The historical-critical method: the Adventist debate

To those of us who are not academically qualified to participate in the debate, Robert McIver (“The Historical-Critical Method: The Adventist Debate” [March 1996]) has made a significant contribution. He has given a balanced overview presenting the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. I especially appreciate his hopeful assessment: “What we have here is not so much an impasse as an opportunity to find a better basis from which to work.” This controversy may never be completely settled, but we should earnestly endeavor to enlarge and emphasize what the author terms the “common ground.”—Roland Ruf, Collegedale, Tennessee.

As a Baptist minister in Australia, I receive your magazine unsolicited and I find it offers some thoughtful articles. I am responding to the very fair article by McIver in the issue of March 1996 concerning the historical-critical method. I have also struggled to reach a balanced conception of the Bible as Word of God but have found some integrating principles along the way.

First, concerning redaction and revelation: if we may believe that the work of the Spirit applies as much to the redactor as to the writer, we may extend our view of inspiration without being tied to the peculiarly American solution in the words: “as originally given.” For example, it has been well demonstrated that accounts of the Second World War written near the time lack both the perspective and the information released in the past few years. So reductive interpretations of Scripture, normally added to the existing text, can be at least as reliable. The ultimate example is the New Testament Gospel which interprets the nature of God shown in the Hebrew Bible.

Second, if we trust in the work of the Spirit bringing inspiration to the reader (as well as writer and redactor) we will not be anxious over discrepancies in biblical accounts. Indeed, the transparency of minor discrepancies is a reassuring aspect of Scripture and serves to highlight the big picture of Scripture, namely the basic theology of a loving God behind it all. It is precisely the message of Scripture (that we are made in the image of God) that frees us from dependence on a notion like inerrancy. For we individually have the divine capacity to reflect and to discern, aided by the Spirit. When further we subject our reflection to the Christian body of which we are a member, we find all the safeguard we need for true understanding.

The article does not acknowledge that in the past decade, scholars within the field of historical-critical scholarship have produced their own far-reaching critique of previously “assured results.” The emphasis of this post-modern era has returned to the text in its final form and this has opened up great opportunity for evangelical scholarship to engage those whom the article refers to as “liberal.”

I am concerned at the somewhat naive use of the term antisupernatural in the article. It is not helpful, nor correct, to equate this with the matter of historical-critical scholarship. The trouble with the strong dualism suggested by this term is that it differentiates the quality of God’s work within the natural order from what is supposedly outside the natural order. In fact, we know that this dualism is no more than a human thought construction to help us talk about the mystery of the spiritual. It is entirely biblical to recognize that every event in the world is historically conditioned, but at the same time, with the eye of faith, to see in these events the hand of God. This is our testimony to the world. Fundamentally, the incarnation of God as Christ puts an end to this dualism and demands a more integrated way of conceiving divinity.—Paul Tonson, Victoria, Australia.

How do you handle truth?

James Cress (March 1996) quotes 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved.” The Greek word for “study” is spoudazo. Arndt and Gingrich translate it as “hasten, hurry, be zealous or eager, take pains, make every effort.” With surprising unanimity the New International Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the American Bible Society’s Contemporary English Version all translate the word as “Do your best to.” It has nothing to do with study in the popular understanding of the word.

If this had been stated at the beginning of the article, the author’s excellent points might have been clearer and more telling.—Rev. William G. Campbell, St. Saviour’s Anglican Church, Alberta, Canada.

Useful and relevant articles

This simply comes to commend you for the useful and relevant articles presented in your May 1996 issue. As an involved member of a local church whose membership is very diverse, I noticed that the articles not only portrayed such congregations as legitimate, but they also gave an accurate picture of what heaven will be like. They were refreshing and enlightening. A few years ago when we were considering merging with another church, we could find very little information when it came to how-tos, benefits, or pitfalls—not much in fact except for church growth statistics, which seemed to encourage homogenous groupings. To many of us this did not seem to be the whole picture, and I am most appreciative that you are helping us, as a member of a world church, with some practical directions.

Both my husband and I also found the piece on PKs quite fascinating, especially since he falls into that category!—Nancy Marter, Silver Spring, Maryland.

If you’re receiving MINISTRY bimonthly without having paid for a subscription, it’s not a mistake. Since 1928 MINISTRY has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers, but we believe the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a renaissance of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share with you our aspirations and faith in a way that we trust will provide inspiration and help to you too. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulders, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you cannot use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead.
A thoughtful glance at the massive changes that have rocked our planet during the past two decades should soften the conflict and bewilderment behind our questions over the issue of appropriate music in worship. It is significant that most of this conflict is concentrated in high-tech, high-communication cultures.

In these cultures, not only is there a plethora of new thought and influence, but the new forms of musical expression convey powerfully the new ways of looking at new realities, and are able to do it for a very broad audience in a matter of hours. All kinds of music speak profoundly to the lives of all kinds of people in all kinds of cultures.

Are there legitimate or even urgently necessary applications of some of these forms of musical expression in at least some of our worship? If so, how far should we go in adapting these expressions in genuinely Christian worship? For some, these questions along with many related ones are old hat, for others their significance is urgent, and for still others the whole question possesses just a dawning import.

I believe the theme articles in this issue of Ministry are worthy of every pastor's attention. This month's issue simply attempts to contribute to our thinking and action in relation to the critical question of music and Christian worship. You may not always agree with Anita Ojeda, Bill O'Connor, Lillianne Doukhan, and Michael Tomlinson, but your thinking will be properly challenged by them.

Our other authors also add very significant thought to this month's issue.
You may pastor a church in which majesty pours from the organ, and the choir's voice soars through the soul of the congregation. You may minister in simpler surroundings where a few songs are sung with imperfect harmony, and where instrumental accompaniment is more a dream than reality. Some of us pastor a fellowship where guitars and drums have deposed the organ, and an interactive musical group leads the worship. In all of this, what is the significance of the relationship between music and worship?

Music in a world church

Clearly, when one looks at this question with a world church in mind, the music of worship does not have to have Bach to be acceptable any more than a rural Chinese fellowship must have the King James Version for the Scripture reading. But should Bach be left out where he is still heard in living tones? Looking from the universal perspective, the relationship between music and worship is not defined by what kind of music is sung or played, or what instruments, if any, are used, or what form of worship is employed.

