

What Is So Unique  
About Adventists?

Countermanding  
the Words of God

Unity and Diversity  
in the Early Church

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# Adventist *Today*



**FATHER-SON  
PRESIDENTS  
OF THE WORLD CHURCH**



features

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## Why We Fail in Reaching the World

By J. David Newman

In my home country of Great Britain, most of the growth in our church comes from ethnic minorities who make up only about 5 percent of the population. In the United States, most of the growth comes from immigrants. When it comes to reaching secular people and non-Christians with the gospel, the Adventist Church has achieved little success. We have barely touched the adherents of the great religions of the world: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, etc. For example, in Fiji the vast majority of our members and baptisms come from the 60 percent of the total island population that is Christian. The other 40 percent of the population, which is Hindu, has barely been penetrated.

Most of our baptisms come from parts of the world that are already Christian. Why do we have this difficulty in reaching secular people and other great religions? I believe there are three main reasons: (1) our fixation with numbers, (2) our preoccupation with bearing witness to “new” truth, and (3) our ineffectiveness at revealing the character of Jesus.

### Number Fixation

Our success is determined by how many baptisms we get. Goals are set around baptisms. Pastors are rewarded on the basis of baptisms. Church growth results from baptisms. Thus we seek out areas that will produce the largest and quickest results. Since few results come, at least in the short term, from working with people who are secular or are part of the great faiths of the world, we spend little time in those areas.

I helped write the original document for Global Mission. We defined an unentered area of the world as a population segment of 1 million that contained no Adventist presence. We defined a presence as an organized Adventist church. We then divided the unentered areas into two levels of priority. We said that the church should first plant a presence where there were no Christians. Once the non-Christian areas had been entered, we were then to concentrate on the world’s Christian areas that had no Adventist presence.

This prioritization was based on the philosophy that other Christians already know the gospel and can be saved. But non-Christians could be doomed to a Christless grave unless someone brings them the gospel. However, by the final draft this two-level prioritization had disappeared. Why? I suspect that the number of baptisms was still far more important than the number of areas penetrated with the gospel.

### Why the Adventist Church

The second reason for our difficulty in reaching non-Christians stems from the original purpose for the existence of the church. The Adventist Church began to convince people who were already Christian of the need for further truth; hence it emphasized the Sabbath, sanctuary, state of the dead, and so on. Joseph Bates, one of the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, provides a terse example. One day his neighbor James Madison M. Hall inquired, “Captain Bates, what is the news?” Bates’s immediate response was doctrinal: “The news is that the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord our God.” Although a good response for a fellow Christian and Adventist, it was totally inadequate as a foundation for reaching non-Christians.

Most of our evangelistic advertising, Bible studies, and tracts presuppose a Christian audience. Revelation seminars attract a certain kind of people. Traditionally the focus is more on beasts, wars, plagues, and trouble than on the Lamb. Those who already know the Lamb are ready to learn about the rest. Those who do not know the Lamb do not care. A value system that was developed to reach fellow Christians is totally inadequate to reach non-Christians.

### Loving Others

Jesus said that his followers would be known by how much they love one another (John 13:35). Paul tells us that love is the glue that holds everything together

*Continued on page 30*

**A value system that was developed to reach fellow Christians is totally inadequate to reach non-Christians.**

THE BURNING QUESTION THAT FACES EVERY ADVENTIST WHO thinks is this: Why do Adventists believe they have a “special message?” After all, Adventists have existed for nearly 200 years. For them to keep saying that Jesus should have come “ere this” seems to be bordering on a sad delusion!

I take these thoughts personally. I would not be an Adventist today if I did not believe that there is something special and unique about the core Adventist “gospel.”

This conviction came to me during my graduate work in the early 1960s at Pacific School of Religion, where my classes were frequently seminars with degree-oriented Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists—the whole bag.

Book Center (*The Desire of Ages*, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, and *Steps to Christ*) and gave them to my colleague. At Christmas time, I received a card that said briefly: “When you gave me *The Desire of Ages*, you told me that I would find that book ‘self-authenticating!’ Now I know what you mean!”

### The Big Picture

What was happening? It was dawning on me—an Adventist pastor with seven years as a college religion teacher and head of the department—that the Adventist mind saw the big picture when others saw only shadows.

I then had to ask myself some questions that I had not really

# What Is So Unique

BY HERB DOUGLASS

Toward the end of the spring quarter, a colleague (a professor at another seminary also finishing his doctorate) pulled his chair across the library floor and asked, “Herb, what are you reading?”

In front of us, in personal library carrels, were three shelves of books that students use to complete their classwork.

And so I answered, with a wave of my hand: “I guess you mean these books!”

He shook his head and said: “We know all that. What are YOU reading?”

All I could say was, “Why do you ask?”

Then he leaned back and answered: “We are in several seminars together. You know how we tackle the heavy questions, give and take, with our professor challenging us—and the time goes by fast. But we noticed that you often sit back until the close and then you seem to sum up our frustrations and come up with suggestions that seem to be so fresh and simple. What are YOU reading?”

I was stunned; then it came to me! I said, “Come with me!” We went across the library to where many Ellen G. White books were located. (I looked at the library cards and noticed that they had been read from time to time.) And then I said, “If anything, these books frame the biblical narrative that makes the most sense to me.”

The next day, I picked up three books at the Oakland Adventist

examined previously: What is there about philosophical and theological issues and questions that an Adventist can address and, in doing so, make a difference? And what is there about my doctoral experience that prepared me to step up to the plate, without me really knowing what was happening?

After all, I had already completed the master’s and bachelor’s degrees from the Adventist seminary while it was in Takoma Park, Maryland. And I was grateful for some great teachers. But I was surely not ready to “mix it up” with graduates from other schools! Essentially, all I had was a super array of biblical texts called up at-will to defend Adventist doctrines. I was not prepared for the real world, which had been grappling with the big questions that thoughtful men and women believed to be important. Yet, through the centuries, it is obvious they struggled without a mental framework that made sense or a big picture that pulled everything together in some kind of integrating harmony.

It was during my doctoral studies that everything I had been reading since I became an Adventist suddenly fell into focus! We call it the Great Controversy theme. That theme had been unconsciously framing whatever some of my seminar colleagues thought helpful.

Walking away with a Th.D. diploma was really inconsequential. My doctoral thesis on the “Subjective-Objective Dichotomy in the Writings of Emil Brunner” became the open door for seeing

afresh the essential uniqueness of the Adventist message as best summarized in the Great Controversy theme.

There I was, day after day, realizing that certain concepts seemed to be exactly what God wanted the world of honest men and women to grasp as the answer to their emptiness in facing life's toughest questions.

Within the Adventist community, about all most people think of when we mention the "Great Controversy" is the fifth volume in the Conflict of the Ages set! For some, it is too academic.

For me, it is the key that unlocks the purpose and message of each book in the Bible—the central theme of the Bible. It unfurls how sin originated, why God made man, what he is trying to do

when he began that sad walk away from the God who had honored him by making him vice president for communication—the closest to God of all the created intelligences.

For some reason beneath all explanation, Lucifer began to envy God's creative powers and, in so doing, permitted the strange feeling of distrust to grow. The controversy began. And thus, the heart of the controversy—distrusting our Creator—is in every one of us!

*Trust* is a phenomenal word. Some would say that *love* is the greatest word. Or theologians may say that *faith* is the key word. But before all of these words is one word that makes all of these other powerful words zing: *freedom*! None of these words work

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# About Adventists?

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to help men and women to be free from the bewitching power of selfishness and to make them safe to save, why Christ died, and how Calvary shut Satan's lying mouth forever. All of this is part of the key to solving the big philosophical questions that have confronted the human race since Plato and Aristotle. And believe me, they cannot be ignored!

But the sad fact is that Adventists can become experts, even in all the essentials of understanding the Great Controversy theme, and still miss the big picture. Of course, there is plenty to unfold in examining this theme. One can devote a full college-semester course to it and yet merely paint a beautiful, engaging "frame" to contemplate, helping students to answer all of the test questions and proudly leave with A's.

In fact, the theological frame may attract the gratitude of fellow doctoral students, provide the most attractive evangelistic lectures for diligent preachers, and even make Adventists satisfied they had finally found "the truth!" Yet all, including myself, could remain focused on the frame and miss the purpose of the frame: to focus our gaze on the "picture."

## The Heart of the Controversy

What's the picture? The truth about God that has been at the center of the Great Controversy! Lucifer-Satan began the controversy

out in anyone's life unless we are free to choose—to choose trust, love, faith, etc.

I surely am not forced to love my wife, Norma, but my regard for her rested in my freedom to choose. I love because I trust her night and day.

In the same way, my loyalty to the Father, Lord Jesus, and my closest companion, the Holy Spirit, is not based on the logic of the biblical story or on the entrancing drama of Calvary! My loyalty to my Heavenly Friends is based on earned trust, and that is all I need to face the surprises of each new day.

How does God earn my trust? By letting me and you in on the Great Controversy! (This is why I wrote *The Heartbeat of Adventism—the Great Controversy Theme in the Writings of Ellen White*.) When I walk through how God gave Lucifer time to think his rebellion through and when I watch how Lucifer used all of the malevolent steps in rebellion—pretense, scapegoating, confusion, and coercion—I see how profoundly simple the controversy is played out in my own life today.

But trust is far more than knowing all of these facts, even though we can defend them rigorously and win every debate.

I recall often that those who understood the Scriptures better than anyone—who were expert Saturday-keepers, paid a double tithing, and followed a divinely laid out health regimen—once

crucified our Lord. Graduate degrees in theology or philosophy or science or education may not be the best way to learn the truth about God. In other words, we can study the Scriptures and miss the gospel!

No wonder Jesus said to those truth-promoters: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and [frankly] these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40, NKJV).

Wow! Jesus nailed it! The Jewish leaders of his day were experts in designing frames, even “true” frames, but they did not have the picture that their theology was really all about. Scary, isn’t it? To have all of our doctrines beyond question—and yet to crucify Jesus because we trust the doctrines, not the Lord who made the doctrines!

OK, the picture. Yet the world is full of God pictures. Yep! Men and women have taken their pick for thousands of years! But Jesus gave us the safe way to think about a God who is worth our trust. In four awesome chapters, John 14-17, Jesus gave us profoundly simple ways to answer our biggest questions:

1. What is the most important subject we can study?

Answer: “This is life eternal” (John 17:3, KJV)! What could be more important?

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**CERTAIN CONCEPTS SEEMED TO BE EXACTLY WHAT GOD WANTED THE WORLD OF HONEST MEN AND WOMEN TO GRASP AS THE ANSWER TO THEIR EMPTINESS IN FACING LIFE’S TOUGHEST QUESTIONS.**

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2. Exactly what leads to “life eternal?”

Answer: “That they may know You, the only true God” (verse 3, NKJV). What instruction could be clearer? Truth about God the Father (verse 1) is not a feeling; it comes through knowing, thinking, and more specifically “the pursuit of knowledge,” because the present tense marks a progressive perception of the Father.

3. How does Jesus recognize the plethora of gods that mankind worships?

Answer: He calls his Father the “only true God” among all of the unnumbered gods that humanity worships, one way or

another. Jesus focused on the only TRUE God, which helped John make a distinction between two Greek words most often translated into English as “true.” The one here translated “true” is used to show contrast between a genuine and a counterfeit or fanciful god. The other Greek word is used more often to distinguish between true and false.

4. How does Jesus closely identify himself with the Father?

Answer: “And Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (verse 3, NKJV).

5. What was our Lord’s job description during his 33 years?

Answer: Jesus said: “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ... I have manifested Your name ... For I have given to them the words which You have given Me” (verses 4, 6, 8, NKJV). In other words, he would glorify (from the Greek root word *doxa*, from which we get “doxology”) the Father in two ways: Acknowledge God for who he is and do honor to his name/character. The glory of God is the revelation and manifestation of all that he is. Jesus thus glorified the Father, and the Father glorified Jesus, and we glorify both by bearing “much fruit” (John 15:8). Truly, this means the act of carrying out their will in personal character and in service for others (1 Pet. 4:11).

6. On the basis of this awesome outline of divine-human interchange of the highest order, what did Jesus say would be the response of all those who believed what he had just prayed?

Answer: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (John 17:17-19, NKJV). These few words are exceedingly powerful!

This Greek word for “sanctify” is used frequently in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to express one’s entire dedication and consecration of both persons and things to God.

Those few verses contain the “heart” of the truth that the world must hear! That is why Jesus came. Yes, he came to die on the cross, but the cross was only a great means to a glorious end. The end is to tell the truth about the “only true God”!

*The whole controversy is over who is telling the truth! Everything begins and ends on that sentence!* The Christian’s job is to tell the truth about God, whom Jesus came to Earth to reveal.

**The Clarity of Ellen White**

Of course, simply letting the actual words of Jesus speak throughout the four Gospels is a no-brainer; getting truth straight from our Lord surpasses any other method of theological study.

I also suggest *Christ's Object Lessons*, which in my opinion is the deepest, clearest, simplest, and most profound book ever written in any language. I could easily fill up the whole magazine this month just by quoting the clear, robust freshness of the author. For instance:

“It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth. ...

“Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, ‘Behold your God.’ The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

“The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, what's the rub? Adventists who have been taught or preached at for the last 60 years may have difficulty grasping the broad and deep principles of the Great Controversy theme.

Almost all of the core principles in the Great Controversy theme have been etched out and recast into mental cement, in our eagerness to be friends with our Evangelical colleagues. Words such as “perfection” and “overcoming sin” have been morphed into pleasing excuses (to help people from getting discouraged). The biblical emphasis (Heb. 2:17-19; 4:14-16) on Jesus being born, “weakened by four thousand years of sin ... the results of the working of the great law of heredity,” suddenly vanished into the typical, prevailing fog of general Protestant theology: Jesus being born as Adam was created. All suddenly contrary to a hundred years of Adventist thinkers who were quietly, firmly connected to the Bible and to the clarity of Ellen White.

Whenever asked where to find the uniqueness of Adventist theology, I quickly suggest that everyone should get a set of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* reference series. This remarkable, deep well of Adventist uniqueness has been aimed at thinking laypersons, but with a lot of insight for the theologian.

For instance, read Romans, especially because Paul had also had to deal with those who teach and preach that “righteousness by faith” means forgiveness only, without any inclusion of sanctification—since anything that we can do is legalism and mere attempts to add to what Jesus did for us on the cross!

A complete absence of the purpose of the Great Controversy!

To sum up, making God known in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the same

task that our Lord's disciples were learning in the first century. How did they do it? By telling the story of Jesus, what he said and did, especially what he said about his (and our) Father in heaven.

## Understanding God as a Father

I find our Lord's many references to God as being “our Father” throughout the four Gospels. It must have been a slow awakening to those loyal disciples who had heard from their parents' knees a built-in, often unspoken, cloudy apprehension of the God who delivered their forefathers from the land of Egypt. But all they remembered was the God of rules—not the Father who delivered them from their enemies.

Let the parable of the waiting father and his prodigal son sink in as one of our Lord's teaching moments. Put that simple story against all of the fabricated fears of God as being our Judge instead of our Father. What a difference a little truth can make in changing night to day in the lives of many, young and old!

The gospel turns fear into trust, but only if we get it right!

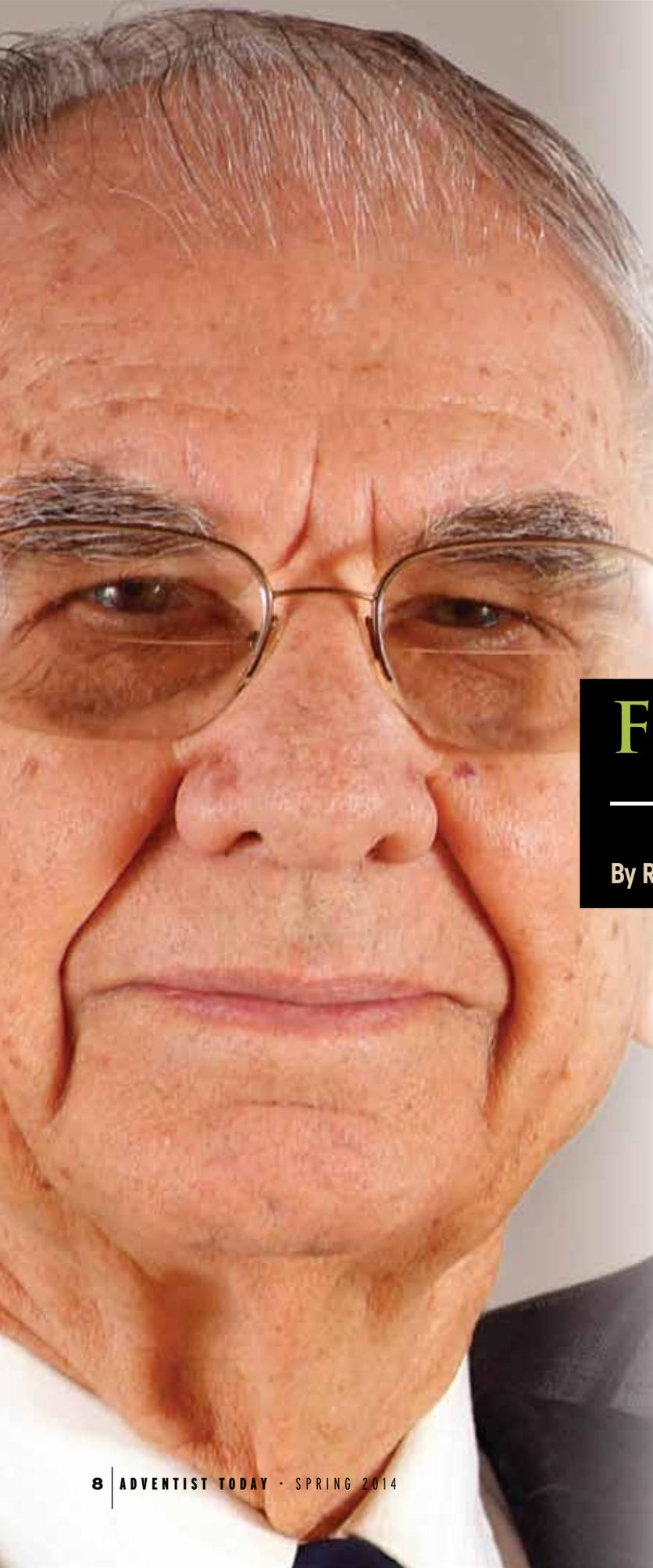
The Adventist uniqueness, at the top of anything else—that something that determines everything else we believe—is understanding the character of God. Not the stern heavenly bookkeeper, nor the severe judge, nor the harsh, demanding creditor. The heavenly Father who never shut the front door on anyone. The Father who seeks and does not wait. The Father who rings the homesick bell in every heart no matter where an individual was born—always through his Holy Spirit, urging us to leave the mess we made of life. Only a gracious, loving Father would give us the grace of both pardon and power as we cooperate with him in helping us to be safe to save.

When a person suddenly hears of a God like the waiting Father, he or she does either a fast or slow U-turn. The more we hear of a Father God like Jesus, the faster trust builds and the quicker fear vanishes. “Perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18, KJV).

Whatever we call the Latter Rain—that last call to seeking, honest men and women—it will be carried by men and women who manifest in their lives and words the glory of God. Only then will their well-framed doctrines make any real sense. Only then will the words “Behold your God!” have any drawing power. 

*Herb Douglass, Th.D., is a former president of Atlantic Union College, a former associate editor of Adventist Review, and the author of many books.*

<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 1900, pp. 415-416.



HE WAS TALL, UNBENT, AND SOMEWHAT SWARTHY. TWO protuberant ears augmented his chiseled facial features, and behind dark tinted lenses he stared through nearly indiscernible eyes. He'd stately rise from a chair and with unrushed paces stride to the pulpit, where prior to uttering a single word he'd scan the audience for several seconds. Elder Neal C. Wilson's physiognomy and bearing drilled into one's senses.

But his mind—oh, his mind! He could extemporaneously address an issue, mentally rolling it over and over while verbally exploring its various facets. Not infrequently the listeners would grow fidgety during his allocution. Additionally, at meetings with hundreds and even thousands of attendees, Elder Wilson would recognize a person by name. “Yes, Brother Ramachandran, ...” or “Please, Sister Kvaratskhelia, ...”

He owned a five-foot pole with which he probed provocative issues that other administrators wouldn't touch with the proverbial 10-foot pole. For instance, during the 1970s, Merikay

## FOOTPRINTS *on the* —N. C. WILSON

By Richard W. Coffen

McLeod Silver's case for equal pay and, during the next decade, Dr. Desmond Ford's theology. I learned that Elder Wilson also tried to explore the delicate issue of tolerating plural wives for African Seventh-day Adventists but that indigenous administrators would hear nothing of it.

History, I suspect, will reveal that Neal C. Wilson and James White had the two most incisive minds of all our 20 General Conference presidents. Regrettably, in later years the acuity of both leaders imploded. Dementia of any sort is cruel.

Permit me to share some personal encounters with Elder Wilson, commonly referred to as simply “Neal,” which led some dyed-in-the-wool punsters to joke about the proper posture one should assume in his magisterial presence. In reality, these witticisms were jocular jibes from people upset with Neal's statement during the Merikay litigation that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the most hierarchical denomination after the Roman Catholic Church. If that weren't sufficient to ruffle traditionalists' feathers, on another occasion he referred to some of his underlings as “cardinals.”

Not having taken notes, I'm relying upon recall to narrate the following experiences. Some details have become a bit fuzzy in my memory, but the overall thrust of the anecdotes is accurate.

### **Openness of God Book by Dr. T. Richard Rice**

During 1962 after performing a thought experiment, I concluded that divine omniscience was modulated by human free will. Otherwise, regardless of one's theology—Arminian (in eternity past, God perfectly foresaw all future events) or Calvinistic (in eternity past, God sovereignly predetermined all future events)—all future events were inevitable, consequently nullifying free will. Professor J. Melvyn Clemons tried and failed to dissuade me, and I assumed that perhaps I was the only one holding this theological conclusion. Then while on a trip to the West Coast in order to find authors for Southern Publishing Association (SPA), I met Professor T. Richard Rice. He told me that he'd like to write a book on the "openness of God," a term that he had coined for God's

as no surprise that certain conservative voices within the church loudly protested open theism. It was even more disconcerting when an evaluator who'd urged acceptance of Rice's manuscript now waffled on support!

One of the major theological objections that I heard insisted that Rice's book advocated the heretical process theology.<sup>3</sup> While it is true that open theism theology holds some concepts in common with process theology, the two are not identical. Process theology is much more radical. To equate the two is dishonest and resorts to fallacious reasoning. It's like an untruthful allegation that the Adventist communion service is identical with the Roman Catholic Mass. There are some commonalities with the two, as well as considerable practical and theological differences.

While at SPA, I discovered that the editorial and marketing departments weren't communicating regularly with authors. So as the new head book editor, I began a program where I'd write to authors every few months—to keep in touch with them. Sometimes I'd wish them a happy birthday or merry Christmas or would share the latest news about sales of their book. Consequently, after the RHPA administrative committee voted to withdraw *The Openness of God* from circulation, I wrote to the author, explaining that because of the controversy swirling around his book, the publishing house had decided to withdraw it from circulation.

Unbeknownst to me, prior to the administrative committee's action, Neal had phoned Harold "Bud" Otis (RHPA president at that time) and said that he wanted the publishing house not to withdraw the book but merely to treat it with "benign neglect." However, after the administrative committee's decision, the entire stock of *The Openness of God* mysteriously disappeared, and "no one" knew its whereabouts.

When Neal returned to the office after a trip to Africa, he phoned me. Had he been a sailor, the air around my handset would have turned blue! He was very upset (to put it mildly). "Richard, I said that I wanted the book treated with *benign neglect*. I did NOT want it withdrawn from circulation. What's going on there at the publishing house?"

"Well, Elder Wilson," I replied, "you're speaking with the wrong person. You need to talk to Bud."

Pronto, the entire printing, whose location "no one" knew anything about, miraculously reappeared in the warehouse! And the remaining stock sold out much more quickly than is the case with most RHPA trade books.

However, because I'd informed Rice of the committee's decision, Bud put me on trial for having broken the confidentiality

omniscience in relation to future events resulting from the use of free will. At least two of us had independently espoused the same theology!

Knowing that Rice's theological perspective of "open theism"<sup>2</sup> (the concept is known by various terminology) could be controversial, I shared the typescript with more than the usual number of evaluators. Overwhelmingly, the response favored publication, and the Book Committee at SPA accepted the project for publication. By the time *The Openness of God* appeared in Adventist Book Centers, SPA had merged (in 1980) with the Review and Herald Publishing Association (RHPA). So, when the book was published, it came from the RHPA warehouse and in RHPA boxes.

This shift in publisher produced both political and theological issues. Politically, neither publishing house relished the merger orchestrated by Neal (merger seemed to be his panacea for financial problems); SPA products sometimes either "accidentally" fell through the cracks (having gotten misplaced on some shelf) or were treated as orphans. Theologically, it came

## SANDS of TIME<sup>1</sup>

## HISTORY, I SUSPECT, WILL REVEAL THAT NEAL C. WILSON AND JAMES WHITE HAD THE TWO MOST INCISIVE MINDS OF ALL OUR 20 GENERAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS.

of the group. He explained to the committee members my wrongdoing and then, in fairness, let me explain why I did what I'd done. He then dismissed me, and I waited in an adjacent room while they discussed my fate. Finally, after a seemingly endless time period, I was summoned back in and told that the committee members had shown great mercy toward me and would let me remain an administrative committee member providing I'd never do such a terrible thing ever again. I promised.

Later, Bethany House republished the book, titling it *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*. During 1994, InterVarsity Press issued another book under Rice's original title. (Book titles aren't copyrightable.) It was co-authored by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger—all prominent evangelical theologians. *Christianity Today* magazine named the book one of 1995's Books of the Year.

