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A very fine academy girl wrote me a letter that glowed with the passion of a glorious week of prayer. (She was not speaking about a celebration service. This was long before anyone had even thought of linking celebration to worship.) The whole student body, she assured me, was aroused. Testimony meetings were lasting long past the usual time for closing chapel. Students with bowed heads were gathering in spontaneous prayer meetings all over the campus. Everyone was sure the Spirit of God was at work and rejoiced in the effect of His power.

A few weeks later she wrote again, saddened and questioning. The holy excitement, she told me, had gone. No one testified at meetings any more. And the spontaneous prayer groups no longer came together. "Why," she asked, "don't remember her exact words "Why didn't God keep up that high level of spirituality on our campus? It was so nice while it lasted."

I thought a long time and prayed a lot and finally answered her. I told her that there are two kinds of fires. One kind is the bonfire. That's the fire we heap all our trash onto. A bonfire is always exciting. Flames leap up, and as new trash is piled onto hot ashes, sparks fly heavenward in the night air. There's a lot of heat and light, and sometimes the neighbors come over to join the action. When the trash is gone, the fire goes out. Bonfires always do that when their work is done; there is no trash left to burn.

Then there is the other type of fire, what we might call the cooking fire. It is never spectacular. In fact, it is rarely seen. It just burns quietly in the stove, keeping the pots hot. It's not much good for burning trash; the cook could set the house on fire burning trash in a cooking fire. But that slow-burning, out-of-sight fire cooks our breakfasts and makes our suppers hot. Similar slow-burning, out-of-sight fires keep our homes warm and our cars running and our airplanes flying.

Oh, yes, bonfires are exciting. And they are useful to a point. But they aren't much use for cooking, and they're no use at all for heating our homes or traveling.

Exciting, glorious, testimony-filled, everybody-praying weeks of prayer are bonfires. They are appropriately called revivals. We need them, but doubt about that; there is so much spiritual trash in our hearts. But they're not much good for the long haul. In fact, keeping a revival going on too long can be like trying to keep a bonfire going when the trash has been burned and we begin to throw valuable items into the flames. Some celebration churches have run into this problem, as we learn in this issue. In order to maintain the early excitement, they have burned up the Spirit of Prophecy, the Sanctuary, and even the Sabbath.

The slow, cooking fire can be likened to reformation. As the cooking fire takes raw food and makes it palatable and digestible, to give our bodies health and strength, so reformation takes our talents and personalities and gradually makes us like Jesus, so we can represent Him.
properly to people on earth and live with Him in heaven.

In this issue you'll read about revival and reformation and their place in our church. They are tremendously important if we are ever going to enlarge our congregations and tell the world how to get ready to meet Jesus.

You'll also read in this issue about false revivals that attempt to attract new members and stimulate rapid growth the wrong way. They have actually prevented growth and hindered reformation.

The material in this issue is unusually important. In some areas questionable ideas and methods are pushing in at an alarming rate, crowding out the tried and true, and leaving behind them bewildered youth and scattered congregations. We mustn't let this happen.

Left Out. Usually in the editorial we give you a brief rundown on the articles and short biographies of the authors. We are leaving that feature out this time; not because the articles aren't good, for they are excellent. But because to get all the articles in, we had to leave something out. It seemed to make sense that, if we didn't have enough room to print the articles and tell you how good they are, we should print the articles and leave you to find out by yourselves how good they are. (Incidentally, my favorite is. No, I'd better not say! You'll be sure to say you like another one better!)

Another feature we've left out this time is the letters. We hate to do this. We love your letters, and were happy to let other people read them, even when you say so many nice things about us! But the Summer 2002 issue was mailed in mid-December. We apologize for its being so late and appreciate your patience. We recognize that you've scarcely had time to read it, let alone write about it. But do please write. As I said, we love your letters. And I'll let you in on a secret. When you Adventists who read Adventists Affirm affirm us in what we are publishing, you encourage us to continue to Affirm Adventists in the wonderful truths God has given us. It works both ways. May God continue to bless us all as He has promised. May we cooperate so willingly with Him this year that 2003 will see the Advent message spread through the world more widely and with greater speed and effectiveness than ever before!
Will Our Church Survive?
Mark A. Finley
Speaker/Director, It Is Written

What is our churchs calling and its destiny? Will we fulfill them?

There is a subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle struggle raging for the soul of the Seventh-day Adventist church today. Serious questions are being raised.

Some members wonder why we exist at all. Is the Seventh-day Adventist church simply another denomination? Do we have a unique mission and message? Have we been raised up to perform a specific task? Le Roy Edwin Froom sums up these questions in his Movement of Destiny: "Just why are we here today, as an organized entity? Do we assuredly have an authorized and authentic commission from Goda mission and message assigned to us that command our respect and demand our all, for the fulfillment of which we are solemnly accountable to God?"

Other members are asking questions of an opposite nature. They believe the Seventh-day Adventist Church was providentially raised up by God to accomplish a specific mission. But they believe that the church has compromised its integrity and apostatized from doctrinal purity. They are convinced that God has called them to leave the "organized church." They see themselves as part of a "remnant of the remnant"modern representatives of that select group of "faithful souls" who have constituted the church in every age. They define the church as "committed believers," not as an organized institution.

Lets candidly examine some of these issues together.

A Look at These Questions. Scripture uses a variety of symbols to describe Gods church. It is "the light of the world," "the body of Christ," the "bride of Christ" and the "flock of God." Christ is its Head, its Husband, its Shepherd.

The embryo of the church was formed in Genesis. As sin widened the gap between Christs followers and the followers of the evil one, "Humanity began to divide into two categories, the sons of God and the sons of men." God established a group of people to preserve His name, His truth and His worship. "Though His special group receives different names in the Biblechosen people, people of God, Christian churchits main purpose remains the same." Gods people represent His loving, righteous character and communicate His message of truth to the rest of the world. They are His witnesses in the lives they live and the words they speak. Their lives of absolute trust, loving obedience and passionate commitment to truth reveal, to a watching world, His way of life. The church is Christs witness in the world.

Gods Purpose, Our Commission. Our church was providentially raised up by our Lord to accomplish His purpose. It is not a manmade, human entity. It is a divine institution established by God. Jesus stated, "I"not someone else"will build my church." Then He declared that no
one will ever destroy it. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). All the powers of evil can never destroy the church Christ has founded.

Jesus Himself gave the commission to His early disciples. His words echo down the corridors of time: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19, 20 NIV).

That commission is just as relevant today as when Christ first spoke it. "The church is Gods appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world . . . . The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9).

Be sure to note that last statement! The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been raised up by God to "manifest . . . the final and full display of the love of God." Seventh-day Adventists are not just another denomination. Our doctrinal understanding reveals depths of Gods love and unique aspects of His character that are often misunderstood by fellow Christians who embrace doctrinal errors. What are doctrines, anyway? They are objective statements about the character of God.

Our Doctrines. Recently I discussed the concept of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a people called out by God to accomplish a special mission with someone who felt I was quite "narrow" in my thinking. Their understanding was that Seventh-day Adventists are no more called by God than any other denomination. This individual, although an Adventist, sees the Adventist church as merely part of the larger people of God, the Christian church.

This persons understanding of our mission is that we should convert secular people or the unchurched to Christ, and nothing more. I detected nervousness when I mentioned the concepts of the remnant, the true church, the three angels messages, the mark of the beast and the fall of Babylon.

During our discussion I asked, "Is it possible for a church to fully reveal the loving character of God if at the same time it teaches the doctrine of eternal torment in an ever-burning hell?" Does a persons concept of hell say anything about their concept of God?

I also asked my friend, "What about the doctrine of the immortal soul as opposed to the concept of physical, mental and spiritual wholeness?" The Greek philosophers separated the soul from the body. This had a dramatic impact on their ideas about life and death, and I wanted to know how my friend saw these things.

The Sabbath. As our discussion continued, I pointed out that one reason the Sabbath is important is that it leads us back to our roots. It speaks of the God who made us, our loving Creator. It is a weekly reminder that we are more than skin covering bone; we are the creation of a loving God who cares for us intimately.

The Sabbath connects us in a unique way to the cross, for it is a symbol of rest, not works.

I suggested to him that, rightly understood, the Sabbath is a symbol of righteousness by faith. Each Sabbath as we rest from our works we trust in the completed work of Christ. We cease from our labors to save ourselves and trust in Jesus finished work at Calvary.

To accept Sundaya manmade substituteis to accept a day that man, not God, has decreed for worship. In a sense, this leads subtly to trusting a human work the change of Gods day rather than by faith accepting a divine command.

In the great controversy being waged in the universe between good and evil, the Sabbath anchors us in our loving Creator. It leads us, by faith, to rest in His grace, and it reminds us of the day when God will create a new heaven and a new earth.
Each doctrine of Scripture, rightly understood, reveals another facet of God's loving character. God raised up the Seventh-day Adventist church to portray fully the magnificence of His character.

**Our Picture of God.** It is not possible to understand the depth of the divine character fully and at the same time embrace the doctrinal errors of modern Christendom. I am not implying that doctrine saves anyone. There are millions of committed Christians who have embraced some doctrinal errors but who have accepted Christ's death on the cross and will be saved. The gift of salvation is theirs.

But, sadly, they do not have a complete picture of God. Their distorted view often leaves major gaps in their understanding. Many of these sincere Christians are groping, seeking to find answers, longing to understand the significance of the great controversy between good and evil.

As Seventh-day Adventists, God has raised us up for this hour. We have a message for both the churched and the unchurched. We have been called of God, brought into existence at this time, to preach the "eternal gospel . . . to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev 14:6). Ours is a special message for a special time, with a special calling. Ours is to proclaim the fullness of the truth about God in the final moments of earth's history, to prepare a people for the coming of Jesus.

"We are not here to primarily build churches, schools, medical institutions, dispensaries, publishing houses, conference headquarters except as they are the means to the one end of saving souls. All material thingscorporeal, mundane, earthly thingswill be consumed at the Second Advent, irrespective of their purpose and use. Redeemed souls alone will leap the abyss separating time from eternity marked off by the Second Advent and abide forever." 5

**Organization.** Some people ask, "What do you mean by the church?" They presume God's church has no organization. They assert it consists of "faithful believers" who must meet in house groups because of the apostasy of the larger body.

