The One Project: An Inside View

Despite its apparently worthy goal of "Celebrating the supremacy of Jesus through the Adventist Church," the One project has faced significant criticism. Rachel Cabose attended the latest One project gathering in Boulder, Colorado, and reported her impressions, positive and negative.

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New Articles:

Inspiring Stories from the ASI Convention
God can use everything from cows to ex-cons to bring people to Him!

If God Is Good, Why Is There Evil in the World?
Answers to this troubling question, drawn from Jesus' parable of the wheat and weeds
Subscriber Exclusive: Excerpts from Rachel's interview with Japhet De Oliveira, One project cofounder

On the One project's relationship with the church: "Adventism is our tribe; it is the group we understand and love. The Gospel is for the whole planet, so we work through the best engine we know—Adventism—to share the Gospel."

On the One project's target audience: "Honestly, this is not for everyone. We expect people to take time off from work or school. It is a huge sacrifice. Those who do join the conversation are like Gideon's 300. They inspire me."

The Paralyzing Segregation of Generations
Why young and old need each other—especially in the church

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The One Project: In Search of Community

Rachel Cabose

Sunday at 1:1 Boulder was a full day, with six presentations, six “Recalibrate” discussions, and three Q&A sessions. Our Recalibrate group retained the same core participants throughout the day, and things went more smoothly as we got to know each other better.

A few noteworthy points and quotes from today’s presentations:

Peter (Japhet De Oliveira):

When Peter saw John following him and asked “Lord, what about this man?” (John 21:21), he revealed his problem of comparing himself with John. We create tension in our hearts by comparing ourselves to other humans instead of Jesus.

The Rich Young Ruler (Terry Swenson):

This man’s question, “What good deed must I do to have eternal life” (Matt. 19:16, NLT), indicated that he was trusting in his own efforts for salvation.

When Jesus looks at you, He sees you, and He loves you. When we follow Jesus, we begin to see people as Jesus sees them.

The Thief on the Cross (Mark B. Johnson):

The thief will have a lot to teach the rest of us when we get to heaven, because he was one of the only people who was close enough to Jesus to see what happened throughout His entire crucifixion.

Thomas (Dena King):

Dena shared several “spiritual myths” she’s busted, such as “If you associate with people who believe differently than you, you will lose your faith.” She specifically addressed a sentiment regarding spiritual practices that’s common among critics of the One project: “If you open your mind too much, even though you’re seeking God, the devil will sneak in.” She believes that when we ask God to give us something good (especially when we seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance), He will not trick us and give us a counterfeit, because He is stronger than Satan (Luke 11:13). I haven’t decided yet whether I agree fully, but it’s a point worth considering!

More insights on Thomas’s story: “A Blessing to Claim: Another Look at ‘Doubting Thomas’”

The Roman Centurion (Sam Leonor)

Jesus started out without hesitation toward the home of this Gentile “outsider” to heal his servant. There’s no place His love will not go.

The Samaritan Woman (Monica Wernick)

Jesus will go out of His way to find us. He’ll fill our bucket so full that we won’t even need the bucket.
The day ended with each of us having the opportunity to anoint a fellow participant with a dab of olive oil and read a blessing to that person. (Excerpt: “May Jesus bless you with openness, understanding, and respect.”) Doug Logan, a member of our discussion group and one of the presenters, told me that an eyebrow-raising phrase mentioning “the light within” had been removed from an earlier version of the blessing used at previous events.

As the last song died away, I felt a bit sad to leave all the new acquaintances I’d met. One of the most inspiring was Ann (sorry if I spelled her name wrong), a woman a few pews ahead of me whom I noticed doing sign language throughout the songs. She told me that when she lost the ability to sing, she had questioned how she could continue to worship God. She had then learned sign language so that she can still praise God, even if she can’t use her voice to sing.

So Let’s Get to the Controversial Stuff…

“I don’t see what all the controversy is about,” my husband said when the day was over.

In many ways, I had to agree—yet I see why some Adventists are concerned about the overall tenor of the One Project.

This was clearly a more “liberal” strain of Adventism than I subscribe to. That was clear from the amount of jewelry being worn, the coffee being served in the lobby, and the fact that in two days I heard two people make a joke about the idea that your angels won’t follow you into a theater. Yet I hesitate to mention these things, knowing that my tendency to take pride in adhering to the behavioral markers of “good Adventism” is no more righteous than others’ urge to flaunt their independence from such norms.

