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# Adventist *Today*

WHAT I  
LOVE  
AM PROUD OF  
APPRECIATE  
ABOUT MY  
CHURCH

# WHAT I LOVE

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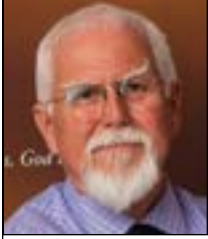
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## What Adventists Do Well

By Stephen Chavez

I recently spotted this message on a coaster in a gift shop: “I saw a sign at a business that said, ‘We treat you like family.’”

Then the zinger: “Yep, not goin’ there.”

Who hasn’t felt a similar sentiment when it comes to our Adventist Church? Whether it’s because of a church employee—pastor, teacher, or administrator—a local congregation, a school, or some level of church bureaucracy, we can all tell stories about how we’ve felt let down, misunderstood, or just plain mistreated.

While the church is Christ’s body on Earth (1 Cor. 12:27), it is undeniably human. It’s fallible because humans are fallible.

But that’s not where this magazine issue is headed. Instead, we’re choosing to focus on what the church does right and on the contributions it makes to our communities, our families, and our physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health. For all of its failures and missteps, the church is where most of us connect with fellow believers who endeavor, albeit imperfectly, to obey the whisper of the Holy Spirit: “This is the way; walk in it” (Isa. 30:21, NIV).

Now, if you’re looking for an apologetic about how this is God’s true church—a faithful remnant that he is going to take through the time of trouble and translate to heavenly glory—you’ll have to look elsewhere. This issue is a collection of testimonies about how the church and its ministries have provided a spiritual home to millions of people throughout the world for more than 160 years. The Adventist Church has played a part in our formation as educated, artistic, prosperous, socially responsible, environmentally conscious citizens. It has elevated some individuals and institutions to national and international prominence.

As you read these essays, don’t be surprised if your heart warms to some memory—a Pathfinder campout, an academy band/choir concert tour, a dorm room Bible study, a short-term mission trip—that changed your life. Our career paths were likely forged in the foundry of an Adventist education. More than a few of us will remember that our choice of a spouse was directly related to what we experienced at an Adventist church or campus.


Unfortunately, some will not read these pages. Fed up with the hypocrisy, bigotry, and rigid dogmatism of some Adventists in some places, they have chosen to continue

their spiritual journey elsewhere. But those of us who remain owe it to our children and grandchildren to create an Adventist experience that is memorable, relevant, theologically balanced, socially responsible, and not mired in the myths and human traditions of the past.

A near-constant refrain heard in many Adventist settings—“What would Ellen White think about today’s church?”—forgets that our Adventist pioneers were decidedly progressive. Dissatisfied with the spiritual state of the churches with which they were familiar, they started their own movement based on their discoveries of Bible truth. Their vision was large. They were unafraid to tackle the social issues of the day: slavery, intemperance, and economic, racial, and gender inequality. Creating a Seventh-day Adventist Church for the future is consistent with the vision of our pioneers and will take their past successes to new levels.

More important than wondering what our Adventist pioneers would think is asking how today’s world church is informed by the life and ministry of Jesus. We have hospitals and clinics as a direct result of his healing ministry. Because Jesus also had a teaching ministry, we operate schools for every educational level. Jesus made a point of serving those who were poor and marginalized, so Adventists support the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and countless Adventist Community Service centers around the world. Jesus practiced a ministry of inclusion, so Adventists embrace an ethic of diversity in which people of every race, gender, sexual orientation, income bracket, and educational level are welcomed, valued, and affirmed.

We’re all on a journey. We may not believe all that we once believed or appreciate all that has happened to us in church, but we can’t deny that our formation as Adventists made us who we are today. And while we may be tempted to walk away from the mess that sometimes is the church, let’s remember the good things that characterize our Adventist experience and work to make the future church even better.

Then we can join the heavenly chorus in proclaiming, “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7, NIV). 

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH

## THE HOPE OF THE SECOND COMING

BY RAJ ATTIKEN



Like most children growing up in a family with Adventist parents, I knew something about the second advent of Jesus from my childhood days. My Sabbath School teachers talked frequently about a Person who did amazing things a long time ago in a land far away. The way my Sabbath School teachers told the story, we'd get to be with him when he comes back soon, and it was an event to be anticipated with joy and delight. Although we couldn't quite imagine what it all meant, we knew that we were special enough for him to want to come to us, so we sang with gusto:

*“When He cometh, when He cometh, to make up His jewels,  
All His jewels, precious jewels, His loved and His own.  
Like the stars of the morning, His bright crown adorning,  
They shall shine in their beauty, bright gems for His crown.”*

While we may not have understood how children become the “precious jewels” in his crown, we knew that he must think well of us. He is coming soon for us! That was assurance enough.

As the years passed, the simple love story of Jesus coming for those he loves got filled in with a lot of details—partly with biblical interpretations, partly with speculations, partly with sensational theories. Certain elements replaced joy with fear and hope with uncertainty. The love story of a Bridegroom coming for his bride was gradually recast as a “warning message.” Included in the warning were calls to prepare for the final crisis. An apocalyptic scenario was described with terms such as the sealing, the latter rain, the shaking, the loud cry, spiritualism, early time of trouble, time of Jacob's trouble, and plagues.

We were given additional depictions of the dreaded mark of the beast, being hunted down while hiding in the mountains (Pathfinders offered classes on wilderness survival, including how to identify edible plants in the wild), persecution by Roman Catholics, people begging rocks to fall down on them, standing before the heavenly Judge without a mediator, and a host of other distresses. Getting ready for this event meant striving for something that was not attainable: perfection. Some even claimed to know how many would get this right: 144,000. Discussions about the second advent often included the 150-year-long claim that it would happen “soon.” Believing in and waiting for the event invariably necessitated getting your eschatology straight (never mind that this eschatology has involved a lot of speculation—some of it reckless and some of it just plain preposterous).

In retrospect, I regret that this embellished version of the story has received more voice and ink than the simple love story of my childhood days. Even worse, I regret the times I included these images of doom and gloom when teaching about the second advent. I have a hunch that our collective anticipation of the return of Jesus would be characterized with hope, joy, and assurance had we not fixated so much on apocalyptic scenarios.

The second advent represents to me the coming of Jesus after the coming of Jesus. The Jesus who promised to come again is the same Jesus who came already—and around whom the gospel writers framed their narratives. His first coming gives me important clues about his second coming.

The first advent was accompanied by some of the same questions we ask about the second advent. When will the Messiah come? How will he come? Will he restore the kingdom, and what would that look like? Those who awaited the Messiah's arrival got a lot of things wrong in attempting to answer these questions. I am inclined to believe that those of us who await the second advent have gotten a lot of things wrong about the complex symbols John employed, in the book of Revelation, to send a message to people of his time regarding the Roman Empire and other contemporary powers. In conflating the events of the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) with the future return of Jesus, we have further muddled our theories.

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**I find in the doctrine of the second advent assurance that God, by his very nature, is a God who comes to us, many times and in many ways.**

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Early in the gospel story, we find angels appearing to shepherds. In announcing the birth of the Messiah, their first words are “Don’t be afraid!” That was followed by what the angel called “good news that will bring great joy to all people” (Luke 2:9, NLT). Assurance and joy are linked to news about the advent.


I find in the doctrine of the second advent assurance that God, by his very nature, is a God who comes to us, many times and in many ways. The Bible even begins with an advent. In Genesis 3, the first pair of humans are said to hear the “voice of the LORD God walking in the garden” (verse 8, KJV). The message of the Bible is that God hasn’t stopped coming. God is shown to have come to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and many others. To be Adventists can mean living with the dynamic expectation that God will come to us today, and tomorrow, and the day after in many inexplicable ways—until the advent described as “his glorious appearing.”

The second coming also tells me that God is not about to discard this planet. After declaring his handiwork to be “good” at every stage of the creation process, “God looked over all he made, and he saw that it was very good!” (Gen. 1:31, NLT). It is no wonder, then, that Jesus values both the people and Earth enough to want to return here.

The creation mandate of Genesis reminds me of the fundamental goodness of the natural order, which must be preserved and fulfilled rather than rejected or destroyed. Yes, I do realize that no matter how much we do to repair the accumulated damage, the world will not improve to the point that brings about the fullness of the kingdom of God until Jesus returns. But that does not deter me from caring for this planet and its environment. Having hope in a future restoration does not remove responsibility in the present.

In the anticipated second advent of Jesus, I find reason to engage in the pressing issues facing our planet today. In framing the advent as a call to sit tight until we escape from the present world, we have understated the importance of preserving Earth, caring for the environment, and putting to right the problems of evil and injustice. In his teachings about what we today might call “being ready” or “preparing for” the second coming, Jesus tells his listeners to not ignore the suffering and distress around us (Matt. 25:34-40). He echoes the calls of the Hebrew prophets to seek justice, help the oppressed, defend the cause of orphans, and fight for the rights of widows (Isa. 1:17, NLT).

Adventists should not hold to a dualistic view of reality that allows us to pollute God’s world on the grounds that it’s all going to be eventually destroyed. Instead, belief in the second coming invites us to be new-creation people here and now, giving birth to signs and symbols of the kingdom on Earth as in heaven.

I love the “advent” message in “Adventist.” Jesus has come and is coming again. Justice and mercy will flood the earth and make all things new. While we continue to pray, “Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus,” we make every effort to reflect God’s wise stewardly image into his creation now. 

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH

## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SABBATH

BY LOREN SEIBOLD

By the time I came along, farming in North Dakota wasn't the little-bit-of-everything vocation of the previous generation. My city-raised wife, when she joined the family, was terribly disappointed that we didn't have duckies and lambies, that the men didn't wear bib overalls and straw hats or milk cows into a bucket,

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**It is the experience of Sabbath, not its theology, that I loved and still (at least in memory) do.**

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that the women weren't in gingham-checked aprons gathering eggs—all of which she'd seen in those old reading books where Dick, Jane, and Sally went to grandpa and grandma's farm.

On our farm, big diesel tractors and combine harvesters raised clouds of dust over thousands of acres.

It was hard work. Personally, I probably enjoyed the mechanical part the most; I learned to weld and fix machinery and vehicles. But going back and forth across fields on a roaring tractor was boring. At the end of the day, I'd come inside covered with dirt and smelling like hydraulic oil. Shoveling grain into and out of storage bins was murder on my lungs.

But no matter what we had to do all week during the growing season, Friday evening would come—and what a relief! With all of the machinery parked in the sheds, we went into the house and forgot about it all until Sunday.

I've joked in sermons that if you want your children to grow up loving the Sabbath, work them half to death for the preceding six days on a family farm.

**Doing Sabbath Well**

I give my family and my little home church a great deal of credit, because they did Sabbath well.

