

The No-Politics Rule

Paul Didn't Teach
Righteousness by Faith

Why Slaves
Won't Be in Heaven

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Adventist *Today*

THE CHURCH
AND POLITICS





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Why Adventists Can't Talk about Politics

By Loren Seibold

Just before the election last November, a longtime *Adventist Today* reader wrote an indignant letter to the editor. One of our website writers had, in passing, mildly disparaged Donald Trump, then candidate for president of the United States. This reader, a retired Seventh-day Adventist pastor, informed us that he was canceling his membership and would no longer be supportive of *Adventist Today*. We had become “way too political,” he said.

I was more curious than concerned. It seemed to me that we'd been remarkably restrained. Donald Trump had by that time described Mexican immigrants as drug dealers and rapists; said uncountable offensive things about women, including that he could fondle women's genitalia with impunity; called women he thought unattractive “fat pigs,” “dogs,” “slobs,” and “disgusting animals;” and blamed journalist Megyn Kelly's menstrual period for his discomfort while talking to her. He also mocked a man with a neurological handicap, told a crowd to “knock the crap out of” a protester, advocated torture “a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding,” threatened the religious liberty of the entire Muslim faith, and promised that he would kill not only terrorists but also their innocent wives and children.

That's enough to give pause to any thoughtful Christian person, it seemed to me. Even if you agreed with Donald Trump's ideas and believed he had both the integrity and the ability to implement them, you should have been able to understand why your Christian sisters and brothers could be offended. The irony was that this particular reader had filled his own Facebook page with endless supportive posts about the Trump campaign. Yet the man judged a religious publication “way too political” if it even noticed that Mr. Trump said and did things that were questionable by Bible standards.

The No-Politics Rule

We here at *Adventist Today*, with a few forgivable exceptions, kept mostly out of 2016 election politics.

I had been taught as a young pastor that politics was one thing I could never have a public opinion about. It's a minefield. “Don't tear your congregation apart over mere politics,” people said. “It doesn't matter very much compared to our end-time message, which is far more important than anything happening in the political world.”

Never mind, I suppose, that our central teachings—the ones remembered in our name—have always orbited political events, historical or anticipated. I remember church members weeping on the Sabbath after the election of John F. Kennedy, the first Roman Catholic president of the United States. Even more memorable was the unrestrained relief on the first Sabbath after Kennedy was murdered. “The Lord has held back the winds of strife!” rejoiced our pastor, and we enthusiastically called out, “Amen.” We were almost giddy—an odd reaction for people who said we hoped for Jesus' soon return. It didn't seem to occur to anyone in my congregation right then to grieve that a young man had lost his life, that a young family had been robbed of husband and father. It was enough that the president was gone. It had been said—though no president has ever made his independence from his religion clearer¹—that he took his orders directly from the Vatican.

In this past year, I asked some church members their thoughts about the no-politics rule. “Never,” one told me. “Don't ever mention it. You keep your opinions to yourself.”

“Do you keep your opinions to yourself?” I asked.

“That's different,” the member said. “I'm not a pastor.”

“How about if the candidate stood up and said, ‘I plan on restricting religious liberty?’” I asked. “What if he said, ‘I am going to mandate a single day of worship for everyone’—naturally, it would be Sunday—and anyone who doesn't worship on that day won't be allowed to have credit or a bank account? Should I mention that?”

“Of course,” he said. “That's prophecy.”

Even if you agreed with Donald Trump's ideas and believed he had both the integrity and the ability to implement them, you should have been able to understand why your Christian sisters and brothers could be offended.

“But if a candidate is immoral, if he is cruel, if he has declared his intention to enact laws that will hurt certain groups of people, that I can say nothing about?”

“That,” he said, “is *entirely* different. Stay out of it.”

Priorities

Why, I wondered, is it *entirely* different? I agree that a stated intention to enforce a particular day of worship, unlikely as that seems right now, would need to be addressed. But is there no overlap at all between our biblical faith and a candidate’s economic, social, and military policies?

Think about the relative weight the Bible gives to honesty, mercy, generosity, justice, kindness, and peacefulness versus cryptic prophecies whose interpretations have been fluid throughout our history. The possibility of a Sunday law would no doubt alarm and mobilize Seventh-day Adventists. But must we remain quiet over a decision to use our country’s military in

That we tend to choose as religious priorities the distant future over the immediate, the ideological over the personal, the abstract over the concrete, the possible but unlikely over a genuine crisis—that, it seems to me, is one of the most curious things about us.

a way that increases civilian deaths overseas? Would the threat to curtail religious liberty, even in small increments, really worry us more than leaving millions of poor people without ordinary health care? Would we lose sleep over the prophetic possibilities in the Middle East, but not our neighbors’ working for poverty wages? Do we get upset because of the availability of abortion, but not because laws will leave children hungry and homeless?

That we tend to choose as religious priorities the distant future over the immediate, the ideological over the personal, the abstract over the concrete, the possible but unlikely over a genuine crisis—that, it seems to me, is one of the most curious things about us.

There are, of course, no ideal leaders. Not one of our candidates comes close. (A bumper sticker I saw said, “Just for once, I’d like to be able to vote for the greater of two goods.”) Nor is there any truth to the notion that democracy is reliably moral and good. For us, here and now, it has worked better than the alternatives. Yet as long as people can be manipulated, democracy is manipulable, too. When a democracy’s leaders are thoughtless and selfish, it can fail its citizens just as readily as other models of government.

In this magazine, Dr. Olive J. Hemmings says that the Bible expects us to hold leaders accountable. But on what basis? More to

the point, in countries in which we choose our leaders by majority vote, on what basis do Seventh-day Adventists choose them?

Aristotle, Habakkuk, and Jesus

In democracies, persuasion is the path to leadership. The tools of persuasion (per Aristotle) are ethos, logos, and pathos, which translate roughly as what a person is, what he says, and how he inspires you. At best, all three contribute to a decision. But that works only if voters are equipped to listen thoughtfully—which is not necessarily true of America’s entitled but badly informed electorate. The ethos, logos, and pathos methodology is easily perverted, which in an information-clogged world sometimes means that the loudest and most outrageous voices win.

In the most recent American election, each of the candidates offered policies—logos. Each came with an ethos: Donald Trump, a successful businessman and show-biz personality who behaved as a lout, and Hillary Clinton, a smart and experienced stateswoman with a reputation for being a shady political operator. Yet most commenters agree that it was pathos that got Donald Trump elected. He appealed to feelings, though not necessarily our most noble ones.

Somehow (and perhaps this is peculiar to Christians, who are accustomed to exercising faith), a majority of white Christian voters were able to set aside his unchristian insults and outrageous accusations, his litigious history and obvious character flaws, in favor of what they *believed* him to be. Like James Dobson, who declared Donald Trump an undercover born-again Christian, Americans projected upon him what they wanted to see.

In Habakkuk, God tells the prophet that he has deputized the Assyrians to punish Israel for its injustice and violence. Habakkuk, surprised, reminds God that the Assyrians are cruel and violent, a far-too-heavy weapon for the purpose. But God insists that he has chosen Assyria to do his work, and his people will have to suffer it. Here, perhaps, is a theology for accepting a bad and immoral leader: he may be acting on God’s behalf. Did some of us Christians feel that we could suspend judgment about Mr. Trump’s character flaws and inexperience because, if his policies matched what we thought God preferred (such as repealing *Roe v. Wade*), then God was going to use him in spite of himself? (If one takes Ezekiel as another model of an unlikely servant of God, then even insanity isn’t a disqualifier.)

Yet if one believes that Donald Trump is God’s man for our time, where is the support for it? Unlike Habakkuk’s prophecy about the Assyrian army, there is no prophecy choosing Donald Trump. (I think we can safely set aside the eschatology of an online preacher who based her argument on the King James rendering of a phrase from 1 Corinthians 15:52: “at the last trump.”)

Jesus said: “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?” Many of us who

voted against Mr. Trump took seriously that “every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Matt. 7:16-18, NKJV) and feared that a man who so often spoke unkindly would act unkindly, that a hurtful man would make hurtful policies. When political candidates show you who they are, shouldn’t you believe them?

In Matthew 21:28-32, Jesus told of a man who asks one of his sons to work in the vineyard; the young man says that he will, but he doesn’t. The other son, who says that he won’t go to work, shows up anyway. Actions trump talk. By that lesson, we Americans should await the outcome of this president’s actions, though we may wonder what will have happened to the United States of America by the time we can say whether or not he has been God’s unlikely servant.

Let Justice Roll

Dare we Seventh-day Adventists take a collective interest in politics? It isn’t hard to see that political questions are at times hopelessly entangled with religious questions. If it were enough to say, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17, NKJV), the church wouldn’t need attorneys or a religious liberty department.

The fundamentalist and evangelical churches preach and write about abortion and homosexuality. Through most of our history, we Seventh-day Adventists have filtered all of our political concerns through eschatology, avoiding other political discussions. And here is what we have lost: the understanding that social justice ought to be as much a part of our political awareness as is religious liberty.


Most of the Hebrew prophets were activists for social justice. They moved from the personal to the political when they addressed entire classes of people—the poor, the priests, the monarchy, the merchants, the rich. God is speaking with political purpose when he says, “Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, ... skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat” (Amos 8:4-6, NIV). God is speaking politically when he threatens Israel with the Assyrian military for their violence and injustice (Hab. 1:2-3) or tells Jeremiah that the kings and leaders are responsible (Jer. 22:3-4). All of these remonstrances are inescapably political, and though we are no longer a monarchy or a theocracy, what would make us think the Seventh-day Adventist Church should talk only about religious liberty and not make social justice part of our political conversation?

There is our problem: we are unable to converse and are terrified of dissent. We would rather be right than be in conversation. Our pioneers talked and disagreed; we disagree and quickly take shelter behind a rather shaky definition of unity.

How many times in the past seven years have you heard that the General Conference² is God’s highest authority on Earth and that everyone should fall into line? Infallible authorities can’t discuss; they can only declare. Even laudatory efforts at conversation, such as the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, eventually fizzled. Our official church publications must be so cautious that they can offer little guidance through controversial issues. (That’s why independent Adventist journalism, such as you find at AdventistToday.org, is so important. It is our intention to keep civil and courteous conversation flowing.)

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Because we can’t converse about politically tinged topics, important parts of our theological heritage have fallen away. Some Seventh-day Adventists in America now define good Christian citizenry by evangelical, Republican, and libertarian talking points. Noncombatancy, a teaching rooted in our historical respect for the Ten Commandments, has in the United States succumbed to a Christian-scented patriotism. We used to say that our mission could be compromised if our institutions accepted public money. Not anymore. If a crisis led to suspension of the religious rights of Muslims in order to maintain law, order, and safety (something many Christian conservatives already favor), I fear even religious liberty might become too controversial for us to discuss comfortably.

Political topics will, I suspect, remain verboten in all but gatherings of like-minded Adventist friends, and I doubt they’ll ever be safe in Seventh-day Adventist pulpits. But one thing we can do is to remind Seventh-day Adventists that there is more to politics than religious liberty; that we are to “let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” That will be reflected in how we vote, to be sure—but more importantly, in how we act. 

¹ See John F. Kennedy’s speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association on Sept. 12, 1960, in which he stated: “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.”

² The quote includes the words “in session,” though that qualifier sometimes fades in usage. Many important decisions are made in the between-session councils, composed almost entirely of General Conference, division, and union administrators. However, even if we only made pronouncements in God’s name when in quinquennial session, the concept is problematic: we still have the equivalent of a pope—one that can be infallible every five years.

Why Churches Need to Engage the Political World

When the church engages in politics, it runs serious risks. But when it doesn't engage, it is doomed to fail in its mission.

BY DAVID NEFF

BEGINNING IN THE LATE FOURTH CENTURY, some church leaders claimed superiority to the governing authorities. Some bishops amassed political power and tried to bully rulers into submission. In 390 CE, the Christian emperor Theodosius overreacted to the assassination of one of his governors. He ordered a massacre of the inhabitants of Thessalonica. Bishop Ambrose of Milan responded by asserting the church's moral authority over the state. He forced Theodosius to perform seven months of public penance. Ambrose relished his new power and strong-armed the emperor into persecuting non-Christians.

This was the beginning of a long history of ecclesiastical power plays, which culminated in the severe anticlericalism of the French Revolution. Because the Catholic leadership had been so enmeshed with France's political elite, the revolution deprived the once-powerful church of its extensive lands, its power to exact tithes, and many of the clergy's freedoms and privileges. More than 1,000 clergy who resisted were executed, while others were deported or forced to marry and become employees of the state.

Something similar developed in Mexico, where the church's imperialism was hard to distinguish from Spanish colonial expansion. After Mexican independence, anticlerical measures were written into a succession of constitutions. In one such charter, clergy were denied the right to vote and even to comment on public affairs.

