously belonged to other churches) will be joined together to form the visible Adventist church triumphant that goes through to the end.

There are two elements of Gibson’s prophetic scenario that merit special attention. First, his prophetic vision anticipates that at the critical time unfaithful members will remove *themselves* from the body of Adventist believers. If this is correct, then it seems unnecessary for any church official or local church to engage in any type of “witch hunt.” To force anyone out of the church against his or her will for theological, organizational, or lifestyle reasons would indicate that one does not believe in the prophetic scenario presented in the book. Second, Gibson’s insistence that the church triumphant should operate as a “Theater of Grace” is an innovative insight (pp. 27-41). He explains that “how we relate to one another as fellow church members is the visible testimony through which God intends to accomplish [his] high purpose” of demonstrating his character as a God of love (p. 30).

Commentary

If the leaders of the non-supportive independent ministries fully accept the arguments set forth by Gibson in this book, there will no longer be a need for their organizations to continue, unless, of course, they become “supportive” independent ministries. If this occurs, Gibson will have achieved his purpose in writing his book. Church officials certainly will be pleased, since large amounts of tithe money previously diverted into these organizations will

now flow back into the severely strained budgets of the institutional Adventist Church. However, this reviewer is sure that was not Gibson’s principal reason for writing his volume.

Gibson’s main purpose in putting these words to page is to persuade the reader that all true Christians at the time of the apocalyptic “end of the age” will become members of the visible Adventist denomination. Ellen White apparently did indeed believe this, and, in the opinion of this reviewer, her views on this constitute yet another illustration of how prophetic figures caught up in apocalyptic speculations can come to profoundly problematical understandings of how God works in the world.

Regrettably, Gibson strongly argues for the corporate church as *the* repository of grace. It seems strange that Gibson would want to assign such tremendous significance to the larger corporate church as *the* repository of grace. Some might argue that local church bodies might be a more appropriate locus where one would expect “grace would abound.” This is certainly more reasonable and biblical than making an entire denomination the place. However, one who views *any* corporate structure—whether denominational or congregational—as *the* repository of grace is engaging in a contradiction in terms. Part of the very nature of grace is its transcendence of *all* human structures.

It is also regrettable that Gibson did not develop in more detail his conception of what should constitute the behavioral criteria of how God’s people in any age and time could be accurately identified. As already noted, he declares he would locate those criteria in terms of the interpersonal relationships between church members so that they become a “Theater of Grace.” If Gibson could elaborate on this topic at greater length, he might contribute to the maturing of the Adventist faith tradition and be worth careful consideration.

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A Generous Orthodoxy

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Author of 'A Generous Orthodoxy', Brian D. McLaren

It wasn't long before I slipped the dust cover back on the book. Brian McLaren is not spreading the kind of ecumenism that good Adventists are taught to fear. This is something entirely different. *Generous Orthodoxy* is all about realizing that as members of the Christian faith we share the same sicknesses in our different faith communities, and that we can grow stronger in our faith by learning from one another. In his book McLaren explores the different churches and denominations that he has been a part of and the different ways he has seen God clearly through them. Those different perspectives have informed and enriched his walk with God.

McLaren gives a glimpse of the "seven Jesuses" he has met. The Jesus of his youth is surrounded by children of all races. The conservative Protestant Jesus saves us by dying for us. The Pentecostal Jesus saves us by his presence in the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholic Jesus saves us by his resurrection. The Eastern Orthodox Jesus saves us by being born into humanity. The liberal Protestant Jesus leads us in service by example. The Anabaptist Jesus shows us how to be disciples in community. The Jesus of Liberation Theology commissions us to fight injustice and free the oppressed. Each faith group has its own unique slant on just who God is and what he is about.

McLaren then proceeds to dive into each of these and other realms of Christianity, claiming and affirming the positive contributions while pointing out areas where difficulty often arises. Most interesting to me was the chapter that addressed remnant theology. I have struggled with Adventism's view of itself as "The Remnant" for some time. I felt that this leads to a kind of built-in recipe for pride and exclusion, a constant slippery slope toward the

swamp of an "us and them" mentality. In this chapter McLaren, who himself comes from a tradition with a strong ingrown view of the remnant, affirms the importance of the remnant message, but from a very different angle. He paints the picture of Moses before God when the people of Israel had once again turned away from God. The Lord was going to reject them and make a new people out of Moses. At this point Moses is the remnant—the last one loyal to God. McLaren suggests that a biblical view of the remnant would be more

like Moses, who says at this moment, "Lord, blot me out instead of them." True remnant theology always reaches outward, not inward. We Adventists have much to offer if we can get this right.