At times I heard theology that I didn’t agree with. For instance, Mark Johnson’s view that God does not cause the final death of the wicked and that Jesus’ death did not “pay” for our sins is one that has gained significant traction in the Adventist Church. While this view is supported by some Bible texts and Ellen White quotations, there are other passages that contradict it, and we need a view of the atonement and God’s justice that is robust enough to encompass them all. (See “How Are We Saved? The Character of God and the Atonement in the Adventist Church” for more on this topic.)

Some ideas were expressed that could have troubling implications. For instance, the ideas that we can all manifest the gift of prophecy at times (by speaking timely words of encouragement, for instance) and that we should all “shepherd” each other (by holding each other accountable) seem to reflect a low view of spiritual gifts, minimizing any specific calling that might give one person a special role.

There are aspects of the One project that I don’t endorse. Yet I’m disturbed by the level of vitriol aimed against the group. I met one older man from a church in Colorado who had come to check out the One project specifically because of the controversy he had heard over it—turmoil that he said had contributed to some members leaving his church. After observing what was actually happening, he was a bit puzzled over the attacks.

I’ve heard questionable theology in Sabbath school, from the pulpit, at independent ministry events, and, yes, at the One project. Knowing the challenges of the times we live in and the even greater deceptions ahead, we Adventists must rightly be discerning and assess biblically the teachings we hear, even within the church.

The Challenge of Community

There were two words I heard a lot this weekend: “tribe” and “community.” “You are not really a follower of God unless you are in community,” one presenter said (I’m pretty sure it was Japhet!). It’s ironic that in the aftermath of the General Conference Session, some in the church seem willing to abandon the worldwide Adventist community because the church has voted to follow a perspective different from theirs on a particular issue. Being “in community” is not easy for our individualistic society.
Just before leaving the One project, my husband and I chatted with Mark Johnson, who’s a county public health director in Colorado as well as church board chair at the Boulder church. He spoke of his passion for revitalized health ministry in the Adventist Church, of the need to follow Ellen White’s counsel to integrate health ministry into everything we do.

These are sentiments that I’ve heard from so many corners of the church lately—from General Conference officials to independent ministries—that “comprehensive health ministry” could be called a movement.

Are we so busy attacking one another that we have no time and energy left to work together toward such God-ordained dreams? If so, it might be time to recalibrate.

(Photo: It was a privilege to “recalibrate” with these folks and others throughout the day. That’s my husband, Greg, to the left of my empty chair!)
The One Project: Yes, It Can Be Controversial

Rachel Cabose

From all the hype I’d heard about the One project, I was expecting one of two things from this weekend (or perhaps some of both):

1. the most profoundly moving and challenging spiritual experience of my life;

or

2. some sort of candlelight meditation where we sit in a circle with eyes closed and chant in unison.

What I have found so far is neither, but I did find thought-provoking messages and the opportunity to discuss them with others.

Not knowing until Sabbath morning how big the Boulder Adventist Church was, I had no idea how many people might attend this first 1:1 (1 to 1) mini-gathering. So I was surprised to see a group of perhaps 200 people, with simultaneous programs for children and teens.

I’d always thought the One project primarily targeted young adults, but Japhet De Oliveira set me straight: “We in fact are intergenerational, and so we like to have an average age of 40 at our gatherings.” That age diversity was reflected in the Boulder attendees.

Ethnic diversity was much less evident, but perhaps that reflects the demographics of the region (Colorado is 83% white). Many attendees came from the Boulder church and surrounding communities, although I did meet other out-of-staters like myself.

“John the Adventist” and Nicodemus

Sabbath evening’s program consisted of two 20-minute presentations (“reflections”), both by individuals from Walla Walla University.

Alex Bryan, senior pastor of Walla Walla University Church and a cofounder of the One project, set the tone for the weekend, reminding us: “Original, primal, foundational Adventism is about one thing: a desire to be with Jesus.”

His reflection focused on John the Baptist—or, more appropriately, “John the Adventist,” since John’s role in preparing people for Christ’s first advent parallels the Adventist Church’s role in preparing people for Christ’s second advent. Bryan emphasized that John consistently and humbly pointed people to Jesus rather than to himself—that his goal was not to create disciples for himself but for Jesus. The controversial implication: are we as a church seeking to make followers of Adventism rather than followers of Jesus? Do we talk about ourselves more than about Him?