The lesson: a close alignment of church interests with those of the political leaders has ended in popular suspicion and even hatred of the clergy, as well as in popular revolts that cripple the church. The theology that undergirded church abuses emboldened church leaders to follow their most worldly instincts.

Retreat from Relevance

There must be another approach, thought the German reformer Martin Luther. In his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, Luther taught that the state and the church were both God-ordained and equal. Each had its own, distinct sphere of divine responsibility; one nurtured the people spiritually, while the other preserved order and protected the people from chaos.

This was an important correction to the medieval Catholic doctrine of the Two Swords: the spiritual sword wielded by the pope, and the secular sword, which the pope *delegated* to secular rulers. Both swords belonged ultimately to the church, and thus magistrates often enforced the church's wishes, including punishing Protestants.

Unfortunately, Luther's much-needed corrective bred a bad habit: clergy became so focused on spiritual matters that they ignored their responsibility to speak out when secular leaders strayed. Thus, as Hitler in the 1930s began to consolidate power and to eliminate Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and others he deemed undesirable, the church had no practiced ability to protest the state's racist policies. A church that practices silence is easily co-opted.

There were exceptions, of course. But the Holocaust happened with little protest from Germany's nominally Lutheran population.

So whether the church engages politically or whether it abstains for spiritual reasons, it can seriously betray the gospel. But, of course, there is another way.

A Better Way

That other way knows that the dignity of every human person is an integral part of the gospel. It sees that human flourishing is God's ultimate aim. That other way does not aim to possess power; it aims at service.

It does not aim to protect the church's interests. It does not even aim at preserving the church from hostile forces—as if the gates of hell could prevail against it. It aims instead to serve and to ensure that everyone in society flourishes.

It was Pope Leo XIII who developed this alternative political vision in his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (Of Revolutionary Things). The document came at a critical time for the church. It dealt with “the conditions of labor” and developed the notion that the proper role of government is to foster the common good.

Leo XIII was forced to reconceive the church's approach to politics. By Leo's time, the church had lost its extensive land holdings and its political clout. Leo could no longer think of himself as a prince, so he became a teacher and began to address the surging socialism and communism of his time. These competitors for human souls promised hope to the urban poor and the powerless working class. But Leo saw the emptiness of those promises and offered an alternative vision that empowered and ennobled workers while adhering to traditional teachings about private property.

Leo advanced the revolutionary notion that hard-working people should be paid enough to provide for their families. He also argued that they should be able to bargain with management for better pay and working conditions. Leo's argument paid off in increased loyalty of the working poor to the church.

Here Adventists would do well to pay close attention to the Sabbath commandment, which is probably the earliest labor law. God addresses the commandment to management—to those who control the work of others and the means of production. God does not tell just managers to take a break. He tells them to give their workers and

beasts of burden the Sabbath off, as well. Even the “stranger within thy gates” (the migrant worker, who is most vulnerable to overwork) benefits from the weekly respite.

The Sabbath, properly understood, is a school for common-good thinking. God's plan for human flourishing is not just about you. The Ten Commandments are not a self-help book. His Sabbath blessing is for everyone, and that makes it revolutionary.

Schools for the Common Good

Because they mix social classes and (to a lesser extent) ethnic groups, churches are schools for cultivating a common-good vision. But as fewer people attend church, that vision grows dim.

In a recent article for *The Atlantic*, Peter Beinart reported on the social and political effects of declining church attendance.¹ Conservative evangelicals who don't regularly attend church are “more hostile to African Americans, Latinos, and Muslims” than their church-going counterparts. Even the modest level of racial integration in America's churches “promotes cross-racial bonds.”

When I was growing up in Tucson, Arizona, Seventh-day Adventists had separate churches for Anglos, Latinos, and African Americans. But while we worshiped separately, we went to school together. The churches jointly sponsored a parochial school, where children experienced a three-way ethnic mix every day. Forming friendships with African Americans and Latinos on the playground and in the classroom made me more likely to think about the common good—what was best for them and their families in addition to what would benefit me and my kind. I deeply appreciate this gift from my church.

“When cultural conservatives disengage from organized religion,” Beinart says,

“they tend to ... [de-emphasize] morality and religion and [emphasize] race and nation.” On the other hand, Beinart reports, “the most-committed members of a church are more likely than those who are casually involved to let its message of universal love erode their prejudices.”

The Gospels show us Jesus' politics of love in first-century Judea under Roman occupation. But what does universal love look like when Jesus-followers are scattered around the globe? An early Christian letter spells it out for us. Here is a brief excerpt from the Epistle to Diognetus, written sometime between 130 and 200:

“Christians are not distinguished from other people by country, or language, or the customs which they observe. They neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life marked out by any singularity. ... But ... following the native customs

Politics is not just about elections and passing laws; it's about culture, the ways we are trained to habitually think, act, and react.

in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. ... They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all people.”

This early Christian writer was articulating a philosophy for how Christians are to dwell in this world: nationality, race, and ethnicity are all subordinate to the universal family of the church. Laws are made not only to be obeyed, but surpassed. As citizens, they share in all responsibilities with others. They seek the common good, but they live as sojourners, knowing the impermanence of this world's alignments and power structures.

Practical Steps

Here are some practical thoughts about Christian civic engagement:

First, the church should broaden its members' horizons. Almost all churches engage in some forms of social service.

God's plan for human flourishing is not just about you. His Sabbath blessing is for everyone, and that makes it revolutionary.

Diversify that outreach so that church members encounter the faces of human need in all of their variety. Common-good thinking connects people with their neighbors, working both with them and for their betterment. If members know their neighbors' faces and aspirations, they have a wonderful starting point for common action.

Get your church engaged in international witness and service. Expose church members on a regular basis to actual human beings in South Sudan or South Africa or South Korea—wherever your outreach is. Send volunteers, especially young people, to such places. Help them feel the strength of their relationship to kindred Christians across borders. Positive exposure to people who are different from them will humanize them, and when it comes time to discuss issues that impact others like them, the issues will have names and faces.

Second, keep your notion of politics as broad as possible. Politics is not just about elections and passing laws; it's about culture, the ways we are trained to habitually think, act, and react. Thus, when I drafted guidelines for the National Association of Evangelicals office of public affairs, we used the term "civic engagement" rather than "politics" in order to keep our political goals broad.

The church can help create those habits of thinking, acting, and reacting. It can either create a culture of isolation (which has, unfortunately, happened too often among Adventists) or it can create a culture of engagement. It can foster a can-do, problem-solving attitude that will build bridges. New York pastor Tim Keller likes to speak of creating a "counterculture for the common good." That means holding onto your distinctive beliefs and practices while working for the good of others.

Third, apply common-good thinking to the political issues of the day. When Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum* in the 1890s, conflicts between capital and labor were roiling most industrialized countries. When I was a child in the 1950s, labor conflicts had again come to the fore. In between and afterward came cycles of debate over women's rights and the impact of immigration, conflicts over natural resources, and race relations. The Bible speaks to the importance of each of these, but it doesn't specify how to solve problems in a postmodern, technological age. Pastors must acquaint themselves with the issues but must also avoid the temptation to pose as experts. Don't tell people what to think; guide them in how to think. Recognize complexity and urge comity with those who disagree. Complexity requires wisdom—a rare commodity in politics—in order to find solutions that respect the human dignity of all.


The Civil Rights Movement is an important case study. The African-American church built credibility and

provided staying power for the civil rights activists. White Christians weren't always happy to be confronted by the realities of racial segregation, but because Martin Luther King, Jr., Fred Shuttlesworth, and other leaders framed it as a matter of faith, more whites considered the message than would have responded to a purely secular appeal.

People of faith need to process contemporary challenges in a biblical, faith-filled manner. If they read their Bibles well, they know that no issue is exclusively secular. As Methodist pastor Keith Ray recently tweeted, "Religion and politics will always be connected so long as political decisions impact persons made in the image of God."

Fourth, speak the truth to power, as did Jeremiah, Nathan, and Hosea. But feel just enough reluctance to be sure of what you're called to say.

Congregations don't need a steady diet of criticism aimed at government or business elites. But there usually comes a time when a critical word is the one thing needful. It was essential in the mid-19th century, when the churches squared off against the defenders of race-based chattel slavery. It was likewise essential in the 1930s in Germany, where the quasi-religion of racial purity was incompatible with the gospel, but the church was too slow to correct it.

Nathan Baxter, former dean of the Washington National Cathedral, remarked, "I used to say the Canterbury pulpit [at the National Cathedral] was a bully pulpit, but not a pulpit to bully people." Every pulpit can be more influential than it is, but precisely because we never know our own influence, Baxter is right to refrain from bullying his hearers. "God loves all people," Baxter says, "even those who disagree with us." So speak truth to power, but also speak the truth in love. 

¹ Peter Beinart, "Breaking Faith," *The Atlantic*, April 2017.

A black and white photograph of a person from the chest up, wearing a dark jacket over a dark shirt. They are holding a small, white, spiral-bound notepad in their right hand. On the notepad is a hand-drawn transgender symbol, which is a circle with a cross at the bottom, a horizontal line at the right, and an arrow at the top-left. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor setting with other people and structures.

A TALE *of* TWO BRIEFS

How current Adventist legal strategy fails the Good Samaritan test

BY KEISHA E. MCKENZIE

THE STORY OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN (LUKE 10:25-37) IS ONE of the easiest to tell children and one of the first Bible stories I learned. A three-act tale in the tradition of Goldilocks and The Three Little Pigs, it is part of a series of ancient Hebrew stories about “Levites, priests, and Israelites.” It taught the nation of Israel what it could be at its best: compassionate to foreigners abroad, strangers in the community, and neighbors at home.

When Jesus retold this story, early in the first century of the Christian era, he wasn’t inventing a new rule about kindness. His norms were as ancient as the story itself. But he did introduce a new character where the traditional story featured an Israelite. The prime example of neighborliness was a Samaritan who shows mercy to a wounded Jew, and Jesus ended his tale with the instruction to “go and do likewise.”

What If “the Enemy” Is Our Neighbor?

As commentators write in the *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, “The issue [in this story] is not ‘who is my neighbor,’ but ‘can we recognize that the enemy might be our neighbor, and can we accept this disruption of our stereotypes?’”¹

In recent Friend of the Court letters to the United States Supreme Court, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) seems to be answering that question with a “no.” No, we can’t recognize our neighbor among those of whom

we disapprove, and no, we won’t absorb any challenges to our customary treatment of them.

Part of our denomination’s custom at this time is a rejection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in the name of God and fidelity to faith. Our church’s lawyers are doing their best to make sure the denomination has the legal freedom to keep that rejection solidly in place and to act it out.

Since 2012, the General Conference’s position statements on sexuality and gender have explicitly taught that members should treat with “compassion” people of whom they disapprove—or believe God disapproves.² At the same time, the denomination has not reconciled that theology with regulations that exclude those people from employment or advancement or that marginalize them once hired, limit pastors’ ability to minister effectively to them, or deny them medically necessary treatment and social support.

Letting the Neighbor Bleed

In cases that address how our denomination’s institutions interact with members, employees, corporations, and people made “Others” in public life,³ the denomination’s *amici curiae* briefs are part of an effort to protect the church organization from “strangers” and “neighbors” rather than to empower church members to assertively and proactively care for them.⁴

From promoting Proposition 8 (2008) and lobbying against civil marriage equality in Maryland (2012) to making public statements on transgender people (2017), the denomination's non-accepting baseline means that the General Conference's lawyers, lobbyists, and school presidents have been looking to the electorate, to Congress, and to the judiciary for permission to opt out of honoring Others' civil rights. Each ruling that exempts us from parts of the Civil Rights Act or federal agency nondiscrimination guidelines licenses us to discriminate. And when it comes to, gender and sexuality, these exemptions allow us to differentiate LGBTQ students, employees, and patients from cisgender⁵ and heterosexual ones in the name of religious freedom.

The Adventist Gavin Grimm Brief

Gloucester County School Board v. G.G. is a recent example. Gavin Grimm's public school board denied him the ability to use the same restrooms as other boys because he is transgender. Gavin challenged the school board on the basis of Title IX of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the part of the law that prohibits sex discrimination, and the case advanced all the way up to the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS).

SCOTUS was scheduled to hear this case in March, and interest groups including the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists submitted briefs to the Court to highlight the aspects of the case that meant most to them. The General Conference's brief, which was co-written with lawyers from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, focused on this question: "Should this Court reduce social conflict concerning religious liberty and transgender rights by allowing Congress and state legislatures to balance competing interests in the first instance?"⁶

Rather than asking the question "Who is my neighbor?" and answering it as Jesus did, our denomination's legal team has assumed that "religious liberty" and our neighbors' well-being are "competing interests." In *Gloucester v. G.G.*, our church specifically assumes that the right of transgender people to live without discrimination in public life and public-serving institutions is at odds with the denomination's moral integrity and legal freedoms. The legislature, our church argues, should resolve that strain.