### The "White Paper"

About a year after the merger between SPA and RHPA, Lowell Bock, former Southern New England Conference president but then a GC general vice president, asked me how things were going. I told him that things were going pretty well. My colleagues at RHPA had welcomed me warmly. However, there had been a few bumps, which were to be expected. Lowell suggested that I write a "white paper" and give it to Neal, chair of the RHPA board of directors.

Sounded like a good idea to me! So I prepared the document and sent it via intermail to the GC president, bypassing my RHPA president, Elder Otis. Duh! About a week later, Bud called me into his office. I could tell from the look on his face that I'd not been summoned for congratulations! He'd heard of the white paper, which had bypassed him, and informed me: "Elder Wilson is ready to fire you. You better make an appointment to see him."

Dutifully I phoned Neal's office and asked his secretary to set up an appointment. Within days I found myself timorously entering the inner sanctum of the GC president. Neal stood up to shake my hand and looked like Goliath to me at that moment! After a few sentences of small talk, he asked, "Richard, why is it that you wanted to see me?"

"Well, Elder Wilson, I was told that you want to fire me and that I should come to see you."

"Who told you that?"

"Elder Otis."

"Richard, who asked for this appointment?"

"I did, Elder Wilson."

"If I were ready to fire you, Richard, *you* wouldn't have had to make the appointment. *I* would have summoned you here."

Neal proceeded to explain that he'd read the report. He even pronounced it a good paper. "However," he added, "I'd not have put some of that in writing."

After more discussion, he offered a prayer and then, with an arm around my shoulder, escorted me to the door and wished me God's richest blessings. I continued my career at RHPA for 23 more years—until my retirement in 2004.

### Perfect in Christ Book by Helmut Ott

In late 1987 the RHPA published a typescript submitted by Helmut Ott of Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists (now Southern Adventist University). In the book he addressed the contribution(s) that Ellen G. White had made to our understanding of Jesus Christ and his mediation in our behalf. Part of the discussion involved the human nature of Jesus—was it prelapsarian (like Adam's *before* the Fall) or postlapsarian (like Adam's *after* the Fall)? Some found the book controversial. About the same time, Pacific Press Publishing Association (PPPA) released a book that likewise drew fire from some within the church. (I no longer recall the title or author of their publication.)

So, in 1988 Neal decided to haul both publishing houses "onto the carpet." A few of us from RHPA drove to Washington, D.C., and several from PPPA flew all the way from Boise, Idaho. Neal had also asked his general vice presidents and the secretary of the General Conference, G. Ralph Thompson, to attend the dressing down of the representatives from the two publishing houses.

Neal must have spent the first 15 or more minutes laying out the "problem." After that, the representatives from each publisher were supposed to defend their choice to publish these two controversial books. (Typescripts at either publisher go through a rigorous review process and are accepted for publication *not* by the head editor or by any other single individual, but by a committee.)

However, before any of us from either PPPA or RHPA had a chance to defend ourselves, Ralph Thompson asked for the floor.

Neal: "Elder Thompson."

"Mr. Chairman, has the church adopted an official position on these controversial theological issues?"

"No."

"Then why are we here?"

Silence! Without having to hear any defense from PPPA or RHPA, the conversation drifted and ebbed. Before too long, Neal dismissed the group. We from RHPA drove back to Hagerstown, Maryland, and those from PPPA tried to make the most productive use of their time before they used their roundtrip tickets back to Boise.

## ASRS Presidential Address

For many years Seventh-day Adventist “Bible teachers” met informally at the end of each General Conference Session. In 1944 the group organized under the aegis of Leon L. Caviness and called itself the Bible Research Fellowship. By its demise in 1952, 91 percent of Adventist college Bible teachers had joined the group. However, former GC President W.H. Branson mistrusted the group, which morphed into the GC-sanctioned Biblical Study Committee as well as the Defense Literature Committee. In 1969, both groups were combined into the Literature and Biblical Study Research Committee, which in 1975 received the name Biblical Research Institute (BRI), an official GC entity.

Throughout those years, many Adventist biblical scholars also regularly attended the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), a professional organization that began in 1880. Because so many Adventists attend these scholarly meetings, in 1972 these academics decided to arrive a couple of days early so that they could talk about areas of common concern. After several years, the BRI decided that it needed to oversee these theological sessions. (Many Adventist scholars perceived this as an attempt by paranoid administrators to put reins on these unofficial meetings.) In order to meet in the convention facilities hired by the SBL, the Adventist group needed to officially organize, and in 1979 that took place, with William G. Johnsson elected as the first president of the Andrews Society for Religious Studies, now the Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS).

ASRS members voted me to serve as president for 1984. In reality, my election was a political move on the part of ASRS members. Certain GC officers still remained suspicious of the topics discussed and the business conducted by ASRS members. So, those present at the ASRS meeting in 1983 voted that I, a non-scholar, take a term as president. After consultation with colleagues, the chosen topic for papers at the 1984 ASRS annual session was the church.

With considerable apprehension, I accepted the nomination and began to write my presidential address. (Putting anything in writing can be a daunting task and something only the supremely courageous or the utterly imprudent will do. I fell into the latter category!) During my presentation (and in passing), I opined that our denomination is run by “aging administrators suffering from jetlag.” Tittering erupted among the members of my audience as they followed along, reading the hard copy that I’d provided.

A few days after I’d arrived back at the RHPA, Robert Wilson, a colleague who, though totally blind, did an amazing job of negotiating the various hallways of the publishing house, cornered me. Bob informed me that my paper had been making

the rounds at the GC. Furthermore, the GC officers (including Neal) hadn’t snickered when they read my depiction of them as “aging administrators suffering from jetlag.”

“Richard,” Bob counselled, “you’d better make peace with Elder Wilson.”

Because the RHPA facilities were in Hagerstown and no longer adjacent to the GC headquarters, I penned a letter to Neal rather than trekking down to Washington, D.C. I explained that, despite appearances to the contrary, I didn’t see it as my mission in life to irritate him! In fact, I really did hold him in high esteem.

At-one-ment had been effected, and thereafter whenever Neal met me, he gave me a strong and warm hug!

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<sup>1</sup>From the poem *A Psalm of Life*, written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882).

<sup>2</sup>Open theism attempts to reconcile divine omniscience with human free will and doesn’t fit into a Calvinistic theological superstructure.

Thomas Aquinas wrote that divine omnipotence entails the capability of doing everything and anything that’s an object of power. Creating a rock so big that God can’t move it or making past events nonexistent aren’t objects of power and so don’t fall within the range of omnipotence.

Open theists affirm something similar for omniscience. God knows everything and anything that’s an object of knowledge. The formula  $2 + 3 = 29.5321$  or remembering sins that God said he’d forgotten are not objects of knowledge. Likewise God has no incorrigible knowledge of events that have not yet taken place, because they are not within the sphere of omniscience.

God created *Homo sapiens* in his image, with the power to think and to do, thereby purposefully limiting his power as well as his incorrigible knowledge. Just as he doesn’t force us to do something, so he doesn’t know without a shadow of a doubt how we shall choose among numerous options. As a result, God can experience newness. What we opt to do can make a difference.

Many proponents of open theism come from the evangelical tradition, including Baptists and Methodists.

<sup>3</sup>Process theology attempts, among other things, to take seriously human free will. Process theologians understand God to be affected by temporal events—somehow contingent upon the processes of the universe. Deity not only does not control events but is also incapable of exerting such control. Any “control” God exerts is via influence, which provides options among which all can freely choose.

God didn’t self-impose these limitations, because they are “givens” inherent in the universe. Therefore, God has no “master plan.” He doesn’t know incorrigibly the future any more than we do. However, he attempts to “create greater beauty” in the universe. God cannot “control” evil or even be assured that it will cease, never to recur. “This leaves God relying on humans to help him with his creation” ([http://www.theopedia.com/Process\\_theology](http://www.theopedia.com/Process_theology)). “God is co-creative with all other creatures, including blooming flowers, singing whales, and insect architects. The source of power and creativity is ontologically distinct from God. ... There is no beginning to creation; God and the universe are co-eternally creative” (<http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/process.htm>).

Mathematician Alfred North Whitehead “invented” process thought, which was later “theologized” in America by Charles Hartshorne, John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin. It has attracted supporters from various faiths, including Anglicans, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Jews, Lutherans, Methodists, Mormons, Nazarenes, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and United Church of Christ.



THE WILSON HEGEMONY WITHIN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST Church has spanned three generations.

First, patriarch N.C. Wilson, Sr.'s service as an administrator included a stint as president of the North American Division and also as a General Conference (GC) vice president. Second, Neal C. Wilson emulated his father, ultimately serving as president of the North American Division and the General Conference. Third, "Ted" N.C. Wilson, after various administrative positions, in 2010 was elected to serve his church as General Conference president.

Ted Wilson seems to cherish the "old-time religion" of "historic Adventism." For example, his sermon after his election to the office of GC president looked to past Adventism as a guide for the future of the church, an interesting echo of the ancient Near

## LIKE FATHER, L

By Richard W. Coffen

Eastern mindset. "The ancient mind lauded tradition. ... The way forward was often a return to the glorious past" (Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, p. 131, footnote 2).

Ted was the seventh general manager/president whom I worked under during my career at Southern Publishing Association and then Review and Herald Publishing Association (RHPA). I'll share some reminiscences of my interactions with him. First, though, how did Neal C. Wilson III come to be known as "Ted"? No Theodore is encapsulated within his given, middle, or last names. Rumor has it that as a small child, everywhere he went so also went his teddy bear. According to the account I heard, they were such close friends that he sort of took on the identity of his stuffed animal and came to be dubbed "Teddy." As he grew older, the nickname shrunk to "Ted."

### The Administrative Mindset

Ted and his wife, Nancy, along with their lovely daughters, Emilie Louise, Elizabeth Esther, and Catherine Anne, were serving in Russia when he received a call to join the GC Secretariat. They

prayed fervently and concluded that it was God's will that he accept the job. So Ted said yes to the invitation, confident of God's calling. (Ted has a methodical mind that would fit the job requirements quite well. I especially appreciated the format he tried—unsuccessfully—to introduce for the items we wanted on RHPA's administrative committee agenda.)

Shortly after Ted had accepted the call, Bob Kinney retired as president of RHPA. The nominating committee elected Ted to replace Bob. Ted's father, Neal, urged him to accept the publishing house position, seeing it as an excellent steppingstone—an easy springboard to the GC presidency. Ted and his family prayed once again, and now Ted concluded it was God's will for him to accept this alternative position. GC Secretariat God's will? Yes. RHPA presidency God's will? Yes. GC

Publishing Association. The RHPA vice presidents cautioned him about trusting too much in his chief competitor. "You know, Ted, that Bob is president of Pacific Press and has *its* best interests at heart, *not* ours. Be forewarned!"

"Oh, we have a very good working relationship, and Bob really does want the Review to succeed."

"Ted, that would be a conflict of interest on his part."

We vice presidents were conferencing with Ted in his office when the phone rang. He answered; it was Bob Kyte. I don't know what the conversation specifically entailed, but it became clear to Ted that Bob had let him down—perhaps hadn't been upfront with him. When Ted hung up, his face revealed his disenchantment. He felt betrayed—by the very person he'd trusted! He felt that Kyte had stood him up. Each vice president

## IKE SON — TED N. C. WILSON

Secretariat God's will? No.

Nancy expressed puzzlement: "How do we know what God's will really is? When Ted got the call to the Secretariat, we prayed and concluded that it was God's will he should accept. Then before we had the chance to move to Silver Spring, he received the call to be president of RHPA. After praying about that, he concluded it was God's will for him to turn down the first call and accept this second one. Both calls were God's will? The first one, which we initially thought reflected the divine will, turned out to be otherwise? Now the second call is *really* what God wants?"

Nancy asked the right questions. However, such a spiritual dilemma rarely seems to bother typical ecclesiastical administrators. From their perspective, or so it seems, whatever they enact or do is categorically God's will!

### The "Other" Publishing House President

Shortly after he'd moved into his new office, Ted enjoyed regular phone conversations with Bob Kyte, president of Pacific Press

bit his tongue but wanted to say, "Told you so, Ted!"

Occasionally, RHPA and PPPA found themselves together at meetings. On one particular occasion, Ted and Bob decided that the administrative team of each publishing house should have a meal together—at a restaurant serving Asian Indian cuisine. Ted explained to his vice presidents that there was a condiment called pickled mango that was so exceptionally fiery one need take only a tiny sliver—even then it should be well mixed into another food so as to tame its atom bomb effect.

When the server came to write down our orders, Ted turned to Bob and asked innocuously, "Bob, have you ever had pickled mango?"

"No, what is it?"

Ted ordered a dish of the excessively spicy stuff.

All of us from RHPA watched bemusedly when Bob lopped off a generous slab of pickled mango and forked it into his mouth. Ted's face remained expressionless as Kyte's mouth exploded with pain. Quaffing a deluge of water really didn't help extinguish the conflagration.