The solution is not in sloughing off all of our differences, but in learning from each beautiful distinctive. Those who do so in each faith community will cultivate an attitude of humility and gentleness, renewing our focus on the mission, as always, to bring more and more people into relationship with our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This book helped me see that the reasons I was leaving were not solely Adventist problems, but problems shared by all my fellow Christians. I can best help heal those core problems right here, in my own faith community. Adventism has a lot of beautiful things to share and a lot of beautiful things to learn, and it's exciting to be a part of both processes. McLaren's attitude is truly contagious. I strive now to be less angry and more gentle, a little less "right" and a lot more generous in my thinking.



Caleb VinCross

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A Generous Orthodoxy

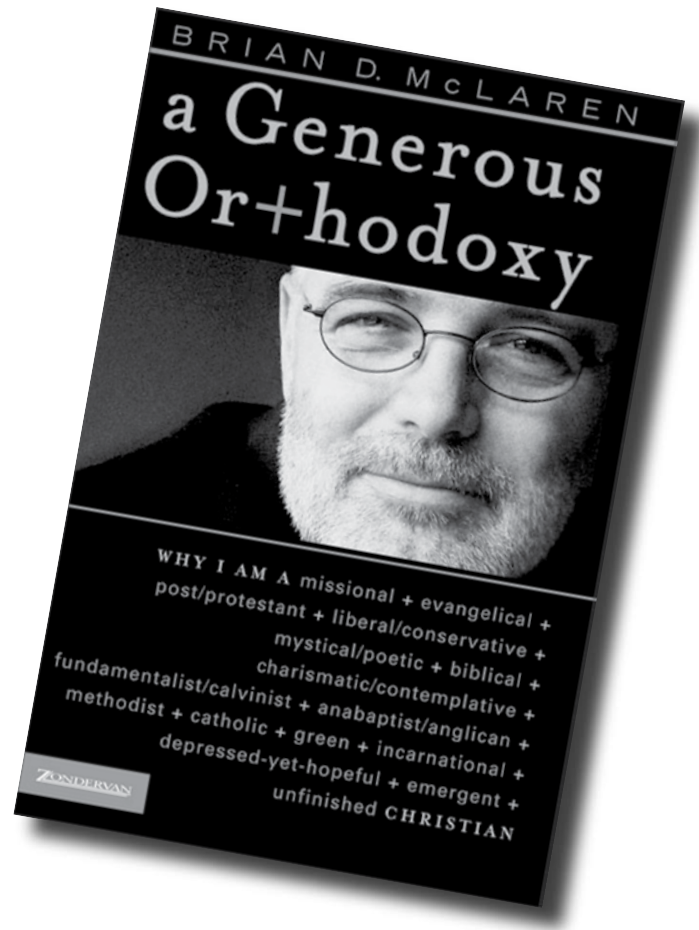
By Brian D. McLaren

Zondervan, 2004

When I picked up Brian McLaren's book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, I was on my way out the door. Emotionally and theologically my bags were packed, and I was looking for, if not a divorce, at least a nice, long separation from the Church. My list of problems had just gotten too long. It seemed like we were missing the point on some deep level—not the people, or the leadership, but something down at the core. Something was fundamentally broken about every local church I had ever gone to. On top of this, there was a growing rage inside of me. I was so angry at what seemed to be Adventism's propensity for elitism and exclusion. That people could think “we” could say that Christians of other denominations are somehow less right with God because they have different understandings about doctrine, made me want to slam the door on my way out.

Even in this state of mind, I felt a little strange reading a book with such an openly heretical-sounding subtitle: “Why I am a missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative+ mystical/ poetic + biblical + fundamentalist/calvinist + anabaptist/anglican + methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished Christian.”

It sounded so ecumenical I have to admit I slipped the dust cover off so that I wouldn't be caught reading it. Within a few pages I was hooked by its disarming, intriguing, and honest style. I knew immediately that this was a very special book.



In *A Generous Orthodoxy* I found an amazing new world of ideas. After signing off on Chapter O's disclaimer, acknowledging that I realize it is “for mature audiences only” and that I am forbidden from using any of its ideas “in a dangerous or divisive way,” I entered into the world of *A Generous Orthodoxy*.

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