W. D. Frazee dealt with this erroneous idea in a sermon he titled, "The Church Our Mother." Frazee agreed that faithful souls constitute the church. He showed that Ellen White expresses agreement with this view in *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 11. But, he pointed out, there is nothing in her statement to support the idea that God's true people must be unorganized or disorganized in order to constitute the true church. As that thrilling hymn says, "Like a mighty army moves the church of God." God's church is not a disorganized mob; it is a well-organized body. And, concerning the remnant who receive the latter rain and go forward to give the loud cry, Ellen White wrote, "They moved in exact order, like a company of soldiers" (*Early Writings*, p. 271).

Elder Frazee quoted two powerful statements from Ellen White: "Oh, how Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings and to refute claims not endorsed by the Word of God" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 9:257, 258).

A little further on in this same section the prophet declared, "Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man being independent" (ibid., p. 258). The Seventh-day Adventist Church "is not to be disorganized or broken up into independent atoms. There is not the least . . . evidence that such a thing will be" (*Selected Messages*, 2:68, 69). "Nothing else in this world is so dear to God as His church" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 7:242). "The Majesty of heaven has . . . the concerns of His church, in His own charge" (ibid., 5:753).

"God has not passed His people by and chosen one solitary man here and another there as the only ones worthy to be entrusted with His truth" (ibid., 5:291).
**Our Destiny Still Unfulfilled.** Many thoughtful Seventh-day Adventist leaders and lay people openly acknowledge that the church has not yet fulfilled its destiny. In spite of its marvelous triumphs, its rapid growth, its worldwide influence, its extensive educational and medical institutions, it does not yet fully reflect the character of our Lord.

In 1935 Elder C. H. Watson, at that time president of the General Conference, wrote, "There is setting in on this people a tide of worldliness to which we are surrendering." 8

Elder J. L. McElhaney, who followed Elder Watson as president of the General Conference, gave expression to his deep concern over worldly trends in the church in these words: "Our greatest danger today is the attitude taken by so many of our people of accepting with apparent satisfaction their present low spiritual condition, and not being very much concerned about it. . . . The time has come for a thorough reformation to take place. . . . There has come into the church a listlessness, a carelessness that is deplorable." 9

Ellen White concurs with the observation of these two godly leaders. "God calls for a spiritual revival and a spiritual reformation. Unless this takes place, those who are lukewarm will continue to grow more abhorrent to the Lord, until He will refuse to acknowledge them as His children. A revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit" (Review and Herald, Feb. 25, 1902).

Will this revival occur within the Adventist church today? Will there be a thorough reformation? Or, on the other hand, will God eventually refuse to call us His children? Will the church which calls people out of Babylon become a part of Babylon?

The promises of Scripture clearly teach that Gods church will be revived, not discarded. Revelation 18:1 describes a time when the earth will be lightened with the glory of God. Gods glory is His character. (See Ex 33:18, 19.)

According to Song of Solomon 6:10, our God will appear as glorious as the morning, radiant with the magnificence of His character: "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun and awesome as an army with banners" (NKJV).

The apostle Paul affirms this truth in Ephesians 5:25-27: "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

God will not fail His people. His promises will be fulfilled in His church. For, as "enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 12).

"The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out" (Selected Messages, 2:380).

God has a church on earth who are uplifting the downtrodden law, and presenting to the people the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The church is the depository of the wealth of the riches of the grace of Christ, and through the church eventually will be manifested the final and full display of Gods love. The world will be lightened with its glory. The prayer of Christ, that His church might be one with Him as He is one with His Father, will finally be answered. Take time to read Testimonies to Ministers, pages 32-62, and notice that the prophet of God unequivocally denies that the Seventh-day Adventist Church ever was, is now, or ever will be Babylon. Her statements are too plain to be misunderstood.

"For years I have borne my testimony to the effect that when any arise claiming to have great light, and yet advocating the tearing down of that which the Lord through His human agents has been building up, they are greatly deceived, and are not working along the lines where Christ is working. Those who assert that the Seventh-day Adventist churches constitute Babylon, or any part of Babylon, might better stay at home" (Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 36, 37).
Victory Assured! Gods church will fulfill its destiny.

It will complete its mission.

It will accomplish its purpose.

A revived church with members filled with the Holy Spirit will carry the gospel to the world. The promised latter rain will fall from heaven on a praying church. The wind of the Spirit will blow. Sins will be confessed. The chains of evil habits will be severed. The spell of worldliness will be broken. The hypnotic enchantment of earthly pleasure will be replaced by the pure joy of sharing Christ with the lost.

"Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. . . . The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God" (The Great Controversy, p. 612).

The work of God on earth will be finished.

Gods purpose will triumph.

His church will be victorious!

Along with you, I long for that day. Would you like to commit yourself to Jesus to be part of His glorious, triumphant church in earths final hours?

NOTES

2 Mt 5:14; 1 Cor 12:12, 13; Eph 5:27; Ezek 34:29-31.
4 Ibid.
5 Froom, Movement of Destiny, p. 654.
6 W. D. Frazee, "The Church Our Mother," ADVENTISTS AFFIRM 7/1 (Spring 1993), pp. 18-25.
Since the church is the body of Christ, what kind of growth should this body have?

Today, church growth is receiving much-needed emphasis. But desiring church growth is not new for Christians. From Christianity’s earliest days, believers have worked untiringly and sacrificially to see growth. Christ’s first convert was His first missionary.¹ As soon as we truly give our hearts to Christ, we can’t help trying to bring others to Him.²

Every Christian wants to learn improved ways of winning souls. God wants to teach us better ways as well!³ Over the centuries many methods for church growth have been tried. Some have worked well; some have proved disastrous!

One of the more audacious church-growth methods was developed by the Jesuit missionary, Xavier. He was able to claim phenomenal success, with hundreds of thousands of baptisms in the Orient. His secret required only a supply of water and something to sprinkle it on.

Sadly, history reveals some well-intentioned but misguided church-growth methods that actually weakened the church severely. In Paris a Protestant literature distribution scheme brought the Reformation to a virtual standstill.⁴ This should give pause to some similar, equally ambitious literature distribution plans today.

Unfortunately, history also reveals that dangerous practices have crept into the church disguised as “church growth.” Virtually any activity, even idol worship, has been defended in the laudable name of “soul winning.”⁵ But disobedience can never call people to obedience.

Can we learn to recognize and avoid harmful church-growth methods? The human body is a useful model for the church,⁶ and may give us insights. In medical school I was taught that not all growth is good growth! Our class learned to differentiate normal growth from diseased growth, a concept I have found helpful in understanding normal and pathologic church growth.

Five Ways to Grow

There are five ways humans can grow:

1. Girth growth. When individuals stop growing up, they may start growing out. If excessive, this growth is not fitness but fatness. It adds nothing to the strength of the body. It isn’t useful growth, it is get-in-the-way growth. It causes many diseases. It decreases endurance. It shortens the useful life. It occurs when the intake of food exceeds the output of work. Empty calories and fast foods contribute to the problem.

As in the physical, so in the spiritual. Spiritual obesity is seen in churches where the members attend church and receive nutrition but engage in little useful labor for Christ. Fast-food
sermons may entertain the hearers. Novel theories, drama, sensational or humorous stories
may appear to arouse religious interest, but the numeric growth is not accompanied by a
corresponding increase in spiritual growth. Members fail to produce fruit, doing nothing to
advance Gods kingdom around them. They do not recognize their great need for continual
repentance and a growing sanctified life. No church with a membership that is increasing
numerically with pew warmers and worship entertainment lovers can have healthy growth. In
time these indolent members will contribute, not to strength, but to serious spiritual disorders
within the church.

Some time ago I visited Washington, New Hampshire, and saw the church where Adventists
first started keeping the Sabbath. It had hard wooden pews and was obviously not a place for
early Adventists to sit comfortably. Perhaps its not a bad model!

Physicians urge over-weight patients to lose weight. The Great Physician does the same for the
church. He says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every
branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15:2). While we dont need
churches that are lean and mean, we do need churches that are lean. This will happen when
the pastor preaches the word of God and the parishioners live by the word of God.

2. Forced growth. To keep growth balanced and healthy, the body carefully regulates itself
with a variety of controls. We can override and defeat these protective mechanisms even in
normal people by giving them certain hormones such as growth hormone. In some cases these
hormones may actually appear to promote growth, but the growth is unbalanced. There are
athletes who are so concerned about muscle growth that they are willing to sacrifice long-term
health to take anabolic steroids and even worse substances. Ultimately they suffer
disfigurement and weakness.

Spiritually, forced growth may sometimes be seen in modern evangelical revivals and
charismatic renewals. Such movements may emphasize great and needed "growth truths"
without the regulating and balancing "testing truths." Faith (without works), love (without
law), and justification (without sanctification) are three common religious "growth hormones."
Revivals may appeal to the emotions without truly reaching the heart. All such growth is
unbalanced and cannot be sustained. 7 It results in misshapen spiritual dwarfs and deformed
Christianity.

Paul says, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27,
emphasis added). He did not simply preach the popular and easily accepted portions of Gods
word. He preached it all. This is necessary for symmetrical growth.

3. Neoplastic Growth. At best, tumors are benign. At worst, they are cancerous.

No one can deny that there is growthrapid growthwith cancer. Although its early stages may be
innocuous and may even appear harmless, it quickly spreads throughout the body. It does not
bring life, it brings death. Cancer is growth that takes the rich resources provided for the entire
body and uses them for some limited, uncontrolled, local cause. Cancer is more than ugly, it is
hideous. There is no cure for this type of growth. It must be detected early and eradicated
fully.

Spiritual neoplasms exhibit the same key characteristics. They consume without producing and
are unresponsive to external control.