Sabbath started with housecleaning on Friday. When I wasn't out working on the farm, I helped with that; my mom taught her sons to do household chores. She also took literally the Ellen White quote about boots being blacked and baths taken before sundown. It was a formal Friday ritual to spread newspapers on the table and lay out all of our shoes and polish them. (I've never asked Carmen to polish my shoes, and she's not volunteered.) When we became teens, Mom gave up on putting the shower off-limits; there were too many of us and not enough capacity in the hot water heater to get it all done before sundown.

I especially looked forward to Friday night dinner. We would listen to the King's Heralds or Del Delker (then, as I grew older, to the Heritage Singers) on the stereo, and we'd eat vegetable beef soup and cinnamon rolls. After dinner, we'd read stories and sing around the piano. Often Friday night singing led to an impromptu special music the next morning at church.

Of course, the television stayed off for 24 hours, and we read only religious books and stories. We'd play a few Bible games or nature-based games, too.

Going to church wasn't optional, unless you were extremely ill or there was a blizzard. And I looked forward to church. Farm life could be lonely for a child, and the folks at church were our friends. (The children in my family attended public school, but we were in that respect "in the world but not of the world." Our social world was the Cleveland church.)

By the time I was a teen, I knew that the quality of the teaching and preaching in my little church wasn't stellar. Still, the important thing wasn't theology, but the experience of gathering with good people in a friendly environment.

When there wasn't a fellowship dinner, Sabbath lunch was often served in one another's homes. I am still in awe of those farm women who could prepare a bunch of children for church, teach Sabbath School or play piano or organ, then still be ready to entertain a family or two around the kitchen table right after church. Of course, everyone pitched in.

(A humorous note: even though most of us farmers ate meat, my mother usually had both a beef roast *and* a platter of breaded Chickettes on the table. In retrospect, I think the "righteousness" of the latter was in some mysterious way meant to balance out the table against the potential "sinfulness" of the former.)

My family wasn't scoldy about what children did on Sabbath afternoon, as long as we were outdoors. We could ride our bikes, take hikes, and even play outdoor games if we didn't get too rough. We did turn the television back on after sundown, unless the company stayed—which sometimes they did.

My colleague Stephen Chavez once observed that the Sabbath was supposed to be a delight as long as you didn't enjoy it. That was the experience of some of my same-age friends; they missed sports games and other fun events held on Sabbath. Personally, I never cared much about sports, but I did like nature, so I loved the days when our Pathfinder club held Sabbath events and picnics. When they didn't, and when no one at our home, I often biked or hiked alone back into the hills.

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**I give my family and my little home church a great deal of credit, because they did Sabbath well.**

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### **Experience, Not Fear**

Let me make it clear that it is the experience of Sabbath, not its theology, that I loved and still (at least in memory) do. A divine command had taught us to “keep” Sabbath, but it wasn't the reason for the joy it brought us.

One aspect of Sabbath that diminished my usual joy was the oft-repeated threat that our keeping Sabbath would lead our neighbors and our government, impelled by the pointy-hatted pope of Rome, to persecute us.

For years it haunted me. Our eschatology, it seems to me, was rough work, built with theological hammers, saws, and nail guns. It was crafted in fear and from fear. By God's grace the Sabbath *experience*, as it came down to me, filled that rough space with soft furnishings.

Even though I became a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, I determined that I would never impose on my parishioners the fear that my pastors and teachers had forced upon me. And I didn't. I have been, if I may now admit it, a better Christian than Adventist. Having seen thousands go to their graves who had thought Jesus would return in their lifetimes, I live for the work of Christ in my life now, not for some scary future meeting.

I also did not indulge in “What am I allowed to do on Sabbath?” discussions. When someone asked, “Can we go swimming on the Sabbath?” I replied: “You're a Christian adult. You know what brings you closer to Jesus and to one another. You decide how you and your family will spend the Sabbath.”

### **Sabbath Lost**

As a pastor, I sacrificed some of the Sabbath experience I grew up with. Friday night meant last-minute knot-in-the-stomach preparation for a busy day of sermons and classes. My wife had a responsibility my mother never had: to work outside the home, which meant less time for Sabbath preparation and Sabbath-day mellowing.

My Sabbaths as a pastor were workdays, driving days, meeting days—filled with too much social interaction, which left me not refreshed, but drained. When I was a young person, I loved the social nature of the Sabbath. But as a pastor, I came to covet time alone. I've never again had the kinds of Sabbaths I had in my youth, and I doubt I ever will.

But there is still this promise: that in the next life “from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD” (Isa. 66:23, KJV). It sounds to me as if eternal life will be one long, long, *long* Sabbath! **AT**

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH

# A CHURCH HOME EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD

BY BJÖRN KARLMAN



A decade ago my wife, Jammie, and I giddily handed in resignation letters to our Northern California employers and took off on a yearlong trip around the world. Our vision was to explore the globe and do some good while we were at it. We lived in Thailand, Argentina, and Germany for a few months each.

Everywhere we went, we tried to get involved. The experience was awesome. In fact, we loved globetrotting so much that we never moved back to Northern California. Instead, we kept moving around the world for eight years, making a living as online “digital nomad” freelancers before settling in the UK in 2020, when COVID-19 made it harder to travel.

As we crisscrossed the globe, we quickly learned that building community locally was absolutely critical to enjoying long-term travel. Luckily for us, Adventist churches provided just that. No matter where we were around the world, warm “Happy Sabbaths,” congregational singing of familiar songs, and amazing potlucks were standard at just about every church.

It was absolutely astounding to us that we could find instant community within days of landing in a different country by simply showing up at local Adventist congregations and doing our best to get involved. Wherever we were, new Adventist friends showed amazing hospitality by feeding us, suggesting accommodation options, showing us local attractions, and asking us if we were available to preach/sing/lead children’s Sabbath School. They even offered us jobs. We felt an immediate connection. It was amazing.

All of this bonding took place during some of the toughest times for the Adventist Church, as denominational leaders warred over ordination, compliance, academic freedom, and more. But nobody quizzed us on our stance on any of these issues as some kind of prerequisite to joining the local church family. We were simply welcomed.

This experience confirmed my hunch that what divides us as Adventists need not define our experience of community and worship together. It never should. If we can’t show love and acceptance to our spiritual family, regardless of where individuals fall on the Adventist continuum, then all of this isn’t worth very much. Something about the experience of communal worship from Sabbath to Sabbath builds ties across ideological divides.

## When Differences Cut Deep

Before things start sounding too hunky-dory, though, I’ll freely admit that we visited our fair share of not-so-great churches around the world. Grumpy greeters, judgy Jesuit hunters (the type who see a conspiracy in absolutely everyone and everything), and phoned-in sermons can combine on any given Sabbath in any country to leave one frustrated and looking for the closest exit.



Worshippers across the Adventist world must contend with huge differences. I'm a missionary kid, and at an early age I learned to accept that one Sabbath I might be worshiping in a rather sedate setting, where my dad taught at Hong Kong Adventist College, and the next week I could be in northern Nigeria, where deacons carried long poles with which to nudge and otherwise set straight misbehaving worshippers. I knew that my grandma's church in the Swedish region of Dalarna was bound to feature gray heads and stoic (somewhat depressing) renditions of hymns set in a minor key and that a week later, I could be enjoying delicious pancit noodles after a Sabbath morning of exuberant Filipino choir singing.

I will confess to feeling whiplash later in life, when moving straight from a conservative congregation in Southeast Asia to a coffee bar in the lobby of a Southern California church. Same happy Sabbath, but very different buzz.

The differences can cut deep, at times. My blood was boiling as I headed to church the first Sabbath after the 2015 San Antonio General Conference vote, which disallowed world divisions the right to decide on region-specific approaches to women's ordination. I was definitely a minority voice that Sabbath, as tight grins and expressions of relief rippled through the congregation at the close call the Adventist Church had had with "compromise." It made me livid.

I still remember the tension when, a few years after San Antonio, I told an ultra-conservative pastor at one church that I was in favor of women's ordination. He reacted as though I'd said I enjoyed casual arson. Instant judgment.

## Friendship and Fellowship

Happily, the story didn't end on that painfully awkward note. My family and I made a point of faithfully attending this pastor's church. He and I differed on some matters, but we made it clear that we were very much in favor of friendship and fellowship, and we hit it off as friends. I was even asked to preach a couple of times at his church. We worshiped the same Jesus. The Spirit could bridge differences of opinion.

I had a similar unexpected "kumbaya" experience with General Conference President Ted Wilson a few years ago. I'd flown to Tokyo from Bangkok for a weekend to write about an evangelistic campaign he was leading. As soon as he heard I was writing for an independent publication, he refused to be interviewed. I wasn't surprised (it wasn't the first time he'd shot me down in person over an interview request), but I was determined not

to waste the opportunity, so I suggested we talk anyway, on the condition that I didn't quote him.

That worked. And as we rubbed shoulders, we got to share some food, crack some jokes, and talk about my native Sweden. I walked away from the weekend still not agreeing with Wilson on a whole host of key issues, but with the experience of seeing him let his hair down (so to speak). What made the difference? Genuine fellowship. Focusing on common ground. Letting the Spirit (and sumptuous Japanese potluck food) work.

I firmly believe the future is bright for the Adventist Church. Many things need to change, some of them urgently. But let us never get distracted from the fact that we are a worldwide family and that we are at our best when we drop our defenses, focus on Jesus, and actually enjoy worshipping together. **AT**

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## FAMILY PRAYER

BY COLETTE GAUTHIER CARR

My parents became Seventh-day Adventists in their thirties, after the birth of their third girl. Both of them came from traditional, though not strict, Catholic families. Their conversion was not seen kindly, and they had to face some nasty comments. To their credit, they never cut ties with anyone—always including, always visiting, always inviting. I guess they had learned how to turn the other cheek and be forgiving.

But their bold decision had profound effects on me, my sisters, and subsequent generations.

Among other Adventist traditions, my parents adopted one very specific one: at home, every morning, every evening, rain or shine, late or not, busy or not, tired or not, my parents stopped for *la vigile du matin et la vigile du soir*, as we say in French—that is, morning and evening devotions.

*La vigile* consisted of a reading from a devotional book (one for the morning, another for the evening) and a prayer offered by one of us. It lasted 10 minutes at the most. Morning and evening, my parents gathered their five girls for family worship. Over time, one after the other flew from the nest: four, three, two, and then

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH

it was just me. I am the youngest, so up until I left home myself, I had been exposed to many, many readings and prayers.

After we were all gone, they kept at it. I can still see them sitting next to each other at the large kitchen table, with the sound of the grandfather clock in the background, opening one of their well-worn devotional books to read the words aloud and then pray by name for each one of us girls, for their many grandchildren, and for anyone else who might need a little extra blessing. They never failed.