These are questions that have troubled me at times, such as when I hear pastors consistently make calls to “study for baptism” rather than to “commit your life to Jesus.”

Douglas Logan, as befits an engineering professor, took a factual and methodical approach to Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus—which Logan described as Jesus’ most in-depth conversation about salvation with anyone. Logan focused especially on John 3:16. One of his most memorable quotes was his comment on the word “believes” in this verse: “Faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin. You can’t have one without the other. But faith is clearly heads and obedience is tails.”
**Time to Recalibrate**

There’s one thing that makes the One project different from other Adventist events I’ve attended: “recalibration.” At most conventions, camp meetings, and retreats, we listen to one speaker after another. We gorge ourselves with knowledge but don’t have a formal opportunity to digest it.

At the One project, every presentation is followed by recalibration—a time for small-group discussion, with suggested questions to discuss. As Becky De Oliveira explained in her opening remarks, encouraging attendees to verbalize and internalize the message is a key aspect of the One project’s approach.

These recalibration sessions gave me a chance to meet other attendees and hear their perspectives. However, since the groups were formed impromptu and had no designated, prepared discussion leader, I felt they were not as effective as they could be.

There was one aspect of the One project that completely fulfilled my expectations: the music. I had felt certain that the One project would be the type of event where the worship music involves a full band with guitar, bass, keyboard, and drum set, and I was not disappointed. Well, actually I was disappointed, since I don’t find that approach to music (worshipful or otherwise) particularly enjoyable or helpful. In my experience, the constant percussion causes the purely physical impact of the music to overshadow its beauty and message, largely spoiling one of my favorite parts of worship.

This was, however, the first time I have seen the drummer encased in a plexiglass cage, presumably to keep the volume down to a tolerable level. I did feel a bit sorry for the drummer having to worship in isolation! On the positive side, I give kudos to Elia King, the music leader, for his song “Lord of All,” one of the more singable and meaningful contemporary Christian songs I’ve heard lately.

**Frustration Spills Out**

Throughout this Sabbath I’ve heard deep frustration—at times even welling up in tears—expressed by many people in regard to the more conservative elements of the Adventist Church. Just one example: the first question asked during the Q&A with the two presenters at the end of the evening was for Alex Bryan: How do you deal with the vehement attacks made on you by some in the church?

“You’re not reporting for the right-wing movement in Michigan, are you?” asked a new acquaintance when I told him where I was from. This was before I’d said anything about being a writer or reporter, so the comment was based solely on geographical stereotypes.

“No, I’m reporting for The Compass Magazine!” I announced gleefully, foisting a business card upon him. There’s nothing like a ready-made promotional opportunity!

The exchange made me wish I could take back all those snide comments I’ve made about “California Adventists” over the years. Stereotyping isn’t pretty, and treating our fellow church members like the enemy isn’t helping any of us grow in Christlikeness.

“I don’t think you have to attend their meetings to know what the One Project stands for,” wrote one commenter on my first article. “Their involvement with Leonard Sweet, alone, should be evidence enough that this is a dangerous movement.”

True—we didn’t have to attend the One project. Some would argue that we shouldn’t. But Adventists right now seem to do way too much attacking from afar.

So we’re here. If we have to criticize, at least it will be with the knowledge that we first took time to listen.
(Photo: Attendees chat during registration.)
“Out of My Misery Comes My Ministry”: ASI Convention Day 1

Kat Taylor

The Adventist-laymen’s Services and Industries (ASI) Convention brings together church members who operate businesses and supporting ministries. Kat Taylor will report each day from this year’s convention in Spokane, Washington.

A couple weeks after returning from the General Conference Session to the “reality” of life, and as the spiritual high of GCSA15 was decreasing, I received an unexpected phone call from the GC Prayer Ministry coordinator, asking me if I would be willing/able to take a few days off and come to ASI to help with the Believe His Prophets/United in Prayer/Revival and Reformation booth. My immediate answer, without delay, was “Yes!”

Now that I am here, the feeling is similar to what I experienced at the GC Session: a true feeling of family. Words cannot explain the joy in my heart when I am around my brothers and sisters, many of whom I never knew until recently. The warm smiles and hugs are as if we have known each other for a very long time. In many ways this feels like a mini-GC; after all, we still have the same burdens to finish His work and to share the love of Jesus with the world; it is just a smaller gathering.