At the turn of the 20th century, Battle Creek was growing. The institutions were increasing in
size, the facilities were improving in convenience. But this was cancer growth. The institutions
were growing by selfishly misappropriating fundsfunds that had been given sacrificially and
unselfishly by believers, funds that were needed in aggressive mission work in the south, in the
west, and overseas. Drastic treatment proved necessary. God had to give two applications of
"pyrotherapy"8 to eradicate it.

Physicians are constantly on the alert for even subtle signs and symptoms of malignancy.
When these signs are present, the physician undertakes an immediate and thorough evaluation.
Similarly, as Christians we must be alert to signs and symptoms of spiritual cancer. We must ask ourselves important questions such as:

- Do I have any time for spiritual outreach, visiting my neighbors, assisting with church needs, etc.?
- If I were the only Christian in this city, how would Gods work fare?
- When my income increases, is there a corresponding increase in my mission giving?
- Am I more concerned with local needs than the pressing needs of the world field?

Our work has always been aggressive. Workers have felt privileged to sacrifice for "the cause." I am reminded of my late father, a minister. He always was reluctant to receive a pay raise because he felt this might cause fewer workers to be sent into the field. Always 30% and often more than half of his small salary was given to extend the work. His example was not unique. Building programs, needy students, mission projects have always been supported by such generous, sacrificial giving.

Selfishness is incompatible with Christianity. True Christians will never use funds for extravagance and show in one region while other parts of the Lords vineyard perish for want of means. "Those who are truly converted will have an equal interest in the work in all parts of the vineyard."

4. Stature Growth. Just as all growth is not good, not all growth is bad. Stature growth is normal growth and development. It is determined in part by our genetic inheritance. There are some people who are tall. Others are short.

Likewise some churches have the potential to be large, some do not. Larger churches and their leaders need not despise smaller churches, nor do smaller churches and their leaders need to envy the larger.

But growth is not only genetic. Diet also plays an important role. Some persons are short because they are unable or unwilling to eat proper foods. The children of the earliest European settlers of this country were short because they did not get adequate nutrition during their developmental years.

Paul calls Christians individually to stature growth in its spiritual sense. This is not numeric growth. This is character growth, growth in grace. This type of growth does not come by anxiety and worry, neither does it come from self-righteous effort. This is the natural by-product of full and daily surrender to the Lord. It is vital to teach this to our children and new members lest they be stunted, and be surrounded by stunted people, and come to think this stunted condition is normal.

5. Fertility Growth. Fertility growth is numeric growth. God intends for families to grow numerically. This requires the complete union of a husband and wife.

For Abraham fertility growth became a test of faith. For more than ten years Abraham and Sarah tried to have a son, but no child came! In their natural and understandable desire for numeric growth, after years of apparent failure they abandoned Gods plan. They didnt wait for the Lord. No matter how Abraham and Sarah rationalized it, Abraham committed adultery, and while numeric growth was the result, it was bastard growth.

We have to look at the situation in North America honestly today. It is not growing rapidly as it once was. Can anyone who loves the church say that it is growing numerically as much as they would like? Can anyone say evangelism is progressing as rapidly as they would like? What should we do when God closes the evangelistic womb? We need not be discouraged. We need not blame and criticize others. We should make certain that the church, the wife of Christ, is intimately united with Jesus. That is the only way for true growth. If the church is intimately connected with Jesus, in faith we can await His timing to open the womb. We need not look for other methods for church numeric growth, they will only produce bastard results.
God has promised growth to us as surely as He promised growth to Abraham. We can trust His promise. If we wait ten, twenty, thirty, or a hundred years, the promise remains sure. Jesus remained faithful when His work appeared fruitless. He trusted His Father's guidance.

The Perils of Counting Numbers

There have been earnest Christians, especially pastors and evangelists, who have felt that numeric growth is the proof of their faithfulness to God. A few conference leaders measure success this way.

Many perils lie in counting the numbers of new members.

1. Discouragement and desperate actions. Elijah tried to count up his evangelistic converts. He felt he had none! He concluded that the territory to which he was assigned was too difficult, and he left for another area. Concluding that his work was a failure, he became discouraged. We can't count our children. God assured Abraham that his children would be numberless.

2. A spirit of pride and competition. David looked in self-satisfaction upon the growth of Israel during his administration. He took a census for reasons of pride and was punished for it. However large our church grows, our strength and trust must be in God alone, not the strength of numbers.

3. Madison Avenue approaches and "marketing." Our commission is to preach the gospel to all the world, not just to those segments that appear most open. We must go not only to the highways, but to the hedges. We need to reclaim past members, not because statistically this is successful, but because it is part of the church's commission. Our success must not be judged on the basis of numeric growth but on our faithfulness to the Lord's instruction. "If you lower the standard in order to secure popularity and an increase of numbers, and then make this increase a cause of rejoicing, you show great blindness. If numbers were an evidence of success, Satan might claim the pre-eminence; for, in this world, his followers are largely in the majority. . . . It is the virtue, intelligence, and piety of the people composing our churches, not their numbers, that should be a source of joy and thankfulness" (Counsels to Teachers, p. 94).

We must not tailor our message to please and attract the crowds but to honor and please the Savior.

4. Hasty baptisms and early apostasies. Today it is considered normal for a high percentage (approximately 50%) of newly baptized converts to apostatize. It is considered normal for 50% or less of the church membership to attend church regularly! But based on the norms of the early church, this should be considered unacceptably high infant mortality. Of the converts brought in under the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Bible says, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42, NKJV). This is true normal growth and development. For this growth we must pray, and we must work in faith.

The Solution for Increasing Growth

Inspiration has pointed out a reason for limited church growth. The following striking quotation has often been repeated. We need to look at it closely:

"The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted, and those who were once converted but who have backslidden" (Evangelism, p. 110).

Unfortunately this statement is often separated from its full context. Reading the entire paragraph helps us understand why there is little church growth:

"The subject of health reform has been presented in the churches; but the light has not
been heartily received. The selfish, health-destroying indulgences of men and women have counteracted the influence of the message that is to prepare a people for the great day of God. If the churches expect strength, they must live the truth which God has given them. If the members of our churches disregard the light on this subject, they will reap the sure result in both spiritual and physical degeneracy. And the influence of these older church members will leaven those newly come to the faith. The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?" (Testimonies for the Church, 6:370, 371, emphasis added).

Until the members of the church take healthful living seriously, and receive and act on the great light God has graciously granted them, there can be no true church growth. Church planting, popular evangelical methods, any or all of these approaches will prove to be a failure without members who love Christ fully and give Him charge of their entire life and lifestyle.

Notes
1 John 1:40, 41.
2 The Desire of Ages, p. 141.
3 Testimonies for the Church, 4:67.
4 The Great Controversy, p. 217.
5 Ibid., p. 225.
6 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18.
7 The Great Controversy, p. 463.
8 "Treatment by fire," or, in plain English, the two fires that in 1902 destroyed the Battle Creek Sanitarium and, a few months later, the office and factory of the Review and Herald Publishing Association.
9 Testimonies for the Church, 8:138.
10 Eph. 4:13.
13 Gen. 9:1; Psalm 127:3-5.
14 The Desire of Ages, p. 330: "In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace. He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment. Amid the greatest opposition and the most cruel treatment, He was still of good courage."
15 1 Kings 19:14.
16 1 Kings 19:3, 4.
17 Gen. 15:5.
18 2 Sam. 24:2-17.
19 Spiritual Gifts, 4a:92.
Can the Church Be Relevant and Survive?

Jay Gallimore
President, Michigan Conference
What are the keys to vibrant Adventism in North America and other first-world areas?

Boredom usually means trouble. Bright, energetic people don't want to sit still. If something is not working, they want to find something that will. They have a point.

Whenever great moves have been made for God, the creative graces of energy, persistence and courage have always been exercised. The question for us today is not whether Adventists should be on the cutting edge, but how? Under Gods guidance, these powerful graces—energy, persistence, courage—have damaged sin, not goodness. They built up truth, not error. They made disciples, not pew warmers. Yet wrongly used, they have compromised the church. Does the church need change today? Yes. But, what kind of change? Enthusiasm should fire our mission with holy excitement. But excitement based on error can consume that mission. When the lure of excitement is dangled by the devil, it can become irresistible. Some people tend to believe that any religious excitement is the working of the Holy Spirit. But the Bible has solemnly warned us to test the spirits.

Why So Fascinated by Mega Churches?

Many are fascinated by the great mega churches with their thousands of members. Their highly visible ministries are so well executed that everything about them seems to breathe success. Then we look at our own churches. So many of them are so small and struggling that we ask, "What's wrong with us? They must be doing something right and we need to find out what it is." So great is our hunger for "success" that we are tempted to throw caution to the wind.

Forgetful. In some respects, we Adventists are too hard on ourselves. Like Israel, we forget too easily. Gods mighty acts in our church should inspire praise and thanksgiving. When we forget, we are tempted to doubt Gods leading of our movement. We wonder whether God is still with us. The trouble is, if we are not careful, we may go looking for Him in wrong places. Before we rush to judgment in our comparisons of "them and us," it would be wise first to count our blessings, "the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history" (Life Sketches, p. 196).

Despite their flying of international flags, mega churches are only able to dream about having a true world church. Seventh-day Adventist penetration around the world is more than remarkable. It is absolutely astounding! Look at our humble beginnings! No one back then would have believed this global growth possible. It is not just the numbers. Consider the breadth and depth of our presence. Today we can rejoice that each year the Adventist ratio to world population continues to grow. Not only has our church growth been phenomenal, our world-wide educational system is a class act. Then there are ADRA and our Community Services.
Think of our world-wide contribution to religious liberty. What other church has a health ministry like ours? Think of our great youth camps across North America. Look at our beautiful churches and schools dotting the land. Let your eye sweep over our camp meetings, where thousands gather each year for spiritual refreshment. Think of our printing presses and their publishing ministry in hundreds of languages. Then there are Adventist World Radio and TV and other broadcast ministries. Think of the hospitals and clinics around the world. The list goes on. For our size, we Adventists are involved in a lot.