While growing up, I felt this devotional time to be mainly a nuisance. It kept me from doing things I thought were more important. But I liked reading aloud; I always had a flair for performing arts and couldn't escape it, so it was often

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**My parents' simple daily request for God's presence and blessings—which, when I was younger, sometimes felt mechanical and repetitive, I admit—opened the door of our family home and invited him in.**

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my assignment to read the devotional. (I must admit that I often tried to read as fast as I could—but always with a good intonation.)

Looking back now, I can certainly see that because of that faithful and repeated family event, I felt God's presence in our home, and it made a huge difference. Over the years we had our share of family drama and trials. And when these times of hardship came, we always had the opportunity to ask for help, which never failed to come. My parents' simple daily request for God's presence and blessings—which, when I was younger, sometimes felt mechanical and repetitive, I admit—opened the door of our family home and invited him in.

My childhood memories are few and often blurry, but I can pinpoint a few instances (how many might I have forgotten?) when God was obviously present in my life and by my side—not because I personally asked him to be with me, but because my parents did.

I am in my fifties now. Both of my parents are at rest—and you guessed it—now I love to spend time in prayer and quiet time! These are precious moments. I may not hear God's voice, might not even feel his presence, but it's my way of telling God: "I'm here. I'm listening (or at least, trying). I'm open to your influence in me. Please, come sit with me."

And God does work in me. I will find, while going about my usual day, lovely opportunities to help someone. Or when things don't go the way I had planned, I am surprised to find that I am able to take a breath and stay calm instead of losing my patience and self-control.

I am a work in progress, but I have no doubt that God helps me and guides me because, when I spend time with him and open my heart to him, I give him permission to do so.

In the end, I think that one of the most precious things our parents taught us—taught me—was to feel comfortable addressing God. It became a normal thing to do. God's was a household name for us. The 10 minutes in the morning and the 10 minutes in the evening they deliberately spent with God added up to countless hours, countless days, and countless years of blessings we'll never be able to fully appreciate and comprehend. **AT**

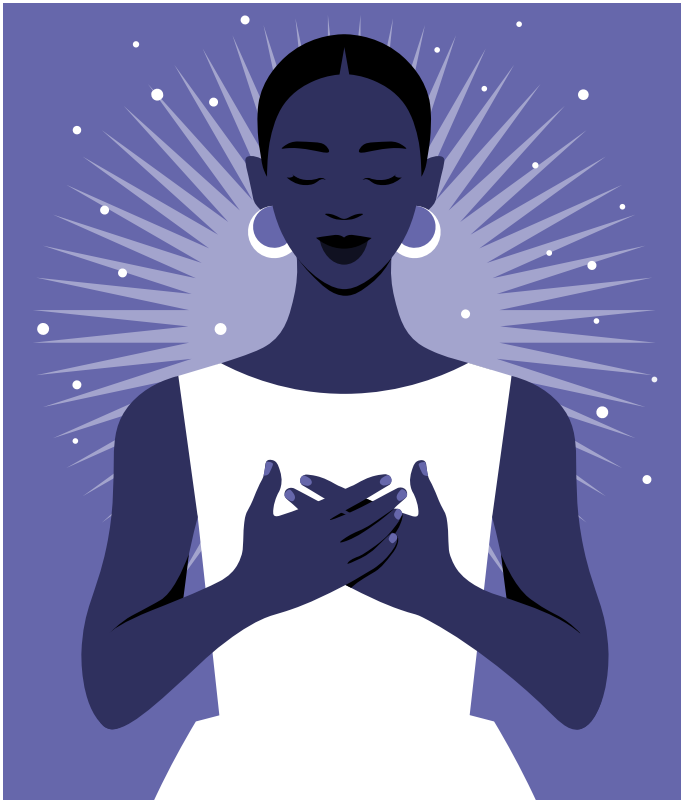
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## THE PROGRESSIVE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

BY JIM WALTERS

The value of truth was deeply instilled in me while growing up in a solid Adventist home. Yes, we Adventists had "the truth"—the complete and final truth. This surety was sometimes communicated by an innocent query about an acquaintance: "Is he/she 'in the truth'?"

As I matured, my notion of truth broadened and deepened, and I realized that "truth" far exceeded my early comprehension, as taught to me by my godly parents and my dear Adventist community in Collegedale, Tennessee, which was affectionately known as "Happy Valley."



Truth-expansion is not just okay; it's mandatory—at least it was for me. I came to see that the very notion of truth implies an implicit progressivism, given that all human (even religious) knowledge is always partial—something the wise apostle Paul understood (1 Cor. 13:8-10) but that escaped my wonderful forebears.

My Adventist upbringing instilled in me the vital importance of truth. I was taught the truth, but more significantly, I caught the truth-bug. The honest pursuit of truth became my core spiritual/intellectual treasure. Thank you, Adventism!

In her more advanced reflections, Ellen White understood this pursuit: “We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn,” she wrote.<sup>1</sup> But in her equally honest but less mature expressions, she often displayed a limited, provincial vision. Although I understand historically her more limited mindset and its pronouncements, I value the mature insights.

## Thought Leaders of 1920

In the final years of Ellen White's life, Adventist leaders were forming into two camps regarding her value and authority on historical, scientific, and biblical issues.

The Daniells-Prescott-Lacey camp held her in high esteem as a person and as a prophetic church leader. But these friends and close associates knew her very well and were too religiously informed to view her or her writings as inerrant or finally authoritative. For H. C. Lacey, White's value was “more in the spiritual light it throws into our own hearts and lives than in the intellectual accuracy in historical and theological matters.”<sup>2</sup> Her writings give “spiritual value,” not “historical accuracy.” Adventist historian Gilbert Valentine observes that A. G. Daniells and W. W. Prescott joined Lacey in this, we might say, devotional interpretation of White's inspiration.<sup>3</sup>

This trio was ideally qualified for evaluating the matter. Daniells, assistant to Ellen and James White in the latter's last years, was later the longest-serving General Conference president. Prescott was a religion scholar and a key aid to Ellen White in the historical revision of the 1911 edition of her monumental *The Great Controversy*. Lacey, a college religion professor, was a brother-in-law of Ellen's influential son, Willie White. In different capacities, all three leaders aided her in co-founding Avondale College in the 1890s.

On the other side was the Washburn-Holmes camp, which saw Ellen White's writings as literally inerrant and infallible in all ways. Minister J. S. Washburn was on the legalist side at the 1888 GC Session, and writer/linotype operator C. E. Holmes advocated for White's perfection in writing expression, lifestyle, and Bible accuracy.<sup>4</sup> Both men were gifted churchmen who early leaned toward fundamentalist thinking.

Washburn criticized Daniells and Prescott for abandoning White's “verbal” inspiration (the common view among laypersons) in favor of advocating a “dynamic” view at the 1919 Bible Conference, a session dubbed by Holmes as the “Diet of Doubts.”<sup>5</sup>

In a hypercritical pamphlet, *Have We an Infallible “Spirit of Prophecy”?* Holmes writes: “One tells me her books are not in harmony with facts historically, another that she is wrong scientifically, still another disputes her claims theologically.... If these claims are all true, how much Spirit of Prophecy does the remnant church possess?.... Several have said to me: ‘Oh, you are

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making a pope out of Mrs. White,’ I reply, ‘Never!’ I would not lower the dignity and authority of God’s messenger by putting her on a par with a Pope. She is far above and superior to any Pope.”<sup>6</sup>

**How They Shaped Us**

Much history about this era wasn’t readily available even five years ago. That’s because a hundred years ago, the Washburn-Holmes camp fought and largely overpowered the Daniells-Prescott-Lacey perspective. Historian Benjamin McArthur says that Daniells “faltered” in the aftermath of the 1919 Bible Conference. This was “perhaps Daniells’s greatest failure as leader. Rather than leading his church toward a much-needed re-examination of its prophet’s writings, he allowed the leaders and members during the 1920s to turn down the path of fundamentalism.”<sup>7</sup>


Today’s Adventism is the result of the endurance of Washburn-Holmes thinking: a world church of over 22 million in which the great majority think much more like Holmes than Daniells.

George Knight, academic/spiritual father to many Adventist historians, recently reflected—tongue-firmly-in-cheek—on the 1960s crest of Ellen White adulation: “[T]he early 1960s was a wonderful time to be Ellen White. She was not only authoritative for exegesis and theology but also inerrant, infallible, 100 years ahead of her time, of a flawless character, and for many, verbally inspired. And to top it off, everything she wrote came straight from heaven. The most remarkable thing about those early 1960s perspectives related to Ellen White is that she herself did not believe them or agree with them. And neither did most of those of her contemporaries who worked closest with her.”<sup>8</sup>

**The Honest, Adventist “Truth”**

Thanks to contemporary Adventist historians, we have more reliable information and insightful, scholarly analysis about our history, which is appreciative of Ellen White but also demonstrates her thoroughly human side. The result is a much richer and more truthful portrait of ourselves, too, and a better understanding of what it means to be a people of progressive truth.

Truth is progressive, period. Particularly for today’s Adventism, this applies to history, science, and theology. Coming even closer to home, truth is progressive in our accurate understanding of our Adventist selves.

Now that’s the honest, Adventist truth! 

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (July 26, 1892).

<sup>2</sup> A. G. Daniells, “The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History,” a conversation topic at the 1919 Bible Conference held in Takoma Park, Maryland (July 30, 1919). Reprinted in *Spectrum: The Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums* (July 1979), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Valentine, *Ostriches and Canaries* (2022), pp. 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Michael W. Campbell, “Claude Ernest Holmes,” *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (2020). Online at [encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=D9HS](http://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=D9HS).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew J. Lucio, “Judson Sylvanus Washburn,” *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (2020). Online at [encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=DAD4](http://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=DAD4).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Campbell, *op cit*.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin McArthur, “Arthur Grosvenor Daniells,” *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (2020). Online at [encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=8972](http://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=8972).

<sup>8</sup> George Knight, *Ellen White’s Afterlife* (2019), p. 17.

OUR DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

BY ROBERT D. CRUX

Who should be the beneficiaries of religious liberty? Should it be Christians only, or should it include Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and people of other world religions?

I have always believed that religious liberty was one of the great strengths of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our church takes the position that religious liberty is inseparable and central to all other fundamental freedoms. The abiding interest of the Adventist Church in religious liberty probably has no equivalent in the Christian world. This is why I find that one of the most valuable things my church has ever done is to advocate for religious liberty for everyone.

**A Biblical Foundation**

The Bible envisioned a society in which religious liberty is respected and individuals make their own choices when it comes to religion. The apostle Paul wrote, “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through

love” (Gal. 5:13, NASB). Scripture places a high value on human freedom, which is part of the creation account in Genesis. When God made humans in his own image, he gave us free will to choose to love, follow, and obey him or to live as we please.

A running theme throughout the Bible is the idea that religious freedom is a basic right for humankind. Citizens and people of faith in the United States have benefited from this biblical principle. It is enshrined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which says that everyone in the nation has the right to practice his or her own religion, or no religion at all.