A perfect example of this is a young lady named Asiah. Her parents are part of the Native American Ministry, and she came over to our booth area with the most beautiful smile to see what we were about. As we chatted she shared what they do and how difficult it is to reach the Native populations in this country since many worship not only the Creator but also Satan. With the biggest smile and laugh, Asiah spoke of how God used a cow in the middle of the road to lead her mother to Adventism. A cow! We all have a conversation story, some more humorous than others, but He draws us all to Him…if only we will allow Him.

I was encouraged, inspired, and humbled during this evening’s Members in Motion presentation. The testimonies of how simple people are making huge differences in the lives of others all around the world were amazing.

We heard of the group in Peru that helps to provide medical care and education, love and support to young people who would otherwise not have much hope for a future. We learned about the use of ASI videos to walk people through Bible studies, and about the woman who over the last ten years has used this program to lead more than 1,000 people to the waters of baptism. We heard of the power of prayer at the Adventist hospital in Nepal, a country where proselytizing is illegal, and of the 10-year-old boy who came there in septic shock and wasn’t expected to live…but did.

Then…there was the convict, a man named Greg Emelander (pictured above). A man who grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who knew right from wrong, but after the divorce of his parents ended up making the wrong friends. Friends who introduced him to petty juvenile crimes, crimes that became anything but petty. Crimes that eventually caused him to cross paths with a Mexican drug lord who employed him as a dealer, a dealer who used…a lot. One thing led to another, and he ended up in prison for seven years. With his family showing him “tough love” and even the pastors he reached out to ignoring him, Greg turned to God. He cried out to God and poured all of his sins at His feet, and when he was finished and had crawled into his bunk, he felt Jesus take the weight of those sins.

I was moved to near tears to hear how Greg got a Bible and some of Ellen White’s writings and began sharing the Jesus who loves with other prisoners, prisoners at 13 different prisons. He now has a ministry that reaches out to others who are where he used to be. As Greg says, “Your past does not dictate your future.”
We as humans tend to judge a book by its cover, and Greg is a great example of that. Many will see him as an ex-con who is trying to _____ (fill in the blank). But God sees Greg as His child. I have often said, “Out of my misery comes my ministry.” This couldn’t be more true in his case!

I took time to seek Greg out and speak to him—and pray for him—this evening. I was moved to near tears at the joy he has in serving our Lord. God truly used all of his past trials to mold and fashion him into the vessel he is today.

Many churches and different denominations have prison ministries, health care missions, and Bible studies. I praise God for using all of these people to open my eyes to where I fall short. After all, do I not have the ability to minister to others?

Now the question is: Am I willing to be used in a more powerful way by God? Are you willing?
Persecution Versus Comfort: ASI Convention Day 2

Kat Taylor

With the second day of ASI came a stark reminder of just how blessed I am to live in a country where being open about my faith is taken for granted. A country where on any given day I will meet men and women who believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

Can you imagine living and working someplace where you cannot openly proclaim that Jesus is your Savior? Someplace where you could very well be called to give your life for doing just that? That is the stark reality in most of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa Union (MENA), a union that includes Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, with 20 countries in all.

This area has a population of more than 500 million people and only around 3,000 Seventh-day Adventists, meaning that if every Adventist living in the MENA Union reached out to one person a day to share the love of Jesus, it would take 450 years before the work is done.

These are the facts that Elder Homer Trecartin (photo above), president of the MENA Union, shared during the morning session today. I have heard some of these numbers before, but I was still blown away by them. This area desperately needs men and women who are willing to uproot, leave family, and put their lives on the line (if needed) to go be tentmakers. Men and women who will, by how they live their lives, witness to the love of Jesus where it is punishable by death to defame the deeply imbedded Islamic beliefs.

I looked at the relative comfort I live in, the freedoms I have, and asked myself if I would be willing to go—to be the face of Jesus. The answer is yes, yes I am. I will go where He sends me…

As Elder Trecartin pointed out, while there are areas where secrecy is required, there are also areas where people are perfectly safe and situations are stable.

Looking back to the General Conference Session and a group of prayer warriors who came together to pray for the 10/40 window (the area of the globe with the least Christians), I remember how we prayed for God to open doors in this region for the love of Jesus to be made known. I was struck by the thought that not only is He opening doors for servants to go in, but He is opening doors for refugees to come out. As situations grow more unstable and ISIS continues to persecute select groups, they are fleeing to Europe, where we can more easily meet their temporal needs.