The great special truths we know bring comfort and courage to our hearts. We know the dead are simply sleeping. "We have this hope" in the second coming. What a rest from a frantic world the Sabbath gives us! If we stop and remember, we have so much for which to praise God! I know of no church that has grown as fast, world-wide, with all the various enterprises and ministries as the Adventists have. When the whole picture is put together it is awesome. One reason for this success is our unique heritage. God instilled a wonderful unselfishness in our spiritual forefathers and mothers. For this reason we are a study in church growth. This Adventist church is blessed, I believe, more than any other denomination.

Urgent Concerns. Yet I know what some are thinking. "But look at North America. While we are growing in ethnic communities, our growth in the mainstream is, at best, very slow. It is in the middle class communities where these mega churches are having their greatest success. If we dont do something, we are going to lose a great deal of talent and support that is badly needed to move the world church." There is no question that these are urgent concerns. But will our creative energy be spent on change that hurts or helps? Do we opt for change believing that change alone will work? Or do we really know what the church should be like when we are done? Have we carefully considered what God wants? In our rush for change, have we left Him in charge? Or have we tried to shape Him into our own ideas? He knows what His church should look and sound and feel like. If we listen to the inspired sources, I dont think we will be misled. Have we studied carefully how the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White define success? Is it wise to let the churches around us define success for us? Perhaps the difference between a false and a true reformation will depend on how well we answer these questions.

For the last ten or fifteen years some Adventist congregations have been experimenting with the growth methods of non-Adventist churches. I believe the pace of this has picked up, because many church leaders are encouraging the shift. First there was "celebration worship." According to the promoters, this charismatic face lift was going to transform the Adventist church. In the estimation of the proponents, Adventist churches were stuck in a time warp. Their message to all of us was "Change or become a dinosaur." Of course, their scariest message, the one that has always ignited our fear, was, "If we dont adopt these methods we will lose our young people."

Checking the Fruit

Now that some time has passed, perhaps it is only fair to check the fruit. Lets look first at the Adventist church that became famous for starting the "celebration" movement among us. It captured the imagination of the North American Division. At its height that church had more than a thousand members. However, with the passing of time some interesting developments took place. Its leading pastor developed an independent spirit that led to internal problems in the congregation. This, coupled with the pastors unwillingness to take counsel from his conference leadership, led to his leaving the Adventist ministry. Today he has joined forces with those who are most bitterly attacking the Adventist church and its fundamental doctrines. Buying into the same spirit, one of his leading elders left the church and started his own Sunday-keeping church.

This first "celebration" church went from one sadness to another. The two new pastors who replaced the founding pastor were dismissed over doctrinal issues. As a result of all this turmoil the church went through several splits. Decline in attendance and membership followed. The remaining members could no longer keep up the payments on their large new facility. The conference kindly assumed the payments while the building was being sold. Finally the little group that was left merged with another congregation.
Attitudes. Of course, I know that the celebration movement among us developed a life of its own. Not every difficulty found in it can be blamed on its initiator. Yet there seem to be certain attitudes that were genetically impressed on it from the beginning. They went something like this: "We need to copy the worship of other churches in order to have their success. The Adventists need to leave the dark ages and get with it. Success is defined as a large attendance and lots of excitement. This is the way to reach the community and save the youth. Life-style values are funny, 19th-century holdovers. Justification is big; sanctification is small. Preach about grace but not about sin. If you preach about sin, make sure to be politically correct. Preach love, not doctrines. At all costs have fun. Small Adventist churches are relics without a future. Conferences and church organizations should be viewed with suspicion or, at best, with benign tolerance." At least, these are the perceptions that seem to keep ringing, even as the worship debate continues.

No Restrictions. For the last few years the new Mecca for Adventist leaders has been the independent congregation at Willow Creek near Chicago. Many Adventist ministers went there to learn how to imitate its methods. Already we are seeing the fruit of the Willow Creek approach. An Adventist church pastored by a skillful minister was featured in one of our leading denominational papers. However, in the midst of the success and attention, the pastor and the church broke away from the conference. You can guess the reasons. They didn't want the "restrictions" of the body. They wanted freedom to do their own thing. Then of course there was the money. They wanted the tithe to fund their mega-church dream. Oh yes, they were going to continue to keep the Sabbath. They would still be part of us, only at a distance. Another Adventist church, near Washington, D. C., did something similar. They were going to teach us how relevance could help us grow. They were going to reach their communities.

Guess what these "wannabe" Adventist mega churches discovered? They could not be "relevant" and also get a crowd on Sabbath. So they opted for relevance. That shouldn't surprise us. Relevance, not truth, was driving their mission from the start. The results were predictable. Today both of these churches are teaching that Sunday is the Sabbath and have left the Adventist church completely. By the way, they were drawing young people but to where? Other Adventist churches have and are following a similar course. Besides the Sabbath, we have many other teachings the world will never buy. One does not become a Seventh-day Adventist casually. If it is any comfort, early Christians also counted the cost.

Safe? Still, many believe that we can copy these kinds of churches and be safe. Not long ago I was in a meeting where a pastor of a "fast-growing" Adventist church spoke. Because of inadequate pastoral leadership, this particular church had dwindled from nearly a thousand to fewer than a hundred. This pastor was brought in to rescue the church. She was very sincere. According to her, one of her goals has been to show that a pastor can successfully run a Willow Creek model in the Adventist church. She believes the churches which left us have given Willow Creek an undeservedly bad name. Under her leadership the attendance has risen in two years to between five and six hundred.

She told us that when she first met with the board, she told them she would come on one condition: they must dissolve the board and give her absolute power. They did. This was necessary, she reasoned, because they were in an emergency situation and needed critical care. According to her, one of the first things she did was to close the organ and substitute "contemporary" music. She fills the baptistry each Sabbath and invites people to give their hearts to the Lord. Any who respond are invited to be baptized right then. However, baptism, she assured us, does not make a person a church member. To join the church, one must attend a class where one must consent to five common points of belief with the Adventist Church. One of the points is to agree not to gossip. In order to be relevant, this church is now holding its service at five o'clock Saturday afternoon. Interestingly, this is a popular alternative worship hour even for Sunday-keeping churches.

Questions. After hearing this pastor speak, I found myself confronted by several serious questions. For example, what happens if the person who was baptized that day is merely adding Jesus to the rest of his occult gods? Do we just assume the secular world really knows the difference between Jesus and the latest movie star? Doesn't the Great Commission put making disciples before baptizing? Doesn't making disciples mean teaching born-again
Christians how to follow Jesus? Isnt baptism the door into the church? Can we reconcile a theology that separates baptism from the body of Christ?

In the winter, most of the Sabbath has passed by five o'clock. One cannot help but wonder if the Sabbath is not being marginalized in the name of relevance. Catering to peoples desire to make Sabbath another "sleep in" doesn't sound like discipling. Then we must ask ourselves if we want church growth so badly that we are ready to give the pastor absolute power. Oh sure, it works for a while if you have a smart, talented minister. But is it biblical? Is it wise? Does such an approach make disciples of Jesus or disciples of the minister?

Gossip is always wrong. But I wondered, in this setting, if it could be translated, "Dont disagree with the pastor!" Cults are built around strong personalities that see any disagreement as a challenge to their authority. It is not unusual for mega churches to have autocratic ministers. Sometimes it seems as if we Adventists committee too much. But I prefer that imperfection to the principles of popery.

Dont Underestimate Our Founders!

Maybe those early Adventists were right after all about church organization. There is a reason why none of these congregational mega churches can be a model for the Adventists. I didnt say we cannot learn from other churches, including Willow Creek. I said they cant be models. Here is why. We do not want to abandon our mission to carry the three angels messages to the world. I hope I am hearing a resounding Amen! Without gospel order, neither the Gospel Commission nor Revelation 14 can be carried out.

Our system of church government spreads our human and financial resources over the entire world. This makes it possible for us to grow in many different cultures with an amazing amount of unity. Our organization is not rigid but elastic, yet not too elastic. It adapts well worldwide while providing unity and oneness.

Congregational churches, on the other hand, are rigid because they are limited by their local focus. They may see the big picture of the Gospel Commission, but their organizational vehicle is not able to carry out a world mission. Congregational churches by their very nature cannot maintain any degree of unity and cooperation beyond a very small area. In addition, they consume most of their resources on themselves or their local mission. They fail to grasp, as Adventists do, the need for an unselfish unity in order to reach all languages and people groups.

The Mission Principle. Mission will always drive resources. There is a principle here. Concepts of mission give birth to church government. The Adventist churches which have recently left are examples of how this principle works. They changed their mission and then their form of church government. If we buy into their mission, it will be only a matter of time before we abandon our "into all the world" focus for a "stay in Jerusalem" concept. For sure, we cannot have it both ways.

Therein lies the danger. Many think that somehow we can have a true world church and copy relevant congregational churches. At some point we will "cling to the one" and "abandon the other." Again, this is not to say we cannot learn from others who are not of our faith. However, any learning we do from anywhere must be carefully tested by the principles of Scripture, the Spirit of Prophecy and our mission.

Layers of Government. One speaker at a recent General Conference session criticized the Adventist church for having more layers of church government than the Roman Catholic Church. The statement resonated with many. However, the last time I checked, the United Statesa model of representative governmenthas the same number of layers as the Adventist church. There are city, county, state and national governments. The Adventist church has the local church, local conference, union conference and General Conference. (The divisions are considered part of the General Conference. They are divisions of the General Conference.)

It is a known fact that representative forms of government do not succeed well unless they
have building blocks starting at the grass roots. This way the power is both top down and bottom up. Yes, it is cumbersome. But if you want a representative government, multiple layers are necessary.

One reason why totalitarian governments have difficulty switching to representative governments is that they do not have the lower institutions of democracy. These lower institutions steer and provide stability throughout the whole. During the last United States presidential election, with its many constitutional crises, the country kept right on functioning. Why? The whole was made up of more than just the one representative government. So when the national election was in disarray, the institutions of democracy, courts, city, county and state, kept on going.