Passing By on the Other Side

If this argument were a general rule, social majorities and minoritized groups such as transgender people would not be able to secure their civil liberties without an enlightened legislature. And if that rule were applied to other civil rights struggles, an enlightened

legislature would also have had to precede *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1952 case that prompted the dismantling of race-segregated schooling.

In reality, however, Congress took more than 12 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* to write and pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That year, while a majority of the U.S. public approved of the legislation, fewer than one in five people thought it should be "vigorously enforced."⁷ This ambivalence was shared by lawmakers and ordinary people—most of them Christians—alike.

During the same time period, Seventh-day Adventists who held the story of the Good Samaritan as sacred had no more advanced an ethic of care than did the general public. It was 1965 before the General Conference recommended (but did not require) desegregation for Adventist churches, schools, and hospitals in America.⁸

Why We're Like This

Historian Samuel G. London has outlined several doctrinal and philosophical influences behind the denomination's reluctance to go the extra legal mile for civil rights in the 19th and 20th centuries. Factors have included Adventists' premillennialism, apocalypticism, sectarianism, theological fundamentalism, and suspicion of both state power and the so-called Social Gospel. Also in play is the influence of leading Adventist theologians and writers who have viewed "challenging injustice on the terrestrial plane" as a job for God, not us, and very much secondary to "evangelism."⁹

Even *Adventist Today* co-founder Raymond Cottrell once held strong opinions on this topic. London quotes Cottrell in 1963 and 1965 arguing that churches acting for civic justice were diverging from Jesus' "Go ye therefore" commission, "taking up a work God never gave [them] to do," and "prostituting their moral authority."¹⁰

Somehow, while living through Jim Crow's death spasms, Cottrell couldn't see that one reason our church's good news is in fact *good* is that it includes the gospel that Babylon's abusive, oppressive, domination system is fallen—that all people can and should be liberated from unjust laws. He failed to recognize that, as disciples of Christ, we have an obligation to assist when our neighbors are wounded rather than to protect our interests and pass by on the other side.¹¹

Cottrell's "hands off" perspective is still popular in some segments of the Adventist community today, particularly for questions of racial or gender equity. Advocating for equity is seen as agitation, and framing equity as a moral issue on its own terms—rather than just an obstacle to credibility in evangelism—is considered liberal.

Across the history of God's people, writes Walter Brueggemann, "commodity desire," which drives economies and institutions, "has, for the most part, crowded out the covenantal tradition," which invites us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We're compelled to create and then protect commodities, brands, and the bureaucracies that manage them; that's what "crowds out" the virtues of covenantal relating, which values people as agents made in the image of God—not as objects, inconveniences, or competing legal interests. According to Brueggemann, systems of coercion such as those Israel escaped in its exodus from Egypt "will turn one's neighbor into a competitor and a threat and a challenge."¹²

That system is part of the background noise for the amicus brief in the Gavin Grimm case, filed jointly by the General Conference and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty.

An Alternative Approach

The book of James calls us to stay "uncontaminated" by the world, not by isolating from society but by reaching out to those who are made vulnerable in it. True religion invites us to be totally and faithfully engaged with all that means life and all that makes good tangible for real people.¹³ Inspired by Christ, we should be first in line to care for and serve Others, not seeking the government's permission to discriminate against them for the sake of our "religious freedom."

As the GC co-developed its brief with the Becket Fund, I watched a different religious argument take shape. Like the GC-Becket submission, this other brief represented Christians and other people of faith, but it wasn't about self-preservation. I may have been the only Adventist of more than 1,800 signatories¹⁴ to assent to it. (My organization's executive director is listed in the final submission.)

It reads, in part, that "The starting point for any discussion of the treatment of transgender persons—as a matter of religious doctrine or civil rights law—must be the fundamental dignity that such persons share with all other members of the human family."¹⁵


The communities and people of faith represented by this legal brief acknowledge, include, and accept transgender people in both religious and civic life, and we urge the equal, respectful, and non-stigmatizing legal treatment of all people *because of* our morality, not *despite* it.

"It is no longer possible, if it ever were, for anyone to claim that a rejection of dignity, equality—and, indeed, recognition of the basic *existence*—of transgender people represents the unified view and voice of American religion. ... Requiring equal

treatment for transgender students like Gavin will not harm the religious liberty fundamental to this nation's founding identity, but will merely affirm his and other such students' fundamental dignity."¹⁶

Fresh Forms of Faithfulness

In *The Prophetic Imagination*, Brueggemann states: "It is the task of the alternative prophetic community to present an alternative consciousness that can energize the community to fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality."¹⁷

In our time, "fresh forms of faithfulness" could look like Seventh-day Adventists acting in favor of the lives, liberty, and well-being of those God loves, as the Samaritan did—even if that means doing so at our own expense. And it could look like us returning to the simple stories of Jesus, allowing their ethics to grow us into better neighbors than we can imagine—better than those who've watched us pass them by for decades would ever dare to hope. 

¹ Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds., "Luke 10," *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, New Revised Standard Version Bible translation (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 122-124.

² Edwin Manuel Garcia, "Church's View on Gays, Lesbians Adjusted to Emphasize 'Compassion,'" Adventist News Network website, Oct. 17, 2012. See also Adventist Review/ANN Staff, "Top Adventist Health Leader Calls for Compassion, Regardless of Cause," Adventist News Network website, March 20, 2014.

³ Mitchell Tyner, "GC Litigation Efforts: Two Current Examples," *Spectrum Magazine*, May 1, 2017.

⁴ Zack Ford, "Conservatives Try to Convince Supreme Court to Embrace Transphobia," ThinkProgress website, Jan. 13, 2017.

⁵ See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cisgender>

⁶ *Gloucester County School Board v. G.G.*, Brief *Amici Curiae* of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty in Support of Petitioner, SCOTUSblog.com website, Jan. 10, 2017.

⁷ Andrew Kohut, "50 Years Ago: Mixed Views about Civil Rights but Support for Selma Demonstrators," Pew Research Center website, Fact Tank, March 5, 2015.

⁸ Samuel G. London, Jr., *Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), pp. 83-84; 67-70.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

¹² *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹³ Keisha McKenzie, "Practicing Faith Responsibly," blog post at mackenzian.com, Oct. 13, 2016.

¹⁴ "Nearly 2000 Clergy, Faith Leaders Sign Amicus Brief in Support of Transgender Protections," Religion News Service website, March 2, 2017.

¹⁵ *Gloucester County School Board v. G.G.*, Brief for *Amici Curiae* of Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church and President of the House of Deputies of the Episcopal Church, et al., March 2, 2017, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 22, 35.

¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 59.

PRESUPPOSITIONS *of Freedom in* ADVENTIST THOUGHT

By Smuts van Rooyen

Last year, at my request, my wife gave me one of those DNA ancestry kits for my birthday. I wanted to know what nationalities and ethnic groups make up my family tree. When the kit came, I expectorated (that's spat) into a little glass tube and sent the contents to the company's lab. After several weeks, I finally got the results and was surprised to find that the biggest slice of my genetic pie was Scandinavian, not Dutch. Van Rooyen is a good Dutch surname, but according to the test, I am not fundamentally a *kaaskop*, or "cheesehead," from Holland. In addition, I was pleased to note a nice chunk of Jewish DNA. However, the most surprising discovery was that I am of Khoisan descent, as well. These hunter-gatherers are the true children of Africa—very spiritual, and great storytellers who thrive in the Kalahari. Maybe that is why I like stories. All of it made me proud. It's a good thing to know your entire genetic makeup.

My present concern is to map out, or sequence, our Adventist theological DNA a little more completely. We all know that Adventists have good law-and-order genes. We are excellent at administration and are protective of the church. I get that. But do we also have freedom genes? I sometimes don't see that. Yet both law and freedom are crucial for denominational health. So then, I ask, do we have deeply held beliefs that support freedom?

Climate of Intolerance

The American church historian Roland Bainton has shown, by means of an extreme but useful event, what can happen when leaders forget their theology of freedom. He does so by referencing the execution of a religious dissident by John Calvin. The reformer clearly believed in freedom, because he had claimed it for himself when opposing Rome and when asserting his right to interpret the Scriptures for himself. Yet he denied freedom to the anti-Trinitarian heretic Michael Servetus and burned him at the stake. A monument to Servetus stands in Geneva, Switzerland, to mark this atrocity. Calvin seemed to be suffering from a severe case of what I call "freedom amnesia."

What induced such amnesia in a good man? What were Calvin's priorities and beliefs, his presuppositions of nonfreedom? To begin, he held that the church is a theocratic institution—God's voice—and therefore must be obeyed. Moreover, he insisted that God has a plan for this world and that any impediment threatening its success must not be tolerated. He also believed that God's divine glory must be vindicated by eliminating whatever offends it. Finally, Calvin proposed that it is merciful to bring a sinner to repentance by burning him at the stake for half an hour, since that might spare him an eternity in the flames of hell.¹

Obviously there is no moral equivalency between Adventism now and Calvin then. However, I am concerned about the climate of authoritarianism and intolerance that the General Conference seems to have created within the church of late. When the General Conference cracks down on entire union conferences with threats of discipline, when it refuses women ordination, when it seeks to monitor the thinking of its university professors with loyalty pledges, when it puts pressure on the gay community, when it does not respect the moral conscience of vast numbers of its members, then it is necessary to challenge church leadership by asking: "Aren't you forgetting that freedom is for Adventists? Don't you see that freedom is in our hearts, our marrow, our genes, our all?"

Promoting the Spirit of Freedom

By freedom I mean the right to be ourselves, to think our own thoughts, and to act according to our own convictions. I mean a tolerance of serious dissent, whether on policy or doctrine. I mean granting the devil a right to question, even when he is wrong. Above all, I mean the freedom to choose God's love. From this, it should be clear that I am not here addressing the religious liberty that flows from the state to the church, but the liberty that flows from the denomination to its own membership, and from Adventist believer to Adventist believer.

What do we hold that makes us free? Perhaps the happiest place to begin a discussion is with the Adventist view of the Nature of Humanity (Fundamental Belief No. 7). This beautiful belief expresses a staggeringly high conception of humanity, namely, that both men and women were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; Psa. 8:4-6). The image of God, it adds, consists in “individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do.” That is, by being our true selves, by using our brains, and by giving full expression to our potential through action, we are like God. We dare not forget this.

Yes, it is true that humanity is fallen like a great chandelier from a high ceiling, broken in sin, and scattered into a hundred inconsistencies (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 5:12-17). But even on the stone floor, it acts as a prism to spread the colors of the sunlight and is still very beautiful. Incredibly, God seeks to fully restore his image in us again, to put us back together with all of our freedom and with all of our powers (2 Cor. 5:14-19). This is emphatically an up-with-people belief, a let-us-empower-potential doctrine, a let-my-people-go assertion that needs a prominent place at the committee table. What happens to the mission of our church if we forget this?

This is not to say that the church has no right to protect itself by meting out discipline in extreme circumstances (Matt. 18:15-17; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). Of course it does. However, self-protection is not the fundamental mission of the church. We do not exist for the sake of protecting ourselves. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are way more important to citizens than a local police force. Security without freedom just does not make sense.

If we had started at the very beginning of our statement of fundamental Adventist beliefs, we would have seen another startling liberty presupposition embedded in its preamble. After asserting that the Bible is our only creed and that through it the church gives expression to its beliefs, the preamble states that we may *expect* to revise these beliefs when the Spirit leads us to a fuller understanding of the Scriptures.

How, then, does this promote the spirit of freedom? To begin, it recognizes our doctrines as constructs of the church and, therefore, open to questioning, improvement, development, and change. It implies that the formation of our doctrines involved humanity. Our doctrines did not plop onto our laps from heaven. Each belief was hammered out by groups of sometimes-argumentative people in prayer, study, discussion, and controversy. Our humanity intruded even as God led. As a result, we regard our beliefs as sufficiently true but not as perfectly true. Adventists, therefore, expect to revise their beliefs. This is a magnificent freedom and an awesome responsibility.

Our past gives witness to doctrines that have necessitated outright change. The issue at stake in the preamble is not merely

a matter of further development of truth, but also of outright change from one view to another. Sometimes we just barked up the wrong tree. For example, our forebears erroneously predicted an exact date for the second coming, were anti-Trinitarian, and even denied the divinity of Christ. In fact, Ellen White, whom our denomination sees as possessing the prophetic gift, exercised her calling for two years while keeping Sunday as the Sabbath. That’s a difficult pill for a sabbatarian to swallow. How could a prophet be so wrong? Adventists know by hard experience what it means to interpret the Scriptures incorrectly, and we therefore maintain that we probably will revise our beliefs in the future. We *expect* to do so! Isn’t grace amazing?