Rather, the essence of the relationship between music and worship has to do with the heart of God and the heart of the worshiper. This assertion is not trite, especially when one considers how fundamental it is, and the difficulty many of us experience when it comes to questions of worship and music.

Jesus on worship

In all of this the conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus is eye-opening and evocative (John 4). Jesus not only revealed who He was to this woman (verse 26), but He opened up the quintessence of His thinking about worship. In order to sidetrack Jesus from the probing questions He was putting to her, the woman asked a popular, controversial question about where people should worship if they were to worship properly. In doing so she did something she apparently did not mean to do. She inquired about worship at the ultimate Oracle (verse 19). She loaded her question with an appeal to tradition, culture, and the authorities in her world: “our fathers worshiped on this mountain” (verse 20, NKJV).

In His reply, Jesus swept away her localized, culturalistic concerns and her appeals to this or that authority. He ignored her need to affirm her rightness in the debate. He did this not in order to deny her tradition or culture, but so that He could point to something transcending anyone’s tastes and traditions. Instead He got down to the heart and soul of the whole question (verses 21-23). He put His finger on the most sensitive spot when He told her in effect that in all her concerns about the where or how of worship she had ended up, in fact, worshiping she did not know what (verse 22). Above all, embroiled in her rather trivial controversies, she was unaware of the hour that had arrived in which God was especially looking for people who would “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (verse 20, NKJV).

Music, worship, and the present hour

In the press of pastoring congregations that contain a cultural assortment of people that are generationally diverse or who are simply time-bound in their views of worship, many of us and our members have been caught up in concerns about worship similar to those of the Samaritan woman. These concerns have a way of dominating our spiritual horizons, and eclipsing the real issues of the hour that has arrived.

As one not long out of a pastorate in which similar concerns were significant, I know that these questions cannot be spiritualized away, and I also know that the real concern for all of us is not simply a certain kind of music or a certain form of worship, it is the one that Jesus identified for the Samaritan woman. We are all looking for meaning and life, for significance and authenticity in our worship experience. I am convinced that this is not going to be found by cosmetically adopting this style of worship or that kind of music, but first of all by finding something deep and real to express in our modes of worship and music. Progress today has to do with worshiping the Father in spirit and truth.

Defending one another’s interests

I am also convinced of something else about the hour to which we have come: That we must not only cease to promote our own concerns or simply tolerate one another’s viewpoints, but that we must rediscover and reinstitute the fabulous Christian art of defending the special interests of one another rather than our own.

Romans 14 and 15 are key chapters in our here and now. They lay down crucial principles: “Welcome those...
Sing the song of gladness

Anita J. Strawn de Ojeda

Being contemporary in music does not diminish its sacredness or its joy.

Would she play the special music for our academy chapel? It wasn’t easy, but Lupita agreed to try. She practiced for days, and at the appointed hour she walked steadily to the piano, sat on the bench, and gently touched the keys. Soon a soft, uplifting melody filled the room. I was immersed in its sweetness, only to be interrupted by a rude whisper behind me.

“Doesn’t she know that’s not a church song? I can’t believe they’re letting her play that in here.”

I cringed, hoping Lupita hadn’t heard the whisper. Lupita, a non-Adventist, was sharing beautiful, uplifting music, as well as part of herself, only to be criticized by a church member.

Non-Adventist youth aren’t the only ones who come under fire for their choice of music. People who are certain that there is only one way to sing praises to God regularly criticize others who think otherwise.

Most criticisms against “contemporary” music fall under one of the three following categories: (1) much contemporary Christian music uses dance, jazz, or rock music with sacred words; (2) it appeals to our sensual nature, and therefore cannot be from God; (3) it entertains instead of uplifts.

Beginning with the Bible

Perhaps we should begin with the Bible. What does it say about music and the form it should take in worship?

A careful reading of Scripture shows that among the communities covered during biblical times, music was very much a part of daily life. It was used to celebrate God’s goodness, victories in battle, weddings, and coronations. It was used in worship and practical life. It was used in times of joy and moments of grief. The people of the Bible were surrounded with music, just as we are today. The Psalms are perhaps the greatest example of how music was part of biblical life.

The New Testament too exhorts the church to worship “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). Paul does not tell the churches to sing only hymns. Although he calls them to make melodies, he does not tell how a melody should be made. He tells the Colossians to sing “with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (3:16), but does not instruct them in how to sing or what is acceptable in singing.

Like us, the people of the Bible had the choice of using either their voices or instruments. In fact, musical instruments were often used to praise God. The Bible mentions timbrels, stringed instruments, organs, harps, cymbals, lyres, trumpets, and psalters. Other cultures in the area used the same and other types of instruments.

The most common stringed instrument found in biblical times was the lyre (a type of primitive harp) and its cousins. The harp mentioned in 1 Samuel 16:23 was actually a kinnor, a type of lyre, the national instrument of the ancient Jews. A lyra was a lyre that was associated with amateur players, love songs, and parties; and the baganna was a type of lyre used by the wealthy. There is no mention that any of these instruments were in any way sacred.

First Chronicles 13:8 tells us that David and the Israelites played before
God with all their might. They sang, and their songs were accompanied by a variety of musical instruments. Notice that they were singing “with all their might.” When I do something with all my might I am attuned both physically and mentally to that which I am doing. If my foot taps or my hands clap during a song, I am singing with “all my might.” That is, my whole being is involved.

If David had been writing today, would he have said, “Praise Him with drums and clapping; praise Him with guitars, banjos, and synthesizers; praise Him with loud drums; praise Him upon the electric guitar” (see Ps. 150:3-5)? Putting it all into context, he may well have said something similar to this.

The way we praise God with music is important. Psalm 126:2 assures us that our mouth can be full of laughter and our tongue praising God through song at the same time. Worshiping the Almighty doesn’t mean a long face and a slow beat. Biblical evidence shows that the music was sometimes loud, accompanied by common instruments, and that the act of praise is more important than the method one uses.

Musical neglect in history

Discussions on “good” and “bad” music go back to antiquity. Greek philosophers recognized the ethical and pedagogical value of music. A classic education comprised instruction in athletics and music (body and mind). One author summarizes what Aristotle thought of music: “If one listens to the wrong kind of music he will become the wrong kind of person; but, conversely, if he listens to the right kind of music he will tend to become the right kind of person.”