My point is this: We can eliminate several layers of our representative church government. But if we do, we will replace them with either Congregationalism or, worse, some form of popery. It can be argued that the papacy is a successful form of church government for a worldwide mission. But despotism is alien to our biblical principles. Either Congregationalism or a religious monarchy would confuse and destroy "who we are." We have already had some bitter lessons in consolidating power in a few hands. Remember those fires in Battle Creek?

**Doing Better.** Nevertheless, with the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy as our map, it is always appropriate to think about doing church government better. We must remember that this is the church, not General Motors or the United States government. It does not have a corporate or a secular political blueprint. It has a biblical die cast. Authority is shared and balanced. That is the way it was in the book of Acts. For example, the local conference does not choose from its central headquarters where church schools will be built and where they wont. Here the local decision is primary.

One must ever remember that the conference is given life by local church delegates at a constituency meeting. Those combined delegate votes give the conference its authority to oversee and guide the operation and expansion of churches, schools and other ministries. Representing the whole, it serves as a shepherd to the churches to keep them focused on their mission while abiding by the common policies. It exists to foster local initiative and self-determination within the whole. That is why the local conferences are what I call field focused.

**Policy, Not Charisma**

The local conferences in turn form the union conferences. Please understand. The Adventist church is not held together by charismatic personalities. It is policy that keeps the organization working together, like the blood in the body. The union conferences represent their part of the world field to the General Conference. They are vital to the policy-making process, just as the bone marrow is vital to the blood-making process. Either we have good policy that we all adhere to, or we die as an organization. The devil knows this, and it is no surprise that our ability to make and maintain policy is being severely challenged. Union conferences also serve as a check and balance on local conferences, making sure policy is followed.

The General Conference is the vision maker and final authority on the policy that drives the church. Each of these parts, local church, local conference, union conference and General Conference, wield real power but in different spheres. We all depend on each others doing well.

**Holy Spirit.** Like the wheels within wheels in Ezekiels vision, we need the Holy Spirit to constantly pour His oil over the machinery. We are very different from secular politics. Our process is set up to be a spiritual process, not a political one. I worry when I see people trying to work our spiritual process the way politicians work the secular process. The two dont mix. Space does not permit an analysis of this issue. I will leave the subject by simply saying that whether we are members at a church board or ministers at a conference committee, we are not politicians but servants seeking the will of God.

"Relevant" methods are sometimes given opportunity because too many churches fall into cold
formalism. Great hymns are sung without enthusiasm. Scripture reading is mumbled. Praise and thanksgiving seem more scarce than "hens teeth." The sound of fervent prayer has been replaced with the "same old prayer." Spirit-filled biblical preaching has been changed for story time. Evangelistic passions are reserved for nominating committees, conference constituency meetings, or when there is a pastoral change. Sentimental indulgence has replaced principled love. Any born-again saints that somehow survive become instant curiosities. Reverence is lost because faith in an awesome God has been lost. People go through the motions of Sabbath observance hoping the sun will go down quickly so they can pop in the latest video and get on with their lives. There is no burden for worship to be carried out with excellence before a glorious God. In such a setting, the impact on the lives of the members is little or none. Soon the members look and act no different from the world.

Earnest Worship. Our simple worship should be fervent and earnest. The praying, praising, preaching, speaking, singing and giving should be our very best. We must visualize that we are in the courtyard of the heavenly temple with its tens of thousands of holy, intelligent beings. Our worship services should be power-packed because the saints come with the latest acts of God on their lips. True faith always creates that burden for souls that translates into soul winning.

All week we should be the light of God to a dying world. Worship then becomes the affirming act that Christ lives in us corporately because He lives in us personally. We need more than a revival. We need a reformation. Cold formalism or worldly entertainment and emotionalism reign where churches are unconverted.

The worship we inherited from our spiritual forefathers and mothers may not have been perfect, but it was warm and vibrant. The three angels messages are just as powerful today as they were then. The truth has lost none of its energy. Yet, when we love the world with most of our hearts, when too many of our theologians and preachers mock the past and ignore the present successes in order to make a name for themselves, when we as church leaders turn Gods church into a social club or our little political playground, when we play fast and loose with the Scriptures, when our own opinion is more important than what the Bible says, we will turn the worship of God into something He cannot and will not accept.

Worship God Rejects

The same General Conference speaker mentioned earlier also said, "There is no right way to worship God. And the only wrong way to worship is any way that bores or shows little forethought or preparation." Really? God doesn't care about the way we worship? He cares only about preparation?

Surely preparation is important, but to discount the way we worship ignores sacred history. Someone should check with Cain and Abel. Ask Nadab and Abihu. See whether Elijah on Mt. Carmel has any wisdom. Ask Moses and Aaron about the golden calf. How did Jesus respond to the devils offer in the wilderness?

End-Time Issue. The book of Revelation is clear. Worship will be the end-time issue. As Adventists we have something to say about the day of worship. We also must say something about the way of worship. False and worldly ways of worship should not be brought into our churches. Neither should we settle for anything less than fervent, reverent worship filled with praise, prayer and solid biblical preaching.

Relevance as a priority can take churches into strange places. Today the great Reformation churches have made their peace with evolution and higher-critical scholarship. Philosophy and consensus have replaced the authority of the Word. Popular culture is the church culture. Their moral voice in the nation has been reduced to a prayerful yawn in moments of crisis.

Charismatics. In the vacuum has appeared the charismatic movement. Charismatics talk about the Bible a lot. But the wisdom, grace, and power of early Protestantism are absent. Charismatics have embraced "success" fueled with Hollywood and Fifth Avenue. Entertainment, emotion, rock music and spiritual thrills are the name of the game. Oh yes, they
do get a crowd. They are having fun. Just dont ask how they justify all this with the New Testament.

All kinds of strange worship is being experimented with. In some charismatic churches people jerk like chickens for hours and bark and howl like animals. They get "slain in the Spirit" by the thousands. They get so "drunk on the Spirit" they have to have taxies take them home. Time magazine, commenting on some of these types of movements, said that some of these churches look more like "rock concerts" and "rugby matches" than Christian worship. But it is not just the charismatics that are offering strange fire on the altar of worship.

**Drama.** Some of these non-denominational mega churches have become famous for their quality drama. Many of them, by design, are housed in outstanding theatrical performing facilities. However, the early church is still the most successful example of church growth. The apostles were not into drama. From some quarters I hear groans. That doesn't mean there is something wrong with an innocent skit occasionally. We are not talking here about the church school Christmas pageant. But when drama becomes the main communicator of the gospel, it is alien. The theater, while a very effective entertainment medium, doesn't switch over very well to serious logical thought. As a medium, it tends to overwork the emotions and bypass the thinking process.

Some argue earnestly that drama is more effective for advancing the gospel than preaching and teaching. If that is true, why didn't Jesus use it? Please don't say it is a new, modern method. Drama and theater are ancient media. One only has to stand in the ruins of the magnificent theater at Caesarea to realize that drama was popular stuff in the days of Jesus. The Romans built fine theaters all over the place, including one in Jerusalem. Jesus had to be very familiar with the medium. He could easily have built a drama team of bright, handsome young men and women. He could have packaged truth in that medium so powerfully that peoples emotions would have been putty in His hands. But He didn't. Somehow, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17) doesn't quite fit the theater circuit.

Jesus used very simple but clear communication methods. He depended on the Spirit of truth to change and impress the hearts of His hearers. Interestingly, large numbers of those who followed him were young people. Those young people stayed, and He used them to help launch His church. It is worthy of note that the Holy Spirit, when He gave gifts and talents to the early church, left out acting.

**Theology-driven Methods**

What is driving all these demands for exciting changes? Contrary to some popular opinion, theology does drive our methodology. I used to believe you could separate methodology from theology. But Jesus is clear about this. We cannot serve Him and the world. Is there a shift in our conviction of our theology?

**Subtle Changes.** Shifts do not happen all at once. Usually they are subtle. Change is often well entrenched before someone notices that profession and practice are no longer synonymous. Can we admit that we cannot use the manipulative methods of rock concerts, Hollywood, circuses, magic, occultism, and Fifth Avenue to prepare a people to meet Jesus in the clouds of glory? We loudly sing "We Have This Hope," but do we really believe it? We Adventists confess a holy and awesome faith. That is why the Church must be into truth, not entertainment. Into repentance, not manipulation. Into building Christian character, not emotionalism. We must not underestimate God's power to use simple means. All He gave Moses was a shepherds rod. The apostle Paul said, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17).

Have we redefined success by redefining worship? Have we moved from a God-centered worship to a man-centered worship? I once heard two Sunday preachers discussing their Sunday services. Their focus was bragging to each other about their crowds. I heard no talk of the faithfulness and virtue of their congregations. In fact, among us, I have heard plenty of church-growth talk but virtually nothing about New Testament holiness. Did not Jesus declare to the devil that worship and obedience are inseparable? A God-centered worship demands
faithfulness in behavior. In our lust to draw great crowds, have we forgotten all the New Testament counsel about character development?

**Lifestyle.** One cannot separate worship from Christian lifestyle. Lifestyle should include all Christian behavior. Being kind to my spouse and being modest in dress are both part of the same New Testament call to Christlikeness. The world is certainly sending its messages about what to wear, how to act, what to look at and listen to. Self-control is out and self-indulgence is in.

Unfortunately, we have preached and published too many sermons, books and articles endeavoring to make Christian standards comfy with our carnal hearts. The result has been to disown the standards, or at least make them insignificant. The usual thrust of these articles is to say: "Dont be a legalist. Dont be unkind. Dont be judgmental." Of course, we should be none of the above. But neither should we abandon the New Testaments calls to holiness in favor of modern sentimentalism.

If we ever needed our members to be building Christian character, it is now. We know we are saved by faith alone. But do we know we are not saved by faithlessness? If we are saved by faith in God, surely we are going to be more concerned about being Christlike than how big our crowds are. This is not to diminish the importance of numbers. They counted at Pentecost. But if we get them out of proper order we will be driven to worship and serve someone else besides the Creator.

**Appeasement?** The devil has never before launched against the Christian faith such powerful forces, all of them focused on destroying Christian character. In the midst of this carnage we seem to be seeking appeasement. The Churchills among us are being crowded out by the Chamberlains. The Apostles greatest joy was not in learning the latest attendance figures. Their joy was in finding that their converts were faithful to their teachings.