### **Adventists Have Led the Way**

The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) Department of the North American Division states that for more than 170 years, “the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been committed to promoting freedom of belief for all people. ... For Adventists, religious freedom has a strong biblical, historical, and theological foundation.”<sup>1</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists have always believed that the God-given right of religious liberty is best exercised when church and state are separate. This became apparent in the late 1880s, when

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**The Adventist belief that everyone should be a beneficiary of religious liberty may be one of the most essential parts of the mission of our church.**

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the fledgling Adventist Church made a difference in the United States by opposing Sunday laws. As people who observed the Sabbath on Saturday, they saw any action by the State to impose another day of rest as a strong violation of religious freedom and a betrayal of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Adventists took the position that the State should not impose a day for religious observance. It is a matter of conscience. They saw themselves as defending the biblical truth that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath day of rest.

Even though Adventist eschatology creates a certain anxiety, even paranoia, that a national Sunday law is imminent and will be enacted just before the return of Jesus, the church’s opposition

to Sunday laws in the late 19th and early 20th centuries helped give the Seventh-day Adventist Church a presence in the public sector. Greater visibility of the church’s position on religious liberty for all people demonstrated an openness to others who also experienced persecution and discrimination. It helped to build credibility and trust with the public. More importantly, it began to change the thinking of those who saw the Adventist Church as a fringe sectarian movement and helped them to view it more as a Christian denomination.

The Department of Religious Liberty was organized in 1901 by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. When the Department of Religious Liberty began to publish *Liberty, A Magazine of Religious Freedom* in 1906, it became the only magazine on religious freedom in the Americas for many decades. Later, when the Department of Religious Liberty was reorganized as the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, it expanded to an international presence advocating for religious liberty.

Through PARL working with governments, religious institutions, and international organizations, the church has fought for the rights of individuals to exercise freedom of conscience. PARL distributes *Liberty* magazine to nearly 200,000 thought leaders, mostly non-Adventist, who include federal and state legislators, judges, lawyers, mayors, and many others identified as having an interest in religious liberty.

Defending people of faith who have been unfairly targeted by school boards, government officials, city councils, business employers, or anyone else in power has been part of our DNA as a church. Fighting against laws that would inhibit an individual’s religious freedoms, working to obtain the release of individuals imprisoned for religious reasons, and supporting the rights of individuals fired from their jobs for following their conscience represent just some of PARL’s efforts. 

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The Separation of Church and State principle, which refers to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, offers the best safeguard for religious liberty and is in harmony with Jesus' statement, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21, KJV). The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department believes that the union of church and state is a sure formula for discrimination and intolerance and offers a fertile soil for the spread of religious persecution.

Seventh-day Adventists believe in the dignity of all human beings and in their God-given right to express their faith according to their individual freedom of conscience. The Adventist Church understands that "fighting religious oppression and defending an individual's right to worship according to his or her conscience—regardless of that person's religious affiliation—is in everyone's best interest."<sup>2</sup>


### Religious Liberty Distorted

In recent years the battle for religious liberty has become distorted and seemingly reduced to benefiting only certain groups of Americans. Andrew R. Lewis, an associate professor of political science at the University of Cincinnati, wrote in *The Atlantic*: "The way the cause is now deployed drives a perception that conservative Christians, who are tightly linked to Republican politics, will be the beneficiaries of its expansion."<sup>3</sup> While intolerance of another person's faith can be a personal choice, it should never be a legal requirement. Religious liberty should do no harm and should not be misused as a tool to ensure that only a specific set of religious beliefs and communities are prioritized above others.

Is there a lessening of appreciation for the church/state principle among conservative Adventist Christians who are sympathetic to the cry of evangelicals and their Christian nationalist movement? Do we still have the same passion for religious liberty as did our Adventist ancestors? Recent attempts by those who wish to distort and litigate the limits of religious liberty should be a cause of concern for Seventh-day Adventists. Because of such distortions and politicization, the cause of religious liberty has taken on a new importance. I have joined the growing number of advocates and voices in the fight to expose the dangers of Christian nationalism. Religious liberty should be a human right, rather than a privilege for only some Americans.

### Resisting Misuse

I am thankful that the Seventh-day Adventist Church remains faithful to the biblical model of religious liberty and continues to stand as a pillar of strength in vigorously defending the rights of all Americans to practice their religion. Our church has also helped to ensure that religious liberty is not misused. Adventists have fought alongside the American Civil Liberties Union and other civil libertarians to maintain religious liberty and to resist conservative Christian alliances with unethical theocratic designs.

As members and supporters of the church, we can all be proud of this ministry and its record of liberty for all. 

<sup>1</sup> "A Brief History: The Adventist Church and Religious Liberty," online at [www.adventistliberty.org/history](http://www.adventistliberty.org/history).

<sup>2</sup> "Freedom to Believe," online at [www.adventist.org/religious-liberty/](http://www.adventist.org/religious-liberty/).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew R. Lewis, "The Fight for Religious Freedom Isn't What It Used to Be," *The Atlantic* (June 17, 2021). Online at [www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/06/fulton-and-polarization-religious-freedom/619158/](http://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/06/fulton-and-polarization-religious-freedom/619158/).

## ADVENTIST HEALTHCARE

BY TERRY SHAW

"Here's what made all the difference to me," said an acquaintance who had been a patient at one of our hospitals in Florida.

"Someone prayed with me before I went into surgery. Yes, I know it may seem like a small thing compared to all of the technology and skill that went into a very complex surgical operation. But I went into that operating theater with a sense of peace. That," he said, "is why I love this hospital."

Those who point out that Adventist healthcare is a huge business aren't wrong: here in the United States, our various healthcare systems are indeed multi-billion-dollar enterprises.

But that doesn't mean they are merely *secular* businesses. We who run Adventist medical establishments are proud that we are extending Jesus' healing ministry into the world, and we are very intentional about it.



## A Spiritual History

Most *Adventist Today* readers know that our current Adventist healthcare system grew from Ellen White's early embrace of preventive and natural health treatments. Mainstream medical care at the time relied on techniques such as bloodletting, blistering, and high doses of "medicines" that included mercury, opium, heroin, laudanum, and tobacco—plus a whole range of herbals that probably did nothing at all.

And woe to anyone who had to undergo surgery! Surgeons worked with dirty knives and bloody hands. While doing surgery, renowned London surgeon Robert Liston once cut off three of his assistant's fingers and slashed an innocent bystander's coat; both the patient and assistant died of gangrene, and the spectator died of fright. Lindsey Fitzharris, author of *The Butchering Art: Joseph Lister's Quest to Transform the Grisly World of Victorian Medicine*, writes that "It is the only surgery in history said to have had a 300 percent fatality rate."


Ellen White perceived that preventing disease was far superior to the butchery and poisoning perpetrated by Victorian medicine. Adventists adopted the sanitarium model—the most famous of which was in Battle Creek, lorded over by the eccentric John Harvey Kellogg, to which celebrities and presidents came for treatment. In 1905, the church established a sanitarium in Loma Linda, California, which grew into a school for training nurses and doctors and, in 1922, received an "A" rating as a fully accredited school for training in major medical specialties. From these beginnings, Adventist healthcare extended all over North America and the world.

As healthcare became scientific, the Adventist medical establishment kept up with new techniques—and even pioneered some. But beyond our embrace of solid scientific medicine, virtually all Adventist healthcare facilities still believe that we must treat the *whole person*: we have on staff specialists in preventive medicine, spiritual care, health education, and public health.

## A Worldwide Mission

Those who know Adventist healthcare from their acquaintance with Orlando or Loma Linda or Kettering should realize that there is more to it than the big corporate systems you see in North America. Says the church's website, "Adventists operate over 170 hospitals, along with 240 smaller medical facilities worldwide that serve over 12 million outpatients each year from every walk of life in hundreds of communities."

Take as an example the Maluti Adventist Hospital in Lesotho, Africa—one of the most HIV-ravaged countries in the world. Maluti has 150 beds but still manages 5,000 admissions to the hospital each year, including 1,600 deliveries and 3,000 operations, as well as 120,000 visits to outpatient departments and clinics. It is the premier healthcare facility in that tiny, mountainous, landlocked country.

Or consider the Hôpital Adventiste d'Haïti, overseen by a team from Loma Linda University that specializes in orthopedic care for the many who lose limbs in that lawless country. Our medical personnel work behind walls, always aware of the gangs and warlords that are eager to kidnap Westerners for ransom. Yet they persist. 

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I could give many examples, but the important thing to know is that we who are privileged to work in the prosperous West are also very proud of our sibling mission hospitals that extend Jesus' healing work to those who have so many fewer medical options than we do in North America.

### A Broad Demographic

I often remind my colleagues in denominational administration that doctrinal evangelism is not the only way to reach the world for Christ. The demographic touched by Adventist hospitals and clinics is far more diverse than the group you'll see in a typical Adventist congregation.

Picture the people who are waiting in the plastic chairs in the Department of Motor Vehicles when you go in to renew your driver's license: they're a cross section of our patients. They're people from all walks of life, all countries, all vocations, all levels of income and education. While we don't force doctrinal teaching upon anyone, we aren't at all shy to let them know that we are an Adventist facility, where there is more to healthcare than just medications and surgeries, where Jesus has a spiritual and healing presence.

Until Jesus returns, people will suffer with health problems. All Seventh-day Adventists should be proud that our denomination is at the forefront of not only good scientific medical care, but *whole-person* medical care.

We are continuing the ministry of Jesus. 

## SABBATH SCHOOL CLASSES

BY CHRIS BLAKE

It was my first Sabbath School. As a sweaty heathen, I slouched in a wooden pew with 14 other adults listening to a "teacher" drone through days of the week using fill-in-the-blank answers from a dry booklet they called a quarterly. Responses were sparse, restrained, and rote. No one asked questions. Nobody challenged or laughed or yawped. No coloring outside the lines. No personal vulnerability raised its tentative head. The entire enterprise reeked of superficial certainty.

*Damn, I thought, this may be the furthest I've ever been from reality.*

Fast-forward. Because of enduring love and infinite grace, I'm now a seasoned Adventist. And I typically savor Sabbath School time. *Why?* During the succeeding years, I found four fundamentals that infuse Sabbath School classes with purpose and joy.

### Interaction

A Sabbath School without interaction is as dry as J. Harvey's corn flakes without milk. The best class conversations are less a two-way street and more a roundabout with six entrances/exits. Authentic discourse is neither fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, nor true/false; it's short essay. The most ideal interaction encourages individualized input and stimulates the life of the mind. Indoctrination is one horn blowing; interaction is an orchestra swelling.

Friendly Sabbath School classes produce what Loren Seibold calls "the privilege of disagreement." Differences sharpen us as stone sharpens iron. One startling concept can enlighten the rest of our lives. *What was that she said?* My friend Buell reflects, "Each Sabbath School I'm blessed by at least one new awareness of God; on a special day, half a dozen shimmering insights blaze their way into my consciousness."