## Wilson Faces a Dilemma Over Sabbath-Sunday Adventists in Samoa

By Richard W. Coffen

Samoans went to bed on December 29, 2011, and awoke on December 31! Yet no one overslept! For economic reasons, the Samoan government had ruled in May that it would officially jump from the United States side of the International Date Line (IDL) to the New Zealand and Australian side.

In 1892 the Samoan government voted to move to the United States' side. There's no international law governing the position of governments along the IDL, so individual countries have on various occasions opted to exist on one or the other side of this imaginary line, which was established in 1884.

One of the side effects of this change was that the Samoans would henceforward be the first people on planet Earth to welcome in the new year. Another side effect was that the seventh day of the week instantaneously had become Sunday. What should true-blue Seventh-day Adventists do? Scripture afforded no concrete help.

Ancient Near Eastern Jews worried not an iota about Sabbath observance on a plump planet. Although a few conservative scholars have argued otherwise, most agree that the ancient geographical view of Earth was that of a flat, though rather fat, disc. They knew nothing of a spherical planet, time zones, a Prime Meridian, or an International Date Line, all of which are recent and artificial human constructs. It is modern society that must wrestle with calendric matters on a spherical planet.

Of course, this wasn't the first time a calendar change occurred. When the world shifted from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar (between 1582 and 1927), from 10 to 13 days disappeared. For example, in 1752 the month of September had days that were numbered 1, 2, 14, etc. Nonetheless, the seven-day weekly cycle of Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday remained the same.

However, that was not the case in 2011 when Samoa hopped over the IDL. Instead, Sunday ended up as the official seventh day of the week. Because this change came as no surprise, having been in the planning since May of that year, the South Pacific Division had prayed and studied over the matter. On which day should Samoan Adventists worship? There was a precedent. Tongan Adventists had been worshipping on Sunday (along with the Catholics, Baptists, etc.) for decades. Again, it was the IDL that had complicated matters. Ultimately, the South Pacific Division recommended that the Samoan churches should continue to worship on the seventh day of the week, even though that day was now Sunday. The division has explained that it "faced a difficult decision: should it [the church] join the government in breaking the weekly seven-day cycle to remain worshipping on Saturday? Or should it retain the integrity of the seven-day cycle, and hence meet on the day the government had renamed Sunday? After significant discussion, the Adventist Church leaders in Samoa decided to retain the integrity of the seven-day cycle. Why? Because

God instructs humanity to rest on the seventh day of the week, not on the day we refer to in English as 'Saturday'."

As a result of this decision, all Adventists in the Pacific islands east of the International Date Line would worship on the same seventh day. A downside is that in American Samoa, Brother and Sister *Fepuleai* keep holy the Sabbath day on Saturday, the seventh day. Were they to travel that afternoon to Samoa, they'd find their brothers and sisters working and selling because *their* seventh-day Sabbath falls on the following day—Sunday. The division explained that Scripture nowhere speaks of Sunday, Monday, Saturday, etc. Instead it refers to the first, second, seventh days, etc. Therefore, the division's decision was to maintain the practice of keeping the seventh day holy. "All Seventh-day Adventists in the Pacific nations east of the 180<sup>th</sup> meridian worship on the same 24-hour 'blessed and sanctified' time—the seventh-day Sabbath. In some places that day is called Saturday and in some places it is called Sunday. ... It may seem wrong to worship on Sunday, but that human logic cannot deny the reality of obedience now. We are asked to remember the seventh day, so we cannot fiddle with the facts and fudge the numbers to fit in with a Saturday-sacredness theory. God has asked us to worship every seventh day, and that is what we will continue to do."

Nevertheless, hundreds of conservative Adventist Samoans took exception to the division's pronouncement. Their complaints traveled all the way to the General Conference (GC) headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. Ted Wilson, along with at least some of his colleagues, was not pleased with the decision made by the South Pacific Division, boomeranging the decision back for additional study—whatever that means, since the division had spent considerable time, prayer, study, and effort before framing its decision, which they felt was in harmony with the divine will. Actually, several underlying issues are at stake: (1) Who holds authority—the local church, the mission, the division, the GC, or another vocal group? (2) In reality, are GC officials servant-leaders or despots? (3) Who has the GC president's ear—the pragmatists and/or progressives or the "tea party" Adventists? (4) What constitutes "worldliness" or, worse yet, "Babylon"? (5) Is seventh-day Sabbath-keeping on either Saturday or Sunday a necessary cause, a sufficient cause, or some other kind of cause for salvation? (6) Is the name of our denomination Seventh-day Adventist or Saturday Adventist?

For additional insights, see Milton Hook's article dated October 15, 2013, and titled "Conflict Over Calendar Change Splits the Adventist Church in Samoa," which appeared in the online news edition of *Adventist Today* on October 15, 2013.

### The “Work Widow”

There never seemed to be sufficient hours in a day to accomplish all Ted felt needed to be done. So he often asked his vice presidents to remain after the 5:30 p.m. bell had sounded. We’d sit around a table butted perpendicular to his desk and eat some supper that Ted ordered in while we discussed important items of business.

These informal meetings could drag on and on until around 9 o’clock, at which time Ted’s phone would ring. “I’ll head home shortly,” he’d say. Nancy was on the line, letting Ted know he’d spent altogether too long at the publishing house. He had a family who needed to see him, and it would take him nearly 60 minutes to drive home.

I felt bad for “work-widowed” Nancy and their “work-orphaned” daughters. I wondered how a family could survive such.

## WHEN TED WAS ELECTED TO THE OFFICE OF GC PRESIDENT IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA, ONE OF HIS FIRST “EDICTS” WAS TO MANDATE THE CLOSING OF THE STARBUCKS KIOSK WITHIN THE CONVENTION CENTER.

John Brown, vice president for manufacturing, once commented in Ted’s presence, “Ted’s OK, but we just *love* Nancy!” Ted smiled weakly.

### One of the Guys

The physical layout of RHPA facilities somewhat resembles a dumbbell—two large buildings connected by a closed-in breezeway. The administrative personnel (mostly salaried) have offices in the front edifice, whereas the manufacturing employees (mostly hourly employees) work in the second structure. Understandably, the workers in the “back forty” can feel isolated and overlooked—if not forgotten.

To help remedy such feelings, Ted periodically would don work clothes and join a workstation in the factory. Although it was a magnanimous gesture on his part, many of the factory workers felt relieved when he returned to his office. They could then resume their usual rapid pace instead of having to slow down to

accommodate the “speed” of their temporary helper.

Nancy (née Vollmer) has Southern roots and is not averse, I understand, to some old-time country music. Don, her brother, was instrumental in organizing The Wedgwood Trio, which controversially introduced folk/country religious songs to our denomination. This was a milieu quite foreign to Ted. However, knowing that I (a displaced Yankee) had spent 10 years in Nashville, Tennessee, at Southern Publishing Association, Ted decided to impress me with his knowledge of country music, which, it appeared to me, was limited chiefly to Glen Campbell’s “Wichita Lineman.”

### Soft-Hearted Man

Despite his strict constructionist approach to theology and lifestyle, Ted can be genuinely considerate of co-workers. Jeannette Johnson,

a new book acquisitions editor, had line edited one of the historical narrative books. Hardly had the book left the printing press when someone protested that the story supported spiritualism. Jeannette had understood the incident in question to have been a personal

reverie of one of the protagonists, who imagined receiving advice from a deceased mother. Ted wasn’t happy, of course, and asked Jeannette how such had slipped through the editorial process. She explained that it wasn’t, in her opinion, an account of a séance or anything resembling that—just merely a personal fantasy.

Ted graciously accepted the explanation, offering no reprimand, but nonetheless ordered the entire printing destroyed and the storyline re-edited—a costly procedure that surely didn’t help the bottom line. Periodically afterward, Ted would buy some gift certificates from Dairy Queen so that Jeannette could enjoy one of their Blizzard® treats.

If during his presidency at RHPA Ted had a “pet” vice president, it surely would have been John Brown. And for good reason. John was supremely likable. His joviality made him fun to be with. I sat next to John during meetings of the President’s Council in Ted’s office, and like a mischievous schoolchild I’d scribble tongue-in-cheek notes about topics under discussion

or something that Ted had just said, sliding them to John. He'd chortle quietly, and Ted would look up with a quizzical expression.

During either late 1999 or early 2000, the auditors thought they'd espied something shifty about John's dealings. They suspected him of a serious conflict of interest and began an in-depth investigation. Sounded like a real messy situation. However, all along Ted defended John's innocence.

John began to feel the heat, and while the rest of us attended the GC Session in Toronto, he ended up hospitalized as a result of his anxiety. John's condition worsened, and before I was able to return to Hagerstown, he died. I learned that his grief-stricken

election as GC president, I've been told that he produced a list of book titles (consequently authors) that he doesn't approve of. Books that I authored were allegedly on that *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*—an “unofficial” don't publish list.

When Ted was elected to the office of GC president in Atlanta, Georgia, one of his first “edicts” was to mandate the closing of the Starbucks kiosk within the convention center. Ellen White had singled out coffee by name as a verboten beverage, and even though the Adventist Church had no jurisdiction over the convention facilities, Ted called for the onsite Starbucks to be *not* merely boycotted *but* temporarily shut down. Delegates who needed a jolt of caffeine to stay awake during the sometimes-

## IT WOULDN'T SURPRISE ME IF IN THE FUTURE—ES ELECTED TO A SECOND TERM AS GC PRESIDENT—FOR “REFORM” ON A NUMBER OF LIFESTYLE AND

wife, Gwen, felt that Ted had turned his back on John. If only she'd known how fervently Ted had supported John until the end!

### Lamblike Visage/Dragonlike Voice?

When Bob Kinney, former president of RHPA, decided to reinstate me as vice president for Editorial Services after a five-year hiatus (another mini-saga of its own), Al McClure, then chair of the board, called me into Bob's office just before the board meeting convened. “Richard, we're going to recommend that you serve as vice president, but some people think you're liberal.”

“Yes, I know that, Al,” I replied. “So does my CPA when he prepares my income tax returns.”

Instantly catching on, Al smiled, patted me on the back, and sent me back to my office.

Later, although Ted never confronted me personally, a colleague confided that Ted suspected my theology. (Neither did he trust my colleague's theology!) I'm simply too liberal, which undoubtedly is the case from his viewpoint. Since Ted's

boring GC business sessions had to quaff their java down the street.

Later Ted demanded the removal of a guest speaker at a conference dealing with sociological issues confronting the church. Why? Because the presenter is confessedly gay.

Ted's behavior came as no surprise to those of us who had served as his vice presidents at RHPA. The publishing house had a small cafeteria where bottles of mustard and ketchup adorned each table. As soon as Ted noticed the yellow and red containers, he ordered that the mustard be discarded. The ketchup, however, could remain.

John Brown twitted Ted about it. “Ellen White didn't mention ketchup by name, did she? That's why *it* could stay but not the mustard, right?”

Ted said not a mumbling word but managed an “I've-been-caught” grin.

Just after his election, while the GC Session continued, at an interview someone asked Ted about his convictions regarding

hot-button issues. Would he be willing to split the church over any of these? Ted replied to the effect that dividing the church was not on his agenda but he'd do so if necessary.

Prior to the Columbia Union constituency's vote to ordain women pastors, Ted threatened: "There will be very grave consequences if you vote the recommendation." When the Southeastern California Conference was about to elect Sandy Roberts—a woman, mind you—as conference president, Ted warned that they would be in "confrontation" with the GC and that she "would not be recognized by the world church." One would understand "world church" to mean the GC.

## ESPECIALLY IF HE'S TED WILSON WILL PRESS THEOLOGICAL ISSUES.



### Ted's Agenda?

While having no definitive knowledge of the future, having worked under Ted's leadership I learned about some of his leanings. It wouldn't surprise me if in the future—especially if he's elected to a second term as GC president—Ted will press for "reform" on the following lifestyle and theological issues.

1. *Church governance.* How much "power" or "authority" does the GC have vis à vis the divisions, unions, and conferences?
  2. *Social issues.* Same-sex marriage? Abortion?
  3. *Inspiration and revelation.* Denunciation of alleged "critical" methods of Bible study? Move toward verbal inspiration and inerrancy?
  4. *Revival of Ellen White's authority.* Affirmation that she serves as an "inspired commentator" who wrote "inspired commentaries"? This is something she never claimed.
  5. *Renewed emphasis on sanctification versus justification.* Justification is solely a divine work; sanctification combines both divine and human endeavor?
  6. *Return to James' theology of works vs. faith.* Works aren't a sufficient cause of salvation, but are they a necessary cause?
  7. *Revival of apocalypticism.* Timesetting, à la G. Edward Reid—again?
  8. *Re-emphasis on stringent Sabbath-keeping.* This would include the day on which to worship in the South Sea Islands—already a hot-button issue among church administrators.
  9. *Resurgence of "health reform."* Elimination of caffeine and flesh food from the diet are important points for Ted.
  10. *Banning jewelry of any kind other than a wedding ring.* Goodbye to other rings, earrings, bracelets, necklaces, etc.
- Ted is unquestionably sincere. However, in his leadership position, sincerity combined with conviction can lead to the "kingly power" Ellen White decried. After Ted's election as GC president, Leona Running, his former seminary Hebrew teacher, told him personally as well as in an open letter, "I pray every day that God will help you be a shepherd and not a dictator." Will her prayer be answered? 🇺🇸

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# Countermanding The Very Words of God

BY JOHN McLARTY

Sometimes, doing the right thing means countermanding the very words of God. This sounds blasphemous, but it is plainly taught in the Bible.