No matter how comfy we feel, it doesn't change the fact that the devils tanks are rolling over the fertile fields of Christian character. May God help us! We need a new militancy, not harsh, not mean, but certainly fervent and supportive in helping our people develop character. As darkness settles over the world, the world needs, as never before, to see the light of Jesus in our members.

Please understand. There is much to be said for being creative and relevant. But unless creativity and relevance are mothered by Inspiration, there is no progressive movement in the church. The Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy must direct our creativity. Anything else will return us to worldliness.

**Confronting Culture.** In todays climate, Christianity in general has failed to confront a culture that is more pagan than Christian. Neither has the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America confronted it with a solid front. Yes, there are bright spots. But there should be light everywhere. This movement to accommodate the world is an admission that the power of biblical Christianity is scarce. In addition, our satisfaction with cold formalism is an admission that we are fast asleep with no oil in our flasks. The results of both conditions are going to be disastrous. The only solution is a Spirit-filled reformation.

When the apostles preached, their gospel sword cut and saved across all cultures. As a result, persecution was a constant threat. People do not take kindly to having their idols superseded by Christ. They dont like having their economics interrupted. Just ask the silversmith worshipers of Diana who started the rioting in Ephesus.

**Growth.** True Christianity does not grow by pandering to Constantines. It grows by solid biblical preaching that calls people to repentance and change. It grows in holy fellowship. It grows when it gives glorious worship to its Creator and Redeemer. It grows when it uplifts a Christ that not only justifies but sanctifies. It grows when it is fearless in the face of sin. It grows when it pours unselfish love into a hurting world. It grows when it embraces the pains and sorrows of the downtrodden of our society. It grows when spiritual values are more important than politics. It grows when virtue in its members is more important than crowds in
its pews. It grows when it seeks the kingdom of heaven first. It grows when it trusts the Lord no matter what. It grows when it pours rivers of grace and energy into saving the lives of wretched sinners. It grows when it moves more by faith than by money.

**Call to Worship.** Jesus opened and closed His ministry with "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That word *repent* is the beginning and heart of all true worship. If ever repentance wasn't relevant, it certainly is relevant now. Eternal life is relevant. Between repentance and eternal life stands the Adventist call to worship the One who made us all. That call must go to the entire world, pure, undiluted and without compromise. Like John the Baptist, we must spare nothing in getting the message out. Only then will the end come.
I Want My Church Back!

C. D. Brooks
Speaker Emeritus, Breath of Life
A veteran preacher calls on us to preach and live the Adventist message.

[Editors Note: The following is transcribed and edited from a talk given to Seventh-day Adventist ministers.]

In the writings of Ellen G. White, that inside information which God sent just to us, the Lord’s servant draws a line over here against this extreme, and then she draws a line over there against that extreme. I’ve been doing this for years. But notice, she leaves a broad swath down the middle. I can walk here and you can walk there, and we’re still within the safety zone. We don’t have to think alike. We don’t have to wear a uniform. You can be you and I can be me, but let’s stay in the safety zone; we’re better off near the middle of the road, avoiding the perilous ditches on both sides of the Christian pathway.

We are now facing an unusual time in which those on the inside of our church are questioning our distinctive teachings and doctrines more than those who despise us. Many of us are walking away from the mandate that God gave to us.

A brilliant professional friend of mine called me long distance. In an almost desperate tone, he said, “Charles, I want my church back!” Then with anguish in his voice, he said, “I don’t know if I can ever get it back!”

Preach Our Message!

My dear fellow workers, I want to tell you today, that one of the powerful keys to success and power in our churches and our pulpits and in our evangelism is resolute faithfulness to the word of God, and to the message God has given to us to preach!

We must preach our message. All of it! There are forces that seem to be dismantling what was so laboriously put together under the indispensable aid of the Holy Ghost. There is a picture of erudition which we carelessly call scholarship, but which is more scholasticism. Ellen White says its as certain that we have the truth as that God lives. She spoke of a platform of truth. She knew that we always be gathering sources and resources, but she said, "Don’t get off the platform." The Holy Spirit is not one to foster confusion, and He does not divide the saints. He may bring separation from the mixed multitude, but not from the saints.

Awesome Prophecy. Amongst us there are those who appear to be tired of our message, bored with it. There is a swelling cry for something different, unique. Some are saying, "We want a modern message designed for young people." That does not go along with the awesome prophecy of Malachi 4, for when the Elijah message comes, just before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the Bible says the hearts of the fathers and the children will be turned together. We are not to be divided by age and generation.

The media use the term simulcast, meaning that they are broadcasting in English and Spanish...
and other languages at the same time. But to us the gospel is coming down from glory simulcast. I've preached to little children and they've come up and said, "I enjoyed your sermon." And I thought it was too heavy for them.

My beloved fellow workers, loose liberalism does not accomplish what we think it will accomplish. George Whital, writing in Washingtonian Magazine, says, "The churches that make the greatest doctrinal and moral demands on their members" (he mentions the evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants) "are growing. Their churches are booming. In contrast," he says, "the churches that have a hard time telling you why you ought to be a Christian, the churches of the old main line, like the Episcopalians, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the United Church of Christ, have been hemorrhaging congregants since the mid-60s. It is vanilla Protestantism that is dying." And then he says, "Theological friendliness, avant-garde worship, and political correctness are a prescription for ecclesiastical catastrophe. Millions are leaving because they have no good reason to stay."

No Discipline, No Care

A blond girl came into my office at one of our colleges where I was preaching and burst into tears, sobbing uncontrollably. When I asked her problem, she said, "Pastor, my parents don't love me."

I said, "How can you say that? They are sacrificing to keep you here and you are dressed very well. They've taken good care of you. Why do you say that?"

She said, "Because they don't care what I do."

Young and old need the discipline of the Word of God. When people feel like they can do what they please, then the church loses its premium value. They figure we don't care. But "feel-goodism" is pervading our congregations, creeping in, and our churches and our schools are floundering. Our church income is being depleted. We had our biggest budget crisis this year.

The devil is playing every device he can. I'm going to do a little tongue in cheek, don't get angry with me. The devil is pleading, "Culture! And pluralism! And scholarship!" He impresses many of us to try to modernize God by humanizing Him. God already answered that one. He said, "I am the Lord, I change not! I am the same yesterday, and today, and forever!" (Mal 3:6, Heb 13:8).

Relevant. I hear a lot about, "Oh, we need someone now to make Scripture relevant!" Fellow workers, I wouldn't talk like this to just anybody. I am glad I can speak to my fellow workers. If God said it, it's relevant! Its our extraneous ideas about what He says that are irrelevant!

Paul said, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Col 2:8). The preaching of the Word, even with love and tact and diplomacy, will inevitably cause confrontation with our sinful, carnal natures. We are not called to make the Word popular, but to preach it with power! I'm one of those transition preachers, a connecting link between the old and the new. Those old war-horses, they preached it straight.

George Peters, Frank Peterson, W.W. Fordham, J. H. Wagner, J. H. Lawrence, P. M. Rowethey stood up for the right. They placed the burden on the Holy Ghost. The message poured out of them. These men made and built Black Seventh-day Adventism.

In 1946 a skinny preacher came to my hometown. I had never heard anyone like him. There was one thing I knew when I looked at that preacher, he believed everything he preached! And he made me believe it.

These are the men to emulate.

You know that our laymen today are too caught up and preoccupied to study, and they get little substance from the pulpit. Wait, wait, wait, and let me say something else. I've got two libraries, one at my home and one at the General Conference. They are rather extensive, and I like to read the hardbacks and the softbacks. But when I sit at my desk in my study, the
bookshelves immediately behind my chair have the Spirit of Prophecy, several versions of the Bible, and the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. When I get ready to read the other books, I've got to get up out of my chair and walk over to get them. But after I get through the books from Review and Herald and all the good stuff from our publishing house out in Idaho, then all this other becomes simply a skeleton on which I can hang the meat of Seventh-day Adventism. Verily my people can be fed. We've got to confront our people for their sake. If you pamper them, you're not helping them. We've got to dare to guide them.

**Guide.** Some of what they're doing is because they don't know any better. We've got to guide them concerning where they ought to go, what they ought to do, what they ought to wear, what they ought to think. And we ought to do it with the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy.

When we talk to our people its not a purely human-to-human encounter. There is a Person called the Holy Ghost. Its our privilege to have Him standing by us and moving out there in the congregation. He will take a difficult truth and apply it to the heart. You think I didn't have to give up things I liked? I'd rather save one person with the truth and with the Holy Ghost than comfort ten thousand in their self-deception. We fail our people when we water down and compromise and undermine and repudiate the message that God has given us to bear and to live!

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**Emboldened to Defy**

Not only that, we embolden them to defy our standards. We embolden them to follow their own whims and offend fellow church members and even their parents. Many of them have chips on their shoulders. They are so self-confident they dare you to say anything.

A young woman who had always been friendly came to church loaded down with jewelry. When I approached her, ready to speak, she wouldn't even look at me. She avoided me. She couldn't be friendly as usual. No wonder our churches are turning cold! Its because our members remain guilt-ridden and insecure and not sure of what they really stand for. They hear about easy divorce, about moral falls even in the ministry, Sabbaths on the golf course, or on the bicycle trail, or at the beach, theater-going, attacks on Ellen G. White. What's happening amongst us?

**Responsibility.** Ellen White says, "Of all the sins that God will punish, none are more grievous in His sight than those that encourage others to do evil" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 323).

And of all the groups of people on the topside of the earth, none has such an awesome responsibility resting upon it, as well as privilege, as the Seventh-day Adventist ministry.

When I was a boy we saw our pastor once every five weeks. Today nearly every Sabbath there is a preacher and still our members wonder, "What's happening to us? Is the Holy Ghost still with us?" Many who feel a lack of the Spirit are trying to compensate with a shaking, rocking, rollicking religion. They want to feel good. But that good feeling will replace their faith and it will be wiped out in a crisis.