Should we seek to avoid differences of opinion in Sabbath School? Hardly. Unity rejects uniformity. Healthy interactions breed a healthy community. New Earth people don't tolerate differences; we celebrate them. "I like you because you're different."



## Relevance

“By praying in Sabbath School for someone else’s pain, I felt connected to those around me,” my friend Mark said. “I knew I had come home.”

As people share what’s troubling them and others pray for them, we enter holy ground. Too often we keep our deepest needs, delights, and concerns buried. Endlessly discussing arcane biblical minutiae (“What happened in the third year when King Jehoshaphat came down to the king of Israel?”) can lead to frustration and detachment. We become masters of irrelevance.

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## Should we seek to avoid differences of opinion in Sabbath School? Hardly. Unity rejects uniformity. Healthy interactions breed a healthy community.

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Connecting the dots between the past and present calls for intentionality and finesse. It isn’t easy. The best classes apply knowledge to local realities (“How does the book of Jonah address systemic racial prejudice?”) without careening into cable news sound bites. What a wonderful confluence arrives whenever we create relevant connections.

“Christianity is always intensely practical,” writes Ellen White. (Yes, along with others, I quote her when I agree with her.) Unfortunately, many Sabbath School classes tend to be intensely impractical. Present truth means merging with present reality. New wineskins—fresh applications—involve new media platforms, new listening, new contextual reaches, and possibly new (tremble at the thought) music.

At the very least, good Sabbath School classes enable us to enter one another’s lives. What could be more relevant than that?

## Sanctuary

In our small (20 or so members) hybrid Sabbath School on the Central California coast, Roger speaks from Nebraska. Harry is in Alaska. Ellen has smiled at us from Spain, Josh from New York City, Arpad from Peru. Greg is in Colorado. Smuts and Arlene are across town. They all Zoom in to find a sanctuary, a safe place to openly be themselves.

The best Sabbath School classes are curious sanctuaries. You know them when you are inside; you feel buoyed, connected, renewed, seen. They remain graceful, open umbrellas against the thrumming rain of dehumanizing, insistent religion. Attending Sabbath School classes next to me have been recovering atheists, recovering Lutherans, recovering deists, recovering Catholics, and scads of recovering Adventists.

Where else do we enter deep discussions about God? When else do you regularly probe life’s three biggest questions (where we came from, why we’re here, where we’re headed)? Facebook? *The Washington Post*? TikTok? Coffee shops? Come on, *really*?

As Jesus did and does, Sabbath School classes draw us out of the mundane urgent toward the irksome important. They make it safe to question, because God loves people who ask questions.

## Discipleship

Many miss the distinction. On Sabbaths, Adventists designate a time for discipleship and a time for worship. Jesus doesn’t opine on how we ought to worship. Instead, he focuses continually on what it means to be his disciples. “If you love me, you will...”

In the Great Commission, Jesus proclaims: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you....” (Matt. 28:18-20, NKJV). He didn’t say, “make *decisions*.” He didn’t say, “teaching them to *know*.” (“Observe” here simply means *do*.)

And he didn’t say, “observe the Ten Commandments.” Jesus’ commandments include:

- “Forgive as I forgive you.”
- “Share without conditions.”
- “Don’t be afraid.”
- “Eat what’s put before you.”
- “Be a peacemaker.”
- “Do not be anxious.”
- “Be humble.”
- “Love your enemies.”

How do we teach people to *do* all of that? When can we set aside time for such an endeavor?

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Discipling time is Sabbath School. That's when. Every week. The best discipleship classes enable people to actually do Christianity with all of its liberating nuances, applying lessons to life. Jesus observes, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34, NKJV). We believe what we do more than we do what we believe. "God's Way is not a matter of mere talk; it's an empowered life" (1 Cor. 4:20, MSG).

Activist Sabbath Schools keep the fun in the fundamentals. Local Sabbath School classes bring food, move families, pay electric bills, supply transportation, clean yards, host parties, assist refugees, buy Christmas presents for impoverished children, pray, serve at homeless shelters, fix cars, protest injustice, volunteer at Food Banks, embrace LGBTQ people, write cards, go caroling in August, and find hundreds of creative ways to deliver joy.

*"Mere words seem inadequate to express our gratitude. Your actions are an answer to prayer. I am overwhelmed and amazed at the kindness shown to us."*

*"These people just showed up and started helping me. I cried when I saw them."*

*"You all sent money, blankets, toys, clothes, so much. You are angels among us, and my family and I will be forever grateful."*

The closer we get to reality, the closer we get to God. God is love. Interaction, relevance, sanctuary, and discipleship coalesce to express love that is intensely practical.

Sabbath School's joyful purpose is transparent. Each week imperfect followers of Jesus gather, intrepid and real, bathed in enduring love and infinite grace. **AT**

# THE STATE OF THE DEAD AND THE RESURRECTION

BY REINDER BRUINSMA

Some years ago, I went to a reunion of my elementary school in a village 20 miles north of Amsterdam. There were three elementary schools in the village of my childhood: a public school, a Roman Catholic school, and the Protestant school I attended with my siblings. I discovered at our reunion that after some 60 years, all seven pupils who had been with me in the same class were still alive. These classmates were all from Protestant Christian homes, but from a number of different denominations. I was a Seventh-day Adventist, some were Dutch Reformed, others were Christian Reformed.

One man in my class, Bart, came from an ultra-orthodox variety of the Reformed branch of Dutch Protestantism. He was one of several of my classmates who remembered, as one of the most dramatic events of their school time, the funeral of my brother Henk, who died when he was just 8 years old. All of the 50-plus students attending our small school had come to the village churchyard and had sung a psalm as they stood in a circle around the open grave.

At the reunion, to my surprise, Bart told me that it was at that occasion that he had heard the gospel for the first time in his life! He said he had been brought up in a religion that offered no element of hope. His denomination taught (and still teaches) double predestination. According to this view, God has decided, in his unfathomable wisdom, who will be saved and who will be lost and will eternally burn in hell. There is nothing a human being can do to influence that divine verdict. And who are we, miserable human beings, to question God's sovereignty and supreme authority?

As the Adventist pastor addressed our family, the boys and girls of the school, and dozens of villagers, nothing in his short funeral sermon alluded to the predestinarian concept that one can never be sure whether one will be saved or lost. The pastor did not talk at all about the nebulous concept of an immortal soul that had left the body that was being buried.

What he did speak about was the certainty that my brother would wake up, after a sleep-like intermezzo, when Christ comes to take all of us home.



## Why I Cherish This Doctrine

Very soon after the 1844 “disappointment,” Adventist Sabbatarians (who would in 1863 organize the Seventh-day Adventist Church) embraced the concept of death as a “sleep,” during which a person’s identity is remembered in the mind of God, until he or she receives a new life at the time of the second coming of Christ. They concluded that the idea of an immortal soul, which exits the body when a person breathes his last and goes immediately to heaven to be with God, has much stronger antecedents in Greek philosophy than in biblical thought.

I am glad my church has retained the biblical concept of what we usually refer to as “conditional immortality” and that I already had a childlike belief in this doctrine when, at age 10, I lost my little brother.

In the milieu in which I grew up, questions about our eternal destiny played an immensely important role. The non-Adventists in my family’s social network were mostly Calvinists of a moderate variety. Most of them had a substantial knowledge of the Bible, and my parents (especially my mother) would get into long discussions about the nature of death.

As a young boy, I knew all of the arguments for death as a sleep, plus the rebuttals for the few texts in the Bible that seemed to support the idea of an immortal soul. I also knew that the people who did not accept Jesus would be punished in the final judgment with the “second,” i.e., an eternal, death. In fact, in the religious climate in which I grew up, Adventist evangelistic campaigns would always begin with public lectures about the state of the dead!

So, the doctrine of death as a kind of sleep, and of the “second death” as a final destiny for those who failed to accept God’s grace, has always been an important strain in my Adventist DNA.

## If God Is Love...

Perhaps the most urgent question, of nonbelievers as well as believers, is *How can this happen, if God is indeed a God of love?* Why does God allow the suffering we see all around us? Why war? Why pandemics? Why earthquakes, if there is a God who defines himself as a God of love?

I do not have a fully satisfying answer. I remain like the father of the epileptic boy, who comes to Jesus and says, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24, NLT). I struggle to reconcile the misery and evil in society around me with the existence of a loving God. Still, I hang on to my faith in God, because not believing would rob my life of all true meaning.

I cannot, however, reconcile the idea that God is love with the existence of an eternally burning hell, in which “the wicked” suffer excruciating pain as sulfuric flames lick at their scorched but never-fully-disintegrating bodies. I cannot believe in a God who would “solve” the problem of evil in such a repulsive manner. I associate the picture of Dante’s inferno and similar portrayals of hell with the evil character of the devil, not with the kind of God whom I want to worship and serve.

Far more consistent with the concept of a loving God is to believe that there is life beyond death for all who say “yes” to God. My Adventist upbringing and all of my experiences as an Adventist believer and as a church worker have, admittedly, left me with many questions and nagging doubts. But among the core beliefs of my church, I especially treasure the conviction that I will live on after the curtain falls over my present existence: not as a ghostly immaterial something, but as a new, perfect creature. In the intermediate period, my identity will be safe in the divine database. God will not forget who I am and will give the person I am now a new life, and eternal life, when the time has come.

That is a gospel of hope. **AT**

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH

POTLUCK, THE GREAT  
EAT-AND-GREET

BY JAMMIE KARLMAN



Church potluck is that special meal where everyone brings a dish to share, church members can continue their Sabbath School arguments, many a college student finally eats something nutritious, small children ladle unconscionable portions onto their plates, befuddled visitors ask, “What is that?” at almost every platter, and all can freely and abundantly criticize the sermon.

On a list of Top 10 Things Adventists Love, potluck probably ranks #3, behind haystacks and *The Sound of Music*.

Potlucks typically follow a Saturday morning church service, but they have been known to spring up after vespers, midweek prayer service, or any time hungry children are around.

**Breaking Down the Bread**

The victuals, usually vegetarian, are laid out in a rainbow cacophony on long tables. Then, people stand in immense lines, clutching their paper plates and praying that some Special K Loaf will still be left by the time they actually reach the table.

Potlucks are where one can come the closest to witnessing the miracle of the multiplying loaves and fish. At the beginning of every church potluck, there is a heart-stopping moment where the dishes seem too few and the people too many.

“Don’t worry,” a church member once said, patting my arm as I stood hyperventilating over a presumed lack of food. “There will be enough. Somehow, there’s always enough.”

And she was right. Either more dishes materialize, or people feel full on less, but I have never left a church potluck hungry. And I have been to a lot of potlucks, in a lot of places. The best thing about having a global denomination is, well, having churches all around the world.

Like any good Adventist university student, let’s get to know what to expect from churches whose members honor food traditions from various parts of the globe.