## Example No. 1: Jesus in Matthew 5

Jesus declares: “It has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (Matt. 5:31-32, NKJV). So Jesus supersedes the words of God in Deuteronomy 24:1 with his own dictum.

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all ... . But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matt. 5:33-34, 37, NKJV). Here Jesus contradicts the explicit language of Numbers, warning people that if they follow literally what God said in Numbers regarding oaths, their words will be “from the evil one.”

Finally, Jesus proclaims: “You have heard that it was said, *‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’* But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (verses 38-39, NKJV). Here Jesus contradicts God’s prescription for justice, a prescription that is stated three times in the Pentateuch. Instead, he calls for radical mercy.

You might counter that Jesus was God. As God, he had the authority to contradict or supersede words God had previously spoken. But if we mere mortals dared to challenge God, that would be blasphemy.

My response: Not always. Consider the story of Abraham.

## Example No. 2: Abraham and Sodom

God tells Abraham that he is going to investigate Sodom and Gomorrah. The implication is that judgment (doom) is at hand. God does not ask Abraham for his opinion. God simply announces his intentions. Instead of bowing and agreeing, Abraham challenges God, accusing him of injustice. “Surely you wouldn’t do such a thing, destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Why, you would be treating the righteous and the wicked exactly the same! Surely you wouldn’t do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?” (Gen. 18:24-25, NLT).

Abraham does not approach this conversation with God as a sycophantic courtier. He is not the president’s lawyer inventing legal justification for “enhanced interrogation.” To press it further, Abraham does not respond to God with an Oswald Chambers-like submission. Abraham knows God has the power to do whatever he wants, but having the power does not automatically confer the right. For Abraham, God’s overwhelming power does not confer indisputable authority.

God readily agreed to Abraham’s conditions limiting God’s freedom to act destructively against the cities, and when the investigating angels couldn’t find even the 10 righteous inhabitants Abraham specified, God honored Abraham’s scruples by evacuating Lot and his family before the fire fell (Genesis 18, 19).

We could appropriately argue that God intended Abraham to act the part of “savior” in this story. God announces an

investigation and Abraham, knowing the moral plight of the Sodomites, steps in to plead for them. In doing this, God is deliberately setting Abraham up as a type of the Savior. Interpreted this way, the passage makes my point even more strongly: The mission of Christians is not to join God in “investigating” and “condemning.” Our job is to join the Savior in advocating for mercy.

### **Example No. 3: Moses and the Idolatrous Israelites**

The people of Israel were camped at Mt. Sinai. Moses was up on the mountain communing with God. After Moses had been on the mountain for weeks, the people began to fret. They wanted a visible god to lead them. So Aaron made a golden calf, and the people began dancing around this idol in worship. God informed Moses of this problem and then gave him a direct order: “Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, and I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation” (Ex. 32:10, NLT).

In the case of Abraham and Sodom, Abraham challenges God. Here, Moses defies God. He countermands the very words of God. There was no hint of diffidence or ambiguity in God’s command. Moses understood it perfectly. But instead of obeying and getting out of the way, Moses questioned God’s judgment. “God, I don’t think you really want to do that. If you do it, you’ll be sorry.” Later, Moses upped his protest by declaring: “I will not step aside. To kill them, you’re going to have to go through me.”

God backed down.

Both Abraham and Moses are celebrated as righteous men. Their challenges to the very words of God are recognized as acts of righteousness. These leaders were honored by God for their obedience and also for their bold challenges.

### **Example No. 4: Joshua and the Gibeonites**

The people of Israel invaded Palestine. At Jericho they annihilated every man, woman, child, and animal—except Rahab and everyone in her hotel. After Jericho, the Israelites destroyed the city and people of Ai. Both of these savage exterminations were ordered

explicitly by God. When tribal groups throughout Palestine heard the news, they formed a league to fight the invaders. The Gibeonites, however, tried a different tactic. They sent a delegation to ask for a peace treaty with the Israelites (see Joshua 9).

When the emissaries arrived, Joshua interrogated them. “Who are you? Where do you come from?”

The ambassadors answered: “Your servants have come from a very distant country. Stories of your exploits have reached even as far as our country. We’ve heard about what your God did to the Egyptians and to kings here in our region. We have come offer ourselves as vassals. We’re prepared to pay tribute. We just want to be on your side. We want to connect with the God who is able to do what your God does.”

Joshua responded: “God has forbidden us to make treaties with anyone in this area. How do we know you live far enough away for us to even consider making a treaty?”

The Gibeonites managed to convince Joshua and the elders that they did, in fact, live far away. Joshua and the elders agreed to a treaty. A few days later, the Israelites discovered they’d been fooled. The Gibeonites lived only three days away from the Israelite camp. The Israelites were outraged. They marched to the region of Gibeon to annihilate these deceiving Canaanites.

Once in the Gibeonite neighborhood, however, Joshua restrained his army. “We gave our word,” he said. “When we make a promise, we keep it. Even to pagans. Even if they tricked us.”

The army was outraged at Joshua’s refusal to exterminate these worthless people. They threatened mutiny, but Joshua was adamant. “Yes, they are Canaanites. Yes, they fooled us. Yes, they are on God’s extermination list. Yes, God forbade us to make a treaty with people like this. But, no, we are not going to break our word. A treaty is a treaty. An oath is an oath.”

Joshua summoned the Gibeonite leaders. “Why did you deceive us, saying you lived a long way away?”

The Gibeonites answered: “Your servants had heard definite, detailed reports about the command your God gave you to wipe out all the inhabitants of the land. We’ve seen your God’s power

in Egypt and in the battles against Sihon, king of Hesbon, and Og, king of Bashan, and at Jericho and Ai. We are helpless against you militarily. We did the only thing we could think of to save our lives. We are in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right.”

So Joshua saved them. He imposed severe “tribute.” They were consigned to serve as temple slaves in perpetuity. But they were alive.

God’s command to wipe out the people of Canaan was so emphatic, so clear and unmistakable, that the pagan people themselves had memorized it. There was nothing fuzzy in God’s directions. God had ordered the Israelites to exterminate these wicked people. When Joshua saved the Gibeonites, he was countermanding the very words of God. Was he right to do so?

A few generations later, King Saul violated the treaty Joshua had made and tried to carry out God’s command to exterminate the Gibeonites. During the reign of the next king, David, God sent a famine to punish Israel for Saul’s effort to obey God’s extermination decree. To atone for Saul’s actions against the Gibeonites, David executed seven of Saul’s descendants. Only after this act of retribution against Saul’s family did God revoke the famine decree. Whatever else we make of this macabre story, it clearly demonstrates God’s endorsement of Joshua’s contravention of God’s explicit command regarding the peoples of Canaan. Joshua, a type of Christ, disobeyed the divine command and saved the condemned people. Saul, a type of Satan, attempted to carry out God’s verdict of condemnation. Is there any question about which of these leaders is a more appropriate model for leaders today? (For an example of the righteous breaking of an oath for destruction, see the story of Jonathan and the honey in 1 Samuel 14.)

**“Doing right is more important than obeying God.”**

Of course, as believers, we would prefer to say this differently. We would say that doing right is the truest, purest interpretation of God’s words. If obeying God’s words leads someone to mistreat people, we would argue that the perpetrator has misunderstood God and that God’s words didn’t really mean what they thought. But I put it the other way, because sometimes we are so sure we know what God meant by what he said that our consciences are anesthetized. When Christian parents administer severe spankings, they imagine they are carrying out God’s will as expressed in the adage “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” inspired by Proverbs 13:24. When Charlie Fuqua, an Arkansas Republican, proposed legislation that would allow parents to seek the death penalty for an incorrigible child, he was attempting to be faithful to his understanding of the words of the Bible.

**We fail to cooperate with God when we use the words of the Bible as weapons for defending the privileges of the privileged or as cudgels for keeping less-privileged people in their place.**

It is not enough to ask, “What did God say?” Sometimes a better question is: “What is right?” Adventists are champions of God’s Law. We see the divine law as an explication of eternal principles that are so universal, so noble and exalted, that God himself is not free to violate it. Obviously, if God is bound by that eternal law of love and justice, we mere mortals are not free to violate it even if the Bible orders us to do so.

If our consciences—feeble and scarred as they are—warn us against an injustice, courageous leaders among God’s people will join Abraham and speak up, even if there are words in Scripture that can be cited in support of the injustice. We will not allow traditional understandings of the explicit words of God to seduce or coerce us into complicity with institutional or societal injustice. We will refuse to be seduced into imagining that our cooperation in injustice is the will of God.

In the Bible, one criterion shows up repeatedly for countermanding the words of God: mercy. Abraham argued to save Sodom on this basis. It failed. Sodom was destroyed. Moses saved Israel as a raw expression of mercy. Joshua faced two legally binding claims regarding the Gibeonites: God’s verdict of destruction and his oath of protection. It is mercy that gives Joshua’s oath priority over the verdict of God.

**Example No. 5: Jesus and the Sidonian Woman**

When the pagan woman from near the city of Sidon (Matt. 15:21-22) asked for Jesus’ help, he ignored her. When this did not dissuade her, Jesus announced that helping her would violate his God-given mission. Then Jesus compared her to a dog, which

meant the gospel was not to be preached to her (see Matt. 7:6). Jesus could hardly have been more explicit about her place outside of God's favor. But instead of yielding to Jesus' words, the woman turned them back against him: even dogs get crumbs. Finally, Jesus capitulated. Jesus (God) bent to the insistence of this mother who demanded mercy for her tormented daughter. To dramatize the divine capitulation, Jesus said to the woman, "May it be for you as you wish" (Matt. 15:28, NRSV, emphasis added <as you wish" (Matt. 15:28, NRSV, emphasis added).). His words were not "as I wish." Not "as God wishes." But "as you wish!"

We believe Jesus' words expressing exclusion were a dramatic setup for his gracious response to this mother. We believe his initial rejection was "apparent" for the purpose of demonstrating all the more powerfully the universality of the kingdom of heaven. God was speaking through the mother when she rejected the explicit words of Jesus and demanded mercy. Her words, not the words of Jesus, were the truest expression of the purpose of God. (Of course, Jesus was deliberately eliciting her words.) Which brings us back to the truth captured in Jesus' twice-repeated quotation from Hosea 6:6: "You would not have condemned my innocent disciples if you knew the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices'" (Matt. 12:7, NLT).

### Some Real-Life Applications

Devout, conservative Christians occasionally talk to me about their quandary regarding their homosexual friends and children. They read the Bible's explicit condemnations of homosexual acts. On the other hand, they have a gut sense that our condemnation of all homosexual unions is wrong. What to do? How can it be righteous to set aside the explicit words of the Bible to accommodate this virtually unalterable human condition?

We might look for our answer in the story of Joshua and the Gibeonites. Yes, like Joshua's soldiers and King Saul, we can quote words of God to justify condemning the class of people we call homosexuals. But those who see in Joshua a type of Christ will devote themselves to protecting and welcoming these vulnerable people who seek sanctuary among us.

Some acquaintances of mine vehemently oppose ordaining women to ministry. They claim that their zeal for keeping women "in their place" is rooted solely in the words of the Bible. They cite the curse of Genesis 3 and some statements by Paul. Then they ask, "Is there any Bible passage that explicitly commands us to honor women with the rite and status of ordination?" But they are asking the wrong questions. When we ask if there are any words in the Bible that can be used to justify excluding people, we are acting like Jesus' disciples who wanted Jesus to send the

petitioning mother away. We are acting like Joshua's soldiers who wanted to be God's enforcers. The Bible is crystal clear that it was Joshua and Jesus who did right, not the soldiers and disciples. We are called to follow the example of Joshua and Jesus. Godly leaders will cooperate with God by honoring the women he calls into public ministry.

Our treatment of homosexuals and women cannot be separated from the lessons of Christian history in regard to slavery. The Bible explicitly condones and regulates slavery. For centuries, Christians used these words of the Bible to justify the status quo of slavery. We now know they were tragically wrong. No matter what Deuteronomy or Ephesians says about the legitimacy of slavery, Christians now decry its immorality. Even though there is no explicit warrant in the Bible for abolition, Christians now agree that this non-Biblical stance is right. What was explicitly allowed by the words of the Bible is now universally condemned as immoral.

Something similar has happened in regard to the death penalty. The Bible prescribes death by stoning for Sabbath-breakers, adulterers, rebellious sons, homosexuals, women unable to prove their virginity at their wedding, blasphemers, witches, and rape victims if the rape occurred within the city limits. The people of God rightly insist that any attempt to impose these Bible commandments in our day would be barbaric and immoral.