**Temporary Fix.** The Bible says, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa 57:21).

Many of our people who love the truth but don't know what to love are getting caught up in the subjective, ecstatic experience, and the 11 o'clock service is like cocaine, a temporary fix. Before the sun sets they are right back to where they were, unhappy, critical, not doing so well. "And what do I want now?" says the devil. "A loud, thumping, bumping religion," I hear him say. "It will cause me great delight to make the old saints uncomfortable." And so we are being divided.

Were not supposed to set our churches on fire that's the work of the Holy Ghost. What are we supposed to do? We are to be repairers of the breach, restorers of paths to dwell in (Isa 58:12). Culture? That deals with the natural man and its not wrong. Im not trying to make everything wrong. But if that is the natural part of us, the Bible says the natural man cannot receive the things of God, "for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Cor 2:14).
**Delusions.** Some among us are questioning things that have been worked out by the Holy Ghost in human history and in my life's history and yours. There will always be some excess baggage. But don't throw everything away. The Apostle said, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess 5:21). Instead, many are trying to satisfy themselves rather than pray and study. They want to reason things out with unsanctified minds. They're starting from the wrong position and will never arrive at spiritual fulfillment, but rather at compounded delusions. For spiritual things are spiritually discerned. The Bible says, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor 4:3).

I said to a congregation one Sabbath, "The gospel is good news, but its not just the cross. Thank God for the cross! But the gospel is more than that. The gospel is health reform, that's good news! The gospel is social reform, that's good news!"

I was invited to preach for the 65th anniversary of the high school I graduated from some 40 years ago. I walked in there and what a crowd! The head table was longer than this auditorium. I had given word that I couldn't arrive there until after sunset. They had said, "We understand that. We'll take care of the preliminaries, and you just come right in." And I did. I sat right in the middle. Those tables were surrounded, many of them, with former classmates. I looked out and they kept waving and winking and carrying on. Finally it would dawn on me . . . Oh, I recognize them and they looked awful!

**Good News.** You think I look old! You should have seen them! Our message is good news! I tried to figure it out; I looked back, and I said to myself, I've been keeping the Sabbath for 54 years. That's seven years of Sabbath-keeping, which means I got seven years of rest they never got!

It hurts me today. Some of you heard a rumor that I'm getting ready to retire. It hurts me today to see that amongst us many, rather than kneeling in humility, are standing up like the Pharisee in the narrative of Christ with jaw set and shoulders squared to debate with God, and the pulpit is losing. Its enough!

**Idols.** I'm not suggesting that you brow-beat anybody. I don't do that! Ellen White says rationalism is an idol (see The Great Controversy, p. 193), for it exalts human reason above the Word of God. Many of our beloved people are making dangerous decisions based on how they feel rather than on explicit revelations from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Error is always impinged to this. How sad I feel. They love to talk about theater now and evolution; and even the mark of the beast is getting a dressing down in our own journals. What are we doing?

There is such a thing as "possessionism." I was the first that I know of to start using that word, but I read two psychiatrists who wrote a book about it. In this present, mixed company I cannot tell you what they said concerning the manipulation and the stroking of the physical by the spirits of demons who possess them. You want a thrill? It will come. If that's where your faith is, it will come. But the Bible says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17).

Harold Lee was addressing this condition not long ago when he said, "Neo-Pentecostalism will be the death of Black Adventism." I wrote that down. We Black people are especially vulnerable, because we are such an emotional people. We've been here too long. Divided and separated by racism, by advantage, education, money, and privilege, we've been forced into being reactive, but we've come too close to heaven. Don't let us be cheated now and miss heaven after all we've gone through.

**Culture Not All Bad**

Culture? When I moved to Washington more than 30 years ago I was courted assiduously to join the White church. Now, these are good churches, good people, good pastors. But I was culturally more satisfied in the warmer atmosphere of the Black church. I see nothing wrong with that. But there is something that transcends culture. That something melds us into the family of God, distinguishable, distinctive, even peculiar.
My problem is that culture is becoming our religious experience. This is the reaction of the insecure that are not sure about anything. I want you to know, beloved, today, that I am not and never have been defined by corn rows and kente cloth.

I was having a discussion with a well-known Black Adventist minister about African-Americans escaping from the plantation syndrome. He said to me, "These people say they are Americans, but they aint. They say they are Africans, but they aint. They are kind of lost people."

**Adopted.** Well, let me tell you. A long time ago I was adopted. There is a Seventh-day Adventist culture, and I was born into this Adventist culture by adoption, which is a legal compact. By contrast, my daddy and mother adopted a boy before I was born; I never saw him. As he grew older he got into trouble with the law and spent time in jail. Finally he said, "I want to leave this family." Remember, he was adopted. No person born of Brooks blood in my large family has ever spent a night in jail. Whats the difference? He was adopted. He came in from another nature. The rest of us were born with Brooks blood. So I have been adopted but I have been born again! Adoption makes me His, new blood makes me like Him. There is a commonality of the blood.

**Our Culture.** Im proud of our culture. Im proud to be a Black man. I want you all to know that I mean that. I am glad I am a Black man. I always have been. The African said that kente cloth was made in Ghanaian villages. It was worn by the Ashanti royalty, the kings and princes of that country. It was very expensive, too expensive to be available to ordinary people. There are plenty of cultural things to be proud of from that part of the world. The first president of that country was named Kwame Nkrumah. Kwame means born on the Sabbath, Saturday. And if you get C. E. Bradfords book [*Sabbath Roots: the African Connection, a Biblical Perspective* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference Ministerial Association, 1999)], youll understand that Sabbath-keeping is intrinsic in our culture. But remember that the Bible tells us whats important in dress. It tells us in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. I want to make this clear, because we have a bunch of smart alecks now saying, "You dont have a Bible base!"

Oh yes, I do! Where have you been?

**Ornaments.** And even if I didnt find it explicitly I got it indirectly from the Spirit of Prophecy, which is biblical. If its not, we ought to throw it away! In time of danger and crisis and judgment God required His people to take their jewelry off. When Jacob was trying to get home, they had to stop and bury something (see Gen 35:2-4). When they worshiped the golden calf, God was about to move with vengeance and wrath. Moses stood between Him and the people. God didnt say, "What theyre doing is all right." No, indeed. He told the people to take off their jewelry. "Take it off," He said, "that I may know what to do unto you." Then, the Bible says, they "stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb" (see Ex 33:5, 6). Since 1844 were in the judgment, and the Bible says those that dont afflict themselves will be cut off.

I loved it when you could look at a young lady and know she was an Adventist. I got invited to a camp meeting. I went into a town and didnt know where to go. My wife said, "Honey, stop and phone." Then it dawned on me that no one answers the phone at a campground on the Sabbath, at least they used to not answer it. I was desperate. I looked at a car easing by and I saw some women, their faces clean. They looked like something. I pulled my car into that lane and followed them. My wife said, "Honey, what are you doing?"

I said, "I'm following those people!"

"You know who they are?"

"No! I just know how they look!"

And I ended up at my destination.
Im saying with my friend, "I want my church back."

**Praising the Devil?**

Every year at Hampton Institute there is a convention of great preachers from all over this country, and many of our ministers go. I am told that this year, when one of those men got up to preach, he said to that congregation (not Adventist), "In our music, weve got to be careful that we are not praising the devil instead of God."

Ellen White says that Satan dialogues with his imps. They discuss their plans together. His craftiness, he knows, will not fly unless he can first discount the Spirit of Prophecy. So he raised up a West Coast preacher, who called the Lords servant a plagiarist and a liar. Then he raised up a teacher and his kind to buy it. Black preachers threw away their red books in green trash cans at a time when they needed them most. But I believe in the Spirit of Prophecy. Now Im going to read to you what Ellen White says:

*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 36: "The Lord"

Who?

[Audience:] "The Lord."

"The Lord has shown me." Now the criticism has been that everything is not inspired when she says, "The Lord showed me." All right, Im reading it again:

"The Lord has shown me what would take place just before the close of probation. Every uncouth thing will be demonstrated. There will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit."

In the very next line she says, "The Holy Spirit never reveals itself in such methods, in such a bedlam of noise."

**Gospel Music.** Wait a minute! I like gospel music! I probably like it more than many sitting out here. And I can prove it. For 35 of the last 37 years I have gone every November to Germantown, Ohio, a Mecca of gospel music. Twenty-eight of those trips were over the Thanksgiving weekend, giving up my family holiday to be inspired by those people. Our precious Eleanor Wright, the late Eleanor Wright, wrote much of it. They were message songs. They rebuked sin! They encouraged the discouraged. Thats one reason she did not die a millionaire, because she stayed faithful to this message!

A little more from *Selected Messages*: "A bedlam of noise shocks the senses and perverts that which if conducted aright might be a blessing" (ibid.). Gospel music should be a blessing.

But you all know it is out of hand.

I dont believe the drum is a bigger sinner than the trumpet or the psaltery or the harp. Its what we do with it! So Satan had a huddle, and he said to his imps, "Lets develop crossover."

Why would a saint want to crossover?

"Lets develop crossover!" said the devil. "Lets blend some of ours with some of theirs. Lets start off with a balance, and then lets gradually move off center. Then lets talk about Christian jazz and religious gospel rock. They are contradictions of terms, you see. Lets get them moving and grooving like our crowd in our places when they are getting down. Then, lets pull out all the stops." Thats what the devil says.

You all believe I tell the truth? I love gospel music. You know what? "Power in the Blood" is a gospel song. So are "Standing on the Promises," "Love Lifted Me," and "Im on the Battlefield for My Lord." Eleanor Wright wrote "Naaman" the weekend after I preached it in Cincinnati, Ohio. And when my father-in-law died she wrote one for our family called "I Dont Plan to
Stay Here." There's a stanza in there that says:

If you miss me, don't dismay,
I might have to rest in a mound of clay,
But when I hear that trumpet sound
I'm coming up out of that cold, cold ground!
Cause I don't plan to stay here, children.

Pray. Today the intonations are pulsing with sensuality and sexuality. When they talk about loving Jesus they say it in a most sensual and sexual way.