**Africa**

At an African Adventist potluck, going hungry is not an option.

“You have a lot of food—lots and lots of food,” said my friend Shola Semakoula, who has been to more than her fair share of African potlucks. And it’s not just easy, quick, snacky kinds of food. You can look forward to, stews, and many other traditional dishes that may take hours to cook, she said.

Interestingly, Shola and her husband, Sam, said that although it depends on the church, it would be hard to find a Nigerian potluck that was completely vegetarian.

## Asia

I have been to Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Korean, Malaysian, and Thai Adventist potlucks. One thing they all have in common is rice—lots of it. At these potlucks, it is not unusual to see rice cookers big enough to fit a 3-year-old inside.

Red rice. Brown rice. Yellow rice. White rice. Green rice. In Thailand, I had purple rice. In the Philippines, rice is made into deliciously sweet desserts, such as biko, or wrapped in banana leaves, as is suman.

In Malaysia, most Christians are Chinese, so Chinese food is a prominent feature at Malaysian Adventist church potlucks. In Korea, barley tea (either hot or cold) is served along with the food, which you must pick up with slim, slippery, stainless steel chopsticks (the food, not the tea). At Thai potlucks, don't be surprised if you see the "M" word: meat (clean meat, of course).

## Scandinavia

I reached out to *Adventist Today's* own Björn Karlman for information about Scandinavian potlucks because (a) he's Swedish, and (b) he was right beside me.

"What are Swedish potlucks like?" I asked Björn, who was trying to nap.

"Uh," he said groggily, "you know."

"What are their special dishes?" I asked. Björn looked around blearily.

"Potatoes?" I prompted.

"Yeah," he said hazily.

"What else?" I asked, exasperated.

"Meatballs," he said.

So there you have it, folks. Swedish potlucks are apparently exactly like an IKEA restaurant menu (except that the meatballs are vegetarian).

## South America

My Brazilian friend (who wishes to remain anonymous) told me that Brazilian Adventist potlucks serve lots of fruits and vegetables, and the food is both healthy and homemade. They usually include some type of soup and lots of homemade whole-meal bread, which is very tasty. Lunches also feature fresh salad, rice, vegetarian

feijoada (Brazilian black bean stew), and soya protein or gluten seitan dishes.

"There would be a lot of food, but not everything was good," she wrote. (Now you know why she wanted to be anonymous.)

In Argentina, I went to potlucks that featured a hearty stew and lots of bread, as well. It was not unusual for people to share mate tea, which was usually served in a hollowed-out gourd and drunk through a metal straw. The real kicker: mate tea has high concentrations of the Big C, caffeine. At least it's herbal.

## Adventists Who Eat Together...

But potlucks are about more than just the food (yes, really!).

My Brazilian friend told me: "I remember that when we went to churches and they had prepared a meal for us, we felt loved and cared for. It made us feel connected as one single people."

Her theory is that food always brings people together. "Having a meal together can break barriers," she said.

Science backs her up. Research from the University of Oxford found that "communal eating increases social bonding and feelings of well-being and enhances one's sense of contentedness and embedding within the community."

To be completely honest, however, at some point in your potlucking you will find yourself sitting with that guy who makes unnervingly long, unblinking eye contact while detailing his latest conspiracy theories about Ellen G. White's writings. Or you'll be sitting beside the church matron who barely talks to you but gives you plenty of side-eye, because your calf-length skirt is revealing too much ankle.

But if you sit and eat with that guy long enough, he might listen to your views. Honestly compliment that church matron's dish, and you might get a smile.

"Potluck is a great place," said Sam, "an opportunity to actually build stronger and better relationships and get to know the people you go to church with. I think it really helps the church community connect on a deeper level outside of just the church service."

Potluck is more than people coming together to share a meal and conversation.

"Potluck is where you become brothers and sisters," said Shola. **AT**

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH

## PATHFINDER CLUB

DARRELL MILAM

I am a Pathfinder. I first became one way back in the 1960s, and I'm still one today.

When I became a Pathfinder—a member of Sligo Challengers in the Takoma Park area of Maryland—my local club had been around for only about a dozen years. The program was huge, with more than 200 members. We met in the church elementary school gym but still had to divide the club in half. Juniors met in the morning and teens in the afternoon.

We did all of the typical Pathfinder activities: learning to camp, to cook over an open fire, and to safely handle a knife and hatchet. We studied the Bible and learned about Adventist history. We mastered how to look sharp in our dress uniforms as well as the basics of drill and marching. Much of that is still embedded in my memory, because I'm still a Pathfinder.

The things I learned in the Pathfinder Club are part of who I am. But it's not only about the skills. It's about the people who impacted my life.

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**I realized that the most important part of being a counselor was not teaching skills, but building connections with the boys in my unit.**

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**Role Models**

Male and female role models became my lifelong friends. Jack Olson was my club director, and his whole family got involved. Harold Carlson was my first counselor. He had a quiet manner, which helped to offset the high energy and rambunctiousness of half a dozen or so fifth-graders. Mr. Carlson's son, David, tagged along, even though he was too young to join the club officially. David and I developed a friendship that still endures.

Harold, as I later came to know him, could fix anything. He loved to tinker and was full of interesting bits of knowledge. His interest and fascination with how things worked challenged us. Now, as a building contractor, I look back and see the seeds he planted. Figuring out how to keep your tent pitched in the wind and rain taught me some of the same design and engineering principles that I use today.

Mr. Carlson impacted my life in other ways, as well. One Sunday morning I walked to a club meeting in my full-dress uniform. Some boys in my neighborhood started calling me names and making fun of my uniform. One slur I remember was “grass eater.” I don't know how they knew I was a vegetarian. When I got to the club meeting, it must have been evident that I had been crying, because some of the boys in my unit started to make fun of me.

What Mr. Carlson said is gone from my memory, but I remember how he reacted to both my unit mates and the neighborhood boys. He comforted me and challenged us as a unit to stand together. He told us that we needed to have each other's back and not pick on each other—to be proud of who we were and what we stood for. He said our uniform showed that we were part of something special. I still remember those feelings of community and camaraderie.

**Learning to Lead**

After going to college and getting married, I was asked to become a unit counselor. As a 20-something, it was a bit intimidating to be responsible for a group of boys. But I had positive memories of my time in the club and figured that if I could emulate what my counselors had done for me, I could succeed. I had the benefit of being able to seek advice from many of them.

I realized that the most important part of being a counselor was not teaching skills, but rather, building connections with the boys in my unit. I made it a point to be interested in what they were interested in. I listened to the same music and watched the same television shows, making it easier to relate to them. I quickly learned that time spent around late-night campfires or rides home in the van presented the best opportunities to build connections. I still use that technique.

I had been a counselor for only a couple of years when I was asked to become boys deputy director. A few years later, I was the club director when Sligo Church decided to add to its pastoral staff a children's ministries pastor. Norma Osborn was the first.

For several years, the Pathfinder program had shrunk to only about 60 members. Some church members seemed to feel that because we wore uniforms and did drill and marching, we were too militaristic. They apparently did not appreciate the skill-building and personal connections being made.

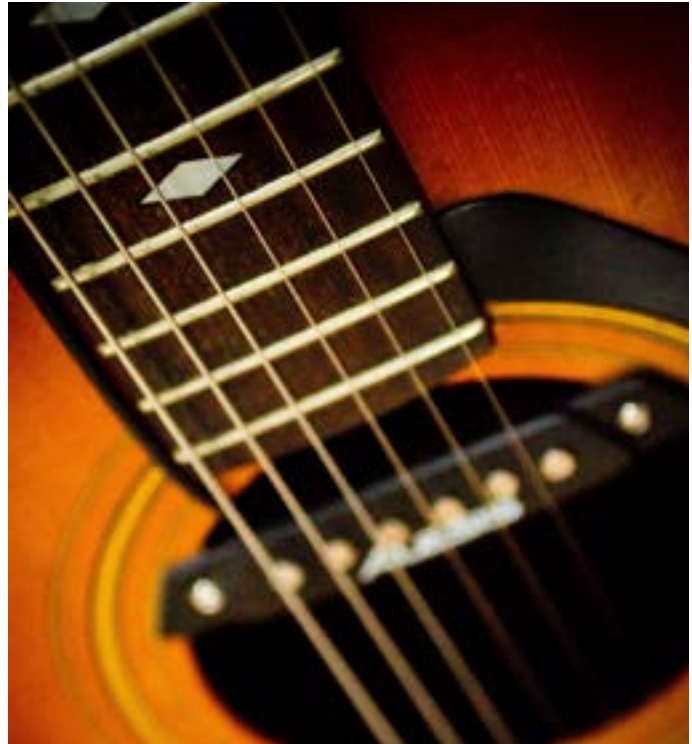
Norma recognized the importance of the Pathfinder Club and worked to integrate it back into daily church life. She placed her trust in me and the club staff. That's when I made my first

presentation to a church board. We had developed a major fund-raising campaign that needed the board's support. We spent quite a few hours around Norma's kitchen table, working out the plan along with the presentation.

Thinking back, I see how she was mentoring me and pushing me to hone my leadership skills. Her trust and support, along with that of other church leaders, had a profound impact on me. I was a young person, with limited life experience, being valued as a member of the team.

Over the years, hundreds of boys and girls have been part of our club. I now have staff members whom I once led as Pathfinders. I have children in the club whose parents were in my club. That brings me joy and a sense of success, but much more important are those relationships. When I run into a former Pathfinder, I get a big smile, a handshake, or a hug. Many former members stay in touch, share what is happening in their lives, and sometimes (still) ask advice. Many club leaders who became adult friends have passed on.

Today, I find myself in their role and cherish the mentorship I received. It helped shape me into the person I am. My role as a mentor carries on what they began. It's why I am still a Pathfinder. **AI**



## MUSIC AND POETRY

BY BARRY CASEY

If you'd sifted through a random lineup of Adventist teenagers where I grew up in Northern California in the '60s, you'd be sure to find several who played the piano; eight out of 10 who were in choir, band, or orchestra; and a few who did all of that and played the guitar, drums, or harmonica besides. The making of music was a virtue much encouraged.

Some were fortunate enough to take piano lessons, the foundation for further musical pursuits, and most Adventist academies at least had a choir, which could make a joyful noise before the Lord.

### New Music

But those were the '60s, and the Beatles were gods. By the time most of us reached college in the early '70s, there were so many songs to cover, from so many groups and solo artists, that almost anyone with a guitar could make some music with friends.

The question for any kid wanting to play folk rock (or rock 'n' roll or pop or the blues or any derivation of those) was not what to play, but where one could play. Almost any music except sacred and classical was considered a threat, and the idea that a guitar could be part of a sacred service was simply inconceivable.

I can remember thumbing through the Psalms for texts about playing on the stringed instruments and the cymbals in the presence of the Lord in the temple. It was a cultural sticking point as well as an affront to religious sensitivities that the music of the street could find a home inside the church.