Think about it: as we provide services and help with basic needs, the hearts of those who have fled will be open and receptive to hearing who Jesus is. God is working even in the darkness of persecution!

The Opposite of Persecution

The flip side came this evening with a powerful testimony given by David Kim. He is a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist who has been blessed with talent as a world-renowned cellist and now businessman.

Yet David contracted a serious and life-threatening disease called Congenital Christianity.

This condition was so severe that spending more than 2-3 minutes a day in prayer (that included at meals) was difficult. Being asked as an elder to attend the prophecy seminars his church was sponsoring brought excuse after excuse to his mind as to why he couldn’t. His condition was made worse by good-hearted church members along the way.
That made me wonder if I have ever contributed to Congenital Christianity. Could I have, while meaning to do good, caused someone else to slip into a deeper state of lethargy? Scary thought!

Looking at the differences between these two messages, the contrasts are stark.

In one part of the world, people are willing to die for their faith. In another, people are willing to die because of their lack of faith.

I pray that we, as God’s chosen people, will be willing to step out of our comfort zones to finish the work so that we may all go home.
Lift HIM Up: ASI Convention Day 3

Kat Taylor

Day 3 of ASI brought a truly high Sabbath, starting with a powerful message from General Conference President Ted Wilson and capped off by outgoing ASI president Frank Fournier.

Elder Wilson praised the members of ASI for their tireless dedication to sharing Jesus in the marketplace and beyond, stating that “ASI is everywhere, and it is building God’s church.”

Always Stay Involved, A Spiritual Identity, an Aggressive Scriptural Interest were all phrases that Elder Wilson used to describe the passion, dedication, and commitment that ASI and its members have when it comes to growing God’s kingdom. And as I have observed this week, they are all very fitting.

Elder Wilson reiterated over and over again that we are called to “Build God’s church, to lift HIM up!” giving numerous passages from both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy to back up the call we were given.

Speaking of the Spirit of Prophecy, he implored all not only to believe in it but to use it. He reminded us that, combined with Bible study, we are to use the Spirit of Prophecy to lift Him up not only to others but also in our own hearts.

Elder Wilson spoke with passion and compassion as he poured out his heart in regard to the work that needs to be done and the pitfalls and stumbling blocks that will inevitably come. Saying, “Don’t ever be a reproach to God,” he reminded us, “With one hand do the work of God, and in the other hold the Word of God.”

The work that we, as God’s chosen people, have been called to is not easy, nor is it without opposition. We were cautioned to not allow ourselves to fall into a false sense of security just because we live in the U.S. and have relative comfort. Seeing all that has happened in such a short time, I completely agree.

As a society in general we have an overabundance of everything and are in need of nothing. This false sense of security that so many have will inevitably lead to unforeseen trials, fear, and compromise.

We must not allow our human nature to dictate and control us when the times of trial come. Quoting Ellen White: “God’s people are neither to fear nor to despise their enemies. Putting their trust in God, they are to go steadily forward, doing His work with unselfishness, and committing to His providence the cause for which they stand” (Prophets and Kings 645).

Do We Have the Right Focus?

Frank Fournier closed out his term with a message that caused all of us to take a hard look at whether we are truly ready to meet HIM, pointing out that many people have made the choice to focus on the wrong things.

If every Seventh-day Adventist was focused on present truth, the three angels’ messages, what God expects, etc., then all the “issues” would be non-issues, and the work that Jesus has called us to do would move forward with great power. This was one theme that Fournier presented, stating, “As a people we are not ready for Jesus to come.” He cited the bickering, power plays, and personal agendas that come when we take our eyes off Jesus.

We have occupied our minds with minor matters instead of Who matters. Like Elder Wilson, Fournier quoted Mrs. White as he reminded us that “whenever minor matters occupy the attention, the divine power which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though...
offered in infinite plenitude" (Acts of the Apostles 50).

We are well able to be the peculiar people that God has called us to be, and while it is not easy to lay self aside, for the sake of the salvation of souls we must. No, this is not easy, and yes, this does go against our human nature. However, we have a great High King who is willing to pour His Spirit upon us, if only we are willing to empty ourselves of self and allow Him.

I have been challenged in many ways by these messages to look long and hard at what I have made a priority in my life. My prayer now is that our gracious Father will give me the will to give Him my will.