History shows that Christian songwriters borrowed elements from secular music. As the science of music progressed, a corresponding conflict between new techniques and organized religion also ensued.

The early Christian church struggled with the problem of music in the same way we do today. They sought to separate themselves from pagan philosophies while at the same time they tried to follow the advice of Paul to use music for worship. The first “church music” was developed during the first four centuries of Christianity. Plainsong, as it was called, was unaccompanied by instruments and was purely melodic. Its development was influenced by the music of the Jewish synagogue as well as the Greek community. At various times it was “reformed” because it was too confusing or needed updating in keeping with new developments in music.

Even though instruments were widely used at the beginning of the Christian era, they were not popular. Jerome (d. A.D. 420) wrote that a Christian maiden should not even know what a lyre or a flute is like or to what use it is put. Such attitudes of Christian leaders may have led Christians to disassociate their music from the popular Greek and Roman plays and their use of musical instruments.

As each new musical discovery was made and put into use, there was a corresponding resistance by organized religion. Pope John XXII in the fourteenth century forbade the use of secular melodies as a basis for the harmonized expressions of portions of the mass. He even tried to do away with harmony altogether. For about the first 10 centuries of Christian history, professional choirs or singers performed church music. All this changed when Martin Luther published the first Protestant hymnbook in 1524.

Luther and music

Luther, an accomplished lute and flute player, enjoyed the music of other contemporary composers, such as Josquin des Prez. Luther wrote at least two types of music: hymns and motets—a type of church chorale that found musical inspiration in the rhythmic schemes of the day. Luther found inspiration for both types of music in old vernacular religious and secular songs. Some of the songs published in the 1552 Geneva Psalter borrowed their tunes from old French melodies and popular secular songs.

Oddly enough, Luther’s contemporaries didn’t find his 95 theses as unsettling as his introduction of congregational singing. “His enemies declared that Luther had destroyed more souls by his hymns than by his writings and speeches.”

Changes in music acceptance

J. S. Bach, one of the greatest composers of all time, used new techniques developed in secular music to accomplish some of the greatest religious pieces known in history. Once again, his contemporaries (mostly his employers) deplored his individuality. According to one of his biographers, Bach “played whatever music seemed fit to him—improvised, extemporized, modulated, juggled his notes and melodies, as if there were no hard and fast rules for the rendering of decent and ‘regular’ church music.” As music continued to develop, things that had once seemed shocking became the acceptable norm in worship services.

The hymn, as we know it today, is a fairly recent innovation in music. It has been around only since the sixteenth century. By the time the pilgrims came to America, hymns and hymnbooks were widely accepted, although our current hymnbook would be quite shocking to colonial Americans. Colonists were accustomed to memorizing 8 to 10 sacred tunes, and singing different psalms and verses to each tune. In the nineteenth century, more tunes and verses were accepted into the sacred repertory, and hymnbooks grew in popularity.

Adventists have even borrowed from the secular. James R. Nix suggests that it was common practice for verse writers to set their words to popular tunes so that congregations all over America would be singing the same words to the same tune. Some of the secular tunes employed included “‘Tis Midnight Hour,” “Old Folks at Home,” and “Bonny Eloise,” which made the “top 10 list” of the day. Many of the tunes in our current church hymnal came from folk songs, operas, or other secular sources. Some familiar ones are

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Historical perspectives on change in worship music

Our generation is not the first to struggle with changes in worship music.

Periodically through history, the church has been confronted with the problem of the introduction of new elements into an existing tradition. In the context of congregational singing, this issue centered on the infiltration of secular elements. The purpose of this study is to present such situations, to show how people dealt with change in their time, and to draw lessons from it for today.

The use of secular music in the church

The resurgence of the popular element in church music has been a constant phenomenon throughout history. The Arian heretics already used the power of popular tunes to spread their false doctrines through singing. The fourth-century Church Father Ephraem Syrus (b. 309) from Antioch did not hesitate to pick up these melodies, being aware of their “sweet” effect. Nine hundred years later, reacting to the heavy formalism of the church and wanting the hymns to be more Christ-centered, Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) also integrated the contemporary secular melodies and rhythms into his laude.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), again in reaction to the formalist worship style of the church in his time, used melodies and rhythms familiar to the people for his chorales. Contrary to Calvin, Luther did not perceive the church as separate from society; in his philosophy, secular elements could be transformed according to a new understanding.

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Pietists, in reaction against the Scholasticism of the Protestant church, rejected the operatic style of art music, and adopted the subjective hymn featuring dancelike rhythms. In England, John Wesley (1703-1791) had a burden that the tunes of the hymns be accessible to all, so that all could participate in the singing and thus express their personal acceptance of salvation. Much to the discontent of the church officials, he adapted popular tunes from many sources.

Closer to our times, hymn singing was a major element during camp meetings and the Great Awakenings. It was intended to be a means to communicate the gospel in a simple and direct language, and an effective manner, to the ordinary man and woman. The melodies of these spirituals or gospel songs were folklike, easy to teach and to catch, mostly adapted from well-known folk melodies. Some of the tunes used at the Moody-Sankey revival meetings (late nineteenth century) were taken over from Stephen Foster. William Booth (1829-1912), the founder of the Salvation Army, shared the same philosophy.

This desire to reintroduce the simplicity of folk music into the worship experience stemmed often from a reaction to the pomp and formality which characterized the official religion. Furthermore, at those moments in history, the congregation was geographically and often physically separated by a screen from the church choir, the part of the church where the office took place. The luxurious style of the Byzantine church brought about Ambrose’s simple antiphonal hymns; the sumptuousness of the Roman liturgy led to Luther’s conviction for the necessity of hymns close to the people.
The “reforms” correspond then to a time of renewal and revival, a time when the reformers decided to put music back into the hands of the people.

Official reaction from the church to these innovations most often resulted in partial or total prohibition of congregational participation in the service. Possible motives for such radical decisions could have been fear of syncretism or weakened ecclesiastical powers, suspicion of people’s spontaneity which would compromise the transcendental character of the act of adoration, or simply a concern for tradition and continuity.

The Council of Laodicea, called by the Church Fathers in A. D. 367, decided to prohibit congregational singing in order to avoid the use of secular tunes and to prohibit the use of instruments in church in order to avoid pagan associations. A similar decision was taken on the occasion of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Congregational singing was no longer to be part of the Mass, but was relegated to extraliturgical moments of popular devotion. In addition to eliminating congregational participation from the Mass, the council also prohibited the use of secular elements (seen as “lascivious and impure”) as a basis for Mass compositions, a practice that had been widespread for 200 years.