As an aside, I want to add that although Adventists hold to the Bible as the supreme, authoritative, and infallible revelation of God’s will (Fundamental Belief No. 1), we do not see the Bible as easy to understand. The Bible is complicated. Issues such as the old and new covenants, the nature of Christ, predestination, prophecy, eternal hellfire, and Jesus going to the nether world to preach to the spirits in prison, to name but a few, are frustrating topics and hard to resolve on the face of the evidence. On many fronts we find the will of God enshrouded in thick darkness and, when on such ground, need to walk tentatively with little ballet slippers and not with rubber gumboots.

Furthermore, if we grant the fact that the Bible can be complicated, then the church may not go hunting in theological twilight. Shooting in uncertain light may involve shooting our own. Where there is a reasonable doubt in regard to a doctrine (such as the investigative judgment), we should not mete out discipline, lest we mistakenly again crucify Christ between two thieves.

An Example of Action

All of which brings me to Christ, who is the desire of the Adventist heart. His life, actions, and teachings reveal who God is (Fundamental Belief No. 4) and are our ultimate source of freedom. The Savior’s personal mission statement committed him to making us free, to restoring our potential:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19, NIV).

We have only to remember how he healed the man born blind from birth to see how he fulfilled his mission. Not only did this beggar see, but he was given the gumption to stand his ground before the authorities. What a transformation of a sidewalk-slumping beggar, tapping his cup for attention, to a cheeky,

assertive, sighted witness for the Lord! He saw more than trees; above all, he saw himself in a positive new light (John 9). In healing after healing, Jesus enables the helpless to be themselves, to stand in the fullness of their God-given humanity. Christ does far more than provide freedom as an abstract option, in a vacuum as it were; he empowers inherent potential and brings freedom to fruition in action.

Both his healing and his teaching seem to breathe and to expand with freedom. As an example, we recall the parable of the rebellious son whose father let him leave home for a far country, in search of his distorted dreams. How moving it is to see the young man, exhausted and beaten, coming to his senses and choosing to return home (Luke 15:11-31). The Savior's words

OUR SAVIOR'S ENTIRE LIFE WAS COMMITTED TO GIVING PEOPLE THEIR SPACE, TO EMPOWERING THEIR POTENTIAL, TO RESTORING THEIR INDIVIDUALITY, TO HELPING THEM THINK FOR THEMSELVES, AND TO ENCOURAGING THEM TO ACT CREATIVELY.

are exhilarating. He says, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36, NIV) and "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32, NIV). Beautiful words, wonderful words—wonderful words of life, are they.

Christ's life exemplified giving people their space. We smile when we see two feisty sisters, Mary and Martha, taking the Lord to task for being negligent and for not showing up at their brother's funeral on time. They each have the same bee in their bonnets, and they let him know about it by turn. Yet Jesus is not offended; rather, he takes their criticisms of him in stride (John 11). Our Savior's entire life was committed to giving people their space, to empowering their potential, to restoring their individuality, to helping them think for themselves, and to encouraging them to act creatively.

Of course, the greatest argument for human freedom an Adventist can make lies in the crucifixion of our Lord. There he gave men the latitude to take his life—and also perhaps to see their own depravity in the way they were mistreating him—and then to change. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela all learned this from Jesus. He could have called ten thousand angels to destroy his adversaries, but did not do so.


His way was that of passive resistance, which is pregnant with human choice for oppressors. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter without verbal protest, but not without communication. At least one Roman centurion took it all in and declared, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39, NIV). We can say of Calvary: Never was freedom so greatly abused. Never was freedom so greatly honored. The cross addresses freedom amnesia.

Moving Forward

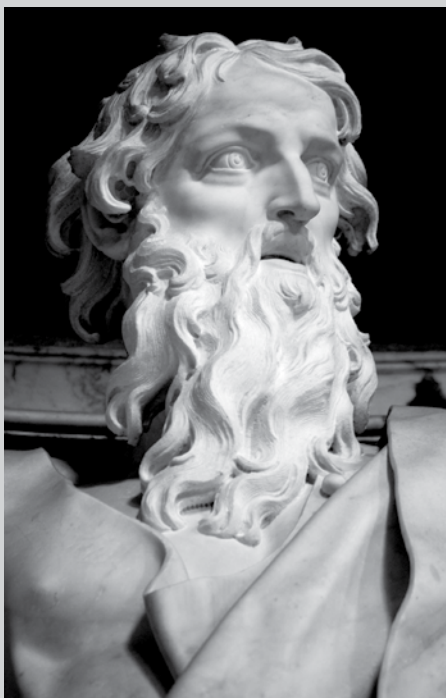
Having seen that by both creation and redemption we are gloriously set free, we next ask the question, "How can the church implement a climate of freedom for its members and still maintain unity?" This is a difficult matter, because we are an independent lot. Seventh-day Adventists hold serious differences in regard to ethics, policy, and doctrine, to say the least. Nor do we suffer from an inability to be opinionated. Thank God, we care about what we believe! But taking the risk of reductionism to the point of sin, I want to propose what seem to be two mutually exclusive actions, in answer to the above question.

The first is to build consensus where we can. We are much more alike than we imagine. In our commitments, our goals, and our humanity, we are very much the same. Much of our thinking coincides, and we need to find the points of intersection and highlight them. We really can break bread together. Such consensus-building will produce trust and unity. But, by itself, it is not enough. There is such a thing as genuine stalemate between believers who care for each other.

Therefore, the second action we need to take is to agree to disagree. This is how we recognize the inherent freedom our fellow Adventists have by right of creation and redemption. Moreover, this is how we set *ourselves* free from the unhealthy urge to dominate those with whom we disagree. Is not "agreeing to disagree" the overriding principle that emerges from the heart of the Spirit at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)? Remember how fighting factions on a divisive issue (the inclusion of the Gentiles as legitimate members of God's church) went their way with freedom to implement the will of God as they saw it. Truly, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17).

So, then, how do we move forward? In my view, we must learn to "do church" like the blind lady navigating a path through the park. She uses her white-tipped cane, exploring the pathway from side to side, from fringe to opposite fringe. She cannot see an easy middle road to stride down, but gently takes both sides of the issue into account with her tap-tapping. Her progress is a little slow, to be sure, but it is forward. 

¹ Roland H. Bainton, *Studies on the Reformation* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1980), pp. 140-146.



Paul does not teach a substitutionary atonement, but the need to die to the fallen nature so as to live in the faith of Jesus.

PAUL DID NOT TEACH RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH

BY HEROLD WEISS

Martin Luther's argument against the selling of indulgences to shorten one's stay in purgatory was a courageous and necessary attack on a grievous abuse of ecclesiastical authority. The *Ninety-Five Theses*, which Luther nailed to the church door at the university where he was a professor of Scripture, presented his argument with meticulous precision. At its core, the point was that "works" do not save Christians. This breakthrough, known as the doctrine of justification by faith, is one of the five tenets that launched the Protestant Reformation.

For Adventists, righteousness by faith has come to mean that the death of Jesus on the cross pays for the sins of every believer, who thereafter receives strength to live in conformity with the Ten Commandments, which define and condemn sin.

Misunderstanding Paul

Although the doctrine of a substitutionary atonement may be derived from other biblical authors, the letters written by the apostle Paul do not support this understanding of righteousness by faith.

Two texts are often misconstrued to make this point. Romans 5:8 (RSV) says that "God shows his love for [*eis* = toward] us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for [*hyper* = on behalf of] us." While the Revised Standard Version translates

both prepositions as "for," the Greek uses two different prepositions. The preposition *eis* usually is translated "toward," meaning that God's love is directed toward us, or aimed at us. *Hyper* means "on behalf of" and "having to do with." In other words, Christ's death had us in mind; we were its primary concern.

Galatians 2:20 (RSV) says that "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for [*hyper* = on behalf of] me." A literal translation of Paul's Greek in this text reads, "the life I now live in [the] flesh I live in [the] faith, that of the Son of God who loved me and delivered himself on my behalf."

While these two texts from Paul's writings are often used to teach a substitutionary atonement, they do not demand such an interpretation, and reading them to support this understanding of righteousness by faith is contrary to Paul's gospel.

On Our Behalf

That Christ's death was an act of love on our behalf appears in the earliest known Christian confession. Paul quotes it as the foundation on which to build his argument against those who teach that there is no future resurrection. It said, "Christ died for [*hyper*] our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he

was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Cor. 15:3-5, RSV). The confession is formulaic. “For,” in reference to our sins, is balanced by the formula “on the third day,” and both are declared to be a fulfillment of the Scriptures. The four verbs constitute two sets of contrasts in parallels: he *died*, and he *was raised*; he *was buried*, and he *appeared*. The point is that a real death and burial must precede a real resurrection.

In summary, that Christ’s death had to do with “us,” “me,” or “our sins” was the customary way of affirming that Christ’s

For Paul, faith is not a noun, but a verb. It is a serious handicap that the English language does not have a verbal form of the root word for “faith,” as it does for the root word for “belief.”

death had been not merely a Roman execution, but also an event of cosmic significance in which God was involved. It did not have to do with Roman justice but was instead “concerned with” the life humans live in the flesh under the power of sin. These texts do not show that Paul saw the death of Christ as a substitute for the death imposed on sinners by the law, but as having taken place so that sinners may live in the faith of Jesus, rather than in the flesh that is under the law.

Faith as a Verb

Paul is quite clear on the necessity for all men and women to die with Christ. The predominant Pauline teaching is not that Christians need not die, since Christ died for them, but that all must die with Christ in the creation of the flesh before they can live with Christ in the creation of the Spirit. He does not teach a substitutionary atonement, but the need to die to the fallen nature so as to live in the faith of Jesus. In this new environment, Christians live no longer under the law of Moses but, rather, free from the condemnation of the law (Rom. 6:4-8; 8:1).

To come to terms with what Paul understands by “to live in the faith of Jesus,” the first thing one should know is that for Paul, faith is not a noun, but a verb. It is a serious handicap that the English language does not have a verbal form of the root word for “faith,” as it does for the root word for “belief.”

Faith is not a belief. Faith is a way of being. In the verse quoted above, Paul contrasts life “in flesh” and “in faith.” To live in faith is to live in Christ by the power of the Spirit. For him salvation is not by faith as the adoption of a belief. Salvation is something God accomplishes for those who “live in faith,” that is, those who live faithfully in Christ. Righteousness is not a stamp placed on those who affirm a particular proposition as true, but something “attained to” (Rom. 9:30, KJV) by those who live in “a manner worthy of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27, NIV).

Paul’s central doctrine is that the death and the resurrection of Christ put an end to the world where sin and death reign because of Adam’s disobedience; they established a new creation, where life and freedom reign because of Christ’s obedience (Rom. 5:19). In the new

creation, the risen Christ is the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), of whom the first Adam was a type (Rom. 5:14). While the first Adam was created as a living being, the last Adam was made into a life-giving spirit. The new creation is a new cosmic reality, in which those who die with Christ receive new life by the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. In it, the law has lost its power to condemn. That is why those who live in Christ as new creations are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14). They live “in the faith of Jesus” rather than in “the flesh of sin.”

Intellectual Belief vs. Faithful Living

No biblical author—much less Paul—ever distinguishes between the moral and the ceremonial law. These categories are not biblical.

The gospels *do* make a distinction between the written and the oral law, the latter of which is considered to be commandments of men. The Gospel of Matthew distinguishes between the Jewish oral law (“it was/has been said”—see 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) and the oral law of Jesus (“But I say to/tell you”—see 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44—in addition to “all things that I have commanded you”—see 28:20, NKJV). Paul contrasts the law written on stone, which has only power to condemn, with the law written in the heart by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3, NKJV), which gives life and freedom to those who have become a new creation by participating in the death and the resurrection of Christ. The power of the Spirit allows the faithful to discern the will of God, what is acceptable and good and perfect (Rom. 12:2).

For Paul, the gospel is “the power of God for [eis = toward] salvation to everyone who has faith” (Rom. 1:16, RSV). The translation “to everyone who has faith” has been misunderstood; Paul actually wrote, “to all the faithful.” Faith, for Paul, is not something to be had or to be grasped intellectually. The gospel is not information to be believed but, rather, power to live faithfully. Paul says that righteousness can never be attained *from* [ek] works of law. It can only be attained *through* [dia] faith in Jesus Christ, or *from* [ek] Christ’s faith. (Both expressions are found in Galatians 2:16, WNT.)