But ladies and gentlemen, do we expect Satan to be candid, or subtle? Do we expect him to be honest, or a master deceiver? The other day I was listening to the Morgan State Choir when a young lady took a solo on a spiritual: "Old Satan wears a clubfoot shoe. / If you don't mind, hell slip it on you."

Bypassing Our Judgment

One scholar from Australia said that music is one force that does not have to pass through the judgment hall of the brain before it affects us. There's an organ at the base of the brain to which music appeals directly. He said that you don't even have to think to start moving. That's how Muzak became so successful. It was background music. Folks didn't even know they were listening to it. It just soothed them. Now they're doing it with light rock. And music is gone. We ought to know Satan would take advantage of a thing like this to captivate and enchant us.

Great Music. We were once known as masters and purveyors of good music of various kinds. I grew up in a small church where we didn't hear the great anthems. When I came to Oakwood I had never heard the Messiah. One day, going to the dairy where I worked at 3 a.m., I heard music over in the chapel. The lights were on. Then when I came back I heard thump, thump, thump. Dr. Dyes was beating out the time with a staff. I said to somebody, "What's going on over there?"

They said, "They're getting ready for the Messiah."

I admit I didn't know what it was, but I said, "Oh, yes!"

On the night it was presented, I felt like the top of my head would blow off. When they got to the Hallelujah Chorus I didn't need a royal example to get me to my feet as the choir sang, "He shall reign forever and ever and ever and ever and ever! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

We were known for that music, classical and dignified, warm and moving and simple. But Ellen White said, "The line of demarcation is [becoming] indistinct" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 316). Satan starts out small. No one comes to sudden ruin. It takes time to corrupt the soul. Gradually the devil perverts. One departure from principle begins the journey.

I want my church back!

Movies and Smokes

Who do we think we were dealing with? He's called the wily foe. He's no friend of ours. These coffin nails called cigarettes he names "Salem" ("Peace"!), "Cool," "True," "Joy."

Who do we think we were dealing with when he names the poison of alcohol "Southern Comfort"? God says a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. (I've got to hasten and please forgive me!)

Movies if you say anything about them, you're old fashioned! I don't mind that opprobrium. Call
me old if you want, God is older than I am. And when God tells us something, He gets it right the first time! He doesn’t have to edit or adjust.

"Oh, preacher, you can’t stop it." I know that. I’m not saying you can, but we shouldn’t promote it!

My Experience. I used to sneak off to the movies. Finally one of my buddies and I didn’t know what else to do, and he took me to hear that skinny preacher, Earl Cleveland. Within two weeks something happened, thank the Lord God.

One Sabbath I walked out of that man’s meeting. The sun was going down, and my buddy and I headed to the Carolina Theater. But nobody made me feel comfortable about it. My own conscience wouldn’t let me feel comfortable about it. We walked about seven blocks discussing what we heard in that man’s tent. The theater was across the street. The red light stopped us and I started thinking. All of a sudden the light turned green and he started off and I stayed. He turned around and said, "What’s wrong with you?"

I said, "I’m not going."

He said, "What do you mean, you’re not going?"

I said, "You know. The things you’re learning. I can’t go, for I know them already."

He said, "If you don’t go, I don’t go."

That was 47 years ago. Today that man is a deacon in the Adventist church. His wife and daughters are officers in the church. Suppose I hadn’t stopped?

Our Truth Is Still the Truth

We serve a timeless God, and time, as we know it, is about to experience a cataclysmic collision with eternity. We are about to enter His realm of time and space. When we do, the truth will still be the truth. Sabbath will still be Sabbath, because truth never dies.

Though ages come and go,

Though mountains wear away and seas retire,

Destruction lays earth’s mighty golden cities low,

And empire states and dynasties expire.

But caught and handed onward to the wise,

Truth never dies.

No Change. Fifty-four years ago I joined this church. I’ve been somewhat educated, illuminated, experienced. I’m getting ready to retire. But I want to tell you, nothings changed. We’ve matured, and we’ve been enlightened. People are meaner, more immoral. But nothings changed. God’s law is still a transcript of His character. It’s too high for us, so He gave us a ladder called grace that we might climb up.

The sanctuary is still in heaven. It isn’t going anywhere just because some say it doesn’t really exist. Judgment is still going on. God still hates pride. Men are still born in sin. Men must be born again. Dead folk are still dead. Christ is still our only Savior. None but the righteous shall see God. We’ve got to be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. We’ve got to be covered with His righteousness alone. He still sends the Holy Ghost. And He is still seeking the lost. He is still saving sinners. And it is possible to delight ourselves in the Lord and the truth. Our message is still valid. And if we stand around waiting for our truth to change, were exactly like the Protestants who want the Sabbath to change. Jack Sequeira said, "If you believe in the Redeemer, you’ve got to start looking more redeemed."
"Morehouse Man." Through the agency of my friend, Walt Pearson, I was privileged to join others to be honored at Morehouse College. I arrived there, and I saw what I don't see on the average worldly campus. We walked outside and up to the presidents dining room, and I saw it again, a certain dignity. I said to some of those who belonged there, "What is this thing I notice, and why? This, this thing that is almost imperceptible and yet is here?" We were told that when a man applies to Morehouse and is being accepted, he starts getting their propaganda.

"You are now a Morehouse man. You cant just dress any kind of way."

"Youre a Morehouse man. You cant carry on and get loud and ugly."

"Youre a Morehouse man. Youve got to stay under control."

"Youre a Morehouse man."

And I thought, "Oh my, Oh my! Im an Oakwood man."

Let me conclude with the Spirit of Prophecy: The Great Controversy, page 461, if you want to read it. I have these little dots in there because I cant read all of it. The "terror of appearing, in their guilt and uncleanness, before the Searcher of hearts. . . . Who shall deliver me? . . . They saw that nothing but the merits of Christ could suffice to atone." They "brought forth fruit," "not to fashion themselves after their former lusts, but by the faith of the Son of God to follow in His steps, to reflect His character, and to purify themselves even as He is pure. The things they once hated they now loved, and the things they once loved they hated. . . . The vain and supercilious became serious and unobtrusive. The profane became reverent. . . . The vain fashions of the world were laid aside."

Revival Coming

Today there are many accessions to the truth. Oh, please, get what Im saying. I do evangelism. Brethren and sisters, we are not in competition with one another. When you run a church meeting and baptize sixty, youve done what some eight-week campaigns under a tent do when they baptize two hundred. Were not in competition. Let us glory when the Lord does it.

But listen today "there are large accessions to the churches; nevertheless" the new members show no "corresponding increase of real spiritual life" (ibid., p. 463). Many who join are not more willing to deny self and take up their cross than before their baptism. Our religion becomes a sport of infidels and skeptics. Oh, Im gonna say it! If I ever hear a man bragging about how many he baptizes, I worry about him.

But I tell you something, and I mean it with all my heart. If you dont like what I say, at least give me credit for being honest and sincere. When I work as hard as I do to run an effort, I want somebody to stay at least until after the snow falls. Dont let me hear that you baptized 250 and nobody can find them. When Earl Cleveland and Bill Scales and George Rainey and Eric Ward and all those, along with many pastors who have not made it their specialty when they do it, the church is enlarged and the folk know what they believe.

Primitive Godliness. The Great Controversy, pages 463, 464: "Picnics, church theatricals, . . . personal display, have banished thoughts of God. . . . Notwithstanding" You see, there is a second statement here. (Im glad there is a second one; the first one took us negative, and this one takes us positive.) "Notwithstanding . . . there will be . . . a revival of primitive godliness"! Did you get it? Not neo-Pentecostalism, but such "primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times"!

Now page 464 again: "Under a religious guise, Satan will seek to extend his influence over the Christian world . . . [with] an emotional excitement, a mingling of the true with the false. . . . Yet none need be deceived" if they rely on Gods word.

Lets go to page 474: "Every sinful gratification tends to benumb the faculties and deaden the
mental and spiritual perceptions, and the word or the Spirit of God can make but a feeble impression upon the heart."

Suppose you had a baby boy, and as he began to grow up he only wanted to eat cake every day three times a day for the rest of his life. Would you comply?

You and I, my fellow workers, are Gods called facilitators to a purer, more powerful Christian life and to a finished work. The only reason why God needs us in the church at all is that we might become witnesses to those on the outside. The truth makes a difference, and we will not arrest their attention until we are peculiar. The power that we walk and talk about is in the Word.

In the Word! Whose side are you on?

I want my church back!

In the Safety Zone. You dont have to be just like me. But lets walk in here, in the safety zone.

Over in Chicago there was an old man, an elegant old man. He wore sport coats like a young guy, drove a yellow Cadillac, brought his beautiful wife (they were both old but she was beautiful) to my meetings every night. He never said a word, just listened and went home. Finally we got down to the decision time and he walked up by himself and said, "I need to talk to you."

I said, "Well, lets go aside."

We did.

He said to me, "Now I want to know from you what I should do about a problem I have."

I said, "Well, what is your problem, sir?"

He said, "In my bar in my basement I have a lot of good liquor. I want to know what to do with it. Shall I sell it? Shall I give it away? What shall I do?" He turned and stared at me.

I said, "My dear brother, you have a misapprehension. There is no such thing as good liquor. What you probably mean is its expensive. Now, suppose you gave it away or sold it, and the person that received it went out driving drunk and killed a bunch of people or shot his wife. Do you know youd bear the responsibility? The book of Habakkuk says, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink" (Hab 2:15).

He said, "Then what shall I do?"

I said, "I have a suggestion. Make your bathroom a temple and the toilet stool an altar. Bring that expensive liquor up from your basement and set it on the back of the toilet. Then kneel down and in an act of commitment give yourself anew to the Lord and pour that liquor out of the bottle with prayer."

He looked at me sternly and said, "If you had told me anything else, I was going to walk out of here." Today, 21 years later, his wife sleeps in Jesus and he is still in the Truth.

Truth Wins. Brethren, this truth will win souls. You dont need to play games and fool people. This truth, with its dignity and power, this truth attended by the Holy Ghost will win souls of the best kind.

I want my church back!