Sources of resistance to change

Resistance to change in church music was not, however, the sole domain of the officials of the church. Many protestations to the introductions of “new” elements in church music came from within the congregation itself. It is noteworthy that such reactions did not occur solely when change was concerned with theological truth and moral values. It seems as if change per se was the problem; the “new” was bad simply because it was new. Some of the arguments advanced at those times carry in fact a very contemporary flavor. In 1712 Thomas Symmes, who encouraged the “new way” of singing (by note) in reaction to the practice of “lining out” (singing by rote), relates some of the reactions to this innovation: “Tho’ in the polite city of Boston this design [the new way] met with general acceptance, in the country, where they have more of the rustic, some numbers of elder and angry people bore zealous testimonies against these wicked innovations, and . . . not only . . . call the singing of these Christians a worshiping of the devil, but also they would run out of the meeting house at the beginning of the exercise.”

Among the objections we find the following arguments: “It is a new way, an unknown tongue. It is not so melodious as the usual way. . . . The practice creates disturbances, and causes people to behave indecently and disorderly. . . . The names given to the notes [do, re, mi] are bawdy, yea, blasphemous. It is a needless way, since our fathers got to heaven without it . . . They are a company of young upstarts that fall in with this way, and some of them are lewd and loose persons.”

Turmoil in the church

It is a well-known fact that the introduction of “new” instruments also created turmoil in the church. Such was the situation in a late-eighteenth-century New England church that had been offered an organ in 1713 by the treasurer of Harvard University, but turned it down. The general opinion was that “if organs were permitted, other instruments would soon follow, and then there would come dancing!” Finally “the Brattle Street Church surrendered to the inevitable and decided to have an organ, but even after the order had been sent to England and the instrument was on its way, the congregation was torn with bitter strife. One wealthy member besought with tears that the house of God be not desecrated, promising to refund the entire cost of the organ if the evil thing might be thrown to the bottom of Boston harbor. But gradually opposition subsided.”

In the same way the organ was considered a secular instrument for which there was no place in church, the instruments used by J. S. Bach in his St. Matthew Passion were a stumbling block to the congregation of his times.

“When in a large town [Bach’s] Passion music was done for the first time, with 12 violins, many oboes, bassoons, and other instruments, many people were astonished and did not know what to make of it. In the pew of a noble family in church, many ministers and noble ladies were present, who sang the first Passion chorale out of their books with great devotion. But when this theatrical music began, all these people were thrown into the greatest bewilderment, looked at each other and said: ‘What will become of this?’ An old widow of nobility said: ‘God save us, my children! It’s just as if one were at an opera comedy!’ But everyone was genuinely displeased by it and voiced just complaints against it. There are, it is true, some people who take pleasure in such idle things.”

Finding it difficult to change

The foregoing examples demonstrate how change is difficult even when it is for the better. Indeed, change is in itself a painful process, for we like to hold on to the familiar, predictable, and comfortable, the nonthreatening. Furthermore, the value of the old is associated with “tradition,” synonymous with stability and absence of change.

Tradition is often a matter of feeling at home with what we have grown up with, which then comes to be interpreted as the “truth.” Old music carries also the aura of being consecrated by the past. Antiquity becomes a recommendation in itself. Today the veneration of the past is essentially an outgrowth of Romanticism. It was indeed the Romanticist understanding of the world as an organic unity that aroused interest in the origins of things, and thus led to a consideration of bygone times as valuable and worthy of interest.

Ever since those times, the music of contemporary composers has been overshadowed at concert programs by historical works. Before the nineteenth century it was not customary to perform works from times gone by, at
church as well as at court. It is a well-known fact that J. S. Bach, for instance, was to produce a new cantata every Sunday, which, by the way, explains the numerous borrowings from his own works as well as from those of earlier composers, a practice that was widespread since the earliest times. These borrowings involved sacred as well as secular sources.

The examples also testify to the problem of borrowing musical elements familiar to the congregation from secular contexts. And yet this is what great personalities of the church did all along. On closer examination it seems that the reasons for this tension lie essentially in the conflict between two different ideals for church music. On one hand, we note the concern for a relevant means of congregational participation, a way for the people to join in and sing along without particular musical training (emphasis on the human aspect of religion); on the other hand, we note the concern for the lofty ideal of church music as a transcendental expression of God and the truth, a means to elevate human thoughts toward their Creator.

In fact, both concerns are legitimate and should work hand in hand in a healthy and necessary tension. In order for church music to be an authentic expression of worship, it should undergird both the transcendental and the anthropological aspects. It should be appropriate to the circumstance and hence translate the lofty character of worship; but it should also be relevant and be conveyed in a language that is readily understood for a more spontaneous participation.

**The lessons of history**

The first lesson of history is therefore a lesson of openness and of flexibility. However, whether these principles are still applicable today remains the burning question; can history be used as a perfect model for today? In other words, how far can we use secular elements in our congregational singing? To answer this question in an appropriate manner, we should not only consider the parallels with past history described earlier but also be acutely aware of the differences. Indeed, the situation today carries specific new elements that make the process of change much more complex and certainly more delicate. I shall note at least two of them:

1. In historical times the introduction of secular music was proposed and monitored by theologians and realized by professional musicians; many of the reformers speak not only of adoption but also of adaptation. Many of the Church Fathers were trained as musicians, and the same was true of Luther. In addition Luther worked closely with such eminent composers as Johann Walter; those composers were active in the fields of both secular and sacred music and knew how to manipulate the musical language for the one or the other.

Today’s renewal of church music, initiated by Vatican II, is mostly the result of a grassroots movement under the motto “By the People and for the People.” The initiative for renewal often comes directly from the congregation and is actually realized by the people who form this congregation.

Our culture has developed a strong sense of democracy and, especially since the 1960s, young people have acquired their own voice and participate actively in various societal matters. It would be of no avail to ignore or deny this reality which can be observed in many other aspects of society.

The same phenomenon could not fail to happen in religion. The young people need to express their desire for participation through their own language in music. However, the enthusiasm of conviction and the stimulation of action should not prevent them from reflecting on the nature of worship and the purpose of church music; they should also be concerned with the nature and the expressive power of music, as well as the need for high musical standards.