We fail to cooperate with God when we use the words of the Bible as weapons for defending the privileges of the privileged or as cudgels for keeping less-privileged people in their place. We partner with God when we use the Bible as an instrument of mercy or as a device for opening prison gates. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read these words as his mission statement:

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD"*  
(Luke 4:18-19, NKJV).

When the people fully realized what Jesus was saying, they rushed to throw him off a cliff. I pray we will not be equally offended by the radical mercy of God but will, instead, rush to join him. 🇺🇸

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# UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND EARLY CHURCH

BY ROBERT M. JOHNSTON

IN CHRIST'S GREAT PRAYER IN JOHN 17, AS we all know, he prayed that his followers may be one, even as he and the Father are one (verse 11). In Acts 4:32 (RSV), it is written of the young church in Jerusalem: "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common." John did not record Christ's prayer, and Luke did not write his report, merely for the historical record. They wrote these things for inspiration and exhortation (as is true of all the many urgings to peace and harmony recorded throughout the New Testament), because the church in the time of Luke and John did not have such intense unity. In fact, one need only read the New Testament with open eyes to see that discord was a continuing fact of life in the early church.

These tensions can be seen in several ways. The most obvious are explicit references to disagreements. A second window reveals discoverable tensions between writers of the New Testament canon, although these (in my opinion) are relatively mild and may consist of little more than differences of emphasis or definition. More significant are indications of serious conflicts that existed in the early church—conflicts in which only one side is represented in the canon. Our canon of 27 writings did not reach final

shape until the fourth century, after the church had the backing of the government for enforcing orthodoxy as it came to be defined. Writings that did not pass through that screen were not preserved or were actively destroyed. This process of selection, of course, had begun long before A.D. 325, but after the so-called Peace of the Church there was a powerful political mechanism for enforcing unity and for suppressing writings that were regarded as deviant. The result is that some varieties of Christianity existed in New Testament times whose views are not represented in the New Testament, but their existence is recognized there. I will survey some of these disagreements and discuss how the early church dealt with them.

## Dealing With Disagreements

First are explicit references to quarrels. The first such disturbance arose as a direct result of the family-like closeness described in Acts 4:32, when believers shared their possessions. The church was multiplying and becoming less homogeneous. The Hellenistic Jews "murmured against" the Palestinian Jews "because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution" (Acts 6:1, RSV). These two parties were marked by linguistic and cultural differences. The apostles resolved this difficulty by an administrative innovation: the election of seven officers charged

with overseeing the distribution. Judging from their Greek names, these seven were chosen from the aggrieved party.

The degree of ethnic variation in the church took a mighty leap when the gospel went to the Samaritans (Acts 8), but far more so when Peter baptized the Gentile Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) without requiring prior circumcision. In Acts 11:2-3 (RSV), we discover that Peter received severe criticism for doing this. Luke writes: "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?'" Peter's action was an inconceivable flouting of Jewish tradition and every sense of propriety—a brazen irregularity, moving outside the acceptable bounds. Peter's only defense was to describe the experience that had led him to do what was contrary to his own religious sensibilities and to declare that the Holy Spirit had told him to do it. Luke's reference here to "the circumcision party" (*oi eūk peritomhē*) introduces one of the parties in a division in the church that continued throughout the New Testament period and beyond.

A barrier had been broken, and the breach was enormously enlarged by the work of Paul, undertaken at first in partnership with Barnabas. The success of the mission to the Gentiles was seen

by the brethren in Jerusalem as a threat to the purity and unity of the church. After all, circumcision was commanded in Scripture (Gen. 17:10-14, Lev. 12:3).<sup>1</sup> Some men came down to Antioch, the headquarters of the Gentile mission, and were teaching the new members: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1, RSV). No stronger claim can be made for the importance of a doctrine than to say it is necessary for salvation! Luke tells us that “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them” (verse 2, RSV). The upshot was that Paul and Barnabas led a delegation to Jerusalem, a meeting was held there, and the issue was much debated (verse 7). A breakthrough occurred when Peter related his experience, concluding: “Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (verses 10-11, RSV). It is doubtful that anyone of a lesser standing than Peter could have dared to make such a theologically radical statement. Paul and Barnabas then made speeches. The real miracle occurred when James, the leader of the Jerusalem community of Christians, took the liberal side. The meeting concluded with the drafting of a letter that distanced the brethren in Jerusalem from the teachers who had earlier gone forth from there to trouble the Gentile believers in Antioch. They were content only to require that the Gentile Christians observe the Noahide laws (verse 29).<sup>2</sup>

The quarrel between Paul and Barnabas over a personnel issue (Acts 15:39) need not detain us. But Acts 21 is important. After many journeys Paul came again to Jerusalem and was welcomed by James,

the leader there, and the brethren, who glorified God for the success of Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles. But all was not well. They said: “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; they are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs (*mēde tois ethesin peripatein*). What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come” (verses 20-22, RSV). Luke, a peacemaker, emphasizes Paul’s willingness to compromise. But when Paul himself relates the story, his words are sharper.

In Galatians 2 we find Paul’s account of a comparable incident, apparently after the events of Acts 15. He tells how James and Peter and John, pillars of the Jerusalem community, gave him and Barnabas “the right hand of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9), requesting only that they remember the poor believers of Judaea. He does not even mention the Noahide laws. Then comes the revealing narrative of Paul’s confrontation with Peter: “But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity” (verses 11-13, RSV).

Paul quotes his own words of sharp rebuke that he publicly gave Peter. The first great Christian controversy, occasioned by the mission to the Gentiles, was over what one must do to be saved, and there were clearly at least two sides in the debate—both considering themselves to be Christian, both believing that they were

preaching the gospel. Paul is ferociously uncompromising: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:6-8, RSV).

### The Opposing Point of View

We do not get to hear the voice of Paul’s opponents, nor can we read their words, but it is not hard to imagine what they thought of him. They would have agreed with the judgment of Gerd Lüdemann that the first great Christian heresy was Pauline theology.<sup>3</sup>

Let us try to understand his opponents’ point of view. In their opinion, not only was Paul dangerously wrong about salvation and casting doubts on the law of Moses, but he was a false apostle. He was not one of the Twelve. Not only did he flout Jewish tradition, but he played fast and loose with the teachings of Jesus. Jesus had given clear instructions about how the evangelistic ministry was to be supported (Matt. 10:5-9 and parallels), for “the laborer deserves his food” (verse 10, ESV). Paul knew these instructions perfectly well and affirmed that he had a right to such support, yet he deliberately chose not to follow them (1 Corinthians 9). Paul also knew and quoted what Jesus had said about divorce and remarriage, yet on his own authority he made an exception (1 Cor. 7:12-15). It was hard for some people to be neutral about Paul. Later on, groups like those who produced the *Kerygmata Petrou* (*Preachings of Peter*)—probably Ebionites—insisted that Paul was a false apostle,<sup>4</sup> while others like Marcion of Sinope affirmed that he was the only true apostle.

Some might say that we can hear the voice of Paul's opponents in Matthew and in James. We do not know whether they are opposing Paul himself, or rather some of Paul's disciples who carried things much farther than Paul would have approved. But in any case, Matthew probably had other Christians in mind when he cited Jesus saying: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. ... Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:17, 19, RSV; note that they are still in the kingdom). James certainly has fellow Christians in mind when he asks: "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?" (James 2:14, RSV). Perhaps he is not addressing Paul but rather hyper-Paulinists, the kind of Christian teachers of whom we read: "There are some things in [Paul's letters] hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16, RSV).

To be sure, in his pastoral epistles Paul exhibits a different side: he has become more concerned about law and order. For by that time the cleavage between Paulinists and anti-Paulinists is not the only division in the church. The hyper-Paulinists (if that is an appropriate term) have evolved into the proto-Gnostics. Paul in 1 Timothy 6:20 warns against the falsely named *gnosis*. John warns against Docetists, who have withdrawn from John's church and formed their own (1 John 2:18-19; 4:1-3). He calls them antichrists. The Revelator warns against other groups, such as the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6, 15). While we can read the warnings of the canonical writers, we cannot hear what was being said by those they opposed. If members of such groups

wrote anything, it is mostly gone. But they all considered themselves Christians.

It is wrong, however, to suppose that the only thing the New Testament writers had to say about differences of opinion was to denounce them. When we turn from the sharpness of Paul's letter to the Galatians to his letter to the Romans, we get a different picture.

In Romans Paul is writing to a church that he neither founded nor had yet visited, but it was already a mixed congregation consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. The real message of Romans concerns how these two groups of Christians should relate to each other. Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 because riots had broken out among them, caused by disagreement over Christ.<sup>5</sup> This was when Priscilla and Aquila went from Rome to Corinth (Acts 18:2).

But after a time the Jews returned to Rome, including Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3). The church offices they vacated when they left have been filled by Gentile believers. Now the two groups are arguing about whether it is necessary to do all of the Jewish things, to keep the festivals, to abstain from meat offered to idols. Paul's counsel in Romans 14 is remarkably mild, a beautiful plea for Christian tolerance of differences and for forbearance. "Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ... Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:13, 19, RSV).

### Lessons for Our Time

We have taken only a cursory look at the tensions and differences in the early church. We have not, for example, noted all of the many pleas for peace in the apostolic

writings or examined Paul's rebuke of factionalism at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-16). But we can make some generalizations.

The early church experienced increasing disunity. Any early unity it had resulted from the afterglow of the Pentecost experience and from the relative smallness and homogeneity of the community. The disunity had many causes: church growth, ethnic diversification, strong personalities like Paul, and the tug between conservatism and liberalism (if those terms are appropriate—perhaps it would be better to say "traditionalists and innovators"). Although the early church was united, after all, in their loyalty to Jesus and in their desire to follow him, the devil was in the details. There was diversity of temperament, of theology, and of behavioral standards. In a word, early Christianity was in fact pluralistic. The question is how and why a writer like Paul could be so intolerant of his opponents, in some contexts, and yet plead for tolerance and mutual acceptance in other contexts. My impression is that what made the difference was the spirit of those holding the various opinions. Paul did not like contentiousness, except when he did the contending. His contending was when a salvific truth was being threatened; otherwise he could be relaxed about differences, as long as faith and love were maintained.

In the second century, we can perceive a growing impulse toward tightening the ship and standardizing the faith. (A parallel development was happening in Judaism. Before the Council of Jamnia it had been very pluralistic, but thereafter the Pharisaic variety was made the norm.) The devices used were the monarchical episcopacy, the creed (probably originally a baptismal vow), and the *regula fidei* (and later, a fixed canon). Persecution was both a help and a hindrance. Three centuries

later unity could finally be achieved when Christianity became the established religion of the Empire, and heresy was against the law.<sup>6</sup> But this imposed unity came at a terrible price. Unity trumped truth, trumped love, and redefined faith. Faith no longer meant trust in Jesus but, rather, assent to the creeds. Obedience to Jesus morphed into obedience to bishops. Orthodoxy was determined by majority vote in church councils. The losers of the debates were called heretics. If the church fell, it was not a fall out of unity, but a fall into unity.

God's church today finds itself in a somewhat similar condition. Anytime after the first generation, if not before, there are always conservatives like James and liberals like Paul. But yesterday's liberal becomes today's traditionalist. And one can be liberal about some things and conservative about other things. Like Peter, we can experience a clash between what our tradition has taught us and what the Holy Spirit is telling us to do. Like the church toward the end of the first century and into the second century, we can be embarrassed by the antics of some deviant groups among us, like the libertine false teachers denounced by Jude or like the Gnostics. They give the church a bad reputation. We want to distance ourselves from them. This was, in fact, the original motivation for the development of the explicit categories of heretic and orthodox.

What is the way to unity, and what kind of unity does God want us to have? There is a hard way and an easy way. The hard way is to wait for the Spirit to lead, to maintain charity, to discuss humbly, to respect differences of opinion but not be satisfied with them, and to back off when disagreement leads to division. The quick and easy way is to use political means (church policy and any temporal means available) to impose unity. In such an

environment, the contest is not between truth and falsehood or between right and wrong, but between winners and losers, between the mighty and the weak, between those who "get there fustest and with the mostest" and those who are less aggressive.

What kind of unity should we seek? Above all the unity of the Spirit, as in the afterglow of Pentecost. How much unity of opinion and of behavior is necessary? The only rules are these: What is clearly true? What glorifies God? What keeps the community together? If people of equal learning and goodwill cannot agree about where the truth lies in a certain area, the reason must be that the evidence is ambiguous or inadequate. If people cannot agree about what glorifies God, the reason is that they have not prayed enough. If people do not care about what will keep the community together, it is because they have not loved enough.

### **Excursus: The Bible**

In the beginning was an Experience. The Earth was without Scriptures and Canon. And God spoke.