“Build God’s church, to lift HIM up!”
If God Is Good, Why Is There Evil in the World? Answers from the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds

Adelina Alexe

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn’” (Matt. 13:24-30, ESV, emphases mine).

The plot of this parable is straightforward: a sower sows good seed in his field, but an enemy corrupts the crop by secretly sowing weeds. The sower decides to let them grow together until the harvest—lest the wheat be lost—and then separate them, sending each to its proper destiny.

Five characters populate the scene:

- the sower,
- the men,
- the enemy,
- the servants,
- the reapers.

The men, the enemy, and the reapers are secondary characters and don’t speak at all. The men perform only one action: they slept. The enemy initiates three actions: he came, he sowed, and he went away. His motives are not disclosed but may be inferred from the nature of the evil caused, wherein his gain consists in the sower’s loss. The reapers are the subjects of four projected future actions that imply obedience to the field owner: they would gather, bind, and burn the weeds and gather the wheat into the barn.

The main characters are the sower and the servants. Both speak twice, and both times the servants ask a question, which the sower answers. The dialogue is initiated by the servants when they notice the problem. We could summarize it like this:

Q1: Why are there weeds if you sowed good seed? (Servants seek an explanation for the presence of the weeds.)

A1: An enemy has done this. (Sower explains the presence of weeds.)

Q2: Should we remove the weeds now? (Servants propose a solution.)

A2: No, this would endanger the wheat. Let them grow together until the harvest. Then they’ll be gathered separately, the weeds burned, and the wheat put into the barn. (Sower rejects solution, explains why, and proposes a better solution.)

The dialogue between the two main characters creates a contrast between them. While the servants speak with the
naiveté of a child who tries to decipher a six-piece puzzle, the sower’s words resemble those of a seasoned adult, readily able to escape an impasse. With the same childlike trust, the servants accept the owner’s explanation for the existence of the weeds and, zealous for their master, offer to go pluck them right away. Their inexperience, however, leads them back to the sower, whose farsightedness perceives the potential problem with their solution, the actual problem (the crop is corrupted), and a prudent solution. Thus, the sower demonstrates not only further knowledge than his servants, but also greater wisdom.

The servants become gradually aware of things: first of the weeds, then of their source, and lastly of the best solution for their removal. The sower, on the other hand, shows no hint of surprise and speaks with the composure and wisdom of one fully aware of the past, present, and future. He knows what happened, understands the present dilemma, and predicts the future, over which he appears to have full control.

The Question of Evil

The contrast between the servants’ limitations and the sower’s all-encompassing knowledge and wisdom only enhances the depth of the question that perplexes them: If the sower has sown good seed, why does the field have weeds?

The question sounds very familiar. It has circulated around the globe for millennia: “If God created a good world, why is there evil in it?” Or “How is it possible for evil to appear in a good universe?”

Notice how cleverly Jesus initially uses the term good seed instead of simply wheat. The emphasis on good is critical for this story. It is a story about good and about its counterpart—evil. The verbs employed in the story, the entries and exits of the seeds and weeds, the characters and settings all contribute to the plot and, with incredible artistry, elucidate the dilemma that has perplexed more minds more frequently than any other.

Three triads of verbs are present in the parable:

- The enemy: came, sowed, went
- The crop: came up, bore, appeared
- The reapers: gather, bind, burn.

All three triads revolve around the weeds, depicting the source of the weeds, the manifestation of the weeds, and the removal of the weeds. The tempo of the triads adds weighty nuances to the plot. The enemy’s premeditated actions are described succinctly: he came, sowed, and went his way. Then the tempo slows down to describe the appearance of the weeds along with the crop: “So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.” The esthetics cloak a deep theological point: the evil sown swiftly and secretly takes time to become visible. The last triad portrays the outcome of the weeds. Again, intentionality is evident. One word could suffice to illustrate their removal; nevertheless, the narrator uses three to suggest that the final destruction of the weeds is certain. Thus, the triads reflect the entire cycle of the weeds.

The entries and exits of the seeds and weeds are brilliant. Notice the sequence and patterns in which they are mentioned:
The seeds are sown first, the weeds after. The spatial marker *among the wheat* is critical. Weeds could be sown in a different field, but they serve the enemy’s purpose only if sown *among the wheat*. Like the weeds, evil can appear only after good and among the good, because evil is nothing but a corruption of the good. Evil does not have an existence of its own; it depends on good in the same way a hole in a carpet can exist only if there is a carpet.