2. The strongest consideration, however, must be the changes that have transformed the modern world in regard to its understanding of the sacred and the secular. Here lies the principal difficulty in adopting secular elements for worship. Today’s society is characterized by a great rift between the secular and the sacred. Daily life is no more permeated by the sacred; there are no more laws, no more taboos, no more direction.

Both a memory of history and a lucid observation of our times should inspire our approach to the problem. One may adopt, of course, the traditional attitudes of rejection or prohibition, but history has shown that those are not very effective in the long run.

Change will happen anyway, with or without us; it is a fact. Instead of resisting change and thus provoking revolt, we should become a part of it, and make it happen in a responsible manner.

On the other hand, considering the above-mentioned forces that surround us today, change needs to be much more controlled and monitored than it was at the time of Luther or Wesley. Perhaps education is needed more today than it used to be. Yet education should not operate against, but with, the people; it implies listening to each other and preparing a ground for common action. Rather than resisting change, musicians should take part in it and help shape it. Isn’t this, after all, the challenge of the artist in society?

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1 The application of new texts to already existing popular melodies is known under the technical term contrafactum.


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The crisis in the congregation

Dick Tibbits

The call was desperate. The conference president was at his wit's end. One of his churches was hopelessly split. Fault-finding, rumors, and misunderstandings were flying on all fronts. The church pastor identified himself with one group, thus leaving the church without objective leadership. By the time I was asked to mediate, the church board had asked for the pastor's removal and one group of members had already split from the main body and was meeting independently.

I stepped in to bring healing to this body of Christian believers. I still recall the divergent voices in that little church: voices of anger, desperation, accusation, and criticism. Some of the voices were quite pointless. Some of them seemed childish. None of them too big to be beyond the power of grace and prayer.

"The music they play," said one, "is of the devil. We should never have allowed it in our church." Such individuals were attempting to uphold what they believed were the right standards, no matter what the cost.

"The old guard is so out of touch with contemporary society," said a young member. "They must have gone to sleep about 10 years ago and haven't woke up yet." Some were sarcastically saying that the "elders" were out of touch with the needs of the younger members, who felt that they were irrelevant to the church.

"This used to be such a loving church," said still another. "My heart aches to see the church falling apart like this." Then there were others—the majority—who felt confused and saddened by the recent events and were not sure of how to resolve the problem.

How can a healthy and growing church so quickly degenerate into warring factions? What should be done when a church is so deeply divided? It may be tempting to resolve the problem by simply firing the pastor and bringing in "new blood." While there may be times when a pastoral change is necessary, simply changing the coach does not necessarily make a better team.

Causes of congregational division

Most congregational division is based on one group's biased perception of the other's position. These perceptions are then pushed to the extreme in order to demonstrate the other's error. The "correct" position is offered as the only real truth. Both sides often end up with positions far to the left or right from where they began. All sides become unwilling to compromise as they defend their own position. Once any position is pushed to its extreme, and is advocated by a significant number

Dick Tibbits, D.Min., is administrative director, Florida Hospital, Orlando, Florida, and he has had years of experience in pastoral and chaplaincy ministry.
of members, any church will become divided no matter how healthy it may have been.

When I met with various leaders of the church, I quickly discovered that each side had solidified its position to the approximate density of concrete. By then, each group had closely linked its opinions to important church values. Defending the values of “truth” and the church is a powerful motivator for maintaining one’s position. Upon closer evaluation, however, it will be found that it is not the values that are in conflict, but how those values are expressed and by whom. When one is evaluating any given situation, it is important to make a distinction between the cultural expression of values—that vary with time and place—and the underlying values themselves.

This particular church initially had two services: one contemporary and the other more traditional. The traditional service had old hymns. Its familiar sermons spoke of hope and stability. The contemporary service spoke for those who sought relevance in a modern context. These differences, which at first seemed to be an advantage in attracting a wider range of people to the church for worship and witness, eventually became points of division. What started out as mission soon became misery.

**Define carefully the issues**

During a congregational crisis it is important to have a well-defined approach that addresses the issues. Simply to listen empathetically, or declare a predetermined official position, is a sure way to guarantee failure. Mistakes at this juncture can be costly and contribute to further complexity. Objectivity, fairness, and openness are essential to restore trust and dialogue.

If each participating party has an agenda that is perceived as biased, it is best to obtain an outside professional who is skilled at mediating church conflict. This may be another pastor or a qualified layperson. It is important that all sides agree to the qualifications and objectivity of the chosen mediator. The stakes are too high to risk further division or deeper mistrust. To ask the next pastor to do this work could result in sacrificing him or her to the conflict. Seeking outside consultation should be interpreted not as a sign of weakness or failure but rather as a demonstration of commitment to discover the best possible solution. It is the first important step in moving from blame to resolution.

It is also important not to view all conflict as bad. Conflict can be healthy as unaddressed concerns are surfaced and dealt with. Thus conflict is not to be feared and avoided at all costs, but rather embraced and valued for the new opportunities it can create. Growth necessitates change, and change requires confrontation. When you care enough to confront, issues can be thoughtfully resolved.

**Care enough to confront**

The bottom line of a church community is the expression of love in the context of truth. If I care about you, then I must be honest with you by telling you my truth. This of course should be done in a sensitive manner. If I want to receive your care, I need your truth. When everyone in a given context of conflict cares in this manner, the truth can be freely spoken in love. Such expressions, when heard and examined in the light of the church’s stated purpose, should lead to the strengthening of church unity. As Paul states: “He has made known to us his hidden purpose—such was his will and pleasure determined beforehand in Christ—to be put into effect when the time was ripe: namely, that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ” (Eph. 1:9, 10, NEB).

Caring and confrontation can be understood as a balancing of love and power. Both are essential for maintaining a lasting relationship. Confrontation works when both parties share a common vision for the future. If we are headed toward a common goal, we will eventually end up at the same place. It may take time, but it will happen. Thus it is profitable to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of every idea, making appropriate decisions in light of the evidence. When this is done, something much more productive than merely arguing over who is right or wrong will occur.

Perfectionism and judgmentalism are the great divides of any relationship, including the life of a church. A perfectionist views every situation as having only a right or wrong answer. A judgmentalist always believes his or her point of view is the right one, and thus condemns others for their “obvious” error. This sets up the classic win/lose situation that can result only in increased resentment and further alienation.