Paul never used the expression “faith in Jesus” or attached salvation to such faith. He attached righteousness or salvation only to the faith “of Jesus,” who died on a cross giving full expression to his faith. Those who as new creations live faithfully “in the faith of Jesus” are the ones who are justified; they actualize the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). This is so because those who have been baptized, and thereby have been crucified and raised with Christ (Rom. 6:6), now live in Christ and are guided by the Spirit that made them a new creation. They are “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11), rather than dead under the law. Paul, quoting Habakkuk, said in the Greek that the righteous live *from* [ek, out of] faith (Gal. 3:11). In other words, for Paul faith is not a way of knowing but a source of life.

Living Faith

The mantra of righteousness by faith may be used to live unlovingly, or as an excuse for not living a life faithful to the gospel. True Christianity is not a theological system; it is a way of being. Christians are those who crucify themselves with Christ and participate in the faith that brought

about Christ’s resurrection and gives new life to the faithful. That Christ died “for [hyper] all” (2 Cor. 5:14) does not therefore mean that no one else needs to die. It means that his death was concerned with all, and all are welcome to die with him having the faith that Christ himself had in God when he died. Faith has to do with a manner of living and of dying. Those who die and live in the faith of Jesus manifest the righteousness of God that is revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:16).

Paul states very clearly that at the Parousia, all will appear before God’s judgment and give an account of what they have done (2 Cor. 5:10). His mission is to bring people to the obedience of faith (Rom. 15:18; 16:26) so as to stand before God. God’s judgment is definitive; therefore, Paul insists, those who live in Christ should not judge another person’s measure of faith. God is the only one with authority to judge, but God’s judgment is not an evaluation of what people believe. It is an assessment of whether or not they live in the faith of Jesus Christ (Rom. 14:4, 10).

The Body


Paul also warns his converts of the necessity to live as members of the body of Christ, where they are empowered by the Spirit (Rom. 12:3) to discern the will of God. Living in the Spirit while guided by the Spirit is living “in faith” rather than “in flesh.” Believers are empowered to “approve what is excellent,” and thus be “pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10, RSV). Their conduct is no longer determined by the conditions of life in the flesh, in which the law of Moses rules. Those who live faithfully are beyond the power of the law to condemn (Rom. 8:1) but are not beyond the judgment of God. The sins of the believers are the things they do which are “not of faith” (Rom. 14:23,


KJV). As Paul says, God’s righteousness has been revealed “apart from the law” (Rom. 3:21, NIV).

As the righteousness of God was demonstrated by the faith of the Son of God, who faced death as a human being fully trusting the power of God, so righteousness by faith has to do with the actions performed by those who live in the faith of Jesus when he faced death. It has nothing to do with the Ten Commandments and judicial declarations. Paul’s gospel is the gospel of the new creation brought about by God at the resurrection of the Son, who died by faith:

[Righteousness by faith] has nothing to do with the Ten Commandments and judicial declarations.

the gospel of the power of the Spirit, who gave life to the risen Christ and gives life to all who live in the faith of Jesus.

Paul says that those who behold the power that gave life to the glorified Lord “are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18, RSV). The evidence of the new creation is seen in the glorified life of those who live in the faith of Jesus. It is in reference to this new creation that Paul exclaims, “the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17, RSV). 



STEAL AWAY TO JESUS

Will God Keep Slaves from Heaven?

BY T. JOE WILLEY

DURING MY JUNIOR YEAR IN COLLEGE, I ENROLLED IN A TWO-credit course titled Spirit of Prophecy. The professor, who also taught German, possessed an unusual fervor for Ellen G. White.

A lightly colored black student in the class was intelligent, reform-minded, and eloquent. I had previously gotten to know Becky while taking a course called Educational Psychology, where she drained the ponds of nonsense and ignorance when some students gave their reports. In debate, her facts were clear and precise. Becky had no equal within the class for silencing adversaries with quick wit. Her comments, which were impassioned and irresistible, could also be wickedly biting.

Near the end of the semester, this professor told our class that Ellen White had seen in vision that God could not take slaves to heaven who had been kept in ignorance and degradation. Instead, he would consider them as though they had never existed. I'd never heard of such a thing, and my impression was that neither had most of the other students in the class.

Becky stood to her feet at the end of the class period and, with fury in her voice, pointedly told the professor: "By God's grace, you have kindled a fire. It will never go out!" She said that she saw Ellen White's statement about slaves not going to heaven as self-righteous, invective, and bordering on racial prejudice. Becky flatly rejected any notion of "colored people denied salvation allegedly coming from a compassionate God, because of no fault of their own." I remember parts of her speech well.

I began to feel bad that, as a white class member, I'd let the statement roll by without even thinking of protest. I sensed that I was chained to my own world of ignorance.

After class, outside the classroom, Becky told me about her family's slave history. A great-aunt had served a plantation

owner's family for many years and, though she could not read or write, must have practiced a simple belief in a higher moral authority, because the family honored her with a gold cross and chain to wear around her neck. Becky also told about a great-grandfather who was a slave in Mississippi, chained naked in a barn. All he was allowed to do was reproduce with the female slaves on the plantation, because he was a large and powerful man. Eventually the overseer, claiming that the slave had lost his mind, took the man out to the slave graveyard and shot him. Becky emphasized that he was a human being, not his master's brute beast.

During the next class period, our professor tried to defend Sister White's 1858 statement in the context of slavery, but the more he dug into his explanation, the worse it got. On this account, inflamed anger hung over the class the rest of the semester.

At our class reunion 25 years after we graduated from college, I saw Becky with her two daughters, and she explained that she was no longer an Adventist. We recounted our experience in the Spirit of Prophecy class, and I told her that someday I would research the origin of the vision and try to determine its context. Here is what I've found, beginning at ground level with the investigative judgment.

The Investigative Judgment

Elon Everts, a farmer living in Illinois who was an acquaintance of James and Ellen White, wrote an unusual letter to the *Review and Herald*. His letter, published Jan. 1, 1857, outlined first impressions of the heavenly investigative judgment—which is now the only totally unique doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is the relevant part of the letter:¹

“Dear Brethren: I am passing through a solemn train of thought. The question with me is, Where are we? I answer, More than twelve years past the proclamation ‘The hour of his Judgment is come.’ Rev. xiv, 6,7. . . . My dear Brethren, from the scripture referred to I solemnly believe that the judgment has been going on in the Heavenly Sanctuary since 1844, and that upon the righteous dead, from ‘righteous Abel’ down through patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and all the saints who have fallen asleep in Jesus, judgment has been passing. How solemn the thought, that perhaps, our companions, our children, brother or sister, has been passing the great momentous review that will entitle them to a glorious immortal body at the coming of Christ.”²

Not long before Everts wrote this letter, he had taken James and Ellen White by sleigh from Round Grove, Illinois, to Waukon, Iowa. Snowdrifts blocked their journey for a week. As they traveled together, their conversation centered on the Laodicean message. After returning to Battle Creek in the latter part of January, James White took up the subject and enlarged the concepts of “the Judgment.”³ Little did the Adventist pioneers know that the foundations of salvation had shifted beneath their feet!⁴

Why Slaves Will Not Be in Heaven

To show how the investigative judgment has practical application, Ellen White included a short chapter titled “The Sins of Babylon” in her first rendering of *The Great Controversy*, written in 1858 as *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1. Two of the five paragraphs contain her views regarding slavery. Although she was not an activist in the anti-slavery movement, the first paragraph is a vociferous attack against slaveholding.⁵ Then, in the last paragraph of the chapter, Ellen White writes that God planned to deny salvation to a class of slaves by treating them as a nonentity in the judgment. Ellen White described certain slaves who were not pious as reduced to the lowest depths of degradation and placed on a level with the brute beasts. Slaveholders were to bear full responsibility for the wicked treatment of those unfortunate souls.

“I saw that the slave-master would have to answer for the soul of his slave whom he has kept in ignorance; and all the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master. *God cannot take the slave to heaven, who has been kept in ignorance and degradation*, knowing nothing of God, or the Bible, fearing nothing but his master’s lash, and not holding so elevated a position as his master’s brute beasts. But he does the best thing for him that a compassionate God can do. He lets him be as though he had not been; while the master has to suffer the seven last plagues, and then come up in the second resurrection, and suffer the second, most awful death. Then the wrath of God will be appeased” (emphasis added).⁶

First, we must ask about the depth of Mrs. White’s knowledge of the religious life of the slaves in the South. Second, we must acknowledge the obvious flaw in her logic (“a compassionate

God” who provides no saving alternative) as well as the racism underlying the paragraph (reference to “brute beasts”).

We do not know if Ellen White had any direct contact with free blacks in the North or with the slave environment of the South. It is likely Ellen White was exposed to the formality of slavery primarily through newspapers, anti-slavery pamphlets, and religious magazines.⁷

I need to emphasize that Ellen White did not establish herself as an orator or expository writer in the abolition movement. She only glanced in and back out again on the subject of slavery. Prior to the Civil War, Adventists did not campaign for abolition through political parties or anti-slavery associations. By contrast, abolitionists endorsed immediate emancipation and equality, demonstrated a willingness to devote time to expressing that doctrine publicly, and were committed to the creation of a society in which blacks would have civil equality with whites.⁸

Ellen White expressed her views against slavery—but not as an abolitionist, which is contrary to claims made by Adventist apologists such as George Knight and Roy Branson.⁹ By the 1890s, when she wrote about church work in the South, slaves had already been emancipated and abolition was irrelevant. In *Testimonies for the Church*, Ellen White never agreed to racial equality.¹⁰

It appears that the contextual basis for declaring that spiritually ignorant slaves would not be in heaven was influenced by an anti-slavery pamphlet published 21 years earlier.¹¹ Its author was Charles Fitch, who studied at Brown University before joining the Millerite movement, then served as the pastor of the First Free Congregational Church in Boston. He died on Monday, Oct. 14, 1844, a few days before the Great Disappointment.¹² In this pamphlet he wrote: “But the poor slave is prevented from learning the way of salvation while he lives, and then worn out with toil, he dies and is lost forever.”¹³

A History of Slave Religion

Making sense of the various religious traditions practiced in the New World was not always easy for the Africans who arrived here on slave ships during the 17th and 18th centuries. In some cases they were able to find a common thread—such as belief in a supreme Creator, to whom they prayed and made sacrifices—that linked the worship practices of their homeland with the Christian religions so prevalent in North America. But they found many Christian beliefs, especially that of a three-person Godhead who was said to come together more or less as a single entity, to be unintelligible from their religious point of view. It was easier to accept the notion of an afterlife, where the good prosper and where evil individuals suffer. Already relevant in many African religions were concepts of wickedness and of sin as wrongdoing deserving divine anger and punishment.

From the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, the possibility of kidnapped Africans converting to Christianity was used as justification for their enslavement—since blacks left in Africa would almost certainly, in those days, die as pagans. Those who dealt in the slave trade assuaged any pangs of guilt over the cruelty inherent in enslaving human beings by emphasizing the prospect of faith, baptisms, and conversions within slave populations.

The oft-painted portrait of an idealized relationship between Christian master and slave contributed to the Southern myth of compassionate slaveholders presiding kindly over their “happy black slaves.” In reality, such benevolence was realized no more frequently than most religious ideals.

Persecution and Conversion

The process and rate by which black slaves converted to Christianity remains unclear. We do know, however, that when a black revolutionary named Nat Turner claimed authority from the Bible in leading a revolt against slavery on Aug. 21, 1831, “a great burst of proselytizing [occurred] among the slaves.”¹⁴ The racially charged atmosphere following Nat Turner’s rebellion confirmed the fear among slaveholders that religion was not a good thing.

Before long, however, that initial fear was overshadowed by an even more ominous threat: what slaves who were *without religion* might attempt. Consequently, the Southern plantation owners began to promote Christianity primarily as a means of social control. As slaveholders became more religious themselves, they increasingly paid white preachers to provide blacks with oral instruction in the Christian faith and to conduct weekly services. Some even encouraged campaigns to promote more humane treatment of slaves. However, Southerners also passed laws that forbade black preachers to lead worship services and also prohibited teaching slaves to read and write. Eventually slaves would have their own churches, but usually only under supervision of the whites.

Despite severe persecution and suffering, multitudes of enslaved blacks bore witness to the Christian gospel, whose truth they perceived and maintained in contradiction to the debasement of the gospel by those who held power over their bodies and their souls. The suffering of the African-American slave is on similar terms as the persecution of Christians in Roman times, except within our own nation’s history.

Incredibly, “slaves were willing to risk threats of floggings at the hands of their earthly masters in order to worship their ‘Divine Master’ as they saw fit.”¹⁵ The singing of the spirituals (sometimes all night) was a natural, intensely personal experience that offered consolation for sorrow, lack of freedom, and the misery of slavery.