The next three times the wheat and weeds are mentioned, they are together: they appear together, are noticed together, and are to grow together. In this parallelism the narrator switches the order in the last mention, anticipating the exit of the weeds before the wheat; they are gathered, bound, and burned, while the wheat is gathered last and put into the barn. Just as the entry of the seeds and weeds illustrates the appearance of evil, so does their exit echo the final outcome of both evil and good: the temporary evil is outlived by the everlasting good.

**The Great Controversy in Brief**

In this parable Jesus peels the great controversy to its very core and explains the problem of evil in unparalleled depth: the endurance of the weeds protects the wheat. The endurance of evil protects the good. This ironic reality is as wise and loving as it is undesired. Just as the immediate plucking of the weeds would endanger the wheat, a quick cut-off of evil would result in the loss of good creatures.

The central idea that the wheat and weeds are to coexist for a while is reinforced through the three spatial markers: *in his field*, (weeds) *among the wheat*, and *in my barn*. Just as the story discloses the life of the weeds from sowing to fire, so does it depict the life of the wheat from the field to the barn. This parable indicates not only the source and final outcome, but also what the process will be like. The journey of the grain from the field to the barn involves growing together with weeds. From the moment evil appears, it must stick with the good until it can be wisely removed without compromising the good.

Notice also the sense of ownership in this story expressed in nouns and pronouns: The sower is the owner of *his field*, which the servants acknowledge as *your field*. The sower also refers to the barn as *my barn*. He owns not only the place where the seeds are sown and grow, but also the place where they are gathered. He is the owner of heaven and earth.

The temporal markers likewise contribute to the plot of the story. We know that the enemy sowed the weeds *while [the sower’s] men were sleeping*. The verb *sleeping* suggests either irresponsibility on the part of the men, which opens the door for the enemy to do his work, or simply unconsciousness. The latter is more probable, since no accusation is brought against the men and nothing else indicates irresponsibility. What the temporal marker does illumine, however, is the nature of the enemy and his work: he is a cunning character who causes damage secretly. The harmful potential of his malicious and deceitful work is huge. Not only do the weeds corrupt the crop and threaten the grain, their presence in the field threatens how the very character of the sower and owner of the field will be perceived. The weeds are, after all, found in *his* field. Has he really sown good seed? Is he a good owner?

The answer lies in his rejection of the servants’ solution and his justification for that decision. Amidst deep theological points and judicious explanations of the problem of evil, we find in this story the owner deeply concerned with the seeds he has sown. If the servants were to pluck the weeds right away, we’d expect them to do careful work. Probably much more grain would be saved than lost. But the sower cannot afford to lose even one stalk of grain. His concern for each seed is unfathomable. Only when you look at a wheat field can you begin to understand the infinite concern and love for each creature that God expresses in this parable.

**Good and Evil in Our Lives**

While this narrative analysis suggests that the wheat and weeds represent good and evil and depicts the relation between the two, we must bear in mind that these abstract concepts are embodied in concrete reality. Just as the crop of the landowner is corrupted, so is the entire human race, which includes every individual. From our birth to
our death, this battle between good and evil is nowhere more evident than in our own being. Yet while evil divides each one internally, eventually it will separate human beings according to the choices they have made, which will be reflected in the final outcome of their lives.

The eradication of evil at the end of time implies the destruction of real creatures (humans and fallen angels) and a real earth, just as the gathering of wheat in the barn indicates the ingathering of the saved in heaven. This is why Jesus, in His explanation of this parable, describes the good seed as the sons of the kingdom and the weeds as the sons of the evil one (13:38).

The literary structure adds depth to the message. A chiastic frame surrounds an issue as central to the great controversy as to our everyday living.

A The sower sows good seed.  
B The enemy sows weeds.  
C The weeds appear together with the wheat.  
D The current presence of weeds threatens the crop.  
Problem: The enemy has sown the weeds.  
Dilemma: Should we gather them now?  
D’ The immediate removal of weeds threatens the crop.  
C’ The weeds grow together with the wheat.  
B’ The weeds are gathered and burned.  
A’ The wheat is gathered into the barn.

The two halves of the story are mirror images, leading us to the difficult dilemma in the center, illustrated in the servants’ question: Should we remove right away the weeds that the enemy has sown?