**Plan your objectives in crisis counseling**

In my approach to crisis counseling I seek to accomplish three objectives. **First, reopen the doors of communication.** To accomplish this, I start by getting each side to understand the concerns of the other. Until you take the time to understand, you have not earned the right to be understood. Assuming you understand only confirms your ignorance.

**Second, clarify and differentiate the underlying values from the issues that are being expressed**—i.e., the argument may be over the color of carpet, but the underlying issue is how to assert my authority. To resolve the carpet issue without understanding the authority issue is to fix the presenting problem while leaving the underlying issue unresolved. In time, another conflict will inevitably emerge over another topic. The best way to get at underlying values is to invite
each group to define its purpose and identify what values are being expressed through its activities. Begin with the end in mind, and work back to current realities. This creates a new way of viewing the issues, thus creating a new set of solutions. The best solutions are those that are most likely to achieve common goals.

Third, make decisions that support both the values of the church and the relationships in the church. You will always achieve better results if you think along two continuums rather than one. This avoids either/or positions that produce a winner and a loser. You will be much further ahead if you think win/win as the only acceptable solution.

Work at your objectives

Communication. Expressed hostility, hurt, or withdrawal are signs of pain, injury, and misunderstanding. The expression of such feelings is an indicator of poor communication. Instead of a clarification of the issues with a desire to understand, ideas are labeled and then judged according to one’s preconceived biases. Instead of attempts to discover common ground upon which to build a new solution, endeavors are made to convince, or force, others to see the superiority of their own position. Such an approach continues the destructive cycle of conflict by building walls rather than bridges.

Effective communication takes place when someone has something important to say and another is willing to listen with a desire to understand. The weakest link in all communication is listening. Most leaders receive some training in public speaking; but how many have received any training in effective listening? This is a serious gap. Listening is often much more beneficial than talking. When I talk, I am simply repeating what I already know; but when I listen, I learn something new. It is through learning that new ideas emerge. This is the process of growth.

In fact, we were designed for listening. It has been said that God gave us two ears and only one mouth, for He intended that we listen twice as much as we talk. Of course, it was no mistake that our mouths were designed to shut while our ears were created to be constantly open. The better we listen, the more understanding we become.

The greatest need of anyone in pain is to be understood. To be understood, I must be willing to tell my story; and if I tell my story, I need someone who will actually listen. Hearing a person’s pain is the first, and most important, step to resolving the pain. I believe that being heard is so close to being loved that, for all practical purposes, they are indistinguishable.

Most people listen just enough to select the most effective rebuttal. Such individuals are thinking their thoughts rather than listening to what the other is saying. Listening must begin with a desire to understand. Solutions are not effective, and usually are not accepted, until the problem is understood not only on the intellectual but on the emotional level. The single greatest mistake in conflict resolution is fixing problems before understanding them.

In effective problem solving, it is important to value one’s own opinions as well as the opinions of others. By making “I” statements, I give value to my ideas while creating space for another’s point of view. When I make “you” statements, I fix blame and undermine your point of view.

For example: “I would like to sing this song, for I believe the words express well the thought of the sermon.” In this expression, the purpose of special music is understood and my desire is made clear. There is now room to discuss the appropriateness of the selection and alternatives that may better accomplish the desired goal. Compare this approach to: “You never approve the songs I want to sing.” You statements blame and encourage defensiveness. They lead to conclusions rather than open possibilities.

The first step in resolving conflict is to pay attention to our communication. The biggest dividends are to be found in improved listening. “Hear what I say, not what you think I am going to say.”

Understanding. The topic being discussed is most likely to be a symptom of the underlying problem, not the problem itself. Often the real problem is clouded by the personal issues of the participants. Underlying the discussion are the substantive issues of personal bias, authority, power, control, and one’s insecurities that are masked by the need to be right.

Vulnerability is protected by arguing over fixed positions. Rigid positions hide deeper fears: fear of failure, fear of disapproval, and/or fear of rejection. Individuals in such arguments believe they cannot afford to lose. They must win, no matter what the cost. In church conflict the costs can be high. Once this dynamic is established, you are sure to have a winner and a loser. Both sides will find a way to win—even if both end up the losers—by either striking back or breaking away. Division is the natural result of such an approach.

Before going down this road, go back to your church’s mission. If your church does not have a mission statement, it is time to write one. A mission statement should identify the purpose of your church and what it seeks to accomplish. The mission of the local congregation should align with and support the mission of the denomination with which it belongs. All ideas should then be evaluated in light of the mission statement. The best solutions are those that have the greatest impact on fulfilling your mission. The more that buy into the mission, the more likely there will be alignment of ideas and activities.

A good mission statement can help determine if your alternative points of view take you down separate paths, or head you in the same direction. A common goal is more important than common ground at this point. Diversity is essential for growth, as long as there is agreement on direction. When you do not have common direction, diversity can lead to chaos.

Solutions. The goal of resolving any problem is not to fix blame but to discover solutions. Blame results in division, whereas solutions bring about unity. Remember, our goal is not only to solve the problem but to strengthen relationships. Solutions come when people are committed to their possibility. Commitment comes when one feels valued and included.
People matter the most. I would rather make a few adjustments to be inclusive than rigidly let people fall out of my circle of concern. Remember the advice of Ellen White: "It is better to err on the side of mercy."  

To value both the person and the outcome, we must think along two continuums simultaneously. To do this, picture a graph with two sets of concerns intersecting, as shown here.

### High concern for people

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### Low concern for outcome

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### Low concern for people

Plot your solutions according to where they best fit on the graph. Evaluate each solution on a scale from one to ten in regard to desired outcome and expressed concern for all individuals. This will help to determine if your solution is a real winner.

Such an exercise should help you move in your thinking from a “we/they” position, in which they are the enemy and we are the preservers of truth, to an “us” position, in which we are in this together as a family of God. We must learn how to talk out, listen through, and discover our common solutions. There is a danger when everybody thinks the same, for then nobody thinks. There is also a danger when everyone thinks differently, for then there is no alignment of ideas, indicating a lack of common vision.