Experience precedes Scripture. The Exodus Experience preceded the Book of Exodus. But the record of the Event makes it available to posterity: "Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11, RSV). Jesus was seen and heard in person by the Twelve, who bore witness (Acts 2:32; 1 John 1:1-3), and then seen by Paul in a visionary experience (Acts 9:3-6; Gal. 1:12; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-8). These experiences eventually resulted in the writing of gospels and epistles. Without the events of Acts 10, which in a sense even trumped Scripture (after all, the circumcision party had Leviticus 12:3 and Genesis 17:10-14 on their side), the apostolic letter recorded in Acts 15:23-29 would not have been written.

Is divine guidance like a GPS or a road atlas? If the directions of the GPS get written down properly, the product is an itinerary or a road atlas, and the GPS can be discarded. The voice of the Spirit got inscripturated and can be consulted at will. It is now in our power. Thus the Church gathered unto itself Scriptures, but it had no canon until it said: Only these, and no others. After that there was no longer any authoritative new revelation, nor any need felt for it; and instead of new revelation, we have exegesis of old revelation. The scholar replaces the prophet.

When we repeat the motto *Sola Scriptura*, think on these things. 🙏

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<sup>1</sup>On the role of Scripture, see the section titled *Excursus* at the end of this paper.

<sup>2</sup>The three prohibitions stated here are generally regarded as an early version of the Laws of the Sons of Noah, later seven in number. We need not assume that this directive released Gentile believers from other moral requirements, but these three were issues of special concern to Jewish believers, concerns which Gentiles might otherwise not share.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Gerd Lüdemann, *Heretics: The Other Side of Early Christianity*, translated by John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 61-95.

<sup>4</sup>In the earliest church, the prime qualification for being an apostle was that one must have been an eyewitness of the risen Christ (Acts 1:21-26; 2:32; etc.). Paul claimed to satisfy this requirement on the basis of a visionary experience (Gal. 1:11-12; 1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-10; 26:13-18). The Jewish Christian community represented by the *Kerygmata Petrou* rejected visionary experiences as a valid proof of apostleship. See Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol. 2, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, translated by Robert McLachlan Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), pp. 122-23.

<sup>5</sup>So we infer from the chapter on Tiberius Claudius Drusus Caesar by C. Suetonius Tranquillus in *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup>To be sure, excommunication could be and was imposed for unacceptable teachings as early as the second century, as the church in Rome did with Cerdo and Marcion. But they were able to go out and start their own churches.

## Is keeping the Sabbath holy preventing you from doing good on that day?

# PREVENTED BY THE SA

The fourth commandment is simple. It tells us to keep the day holy by not doing the routine work that we do on the other days in the week—and not to require others to do that work, either. After that, God is largely silent on specifics about how to keep the day holy. His silence leaves us free to focus our attention on him instead of measuring our performance in obeying laws.

Many have taken God's silence as a blank slate on which to write their own rules for keeping the day holy, and as a license for imposing those rules on others. The ancient Jews wrote more than 600 rules for keeping the Sabbath holy. Those are what the Pharisees had in mind when they accused Jesus of breaking "the law" on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-12; Mark 3:1-6; John 9:13-16). It's also why "a sabbath day's journey" is mentioned in Acts 1:12. Jesus got right to the point when he told the Pharisees, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" (Mark 7:9, NIV).

A classic story illustrating the clash of concepts about Sabbath-keeping has a

missionary couple on a tropical island going bird-watching on Sabbath afternoon. Along the way they meet a student missionary heading for the

beach. He's carrying his mask, fins, compressed-air tank, weight belt, and other pieces of diving gear. The missionaries

think he is breaking the Sabbath and confront him. "Where are you going?" they ask. He eyes their binoculars and bird books and then replies, "Fish-watching."

If we consider bird-watching proper for the Sabbath but not

also fish-watching, are we not being modern Pharisees and focusing on keeping laws instead of building our relationship with God? What if, instead of creating lists of prohibitions for the Sabbath, we sought to be like Jesus and found ways to do good for others on the Sabbath?

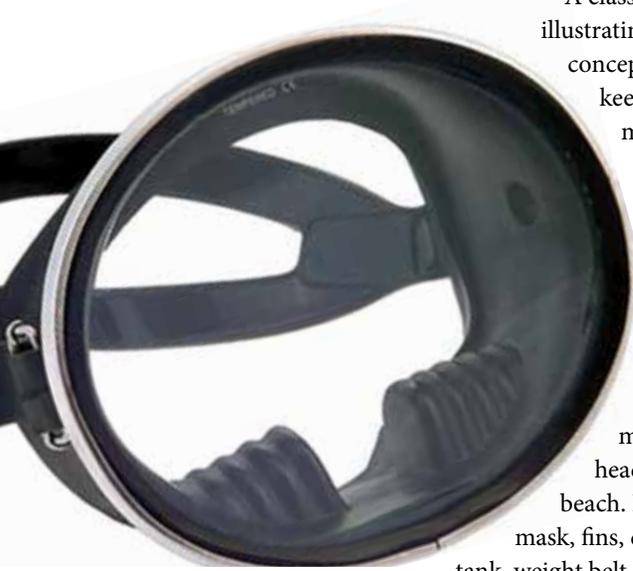
In Luke 13:10-17 we read the story of a woman in the synagogue who had been crippled by an evil spirit for 18 years. Jesus sees her need, casts out the evil spirit, and she is healed. But the ruler of the synagogue sees things differently. He protests: "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath!" (verse 14, NIV). Jesus answers: "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" (verses 15-16, NIV).

It is easy to restrict our concept of what is permissible to do on the Sabbath to things like miracles of healing, because the infrequency of such events keeps the discussion theoretical. For that reason, most professed believers in Jesus will go to their graves without having touched anyone with more than a passing puff of God's love on the Sabbath.

In Isaiah chapter 58, we find God chastising his people because they claim to be honoring him when they are not. He asks: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (verses 7-8, NIV). Doing those things requires us to be purposeful while expending considerable time and energy.

Jesus declared that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8, NIV). How many opportunities does God give us to demonstrate his love in actions that help others? To do those good things on the Sabbath?

At my home church, Grace Fellowship SDA Church in Madison, Alabama, promoting innovative ministry and pursuing the opportunities God gives us to share his love are important parts of our church culture. We encourage members to find



# BBATH?

BY WILLIAM NOEL

how the Holy Spirit has empowered them and to develop their gift set in active ministry. I have been richly blessed to lead a helping ministry called the Angel Team. Over the past seven years, God has taken us on some amazing adventures. We've seen God do lots of amazing things and have been honored to be his hands along the way. Most of our projects have been inside the church, and the results have been beyond anything I could have imagined. We don't just talk about ministering God's love; we reschedule our lives around doing it. The team name came from people saying we had to be angels because there was no way that humans could do what we were doing for them.

Helping others has become a habit in our church. People are so blessed by helping that I am often asked when our next project will be. Someone asked me that question between services on Sabbath, Sept. 7, 2013. "I don't know," I answered. "God hasn't told me yet."

Two hours later, God interrupted my plans for a relaxed afternoon. This project was different. There was no time to evaluate the need, send out an email announcement to the church, schedule volunteers, or plan tasks. It was a get-moving-right-now need.

We were finishing our potluck lunch when a church member asked me if I'd heard about the fire at the Parker<sup>1</sup> family home. This family used to be part of our fellowship but had transferred their membership to another church in the area. Some of us had known the wife's family for close to three decades after they emigrated from another country.

Susan was the second of six sisters, and all excelled in their educations and careers. Susan married Mark Parker while she was in medical school, and she was in her family practice residency at an area hospital when their first daughter, Karen, was born and brought to my wife for child care.

After graduating from medical school, Susan's younger sister Mary started a residency in cardiology in a city with a high crime rate. Less than a month after Mary's arrival, a carjacker shot and killed her. I still remember the shock I felt upon hearing the horrible news. But that was nothing compared to the devastation the family suffered.



Karen had just returned to college for her senior year when the fire started. Susan and her second daughter, Allison, were away for the holiday weekend. In the blink of an eye, at 2:43 a.m. on the morning of September 2, the National Weather Service recorded six rapid-fire lightning bolts at the GPS coordinates of the house. Timothy, the youngest of the Parkers' three children, awoke hearing a crackling sound in the attic above his second-story bedroom. Mark said that when he opened the attic access and saw everything aflame, knowing what they had to do was "a real no-brainer." They escaped with barely the clothes they could grab. Engine companies from three volunteer fire departments fought the flames. The roof collapsed, and much of the second story was burned away. It was apparent the house would be a total loss. The family took refuge at the nearby home of one of Susan's sisters. Fire and insurance officials prohibited the Parkers from entering the house and recovering belongings for several days until they completed their investigation. Clearance came Friday afternoon. Now it was Sabbath, and they were starting the task of salvaging belongings from the rubble.

I do not know why we had not heard about the fire earlier, except that God was setting up the situation for us to help. A church member had taken his daughter, a talented violinist, to the Parkers' church to play for that morning's worship service. And while there, they had heard about the fire and the start of the recovery work.

Whether it was in the synagogue, beside the pool at Bethesda, or in the temple, Jesus did good whenever and wherever people needed his help. The Parker family needed help, and my brother in Christ was asking if we could assist them. Our reaction was

reflexive. We had just two questions: the exact address and how long it would take us to change into working clothes and get there. News spread by word of mouth and phone text message.

On my drive home, I ran a mental checklist of tools we might need. My wife and daughter packed a large picnic cooler with bottles of water and Gatorade, while I changed into jeans and work boots. Shovels, hardhats, leather gloves, dust masks, ladders, and other supplies went into the toolboxes on the truck for others to use. I added a portable generator, extension cords, floodlights, and ladders. The mercury was hovering at 90 degrees under a blazing sun. A quick stop at a convenience store along the way added a 10-pound bag of ice to keep the drinks cool.

The family was away eating lunch when we arrived. So we surveyed the situation and began clearing the broken glass, nails, and large debris from pathways through the rubble. Low-hanging, charred rafters made wearing hardhats essential.

Eight people came to help. Among them were a father and his

items to a rented storage unit and the rental house where they were setting up a new life. A woman in our group packed dishes and cookware into her car with plans to run them through her dishwasher at home before returning them to the family.

One of our volunteers was a full-time firefighter for a nearby city. As we emptied one cupboard, he declared to anyone who could hear: “This is reason number sixteen thousand and three why I love my church. Where else could you find a group of Adventists doing something like this on a Sabbath?”

The things people typically try hardest to recover after a disaster are the ones to which they have emotional attachments—like photos, awards, diplomas, and gifts from loved ones. In the garage we began working down a stack of unburned storage containers, a number of which were filled with water. I grabbed the top one and tilted it to try and pour off some of the water. Several pieces of clothing flowed out with the water. I took them outside and spread them to dry

in the intense sun. One of them was a white physician’s lab coat. Later I returned and turned it over so the sun could dry the other side. That’s when I saw the name embroidered on the left breast: Dr. Mary Parker, M.D. The sight stopped me in my tracks, and for a moment I remembered the pain and shock I had felt all those years

ago after hearing of her untimely death. Tears began welling up in my eyes. Without question the lab coat was on the “must save” list. Moments later I found Susan and told her about it. Her composure crumbled as she turned away to retrieve the lab coat. She picked it up, studied it, then folded it tenderly and placed it where she could give it special attention instead of sending it into storage.

Later a helper was packing a bin with books recovered from the living room when she saw me approach. “These are Mary’s notes from medical school,” she said as she looked up. Tear tracks traced from her eyes to her small, but growing smile.

After three hours of work, we decided it was time to stop. We were hot and tired, and we all stank terribly of sweat and smoke. At the same time we felt extremely satisfied and blessed from knowing we had provided some relief in such horribly a life-upending situation.

Jesus said it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. How much good are you going to do next Sabbath? Or will your concepts about how to keep the Sabbath holy prevent you from doing it? 

*William Noel is an award-winning freelance writer whose credits include more than 2,000 published bylines and two books.*

<sup>1</sup>All names have been changed.

## What if, instead of creating lists of prohibitions for the Sabbath, we sought to be like Jesus and found ways to do good for others on the Sabbath?

teenage son, who was a friend of Timothy Parker. “Dad, is this the sort of thing we should be doing on the Sabbath?” he asked. “Is this an ox-in-the-ditch situation?”

“No,” the father answered. “This is more like having your entire herd in the ditch.”

I was going through a cupboard in the kitchen when the voice of a new volunteer greeted me. I sent him to the truck for a hardhat and leather gloves. In moments Carl was back, smiling broadly and asking where to start working. I gave him a quick description of how we were trying to find and preserve items that were undamaged, could be cleaned, and would not hold the smell of smoke. He set to work with enthusiasm. Carl had been without regular employment for more than a year, and three weeks earlier the Angel Team had helped him and his family move from an unpleasant apartment to a rental house. So Carl was paying the blessing forward with joy.

Susan claimed that her family had gotten over the initial shock, but their long faces told a different story. They were unsmiling and moving about as if in a daze. Our presence, cheerful conversation, and loving labor began lifting their spirits.