The Wedgwood Trio's winsome interpretations of hymns and spirituals eventually opened the door for other groups. The fact that they were banned from many Adventist colleges seems almost unbelievable now, but I suppose campus administrators could not see past the association of guitars with hippies, drugs, and sex.

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH

When we faced the wrath of a church elder who was incensed that we were bringing guitars into the sanctuary, we interpreted it as a power play intended to crush our youthful exuberance. The elders believed there were immutable standards for worship set down in the Bible and in church tradition. We were trying to make a space within that tradition for something new.

I think both of us were off the mark. Now I feel that worship practices are more about what we grow used to and comfortable with, rather than a prescription for sanctity. My friends and I thought of music in worship as an offering, not as a performance. It is not lost on me that my tastes in music for worship, unintentionally radical then, would now likely be seen by young people as surprisingly conservative. I also realize that what I long for personally in worship is a spirit of awe, mystery, and reverence—all elements that my elders felt would be lost by allowing guitars and drums in the sanctuary.

We find our way to spiritual transcendence early in life. Through the music of the choirs I sang in during academy, I felt the transformative power of poetry and song to lift my spirit and direct my energies toward God. I will be forever grateful to my Adventist teachers for that.

What I learned in choir was to pay attention to the lyrics and the way the music enhanced them to tell a story. That's what I find in the music of Paul Simon, U2, Bruce Springsteen, and Joni Mitchell, to name just a few. What drew me to these artists was their search for meaning, and their musical and lyrical eloquence in expressing themselves about being human in a confusing and heartbreaking world, that is somehow still beautiful.

I passed through that period of my life only occasionally reflective about the moment, except to be aware that I was living in a remarkable era—the meaning of which would not become clear any time soon, if ever—and that, like a swimmer trying to catch a wave, I had better do my best to stay ahead of the inevitable crash and to enjoy it while I did.

### Poetry

As a child growing up with loving but rather strict grandparents, I was not allowed to read novels, comics, or even most fiction. In elementary and middle school, that standard still existed for the most part, although one of our teachers read *Animal Farm* to us every day after lunch, thus instilling in me from an early age a love for both fiction and George Orwell.

Poetry was another matter. In our home, poetry ruled, and I found my way to the Victorian and Romantic poets my grandparents loved. Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Arnold, Rossetti—I read them early and often, along with Frost, Sandburg, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

I also discovered that quite a few of the Adventist adults I knew could recite poems from memory, a quality I admired and tried to emulate. In academy, our teachers brought us to great poetry, short stories, and dramas. Again, I'm grateful that they knew and loved great literature. They understood how beauty is so often aligned with truth and that wisdom for living springs from these wells.

I have most often seen myself on the boundary between the church and the world, as much drawn to communication with the world as I am despairing of making sense to many within my church. This boundary walking is an attempt to say to the world that Jesus is the answer to most of your questions and to say to the church that the world has questions for which your answers fall short. This impulse pretty nearly consigns my spiritual life to straddling a type of San Andreas fault line, yet the tremors I feel can be the source of whatever creativity is possible for me, a member of the species *Adventist* in the genus *Christian* of the human family. **AT**

## EDUCATION

BY LOREN SEIBOLD

I grew up in a working family. All of my ancestors, on both sides of the family going back more generations than I can trace, were farmers. My grandfather went to school to the second grade, and the rest of that generation felt blessed to be educated to the eighth grade. Because of Adventist education, my father and his sisters graduated from Sheyenne River Academy (where my father met my mother).

Since no church school was close to us, my siblings and I went to a small public school in Gackle, North Dakota. We were so isolated that we rode the bus for over an hour each way. It surely wouldn't rank as an extraordinary school, but we learned reading, writing, and arithmetic—and based on what I know about my classmates from those years (some of whom I still communicate with, thanks to social media), most of us did just fine.



Yet, it could have ended right there for me. As the oldest child, I could have stopped school at 18 and started farming—or taken up some other trade. What propelled me forward was the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Education Was Adventist**

Sheyenne River Academy was old and rundown. But being sent to a boarding school emphasized how important education was. There I entered a bigger world. Educated pastors from around the conference came for weekend programs. Weeks of prayer might introduce us to people from Union College who used “doctor” in front of their names. Returning missionaries inspired us with stories from their travels.

We were cut off from popular culture, but we were very much in touch with a broad Adventist culture. Our teachers, a few of

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**I could have stopped school at 18. What propelled me forward was the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To be Adventist was to be educated.**

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whom I still think were excellent, were from other parts of the country and told us stories of places they’d been.

I never asked if I should go to college; the education pattern had been set already by a few members of the family. Uncle Leon was a pastor and missionary. Uncle Harry was a school principal and educational superintendent. Aunt Gladys was a nurse. I had 11 cousins on one side of my family, 22 on the other. Every one of us went to college; many of us have done graduate studies, and a few of us even have the title “doctor” added to our names.

I struggled with college at first, but when I finally got serious about education, I discovered that I was a better student than I had given myself credit for.

### **What Makes Us Educated**

It seems to me there are three necessities for a good education.

One is curiosity. I wish teachers would realize that the point of education isn’t to memorize facts as much as to teach children to pursue the things that interest them. I have always followed rabbit trails of ideas, and I love discovering things I didn’t know—even in topics outside my field of study. It has served me well in this latest journalistic phase of my life.

The second is reading. Again, I have my church to thank for providing copies of *Primary Treasure* and *Junior Guide* and *Uncle Arthur’s Bedtime Stories* and the reading course books. Every night my parents read to us, and the habit of reading pushed us far beyond Adventist material.

A third thing, perhaps the most important, is meeting people—in the educational setting, teachers—who interest you and who are interested in you. When I arrived at Walla Walla College, I found an astonishingly interesting and interested group of youngish teachers in the school of theology, including Gerald Winslow, Alden Thompson, Ernie Bursley, Jon Dybdahl, John Brunt, Charles Scriven, and Malcolm Maxwell.

It was in a class about Galatians that I first heard Dr. Maxwell say we were saved by faith, not by works. It was a revelation! Imagine going through one’s whole intensely Christian life and not realizing, until 21 years old, that salvation was about God’s grace, not food or Sabbath-keeping! And yet that was my experience.

Another teacher, J. Paul Grove, insisted that we study the Bible without ever looking at a commentary or asking someone what it means. I found it tedious at the time, only later realizing that he was teaching us a basic form of biblical criticism that relied on context and structure. It made the Bible far less mysterious, not dependent upon authorities who would dictate its meaning to us. I became a critical (in the positive sense of that word) Bible reader.

Surprisingly, some of the people I met at Walla Walla College thought I was a decently bright chap who was worth mentoring! I owe much thanks to David Neff (then Walla Walla College Church associate pastor) and his wife, LaVonne, who welcomed me into their home and family, not just as a student but as a sort of little brother. I may have been educated more from conversations with them, thanks to their courageous honesty and incisive wit, than in classrooms.

And (here was the real miracle) they listened to me, and treated me as though I, too, were interesting! It was something I, a hick from the sticks, surely didn’t feel about myself.

I’m sure our teachers were cautious about what they said in classrooms, but the Neffs were among many in those years who mentored students. They invited us to their homes, conversed with us, suggested books for us to read, and told us things about the church and its teachings that we wouldn’t have learned elsewhere.

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH

**Other Reasons**

Oh, I know that the reason for emphasizing education wasn't always professional excellence. I believe many parents thought of Adventist education as a way to keep their children indoctrinated in the church, while finding a spouse who wouldn't lead them astray.

But that's okay—it worked for both. I met my wife, Carmen, at Walla Walla. She was from Cuba, I from a North Dakota farm: one of the blessings of a worldwide church! We both went on to earn advanced theological degrees: I attended Andrews University, where we became lifelong friends with Fritz Guy, and Carmen studied at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Later, thanks to being pushed by Central California Conference leader David Taylor, I graduated with a doctorate from the San Francisco Theological Seminary.

**Professional Postscript**

I am forever grateful that my professors taught me to be a creative thinker. But they didn't warn me that in becoming a pastor, I was plunging into a world that feared creative thinking and that mostly valued simplistic evangelistic formulas, safe orthodoxy, and baptism numbers. This was the era of theological witch hunts, and several times I nearly lost my pastoral career before it was well begun. Some of my conference leaders were unprofessional, dishonest, and cruel. Congregations were then (and many still are) mired in conflict, theological and otherwise, and the pastor is the one to get blamed. (That's why pastors move so often, and why the best are motivated to escape into office jobs.)

Parish ministry never lived up to the intellectual promise of my education. I am thrilled about what my Adventist education gave me personally. But I wonder whether the broad and liberal sort of theological education I received is necessary, or even helpful, for the churches most pastors will serve in this denomination. It may be time to rethink this model. **AT**

**HEALTH AND FAITH**

BY JACK HOEHN



The chance to meet the Son of God face-to-face in the second advent must be the first Adventist draw, and taking a real Sabbath rest every week must be the second. These two teachings shaped the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and others have written about them in the essays you'll find in this magazine.

But a third draw was added to Adventism just a few weeks after the church organized as a denomination: in 1863 Ellen White visioned a "health message." She looked back to an unspoiled Eden with "noble" inhabitants: perfectly healthy, long-lived human ancestors of great size—who, sadly, had since devolved by sin to a race that she unsparingly described as unhealthy, ugly, diseased, deformed, shrunken in size, short-lived, and plagued with "imbecility."<sup>1</sup>

White recast Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit as intemperance, or appetite controlling reason, and named as the cause of modern human suffering and sickness: "violating the laws of health."<sup>2</sup>

She also emphasized a plant-based diet as God's original design. "It was contrary to His plan to have the life of any creature taken," White wrote. "There was to be no death in Eden."<sup>3</sup> Humans before and after Noah's flood ate animals as food, however. The shrinking of human lifespans from the hundreds of years recorded in the first chapters of Genesis, and the shrinking of human size inferred from giant fossil bones, were both blamed on meat-eating.

Sodom and Gomorrah were examples of the result of gluttony, which then led to sexual excess. God fed the Israelites a vegetarian diet of manna and fresh water, but when they murmured for the "flesh pots" of Egypt (Exo. 16:3, KJV) and God allowed them to eat quail, it brought them death and disease (see Numbers 11).

The drunkenness exemplified by Noah, Nadab, and Abihu, as a result of drinking fermented wine or other alcoholic intoxicants, was next decried. Tobacco was described as "a slow poison." Tea and coffee were added as lesser members of the same class: "stimulants" that "lessen the value of spiritual things." In addition, "highly spiced meats," "rich gravies," "cake, pies, and puddings" were said to exhaust the stomach.