Every conflict must eventually end. To get there, you need to focus on problem solving. This is a process of collecting data, identifying options, and evaluating the pros and cons of each option. From this information a decision needs to be made. The primary consideration is not whose solution is right but whether the solution supports the mission. It is a matter not of winning, but of doing the right thing. And in doing so, expressing care and concern for all involved.

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1 The story is a composite of several situations I had to deal with in my ministry. No particular congregation is to be identified.


The Denny’s dilemma

Ron Gladden

Multiplying means moving beyond the restrictions of the traditional order.

If Denny’s* were the only restaurant in town, would more people dine at Denny’s, or would fewer people go out to eat?

Let’s pretend we’re in business—the consulting business. We’re meeting this month with Denny’s corporate board, whose calling is food service. Their passion is to entice as many people as possible to eat their food. One thing is not negotiable: they refuse to compromise the quality of their food. The rest, supposedly, is up for grabs.

Their beginnings were humble; they go way back. Denny opened his first diner, and the people came. He insisted on reasonable prices, 24-hour service, and “down-home” decor. “This will be America’s restaurant,” Denny boasted. “We will offer something for everyone: steak, salad, sandwiches, children’s menu, and breakfast items. When people think eating out, they’ll think Denny’s.”

One restaurant became 10, then a 100. The way he prepared and served food was an obvious “grand slam” success. Denny dreamed even bigger. “Decided efforts should be made to open new diners in the North, the South, the East, the West,” his employee bulletin proclaimed. “Place after place is to be visited; restaurant after restaurant is to be raised up.”

A plan to multiply

Early corporate leaders seized the challenge and devised a plan to multiply their presence rapidly. They called it “dark county marketing.” The plan? Place a Denny’s restaurant in every county in America.

It went pretty well. So well, in fact, that today nearly 4,700 Denny’s serve hungry Americans from coast to coast. Most cities have been entered. Many cities enjoy several of these establishments. Name recognition is high.

Yet all is not well. Research shows that only one of 1,000 Americans eats in a Denny’s on a fairly regular basis. Even in neighborhoods with strong restaurants, most of the people never darken Denny’s doors. So the chain has had to retreat from the original vision of serving people of all ages and economic backgrounds with a wide range of menu options. Now it targets senior citizens.

Listen to the Denny’s advertising. Two older, hard-of-hearing ladies loudly discuss the latest specials at—well, let’s see—was that Denny’s or Lenny’s? While corporate sales squeak ahead at barely 2 percent gain a year, the population is expanding so quickly that market share is actually in retreat.

What should they do? How can they reach the vast millions of Americans with their food?

A special “think tank on growth” has been called to address the problem. Loyal but frustrated corporate leaders have flown in from all over the country in hopes of stumbling onto something that will make a difference. Participants take their places around the polished oak table; we are invited to listen as the ideas spill out.

“Back when Denny started this chain, a lot of young people ate here,” an old-timer reminisces out loud. “If we could just get more young people to show up, they’d get other youth to come!”

“I have a brainstorm,” a regional manager breaks in. “Use giveaways. Give everyone a free meal on his or her
birthday. My granddad used to run a little restaurant, and that’s what he did. It worked! Once they got hooked on Grandpa’s food, they came back again and again.”

The only female in the group is known for her progressive ideas. “How about this?” she suggests. “Let’s adopt a new slogan. It could be printed on our menus, our napkins, our signs. It could be a little jingle in our ads. Let’s call ourselves ‘The Caring Restaurant.’” Hear me out. People get beat up all day at work. This is the place to come and tank up, where someone cares about them.”

“Whoa! You’ve given me an idea. Would it work to have a ‘Visitor’s Day’ once in a while? I mean, our regular customers are great, but what if all our employees went out and invited their friends to eat at Denny’s? They could even knock on doors in the neighborhood and say something like ‘Hi! My name is Jane. I work at Denny’s, and we’re having a special Visitors’ Day. I wonder if you’d like to come eat at our place this weekend?’ Then, when they come, we could really make them feel welcome. Partway through the meal we could ask all the newcomers to stand up and tell us who they are and where they’re from!”

**Multiplying despite the risks**

The VP for marketing bounces a pencil on his palm. “That’s all well and good, but I think what we really need is more restaurants. I’ve crunched the numbers. The demographics show that there is room for a few more of our restaurants in several states. I suggest we scout out some affordable land—or find some buildings for sale—and enter those dark areas.”

“That’s risky!” a regional manager from the Midwest warns. “Can you imagine how upset some of our employees will be when they lose some of their ‘regulars’ to new restaurants?”

The old-timer comes to life. “I’m against it too. Sure, our profits are flat, but we ought to work on filling the ones we have before we go to the expense of opening new ones. Now, if you’re talking Hispanic neighborhoods or other ethnic areas, I can live with that, but not anywhere else.”

“Amen!” chimes in an executive from the division office. “If people really want to eat out, they know where we are.”

The CEO clears his throat. He unfolds his arms and plants his elbows on the table. “OK,” he speaks deliberately. “I can live with the birthday idea, and maybe the right slogan will help. Regarding your suggestion, Tom, of opening new restaurants, I’ve heard the objections, but I think you’re right. We need to dust off the maps, find some unentered areas, and go for it.

“But to be honest, I’m still worried. Really worried.” The crease in his forehead is convincing. “Living in the shadow of our existing restaurants are thousands of people who apparently won’t come no matter what we do. Tweaking what we’re already doing and opening a few places similar to the old ones will help a little, but only incrementally. We need a breakthrough. Something has to give. Something consistent with our mission, yet radical enough to shake things up!”

Pencil erasers are chewed. Corners are stared into. Papers are rearranged. At this point the CEO nods toward us, and we’re on. . . . Any suggestions? Can we help?

**Reapplying the original vision**

First, let’s remind him of the original vision. That vision was not to open a Denny’s in every county or even in every neighborhood. “Dark county marketing” was only an initial step toward making the food available to more people. Even if there were a Denny’s on every block, thousands would remain unreached. The original vision was “to entice as many Americans as possible to eat our food.”

“We think the answer is fairly obvious: There is not just one way to serve food. There is not a ‘right’ way of operating a restaurant to the exclusion of other ways. As long as you don’t compromise the quality of the food, the rest, remember, is up for grabs.”

“Pretend, sir, that there are no other restaurants in America. Just yours. Just Denny’s. You’ve earned a lot of customers. By and large, they’re happy with what you do. That’s great. So keep all Denny’s restaurants open. Make them the best they can be. Run new specials. Give things away. Try the new slogan.