Frederick Douglass, former slave and author of the *Narrative*, observed, “Slaves knew enough of the orthodox theology to consign all bad slaveholders to hell.” Some slaves thought that heaven would be the place where they could avenge their enemies. Most of the time, slaves obeyed their masters out of fear and belief that they “had already lived through Hell: In them days it was hell without fires, but slaveholders faced eternal punishment.”¹⁶

Exercising Exclusivity

We can see that the drama of sin and salvation—of damnation and heavenly translation—in the conversion of a Southern slave was more complicated than either Charles Fitch or Ellen White understood.

Efforts to teach the slaves moral and salvation principles from the Bible were characterized by both difficulties and reluctance. Adventists in particular delayed their entrance into this field for almost 40 years after Ellen White’s 1858 statement. The concept of a remnant and its premise that few will be saved, combined with Adventists’ cherished exclusivity as God’s anointed, may have something to do with the prevailing racial repugnance.¹⁷

Notice the similarity between the shut-door teaching, which blossomed after the Great Disappointment, and the investigative judgment doctrine as it relates to whether or not slaves are permitted to enter heaven. Both appear to serve the same purpose of narrowing the number of redeemed in heaven on the basis of “darkness.”

The attitude that blacks were inferior human beings began to change in the mind of Ellen White during the 1890s, when she sent a series of 10 articles to the *Review and Herald* urging church leaders to evangelize in the South. In summary, she wrote: “The colored people have souls to save, and we must enter into the work, and become colaborers [sic] with Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

As strange as it may sound, Ellen White believed that blacks arriving in heaven would be changed in complexion to white. At the close of a sermon to recently converted colored believers in Vicksburg, Mississippi, on March 16, 1901, she publicly said: “Remembering this, you will be able to bear the trials which you meet here. In heaven there will be no color line; for *all will be as white as Christ himself* (emphasis added). Let us thank God that we can be members of the royal family.”¹⁹

¹ While living in Vermont, Ellen White visited Elon Everts and found him to be in the “age to come” movement, which he said he would not give up. Later Everts confessed his error, after a vision about the “age to come” showed that he was wrong. See Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years*, Vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1985), p. 223.

² Elon Everts, *Review and Herald*, Vol. 9, No. 9, Jan. 1, 1857.

³ Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862*, Vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1985), p. 354.

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CONTRIBUTORS



OLIVE J. HEMMINGS is a professor of religion and ethics at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland.



KEISHA E. MCKENZIE, PH.D., is a technical communicator, interfaith program director, and board member of the

Adventist Today Foundation. She blogs at mackenzian.com.



DAVID NEFF is the retired editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today*.



SMUTS VAN ROOYEN is a retired pastor living in Central California whose ministry was divided between

teaching undergraduate religion and pastoring. He holds an M.Div. and a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from Andrews University.



LOREN SEIBOLD is a pastor in Ohio and the executive editor of *Adventist Today*.



MAYLAN SCHURCH is pastor of the Adventist church in Bellevue, Washington, and has authored or co-authored more than a dozen books.



ALDEN THOMPSON is a professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla University.



HEROLD WEISS is professor emeritus of religious studies at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. A native of Uruguay who now lives in Michigan, he earned his Ph.D. from Duke University. Herold's most recent book is *Meditations on the Letters of Paul*.



T. JOE WILLEY received his Ph.D. in neuroscience from the University of California, Berkeley, and taught at Loma Linda Medical School, Walla Walla University, and La Sierra University. He was a fellow with Nobel Laureate Sir John Eccles at the University of New York, Buffalo, and research fellow at the Brain Research Institute at UCLA, Los Angeles.

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EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

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Romans 13:1-7

BY OLIVE J. HEMMINGS

Attempting to distinguish between the secular and the sacred affairs of humankind—what we today call the separation of church and state—is a modern phenomenon. In ancient civilizations, the sacredness of the entire creative order was never in question. Government was not a secular domain.

Romans 13:1-7 does not speak of the divine appointment of a specific leader, but of the divine appointment of *the order of government itself* (verse 1b). Paul calls his audience to be subject to the governing *authorities*. The term Paul uses here for *authority* is *exousia*, which means power or domain or jurisdiction, referring generally to governing domains (verse 1) or the jurisdiction or office of government (verse 2).

We know from 1 Samuel chapters 9 and 16 that the anointing of a king for Israel was by divine appointment. However, at the prophetic level, Israel also recognized the divine appointment of foreign governments. For example, Isaiah 45:1 speaks of the divine anointing of Cyrus of Persia, who became ruler over Palestine. The nations represented by Daniel's multi-metal statue were likewise apparently ordained by God (Daniel 2).

Rome itself embraced the divine appointment of the emperor to the extent that the emperor would be called "Son of God," a term which in the first century (and prior) was synonymous with the term "Messiah" or "Christ"—one appointed by God to deliver and safeguard the well-being of humanity. Neither Paul (who was living under Roman rule when he wrote Romans 13:1-7) nor Jesus (who was asked to pay the Roman imperial tax, according to Matt. 22:15-21) challenged the divine appointment of the ruling government.

This does not mean that they would fail to hold leaders accountable. As notable Jewish rabbis, both Jesus and Paul understood that divine providence and human responsibility go hand in hand. In the Gospel of Luke, which portrays Jesus as fulfilling the work of the Hebrew prophets (Luke 4:18-21), Jesus calls Herod Antipas, the Roman governor over Galilee, "that fox" (Luke 13:32). Herod Antipas, who was responsible for beheading John the Baptist, lived a corrupt and immoral life. Jesus publicly identified him for what he was.

Eschatological Anxiety

At the time Paul wrote our key passage, there seems to have been little cause for civil disobedience. Nero was

emperor when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, but he had not yet begun his reign of terror.¹ Furthermore, around 58 CE—the date of the epistle to the Romans²—Jesus' followers were regarded as a sect of Judaism, so no persecution had yet come upon them for refusing to worship the emperor, since Jews were exempt from the imperial cult.

From whence, then, comes the antagonism toward the state that Romans 13:1-7 seems to address? It may have been eschatological fervor. Particular factions in Judaism believed that the people of God should not be under foreign rule. The land was theirs by covenant, they said, and as long as a foreign government ruled and occupied it, the covenant remained unfulfilled. This sentiment nurtured a general culture of resistance, even among some of Jesus' followers, and became the foundation of Messianic expectation. Paul's counsel is instructive: no amount of eschatological fervor should excuse the church from its social responsibility—an instruction that applies also to Seventh-day Adventists.

A Prophetic Distance

While there was no "separation between church and state" in ancient Israel (or the entire ancient world), the prophets and philosophers did place themselves at an objective distance from government. We see this in the

work of the Hebrew prophets, whose oracles took both the government and religious leadership of Israel to task in the interest of the poor and powerless (e.g., Amos 5 and 6). Such was also the work of philosophers such as Plato (via Socrates), who preached justice and human responsibility. These select few recognized that ultimate responsibility for the well-being of citizens rests with their rulers. They did not question

Paul's counsel is instructive: no amount of eschatological fervor should excuse the church from its social responsibility—an instruction that applies also to Seventh-day Adventists.

the divine ordination of government; rather, they held the state accountable to its divinely ordained responsibility to advance the welfare of the citizenry.

Western civilization attempts to separate church and state. This separation is not merely secularization, as one may assume. Instead, it involves a process of checks and balances regarding the affairs of the citizenry, who are also God's children. The state must protect its citizens wherever they exist and operate within the

authorized institutions. The church member is under the full protection of the government, regardless of that church's beliefs and practice. This is why the state had to intervene in the 1970s when a worker under Seventh-day Adventist Church policy received lower pay because of her gender.³ The policy violated federal law to protect women from discrimination.

At the same time, because the government of the state has jurisdiction over God's creatures, those who claim to be God's mouthpiece—the church—must call government to accountability whenever it falls short. Recently many church leaders have called upon the state to protect refugees who are fleeing suffering in their homelands.


For the church to have any moral authority over government, it must assume the prophetic mode; it must stand at an objective distance. This means that it cannot be blinded and constrained by partisan politics, or ideological straightjackets, but must be enlightened by the fundamental principles of the prophetic mandate: namely, to speak out against oppressive and corrupt systems that victimize God's creatures (Isa. 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19).

Leading or Following?

Sometimes government leads the church in matters of justice, and it is the church's obligation to cooperate, as in the case of *Merikay McLeod Silver vs. Pacific Press Publishing Association*. Too often churches, including ours, remain reticent to speak against injustice, as was the case with Jim Crow laws, apartheid, and the Rwandan genocide.

In the context of Romans 13:1-7, what is the church's role in politics? The church must respect the function of government while constantly asking whether government is accomplishing the full purpose of its divine appointment. This does not mean that specific leaders have automatic divine responsibility, and where it fails due to the shortcoming of specific leaders and their policies, the church must assume its prophetic role to call leaders to responsibility. The church must not obstruct the governing process because of its own political or ideological bias; rather, it must seek the spiritual discernment to know when government neglects its duty to defend and protect the well-being of all.

For example, many Christians are questioning whether or not the protection of LGBTQ citizens against discrimination, prejudice, or harm is an appropriate duty of government. Should the church seek to obstruct the government's effort to define and protect these citizens' rights? Should it speak out if government refuses to protect them by law? This is a complex question that has as much to do with mercy and kindness as it does with specific Bible passages that are used to condemn homosexuality.

The mandate of Romans 13:1-7 is that the church recognizes its responsibility to ensure that government lives up to its divine appointment to advance and defend the well-being of its citizenry. 

¹ Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, New Testament (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 440-441.

² Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), p. 119.

³ *Merikay McLeod Silver vs. Pacific Press Publishing Association*, 1975.

Mongolian Showdown

BY MAYLAN SCHURCH

"Tom!"

"Harry, you old horse! I didn't think you were a Mongolian grill type of guy."

"This is my first time here," Harry said. "Somebody suggested I try it out. You come here often?"

"A couple of times a month."

"Must be good, then. How does it work?"

"We start by getting in line right here," Tom said. "I'll talk you through it. It's sort of like a Sabbath potluck salad bar, but they grill your veggies and give 'em to you on a platter with rice and your choice of sauces."

"Funny thing," Harry said as they each picked up a bowl. "You and I have been team-teaching a Sabbath School class for—what is it—five years, and we've never once had lunch together. Except at potluck."

Tom pointed. "See that corner booth? If you're not expecting anybody else, why don't we sit there? Maybe we can compare notes on Sabbath's lesson. We could pull it up on our smartphones. You're going to cover Sunday through Tuesday like always, right?"

"Fine with me," Harry replied, as he loaded sliced carrots into his bowl. "I think the class gets a kick out of seeing us both up front, teaching at the same time."

"Kidding each other..."

Harry chuckled. "*Insulting* each other..."

"But all in good fun."

Once in their corner booth, they tackled their food. Suddenly Harry sighed. "What a crazy country."

"What do you mean?"

"It just boggles my mind that otherwise sensible citizens could have elected *him*."

Tom gazed in profound surprise at his friend, a forkful of noodles halfway to his mouth. After a pause, he decided to change the subject. "Uh, what do you think of the food?"

"It's turning to ashes in my mouth, with *him* in the White House. Mark my words, the time of trouble's just around the corner. Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Harry. Don't tell me you voted for *her*."

Harry's eyes widened. "Don't tell me you voted for *him*!"

Tom glanced around and lowered his voice. "But she was part of the D.C. establishment! What did you want—years nine through twelve of Democratic rule?"

"What's wrong with that?"

"Harry, nothing got done! Gridlock city!"

Harry tried to load his fork with noodles and mushrooms at the same time, but they fell back onto his plate. "You know good and well why nothing got done. The Republicans said No to everything the president wanted. They predicted right up front that they'd do that."

Tom frowned at his platter. "The grill guy must have put the wrong sauces on this. It tastes awful."

"We're talking politics, that's why," Harry said sympathetically. "*Your* food's turning to ashes too. You and I have never talked politics before."

Tom scowled at him. "I had no idea you were for *her*." He tried another forkful and munched in silence.

"And *why*, you turkey," Harry said frankly, "did you vote for *him*, of all people?"

"Now listen here," Tom said ominously. "We needed a change. 'Change' was what *your* guy promised, and didn't deliver on, for eight years. And don't you dare bring up Obamacare."

Harry took his smartphone out of his pocket. "What say we go over the lesson?"

"I'm not in the mood."

"So, what do we do? Keep talking politics and get acid reflux?"

"I am just so blown away," Tom snapped, "that you could ever vote for *her*."

"Well hey, pal, some instinct tells me that she wouldn't be imploding the way your guy is right now."