We placed recoverable items on the grass and driveway behind the house, where they were sorted and packed into storage containers and trash bags. Two pickups shuttled the



## Scottish Sabbath

By Alden Thompson

During our first visit to Scotland in the early 1970s, the Scottish Sabbath was an eye-opening experience for us. In the cities, any sense of “sacred time” was hard to find. But for the devout Scots in the rugged north, Sabbath—meaning Sunday, for them—was still alive. Some even objected to the government’s plan to operate a toll bridge on Sundays.

We learned firsthand of this deep reverence for sacred time. On the west side of Loch Ewe, for example, we took a picture of a carefully hand-painted sign that had been erected beside the road. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” it read. Sabbath verses from the Bible followed.

And in the entryway of a self-catering cottage at Bualnaluib, a printed sign hung on the wall: “We cherish our quiet Sabbaths. Please do not do your laundry, wash your car, or go fishing on Sunday.” At the end of our week’s stay, we talked with the landlady about her sign. She had never heard of a seventh-day Sabbath. But she was serious about the sign. “I once had an Irishman stay here,” she said. “He ignored the sign and went fishing. After he fell and hurt his leg, I told him he should be thankful that he didn’t crack his head!”

On later visits to Scotland, we sensed that even up north sacred time was no longer secure and that the avalanche of secularity had nearly buried the cities of the south. A new shopping mall at Cameron Toll in Edinburgh, for example, was planning to stay open every day of the week. A branch of the Trustee Savings Bank (TSB) was part of the plan. Before the mall opened officially, however, a flash flood covered the mall property with up to four feet of water. A letter to the editor of the *Scotsman* proclaimed the flood to be an act of God’s judgment: TSB now stood for “The Sabbath Breakers”!

The owners cleaned up the mess and the mall opened anyway, albeit a few days late. In spite of the judgment of God, it stayed open seven days a week.

But what about the real Sabbath, the one God blessed? In the early 1970s, only about 200 Adventists were scattered among the 5 million Scots. The footprint of the “real” Sabbath was modest. But for me, one Sabbath memory has left a lifelong impact.

It wasn’t a whole Sabbath—not even a half. It was just a couple of hours, and the two most traditional ones at that: Sabbath school and church. But that was enough to rank it among my best Sabbath experiences.

On that Sabbath morning, we were driving from Edinburgh to Perth to visit one of the tiniest of the 10 Scottish Adventist churches. Seven members, all first-generation Adventists, met in an upstairs chapel. A center aisle separated the rows of pews. Depending on the girth of the worshippers, each pew could accommodate three to four people.

**And then the Sabbath surprise. Through the door came a stream of strong, young bodies: black ones, white ones. And they kept coming, filling two, three, four pews. The church was packed.**

Typically I preached at Perth about once a month. My wife and our two girls would occupy one pew, and the regular members filled two and a half pews more. We always hoped that no one would be sick. Once (during a flu epidemic) we had arrived to find only one member. Song service had been thin that morning and the sermon to the “congregation” awkward. We ended up merging Sabbath school and church and sat in a very small circle. ...

On this particular Sabbath, as we made our way toward Perth through the beautiful Scottish countryside, we prayed and hoped. I longed for a Sabbath blessing and for real people to share that blessing with us.

The Lord listened. The members were there.

And then the Sabbath surprise. Through the door came a stream of strong, young bodies: black ones, white ones. And they kept coming, filling two, three, four pews. The church was packed.

It almost danced with music. The lesson study came alive, and on the faces of the faithful seven I read a story of gratitude and joy. Now they knew: they were not alone; others shared their precious faith. Worshiping all alone week after week had sometimes made that hard to believe.

And where did this buoyant new crowd come from? From London. An Adventist youth group had planned a camping trip to the Scottish hills. They had rented a van, stuffed it full of live bodies, and headed for Scotland. But instead of doing their own thing in nature on Sabbath, they had responded to the promptings of the Spirit and had joined the believers in Perth.

Now, whenever I'm away from home on Sabbath, I remember

that lively crowd of young people and the joy they brought to a tiny Scottish church. They filled up the church; they sang with us; they prayed with us. Here is one Adventist who will never forget.

In time the tiny church at Perth was sold. According to the Scottish Mission website, the nearest Adventist church is now at Crieff, some 40 minutes from Perth by car. The challenge of our secular age is daunting. On our last visit to Loch Ewe, the carefully painted Sabbath sign at the roadside was gone. And I have heard devout Scots lament the fact that for boys attending boarding school in Edinburgh, church is no longer a required part of the Sunday agenda. They can choose what to do, and church rarely wins.

If secularization has threatened the Sunday Sabbath, will it sweep away the "real" Sabbath too? It could. But a van full of young people who come to worship with the saints can make a difference. It did for me, and I am grateful.

## EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the editorial board. One of the purposes of this magazine is to encourage dialogue between those of differing viewpoints within the Adventist Church. Thus, we will publish articles ranging throughout the conservative-liberal continuum.

### Editorial *continued from page 3*

(Col. 3:14). Peter surprises us by declaring that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). Ellen White puts her discerning finger on the key to effective soul winning: "If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one."<sup>1</sup>

The Adventist Church does not need to give up its doctrinal approach. It does indeed have a special message for these times, but it also needs to develop another completely different stream. This is not easy. Since the church was founded on the basis of converting people to additional truth, many are afraid that if we emphasize a gospel

approach, we will lose our distinctive nature. That is the tension. It would be much easier if we could teach, like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses do for their respective organizations, that you have to become a church member to be saved. But we do not believe that. People can be saved outside the Adventist Church.

The gospel, which is the good news that Jesus died for our sins and gives us eternal life when we believe in him, is simple and complete. This gospel is the answer to the age-old search for meaning in life. But secular people want more than pious platitudes. They want to see this gospel believed and practiced in loving, kind, and considerate people.

<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 189.

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# Adventist Man

## A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

### The “Year of” Contest

Let me begin by offering a clenched-teeth “thank you” to the 279 persons who responded to the “A Year of Living as a \_\_\_\_\_” contest. A nerve has been touched, it would appear, as attested by the many previous yearlong experiments documented by other soul-searchers. One wonders if, since then, the genial author of *A Year of Living Biblically* has been turning restlessly on his pillow and muttering, “I have created a monster.”

For you out-of-the-loopers who are frothing at the mouth, toggling on your CapsLock key, and composing angry emails with the theme of “WHY DIDN’T I EVER HEAR ABOUT THIS? CAN I STILL ENTER?” let me explain.

*Adventist Today* technically did not promote this contest. Like every courageous, near-the-edge journal, we have on our staff those who long to spawn an even edgier periodical. In remote basement rooms in our building, these radicals have stood shakily on the shoulders of *Adventist Today* (whose name and concept are both perfectly fine, thank you, and already express the immediacy of the moment) and have launched a new magazine, *Adventist Later in the Evening* (A-LITE). A-LITE’s scrappy first issue featured the “A Year of Living as a \_\_\_\_\_” contest, more as a circulation-builder than from any loftier motives. Lo and behold, circulation was built and the entries poured in.

The contest’s two winners, once winnowed, will be awarded a grant to keep them fed, clothed, and sheltered while they pursue

whatever 12-month quest they wish. And if the quest is loopy enough, they’re virtually guaranteed a book tour, a grilling by a CNN commentator panel, and that Holy Grail of success: a thoughtful hour on NPR’s *Fresh Air*.

Yes, the contest has closed. No, it will not be offered again. Yes—as you can tell by my tone—I am annoyed. Because, guess what? The A-LITE guys with their scruffy beards and the girls with their solemn spectacles have long since lost interest in “Year of” (if they ever had any to start with) and are now consumed with working on TED talks<sup>1</sup> about life insights they learned as student missionaries, leaving your steaming columnist to tie off the “Year of” paperwork.

But this is where you can help. Let me tell you about the finalists, and you can email me about the one you think most worthy.

**Hans Linkersloopft**, head deacon of an Adventist congregation in the Netherlands whose church board (with begs and threats) have urged me not to mention its name, plans to spend a year with his index finger inserted nobly into the leaky nozzle of a water fountain near the children’s Sabbath School classrooms.

Hans assures us that he will wear latex gloves, squirt obliging shots of water into young mouths upon request, and subsist on rations of Pathfinder campout wieners. This valiant finger-in-the-fountain gesture—though I would advise Hans not to attempt to gesture at all lest he lose his grant—is not necessary to preserve his homeland from flooding, but it will still save the church budget the equivalent of US\$19.

**Mindy Manderlinski-Mgumbo** has vowed to spend her 12 months providing in-depth answers to the question “How are you, Mindy?” whenever she is asked. She is assembling an array of talking points, including her medical symptoms both past and present, the childhood

traumas and nay-sayers who have prevented her from realizing her true destiny, her political views, her helpfully corrective fashion critiques, and much-much more. Mindy has been reading Coleridge’s poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* so she can perfect the “glittering eye” with which the Mariner fixed his helpless listener.

**Fortescue Dunleavy Schmork** (Who names these people, anyway?) has long believed that the Adventist church should follow a liturgical year, and he is making a list of 365 Seventh-day Adventist “feast days” that he will successively celebrate, such as Doug Batchelor’s birthday (March 9), the anniversary of the first Pathfinder Camporee (May 7, 1954), and so on. On his own recognizance, Fortescue has added to the liturgy a daily lentil loaf “wave offering.” (It’s a goodbye wave.)

**Anton Chekhov Chicklesworthy** attends a church whose musical style involves a great deal of audience participation. It is his plan to spend a year deliberately clapping off-sync with the rest of the congregation, resisting with a bland smile any attempt to get him back on track.

Send me your votes, *pronto*. Get this project off my back!

<sup>1</sup> TED talks aren’t speaking engagements by the GC president. Read about TED online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TED\\_\(conference\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TED_(conference)), or view a sample on YouTube.

**Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has “the answer.” As a former member of “the remnant of the remnant,” Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at [atoday@atoday.org](mailto:atoday@atoday.org).**

# Where Are We Headed?

*Some insist the Church is lost and must find its way back home.*

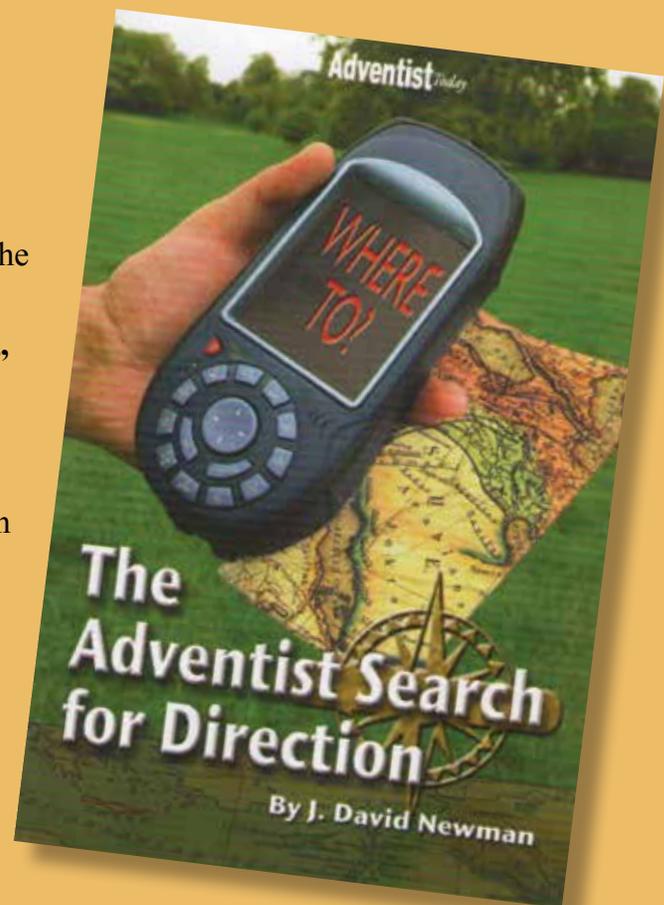
Huge changes have occurred in the Church during the past 35 years. Have we turned our back on the ways the Lord has led us in the past?

In **“Where To? The Adventist Search for Direction,”** *Adventist Today* editor J. David Newman, D.Min., looks at both church history and the current condition and leadership of Adventism. He thinks we may need to alter course in light of gospel principles and modern realities.

Trying to return to the past is neither possible nor prudent, writes the author. The world is changing, and ministering to end-time society in the manner of Jesus and using his principles cannot be accomplished by simply replicating past approaches.

The book challenges the Church to rise to the occasion, put first things first, and move the gospel forward, nation by nation, society by society. In times past, when all nations were essentially Third World in perspective, a one-size-fits-all approach worked. But with sophistication, education, and increased standard of living has come the need for far more “savvy” in our approaches, with significant change in the models of the past.

We must triangulate new avenues to the hearts of the people, as we spread the gospel in increasingly complex times.



**About the Author:** Dr. Newman is a highly successful pastor whose church doubled in size and numbered 700 persons at the time of his recent retirement. A son of missionary parents who has lived in many parts of the world and for 11 years edited *Ministry* magazine for the General Conference, Dr. Newman is considered one of Adventism’s most creative sources of ideas for expanding and growing the Church in changing times.

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