Adventists received a fairly straightforward prescription for reversing this downward path that led away from Eden, nobility, and health: "Be satisfied with plain, simple [plant-based] food, eating twice, or at most, three times a day."<sup>4</sup>

This Adventist health message later became Adventist health reform. The church opened sanitariums as an alternative to hospitals, promoting water treatments, vegetarian diets, and exercises instead of toxic chemicals (opium, strychnine, mercury, arsenic, etc.) as medicines.<sup>5</sup> This eventually led to training health-reformed Christian practitioners at denominational nursing, medical, and dental schools. Today, a community of about 9,000 Adventists in Loma Linda, California, form the nucleus of America's only "blue zone" region of exceptionally long-lived, healthy people.<sup>6</sup>

## Keeping the Health Message

Before writing this article, I talked with four people I love who are no longer Adventists to see how much of the health message they have retained.

Tammie is a court reporter. She says: "I am grateful to have been raised Adventist. I think it taught us how to be good people, positive people, helpful people, salt-of-the-earth people, to create a little heaven on Earth if we can, to hope for life after death. I did remain a vegetarian for several years after I left the church, although I finally gave that up. I have always eaten whole wheat flours, never white. I've always been attracted to a simple diet of natural whole foods, as described in the story of Daniel and his friends, who pledged to eat only vegetables in Babylon."

Scott, who served in the U.S. military and now works for the Veterans Administration, shares: "I would say that I am much more conscious than my co-workers of the foods I eat. I watch my sugar intake so as not to become diabetic. I don't eat fatty foods excessively. I do eat meat of all kinds, however. I try to include more fruits and vegetables than I would have, if not for my past. I found that my body and bones needed more calcium and Vitamin D, so I include foods containing both of these vitamins in most meals and also take a pill once a day. My health is good, and I don't have any medical conditions/problems I am aware of. I am glad for Mom's and Dad's advice on these matters and think I will live longer, better, and healthier as a result."

Patty is a lawyer who was raised vegetarian, but now (with her husband, son and daughter-in-law, and both granddaughters) she is totally vegan. Her Adventist upbringing made this transition with her family fairly easy for her.

The vegan diet is a common response for those who want to improve their personal health and also reduce the threat of global warming. Livestock production for food causes an estimated 23% of global warming. Learning in Sabbath School that killing animals to eat is unnecessary, because God didn't intend for this to happen, is not something you forget—even when you no longer attend any church.

## Adventist Mental Health

Some people have found Adventism toxic to their mental health, but others credit their Adventist upbringing with providing emotional and mental health benefits.

Tammie commented on this topic also: "My focus on gratitude originated with learning to pray as a child, to thank God for all of the good things. I'm agnostic now, so 'God' is a fuzzy idea, but the feeling of gratitude is still uplifting. I like how it focuses on the good that already exists. It feels more real for me than praying for things that do not yet exist."

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY CHURCH


Heidi, who runs a travel agency, told me that a group of former Adventist classmates and friends were sitting around a table when someone asked, “Would you as a non-Adventist send your children to an Adventist school?” After various replies, the one who posed the question then admitted she would “seriously consider it, based on the quality of the women sitting around this table.” Heidi suggests, “The Adventist emphasis on family, on nature, on doing good as well as being good—all of these are wonderful for children, and indeed, for humans in society.”

Why do some people who were raised Adventist feel scarred or damaged by their exposure to the church? Heidi reflects: “Being taught to think and reason, being allowed to question—these were not the experiences of all my peers, sadly, so I will always be thanking our parents for fostering that in us. I knew how lucky I was to have a loving and supportive family, good friends, nice Adventist teachers and fellow church members. While I knew that I probably wouldn’t continue in Adventism, I also recognized the value and benefits of it and have no regrets; indeed, I am very grateful for the way I was raised.”

**Good Principles**

Asked what religion they profess, an increasing number of former Adventists will answer, “none.” But when asked to describe what they value, their list of virtues includes unselfishness, justice for the abused, care for creation, universal acceptance and tolerance of all humans (and for most animals, except snakes or spiders), kindness, sharing, joy, peace, mercy, egalitarianism, hope, and healthy living. They search for meaning to life, and they want to be part of fixing what is wrong—to be active, not passive.

As an active, involved Adventist, I find these ideas from the “nones” to be a logical and theologically sound extension of the Adventist health message—a religion offering health for all humans, including women, homosexuals, the gender nonconforming, exploited races, and other underserved populations.

The theology behind our 19th-century health message obviously needs refreshing. The science behind good health is much more reliable today than it was 160 years ago. But the basic message—that God wants humans to be healthy and that it is a religious duty to do as much as we can to stay that way—is not a passing fad. Like the hope of Jesus’ return and the blessing of the Sabbath, it is an enduring strength of Adventism. 

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4a (1864), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> White, *Healthful Living* (1897), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4a, p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> A 2002 *Adventist Review* article by Dr. Hoehn, which reviewed the history of Adventist opposition to 19th-century toxic drugs, is available online at [www.adventistreview.org/archives/2002-1517/story1.html](http://www.adventistreview.org/archives/2002-1517/story1.html).

<sup>6</sup> Alexa Mikhail, “A Look Inside America’s Only Blue Zone City—Home to Some of the World’s Longest-Living People,” *Fortune* (April 2, 2023).

## ADVENTIST DEVELOPMENT AND RELIEF AGENCY

BY EDGAR CASTILLO

Many parts of the world are experiencing increasing secularism and a declining interest in organized religion and official dogma. But plenty of people, religious and nonreligious, have a desire to help others.

Relieving suffering and helping people make a better future is part of our Adventist DNA, as expressed in a major ministry of this church to which I devoted a significant part of my life: Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

Numerous Adventists see ADRA as the church’s most important ministry, and some donors prioritize ADRA over other ministries of the church. While I appreciate membership-growth initiatives in the organization, ADRA’s work also fulfills Christ’s mission by following the motto: “Justice. Compassion. Love.” In some countries, Adventists are known far more for relief and development than for the Sabbath—and I believe Jesus is happy with that.

**Our Journey**

I was working in Armenia in 2004 when I became director of ADRA in Armenia and Georgia (a neighboring country in the Caucasus region). It meant moving between countries frequently, and I didn’t enjoy spending time away from my

family—my daughters were 8 and 10—but I felt strongly that God had called me.

Our first project in Armenia was a soup kitchen. A U.S. \$54,000 project may not seem like much, but it let us offer fresh and prepared food to elderly people in Yerevan, the capital. In Georgia, we implemented basic healthcare projects within conflict zones. While dodging geopolitical conflicts, we kept busy an active team of professionals from Georgia, Russia, Armenia, and other nations.

Later, my family and I moved to the ADRA office in Sri Lanka, where we did water and sanitation projects and worked to improve nutrition, health, and emergency preparedness; then, we moved on to Mozambique.

After working in the United States for a time, I became the interim director of ADRA in Yemen in January of 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 crisis. Yemen had one of the most extensive and complicated portfolios. The country had been devastated by years of internal conflict, and a large part of its population was dependent on humanitarian aid. Food security, health services, and access to clean water are among its major needs. Yet, ADRA's work was appreciated by Yemenis on both sides of the conflict.

## The Mission of ADRA

It wasn't in God's original plan for humans to suffer, but our responsibility is to be his hands in caring for those who do. "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD," says Proverbs 19:17, NIV. Jesus told his followers that what matters most is helping those he called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine" (Matt. 25:40, NIV). Giving people food to eat and water to drink, sheltering the stranger, clothing those who have no clothes, looking after the sick, and visiting and caring for those passing through distress—whether in prison, persecuted, displaced, or refugees—these are some of the ways that ADRA fulfills the mission of God in this world.

With a dedicated and professional team worldwide, ADRA carries out its work of "serving humanity so all may live as God intended." We touch the lives of millions in nearly 120 countries worldwide, regardless of their ethnicity, political or religious affiliation, or gender. During 2021 alone, ADRA served 25.3 million people through 1,600 projects.

As I reflect on this journey of service with ADRA, I have nothing but gratitude to God. We worked among intense conflicts, constant security problems, precarious access, and a pandemic that made everything extremely difficult. At times it was a bit dangerous; during one visit in Yemen, I had to be evacuated on a United Nations flight.


Through it all, I was sure of one thing: God was always with me and my family, with those on the ADRA team, and with the people we served.

## A Blessed Life

Serving people in this way changed our family's life. We moved at least 10 times, each time learning new languages, new cultures, adapting to new foods and different ways of life, and traveling to places where few people can. Joining new cultures gave our lives as expatriates unique and positive meaning. In each country, we became active members in local communities of faith. We came to feel at home as we worshiped, studied, sang, and gave testimony to Jesus' love, his second coming, and his purpose for our lives.

The greatest blessing was the many extraordinary and lovely people we met. Whether in South Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Southeast Africa, the Middle East, or South America, ADRA's work introduced us to children of God who fulfill the mission of Christ to serve "the least of these."

We did not feel discouraged by the difficulties we faced; indeed, we're grateful for the experience. We felt assurance that we were doing God's work, and we were grateful to the Adventist Church for taking care of us as international workers.

I've learned that there is more to ministering God's grace than teaching or preaching in the country of your birth. I wish more young Adventists would make relief work their ministry. They'd experience no monotony or boredom while working for ADRA! Whether solving water problems in remote communities; providing food to low-income groups; improving basic health services; training teachers, educators, or community leaders; developing agricultural programs to produce better food; or providing people with basic knowledge about nutrition and hygiene, adventure-seekers with a commitment to Christ's mission find excellent opportunities for learning and action. 

# Contributors



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# Good News for Everyone



We love our church.

That's why we at *Adventist Today* do what we do.

Yes, we tell the truth about our church—historical and current. But our purpose isn't to show off how much we know. What we really want to do is to hold the Seventh-day Adventist Church accountable to giving what the Bible calls “good news” of salvation—for everyone, not just a few who believe certain approved things.

Denominations, when they get self-important, operate in ways that aren't necessarily about good news. They want to

stay in control. And if that means repeating the same old partial truths over and over again, that's what they'll do. If it means using guilt and fear to manipulate people, they'll do that, too. If they must spend the money we give them on self-promotion and hiding things we should know, well, that's all part of the game.

They may not do it with bad intentions, but they do it just the same. It's a side effect of institutionalism.

We at *Adventist Today* are aspirational for Seventh-day Adventism. We want our church to be the most generous spreader of the good news of salvation that it can possibly be.

That's why, first, we try to find new ways of telling the Adventist truths as good news. What is it that made this denomination grow to more than 20 million people, and how do we make the most of our historical legacy as a truth-telling church? And second, we challenge those with influence in the church to meet that same standard.

Read through this magazine, and you'll see in every piece our passion that even in an era when interest in religion is fading, Seventh-day Adventist Christianity won't just survive, but will thrive as good news to a struggling and broken world.

We do all of this because we love our church. And we hope you do, too. Thank you for your support, your responses, and your gifts.

Loren Seibold  
Executive Editor

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