"I never trusted anything that woman said."

Harry's eyebrows rose. "And you do trust the words that come out of *his* mouth? Or out from under his tweeting fingers?"

Tom took a gulp from his soda and set the cup back on the table with unnecessary force. "Give him a break. He's a salesman."

"I'm a salesman. What are you saying?"

"I mean, salesmen are used to making everything sound positive and rosy. 'Make America Great Again.'"

Harry put down his fork. "Okay, here's how it is. You need to apologize to me."

"Why?"

"You just slandered my profession. If I or the rest of my sales staff did even one-twentieth of the things he has done, or *said* even one-twentieth of the things he's said..."

"*Harry*." Tom glanced around. "Calm down. People are looking at us."

Harry stared at his plate as though it were filled with poison. "Why you think this is such great food, I have no idea. Your Republican buddies probably come in here and mop it up till their eyes bubble, but I can't see why. After all, *your* guy likes KFC."

"And *your* gal inspired such confidence that thousands of people all over the country kept screaming, 'Lock her up!'"

"They would never have started screaming it if the carny barker hadn't goaded them into it!"

Tom licked his lips nervously. "Harry."

"Or instead of carny barker, should we say *der Fuehrer*?"

Tom's mouth opened and closed a couple of times. He breathed deeply and finally said, "Harry, here's the bottom line. This coming Sabbath at 9:45, you and I are going to be standing up there at the front of the class tag-teaming the lesson study discussion on Peter's epistles."

"I'll tell you how it is, Tom," Harry said flatly. "I don't have the stomach for it. At least not right now. I had no idea that you were a..."

"A what? A Nazi?"

Harry sighed. "No, no. Not a Nazi. And he's not really a *Fuehrer*. And no, he's probably not going to bring on the time of trouble—at least I hope not."

Tom giggled. "And no, I don't believe everything he says. The guy talks too much and tweets too much, and then everybody else has to try to mop things up. But at least we know what he's thinking. He says what he feels."

"Like on that bus? Remember that bus tape? Remember, Tom? No other candidate would have gotten away with that."

"Yeah, yeah. That was bad. But people voted for him."

"*She* won the popular vote."

Tom's rolled his eyes. "What do you say we change the subject? We are Sabbath School teachers, for heaven's sake."

Harry took a death-grip on his fork. "But I have so much more to say."

"About what?"

"About *him*. About his staff. About his past business dealings. About..."

Tom cleared his throat. "Great weather we're having today."

"Don't change the subject. Did you realize that he..."

"Harry, stop. We're not on talk radio."

Harry suddenly sputtered with laughter. "No, we're not on talk radio."

"And you brought the whole subject up, remember?"

Harry nodded, and paused for a moment. "Know what?"

"What?"

"This scares me."

Tom rolled his eyes. "You mean the president? Don't start again. Please."

"No. I mean it scares me what just happened to *us*. Here we are, two friends. We're friends, right?" Harry asked anxiously.

"Sure, we're friends. Always have been."

"And because of a stupid political discussion, we almost didn't teach Sabbath School class together this week."

Tom swallowed. "Right."

"But you talked some sense into me. So I've got an idea, okay?"

"What's your idea?"

"We don't talk politics anymore. Or at least not without trying to understand the other person's viewpoint."

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "Sounds good to me. And I've got an idea too."

"What's that?"

"Since we're team-teaching each lesson, you could teach from the Democrat viewpoint and I could teach the Republican one."

Harry's mouth fell open.

Tom giggled. "Kidding. But I'm betting Peter was a Republican." 🐘



Adventists and Catholics: Attack, Avoid, Cooperate

By Alden Thompson

On April 3, 2017, the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* announced “a merger of sorts” involving the Roman Catholic Providence St. Mary Medical Center and Walla Walla General Hospital (WWGH), a part of Adventist Health in Washington state. According to the newspaper, at some point this summer “WWGH will cease to be a member of Adventist Health and become a member of Providence Health & Services.”

For a number of years, Adventist and Catholic hospitals have participated in cooperative ventures elsewhere. In Colorado in 1996, for example, a joint operating agreement between Catholic Health Initiatives and Adventist Health Systems formed Centura Health. According to the online edition of *Adventist Today*, Centura is now the largest healthcare network in the state of Colorado.¹

The close-knit nature of the Adventist community in the Walla Walla Valley will make the loss of this hospital particularly jarring for devout church members. The valley offers its residents a host of Adventist choices: 14 churches, two grade schools, Walla Walla Valley Academy, Walla Walla University, Andy’s Market for health food and produce, and until this summer, an Adventist hospital. In short, to borrow lines from the sociologists Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, the Adventists in this valley have built an alternative to the American Republic.² They haven’t needed the rest of the world.

But now we have the opportunity to address a much-neglected topic, namely, the relationship between Adventists and Catholics. In my view, the time has come to more effectively address the biblical and theological issues involved. My goal here is to lay those issues out in the open so that we can begin to deal with them honestly on the basis of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White.

Practicing the Golden Rule

The three key words in my title—Attack, Avoid, Cooperate—point to a three-step historical development in Adventist-Catholic relationships, especially as illustrated in the Walla Walla Valley. The

first step, Attack, was vividly illustrated in *Adventist Today*’s first year of existence (1993) by the explosion of pointed anti-Catholic billboards in Florida, the northwestern states of Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, and in other parts of the country. The second issue of the magazine contained an interview with David Mould, the mastermind behind the billboard campaign; the third issue published my article “*The Great Controversy Is Dated But True*,” which addressed questions of Adventist eschatology.³

Revisiting my files and papers connected with the “beast bashing” billboards of 1993 and remembering the tension of that time has been a sobering experience for me. Letters on the topic of the billboards, as published in the North Pacific Union *Gleaner*, were sharply divided. The editor’s comment to me was revealing: “Never before, as editor, have I published a set of letters so profoundly filled with honest frustration.” But as horrified as I was by the public vilification of Catholics by Adventists, I was brought to my senses by this wonderful “diversity” quote from *The Ministry of Healing*: “Every association of life calls for the exercise of self-control, forbearance, and sympathy. We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experience is alike in every particular. The trials of one are not the trials of another. The duties that one finds light are to another most difficult and perplexing.”⁴ In short, even beast bashers need our love.

Throwing Out the Baby with the Bathwater

While the Attack mode was mounted by confrontational Adventists, the second step, Avoid, was triggered a decade later by non-Adventists—most specifically, by two radical dispensationalists, Ray Yungen and Roger Oakland. Mounting a strong attack against anything that looked like “spiritual

formation,” these men camped out on their computers and watched for key words: spiritual formation, contemplative prayer, emerging church, and Roman Catholic.⁵ Even stalwart evangelical entities such as Moody Bible Institute, James Dobson’s “Focus on the Family,” and Biola University drew their fire. In Adventism, authors such as Rick Howard and Herbert Douglass contributed to an attitude of deep suspicion for anything with ties to Catholicism.⁶

As the atmosphere became more embittered, I personally faced a dilemma of what to do with some of my favorite quotes from Catholic authors. Henri Nouwen, for example, who had been labeled one of the “bad” guys,⁷ wrote this about forgiveness: “Forgiveness is the name of love among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all of us love poorly. We do not even know what we are doing when we hurt others. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour—unceasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family.”⁸

Nouwen also wrote this about our relationship with God: “Dealing with burning issues without being rooted in a deep personal relationship with God, easily leads to divisiveness because, before we know it, our sense of self is caught up in our opinion about a given subject. But when we are securely rooted in personal intimacy with the source of life, it will be possible to remain flexible without being relativistic, convinced without being rigid, willing to confront without being offensive, gentle and forgiving without being soft, and true witnesses without being manipulative.”⁹ You can’t get much better than that. Yet Nouwen is a Catholic.

Another Catholic author deemed a “bad” guy is Thomas Merton, who wrote one of my favorite Second Advent quotes. When someone asked him how the Shakers could turn out such marvelous furniture given their belief in the imminent end of all things, Merton replied: “When you expect the world to end at any moment, you know there is no need to hurry. You take your time, you do your work well.”¹⁰

Good stuff from a good Catholic—which should come as no surprise.

Scripture shows that even Bible authors could learn good things from one-time enemies. In the book of Proverbs, for example, one section of 30 sayings (22:17-24:22) includes a number of close parallels with the Wisdom of Amenemope, a piece of Egyptian wisdom literature. Recent manuscript discoveries have shown that Amenemope was known before the time of Solomon, demonstrating that Proverbs borrowed from Amenemope, not the other way around.¹¹

Kari Sandhaas points out the same phenomenon in the teachings of Jesus: “One of the remarkable experiences for we who measure goodness by the person of Jesus Christ is that we see it displayed in people who do not follow him. Our Lord once met a Samaritan, whose belief was condemned by Judaism. Jesus so admired the man’s tenderhearted action that he held him up as a model of compassion. Jesus didn’t become a Samaritan, and he didn’t give up his passion for the Jewish vision of God’s reign. But when he met goodness, he simply rejoiced in it.”¹²

Ellen White was similarly gracious. To one brother, apparently inclined to be somewhat abrasive, she wrote in 1879: “If you would always manifest kindness, respect, noble love and generosity, toward even wicked men, you might render effectual service to Christ.”¹³ And in a testimony published in 1901, she wrote: “The Lord wants His people to follow other methods than that of condemning wrong, even though the condemnation be just. He wants us to do something more than to hurl at our adversaries charges that only drive them further from the truth. The work which Christ came to do in our world was not to erect barriers and constantly thrust upon the people the fact that they were wrong.”¹⁴

Trying Honey Before Vinegar

In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus commands his followers to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27). Jesus could utter scathing rebukes, to be sure, but as

If we see the “beast” of Revelation 13 as a type of all deceiving and coercive powers, then we have a way of addressing beastly behavior anywhere in the world.

We can see
current
developments
as a great door
of opportunity
for finding ways
to work more
effectively with
our Catholic
friends.

Ellen White put it, there were “tears in his voice” when he did.¹⁵ And Paul presented the Corinthians with a choice of “a stick” or “love in the spirit of gentleness” (1 Cor. 4:21, NRSV). There’s plenty of tough stuff in Scripture and in the writings of Ellen White, and it is the work of the church to determine how and when to use the more rigorous methods. But both the biblical evidence and the writings of Ellen White suggest that we should favor trust, not suspicion. In our current situation, we must grapple more seriously with the implications of Ellen White’s comment in *The Ministry of Healing* that “The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”¹⁶

So the third step in our relationship between Adventists and Catholics is a call to Cooperate. Can we do so conscientiously? Even if we try, can we pull it off? By God’s grace, I want to argue “yes” across the board. However, we should be prepared to address several issues. If you wish, you can view them as suggestions. I’ll simply list them off, not necessarily in order of importance.

1. Start with the Bible and the teachings of Jesus.

A host of our Catholic friends are gracious and loving people. For us to love them is not an obligation, but a joy. They don’t act like the beast of Revelation 13 at all! So if we start with Jesus’ one-verse summary of the Old Testament, our marching orders are clear: “In everything do to others as you would have them to do you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12, NRSV).

2. Study the nature of prophecy and prediction in Scripture. From the book of Jonah, I have concluded that prophecy and prediction are not the same. Indeed, a failed prediction can be the mark of a successful prophecy. Jonah preached what sounded like an absolute prediction: “Forty days and Ninevah will be destroyed”—no ifs, ands, or buts. The prediction did not come to pass, but the prophecy was wildly successful: the people of Ninevah repented. And when the people repented, God repented, too! Indeed, in the Old Testament, God repents more often than anyone else!

Adventists have often studied this subject under the heading of conditional prophecy. Our Evangelical friends don’t like the idea of conditionalism, and neither do many Adventists. Most humans, like Jonah,

want iron-clad prophecy that will allow us to say, “I told you so!” But God is much more gracious than that, as the book of Jonah so clearly teaches.

For a serious discussion of conditionalism and prophecy in the Old Testament, take a look at a virtually unknown gem in Adventism, an article in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* titled “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy.”¹⁷ It grapples seriously with the striking differences between Old Testament and New Testament eschatology.