This is a question with immediate echo in our lives, as it illustrates the old and lasting puzzlement of good creatures. Like the loyal servants in the service of a good master, we are often too ready to deal with evil right away. Too many times we offer a solution before having comprehended all the ramifications of a situation. But dealing with evil prematurely can be fatal for the good. More harm than good can be done. People’s eternal lives are threatened.

Thus, in addition to expressing the heart of the great controversy and the problem of evil, this parable also shows us how to engage the evils we become aware of: only when wisdom and love accompany our dealing with evil can we ensure that no unnecessary harm is done and no soul is unwittingly pushed away from the kingdom of God.

I don’t know about you, but I have yet to hear anyone explain the problem of evil with such depth and clarity, convey the magnitude of God’s love with such beauty and simplicity, and wrap it all in one short parable with such freshness and artistry as Jesus did. Next time you are in a field of grain, look closely at one stalk and meditate on God’s love for you. I imagine Jesus’ hearers did.
The Compass Magazine – The Paralyzing Segregation of Generations: Why Young and Old Need Each Other

Joe Reeves

It’s been 15 years since Roger Dudley’s book Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church became available in every Adventist Book Center, warning that our church is losing 40-50 percent of our young adults (p. 35). Church leaders have heard more recently from professors such as A. Allan Martin who say that our churches are actually losing 60-70 percent of the young people.

But not all the statistics are dismal! The Seventh-day Adventist Church Young Adult Study recently conducted by the Barna Group reveals that only 17 percent of young adults who are unengaged from church say that they plan on never coming back. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) indicate that they are very open to coming back. The remaining 20 percent are in between (p. 29).

The surprising openness of this group gives a lot of hope to those willing to invest in the inactive young. They are more than worth the attention, the food, the phone calls, the text messages, the activities, and the love.

The missing generation can wait no longer. They need the best we can offer to win them back. And we need the best they can offer to make our churches more excellent in every way. The generations need each other’s talent and wisdom working together like never before.

What else could the last verse of the Old Testament be calling for? “And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:6, NKJV). This last-day prophecy first exposes the hearts of parents and grandparents who need healing that they might better love their children’s generation. Thousands who have been excluded and unappreciated by old church cranks would concur on the devastating effect such an attitude can have. Secondly, the Scripture exposes the hearts of children who also need healing that their attitudes toward their parents’ generation might be subdued and healed.

Bring Down the Generational Walls

So what’s worse: a church full of grandparents isolated to themselves without any children in sight or a church full of youth without any parents and grandparents helping? Both violate the heart of God and His beautiful design for His family. We need unity. We need the walls to come down. We need healing and community. Churches segregated by racial hatred do not have a good future, and neither do churches segregated by age.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Young Adult Study by the Barna Group reveals that healthy cross-generational relationships are more important than we at first realized. Page 48 of the report says, “Intergeneration relationships are a big deal to both engaged and unengaged young adults—and not just in a good way. Those who felt welcome and nurtured referenced older adults, and those who felt judged and rejected also cited older adults. These interactions seemed more important than peer interactions in creating an atmosphere of tolerance.” The report continues with several firsthand testimonies by young people who attribute their involvement in church to older members who affirmed and mentored them in meaningful ways.

In 2013 the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee discussed young adult attrition. Dennis Austin, a Pennsylvania Conference pastor, addressed the issue: “There are some churches that want nothing to do with young people. Sometimes we demonize young adults by telling them we don’t have a place for them, so we give...
them their own spaces. But we need each other. We need to find ways to encourage our congregations to become intergenerational."

A. Allan Martin, a former professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University and a current young adult pastor at a thriving church in Texas, agreed: “It is our responsibility to interface with the next generation of the church. I’m all about church planting, but if it’s done to segregate, then the church will become anemic, especially if it is done to accommodate a preference for a certain worship style.”

None are too old or too young to help save each other. If you care about the unengaged, write down their names. Do something meaningful for them. Doing something small will probably accomplish the most. Let them know they’re missed. Check in with them. Invite them over. Play with them. Smile and laugh with them. Put your hand on their shoulder. Affirm their talents. Add in the other things that Jesus did. We are His disciples. They are His children, the ones He died for.

For both fathers and children, we need God to heal our hearts, “that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity,” “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Ephesians 2:16; 1:10, NKJV).