3. Universalize historicism. Under the heading of Applied Historicism, I have tried to follow the pattern in Scripture that moves us beyond a single application to one that is more universal.¹⁸ That is particularly crucial for Adventists, who now stand almost alone as defenders of historicism. If we see the “beast” of Revelation 13 as a type of all deceiving and coercive powers, then we have a way of addressing beastly behavior anywhere in the world. Rome is never mentioned in Revelation. It would not have been safe. The figure “Babylon” is used, a kind of code for the current oppressive power. One challenge we face with pure historicism is that we are left speechless in those parts of the world where Roman Catholicism is not active. But with applied historicism, the beastly behavior of the Roman communion in the past becomes a model for addressing the current beasts in our world. In short, we have universalized the message.¹⁹

Recognizing When It’s Time to Move On

One other elephant in the room that we are often reluctant to recognize is the question of Sunday laws. Most Adventists are, at best, dimly aware of the history of Sunday legislation in America. Between 1885 and 1896, Adventists spent a total of 1,438 days in jail and 455 days on chain gangs for working on Sunday.²⁰ Willie White, the son of James and Ellen, was arrested in 1882 for running Pacific Press on Sunday. Congress itself debated a National Sunday law.²¹ You could read Adventist eschatology from the front page of any daily newspaper. Today the only way to preach it is from the book *The Great Controversy*. In fact, the very idea of sacred time has practically vanished from American culture. That’s not just my idea. Recently a

good friend of mine, a former Adventist who is still an active believer with remarkably broad exposure to the American religious scene, told me, “Nobody out there has any idea of sacred time.”

Consequently, any Adventist who wishes to maintain good and regular standing in the community must now think long and hard before raising the Sunday-law question in public. I personally believe that the principles of conditional prophecy would enable us to put Sunday legislation in the same pot with the detailed eschatology of Zechariah 14. In other words, it’s highly unlikely.

In a five-part series on beast bashing that I wrote in 1993 for the North Pacific Union *Gleaner*,²² I cited two remarkable quotations from Adventist brothers in high places: Charles Bradford, former General Conference vice president, and Roland Hegstad, former editor of *Liberty*. In 1990, *Adventist Review* published Bradford’s comment in the official General Conference reports: “Today there are fewer Sunday laws being enforced than at any time in recent years.”²³ Hegstad’s comment appeared in a 1993 *Liberty Alert*, an insert in the *Adventist Review*: “Over the past 30 years the growing secularization of society has been a greater threat to our church than have Sunday laws.”²⁴ More typically, such comments are only whispered quietly after dark. But Bradford and Hegstad put them into print in *Adventist Review*.

Seizing New Opportunities

Today, we can see current developments as a great door of opportunity for finding ways to work more effectively with our Catholic friends.

Denis Fortin, former dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, gave me permission to share his experience of growing up Catholic:

“Few people know that I was raised Catholic and became Adventist in my late teens. My experience as a Catholic is a beautiful and positive one. Contrary to all we hear about Catholic priests and child abuse, my experience was never like that. I was raised in a nominal Catholic family. My mother never went to church, and she despised priests and nuns. But my grandmother was a faithful Catholic, and after she came to live with us, she would ask me or one of my


siblings to take her to church on Sunday morning.

I also served as an altar boy for five years and loved it. I admired the priests who taught me the faith and how to serve the mass. By the time I had been an altar boy for four years, I was one of the most trusted and experienced of the group and was asked to serve during the most meaningful services of the liturgical year, for Christmas Eve mass, Good Friday, Easter morning, weddings, funerals, and baptisms.

“My family was poor, and my mom did her best to raise us with the welfare money she received. Our meals were simple, and our clothes were seldom new. Only now do I realize how much she struggled to make ends meet with the little she had. My local parish, St. Vincent de Paul, had wonderful people who helped families like mine, and we benefitted from food baskets and winter clothes. I have experienced nothing in my youth to [cause me to] say anything against the Catholic priests and people who worked in my parish. The ones I knew as a kid were all good people. Sometimes I wonder if I could find Father Chamberland, to thank him for his gentle care for me and my family. I think it was through his caring manner and mentorship that I first felt a call to ministry. I think he’s the one who planted in my heart the seed of vocation to serve the church and God’s people, a seed that was later watered by my first Adventist pastor, Daniel Rebsomen.”²⁵

I conclude with a comment from another Catholic-turned-Adventist—a deeply committed Christian who converted in the early 1990s. After the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin* announced that the Adventist hospital would become part of the Catholic Providence Health system, I was astonished to hear this person say: “I think God has a marvelous sense of humor. I love the pope. I don’t have to be a Catholic to recognize the good things that Catholics do.”

So let’s grasp this wonderful opportunity, given to us by our Catholic friends no less, to practice the teachings of Jesus—treating others the way we would want to be treated” (Matt. 7:12) and to recognize the great value of Ellen White’s statement that the “strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”²⁶ While this article may appear to be tangential to the theme of “The Church and Politics” in this magazine issue, wouldn’t it be

wonderful if Catholics and Adventists could show the world, including the world of politics, how people with very different convictions can work together in peace to further the kingdom of God and to benefit humanity? 

¹ “Centura Health CEO to Step Down,” *Adventist Today* online edition, May 22, 2017.

² Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), dust jacket to the first edition.

³ With an introduction indicating the article’s recent relevance, it was posted in early April 2017 to the *Adventist Today* website under the title “An Earthquake Rattles an Adventist Village.”

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), p. 483.

⁵ Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing: How Ancient Mystical Practices Are Uniting Christians with the World’s Religions* (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails, 2002, 2006); Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone: the Emerging Church—a New Reformation or an End-time Deception?* (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails, 2007).

⁶ See especially Rick Howard’s books published by Remnant Publications: *The Omega Rebellion* (2010) and *Meet It: Iceberg of Deception* (2014). For a critique of the movement, see David E. Thomas, “The Great ‘Spiritual Formation’ Kerfuffle,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 44-49.

⁷ See Yungen, pp. 61-64, for his comment on Henri Nouwen.

⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*, Vol. 7, No. 2, March/April 1992.

⁹ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 31-32.

¹⁰ Cited by Rodney Clapp, “Overdosing on the Apocalypse,” *Christianity Today*, Oct. 28, 1991.

¹¹ R. J. Williams, “Wisdom in the ANE [Ancient Near East]” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).

¹² Kari Sandhaas, *Signs of the Times*, July 1993, p. 6, from *Context*.

¹³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1881), p. 331.

¹⁴ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1901), p. 121.

¹⁵ White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 353.

¹⁶ White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470.

¹⁷ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1955), pp. 25-38.

¹⁸ See Alden Thompson, *Beyond Common Ground: Why Liberals and Conservatives Need Each Other* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009), pp. 194-220.

¹⁹ One of the best biblical examples of multiple applications involves the “dark day” of Joel 2. As the context makes clear, it originally referred to a

locust plague in Joel’s day. In Acts 2, Peter applies the prophecy of Joel to his day. Early Adventists applied the prophecy to the Dark Day of 1780. But Revelation 6:6-12 becomes the capstone where the dark day refers to the second coming.

²⁰ See Dennis Pettibone, “The Sunday Law Movement,” in *The World of Ellen G. White*, Gary Land, ed. (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1987), pp. 113-128.

²¹ See Richard Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979), pp. 250-255.

²² Alden Thompson, “Adventists and the Beast,” North Pacific Union *Gleaner*, May 17, June 7, June 21, July 12, and August 1, 1993.

²³ *Adventist Review*, Vol. 167, No. 34, July 17, 1990, p. 12.

²⁴ *Liberty Alert*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan/Feb 1993), p. 4; insert in *Adventist Review*, January 7, 1993.

²⁵ Denis Fortin, “Coming Out of Babylon and Christian Unity: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Adventist Discourse About Other Christians,” paper presented at the Adventist Society for Religious Studies at San Francisco, Nov. 17, 2011.

²⁶ White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470.

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⁴ Milton Hook, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist* (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today Foundation, 2008).

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1858), p. 191. “All heaven beholds with indignation, human beings, the workmanship of God, reduced to the lowest depths of degradation, and placed on a level with the brute creation by their fellow men. And professed followers of that dear Saviour [sic] whose compassion was ever moved as he witnessed human woe, heartily engage in this enormous and grievous sin, and deal in slaves and souls of men. Angels have recorded it all. It is written in the book. The tears of the pious bondmen and bond-women, of fathers, mothers and children, brothers and sisters, are all bottled up in heaven. ... God will restrain his anger but a little longer. His anger burns against this nation, and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned, and have themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise.”

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 193. The next chapter (p. 195) includes a short description of how “The last call is carried even to the poor slaves, and the pious among them, with humble expressions, pour forth their songs of extravagant joy at the prospect of their happy deliverance, and their masters cannot check them; for a fear and astonishment keep them silent.”

⁷ The Samuel J. May Anti-Slavery Collection in Cornell University Library’s Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections contains over 10,000 pamphlets, broadsides, sermons, speeches, etc.

⁸ Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), p. xiii.

⁹ See Roy Branson, “Ellen G. White: Racist or Champion of Equality?” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 147, April 9, 1970. He wrote, “Clearly, Mrs. White stood with that abolitionist minority in the North which condemned those who hesitated or equivocated on the basis of the emancipation issue.” However, this is not true, as Ellen White and other Adventist pioneers believed that the slaves would gain emancipation only at the second coming and thus avoided participation in abolitionist politics. In a vision, Ellen White “was shown that God’s people, who are His peculiar treasure, cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith.” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1868), p. 361. See also Julia Neuffer, “How Activist Were Adventist Abolitionists?” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 147, Sept. 10, 1970, p. 11. See also T. Joe Willey, “The Political Tapestry of Ellen White’s Amalgamation Statements on Abolition & Emancipation,” blog post on www.tjoewilley.com, June 16, 2016.

¹⁰ See *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, p. 214, where she wrote: “The colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people. ... The work of proclaiming the truth for this time is not to be hindered by an effort to adjust the position of the Negro race.”

¹¹ Charles Fitch, *Slaveholding Weighed in the Balance of Truth* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837), pp. 11-12.

¹² In *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), p. 67, Ellen White wrote that she saw Charles Fitch in her first vision, received shortly after the Great Disappointment. “We all went under the tree [of life], and sat down to look at the glory of the place, when Brethren Fitch and Stockman, who had preached the gospel of the kingdom, and whom God had laid in the grave to save them, came up to us and asked us what we had passed through while they were sleeping. We tried to call up our greatest trials, but they looked so small compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that surrounded us, that we could not speak them out, and we all cried out ‘Alleluia! heaven is cheap enough.’ And we touched our glorious harps and made heaven’s arches ring.”

¹³ Fitch, p. 16.

¹⁴ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 186.

¹⁵ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004 ed.), p. 215.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁷ F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Takoma Park, MD: Review & Herald, 1951), p. 210.

¹⁸ E. G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1901), p. 33.

¹⁹ E. G. White, “Trust in God,” *The Gospel Herald*, March 1901, p. 22.

NEWS BRIEFS



Potluck Fiasco Holds Entire Congregation Hostage

Deacons are refusing to allow anyone to exit the fellowship hall of Shady Grove Adventist Church until the potluck meal is completely cleaned up. All exits are being guarded in what is quickly escalating into a hostage situation. At the center of the crisis is a large group that is refusing to do any dishes, claiming that they “did them last week.” Another contingent refuses to do anything except eat, having decided that absolutely all of the potluck cleanup duties constitute unlawful Sabbath work.

Amazing Facts to Use Real Beasts in Prophecy Series

In order to boost attendance at Amazing Facts Bible prophecy seminars, live animals will now be part of nightly presentations. Lions and other prophetic look-alikes will be held in cages on stage as the beasts of Daniel and Revelation are introduced to what staff members expect to be unusually attentive audiences. Organizers have warned that if audiences look too sleepy, a cage just might be opened a crack.

Jackhammer Prompts Existential Questions Among Quiet Hour Staff

The entire staff of Quiet Hour Ministries is doing its best to suppress a growing rage caused by a jackhammer operator, who has been working tirelessly outside their offices for the better part of a week. Despite attempts to remain calm, by alternating deep breaths with recitation of the Serenity Prayer, one staff member finally unleashed the most vicious howl heard in the history of the organization. The eruption was so aggressive that ministry leaders began to wonder if the organization had finally outgrown its name.

Men's Retreat on Purity Leads to Mass Blindness

A weekend Adventist men's retreat has left the 300 male attendees completely blinded.

At the outset of the weekend, participants had been told to take the Bible literally and apply it to everyday struggles. As discussions turned to purity and causes for lust, eyes began to be plucked. Organizers feel that only the unavailability of knives or other sharp objects saved the participants' hands.

Adventist Ponders How to Kill Her Enemies With Kindness

A grim-faced Adventist woman was reportedly lost in thought for hours today, developing an intricate revenge fantasy that involves incinerating her enemies with kindness. Sitting in a well-upholstered chair with an electric blanket turned up all the way to medium, Mildred's eyes glowed as she thought of heaping spadefuls of coals on her many opponents' heads, all while wishing them a “Happy Sabbath.”

BarelyAdventist (barelyadventist.com) is a satire and humor blog on Adventist culture and issues. It is written by committed Adventists who have no interest in tearing down the church but don't mind laughing at our idiosyncrasies.



Envision Our Future

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