“Next, plant a few new ones wherever the territory permits.

“Finally—and here’s the breakthrough—open new restaurants where the food is deliberately served differently.

“For example: Start a restaurant where baby boomers feel comfortable and young couples can go for their first date. A good name for it would be the Olive Garden. Decorate with patio lighting and murals to give the sense that you’re outdoors in old Italy. Make pasta right out front where customers can salivate and anticipate. Create the illusion of getting something for nothing with all the salad and bread-sticks you can eat. Price it a bit higher than Denny’s so it seems ‘classy.’

“Then create a restaurant targeted at kids. Name it Taco Bell. Kids aren’t good at waiting, so serve the food fast. Use bright colors and hard seats. Hang crooked signs that shout ‘Four-Alarm Tacos!’ Extreme Meals!’ Summer’s short—Stay up late!’ Sell small, inexpensive portions so kids can eat all they want.

“Next, Mr. Chairman, ask this. If you offered Italian food—say eggplant parmigiana—at Denny’s, prepared exactly as you would at the Olive Garden, would people come to Denny’s to get it? Most would not. It’s not just the food; it’s the way it’s presented. It’s the atmosphere. It’s the wild-colored neckties of the waiters and waitresses. It’s the hanging plants and the Old World flair.

“What about seven-layer burritos or Mexican pizza? Would the kids beg Dad to take them to Denny’s if you served them there? Don’t you wish! It’s not just the food; it’s the way it’s presented.

“So be proud of the Denny’s you have, Dream bigger than just improving Denny’s and starting some new ones. Dream of reaching tens of thousands of new customers everywhere with high quality food served in a host of creative ways. Dream of planting Casa Lupitas, Subways, Red Robins, China Gardens,
Friendly’s, even a Macheezmo Mouse or two.

“Roll out the maps again. Plot the restaurants you already own, then go beyond thinking merely in territorial terms. Lay out new maps. Target age groups, mind-sets, interests, preferences. Be different on purpose. Notice now that every county is a ‘dark’ county. Realize that hundreds, even thousands, of restaurants are begging to be planted. If you plant them, people will come!”

Speaking of grand slams, we consultants have just hit one. The CEO is ecstatic; the think tank is a smashing success!

From restaurants to churches

One hundred years ago Ellen White urged church planting upon a young, aggressive church. Her vision was huge. She insisted that far too many people still lived beyond the reach of Adventist influence. “Decided efforts should be made to open new fields in the north, the south, the east, the west” (Evangelism, p. 19). “Place after place is to be visited; church after church is to be raised up” (Testimonies, vol. 7, p. 20).

The dream proved contagious. Our leaders seized the day and launched a serious initiative to bring the light of truth to every county in America. We called it “dark county evangelism.”

From that origin Adventist church planting came to mean: spread out the maps, highlight the county lines, plot the Adventist churches, list the unentered counties, prioritize by population, then do whatever it takes to raise up a church in that place. Our paradigm for church planting was territorial.

How did it go? Not bad, actually. The number of churches in North America surged from 179 in 1870 to nearly 4,700 today. Relatively few dark counties remain, and those are quite sparsely populated. (One example is the Oregon Conference, which has 131 churches and companies within the 31 counties of its territory.)

Is the mission of planting churches accomplished? Would Ellen White pat us on the back for a job well done? Can we fold up the maps and tuck them away? Is it appropriate that the early momentum of church planting has nearly ground to a halt?

The answer is determined by the vision. What is God’s vision? What was Ellen White’s vision? A church in every county? Not at all! For the church of her day, dark county evangelism was a bold response to an urgent need, a critical step in the right direction. Dark county evangelism was the church’s initial strategy for placing the everlasting gospel before the vast numbers of people who would otherwise never hear it.

Yet the dream was not territorial. The mere establishment of churches in previously unentered counties was never an end in itself. A larger vision burned in the hearts of our leaders—and still does today. The vision is to make Jesus and His truth attractive to the millions of North Americans who are headed for a Christless eternity. Many
of these people live in the very shadow of our existing churches.

**Church planting works**

Evidence abounds that church planting works. Church planting kindles the fire of mission. It reclaims the inactive. It develops new leaders. It wins the lost more effectively and at significantly less expense per convert. Why, then, has church planting ended up on the back burner of evangelistic priorities? Two reasons.

1. Even today, when we as Adventists think church planting, we think territory. When someone suggests a new church, our mind's eye scans the map. "Let's see," we inquire, "we already have a church in that area. Has the population profile changed significantly enough to warrant another church so close to the first one?"

2. When we do plant churches, they tend to be like the churches we already have. Ministry is done with more energy, but—just like Denny's—our approach and methods are the same. It is natural for parents to have children like themselves. But the question begs to be asked: If the parent churches struggle to impact their communities, why plant churches that are similar to them in approach and personality?

We can do better, much better. We can reach thousands more people hungry for Christ by planting varieties of churches with "atmospheres" and "food preparations" or presentations especially designed for specific groups within the culture. That is, we can plant churches that are deliberately different—not in theology, character, or essential standards, but in approach and personality from our traditional churches. Without compromising the quality of food, we can plant a variety of churches in which the food is served to attract youth, the unchurched, singles, Christians of other faiths, and young parents to the Bread of Life.

The first wave of church planting was territorial. It lasted 130 years. It brought us to the strength we enjoy today. North America is ready now for a new wave, the wave of targeting. A wave that holds our message high while arresting the interest of lost people everywhere. As we who love Christ resolve to ride this wave together, we will unleash a virtual torrent of energy, excitement, and enthusiasm for the mission and message of Jesus Christ.

"The children of this world," Jesus lamented, "are... wiser than the children of light" (see Luke 16:8). Let us be wiser and more daring than before, as we seize the challenge of growing the church for Christ. We solved the Denny's dilemma. Under the Holy Spirit, let's solve ours.

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* Denny's is a well known restaurant chain in the United States. All "facts" regarding Denny's are hypothetical and are used for illustrative purposes.

Choose any group of people we are not currently reaching and insert their name in the place of Denny’s.
Divine designs for dealing with ethical issues

Ron du Preez

A six step biblical paradigm

“Pastor, my wife has tested HIV positive. Can I divorce her and remarry so that I can have a normal life without the constant threat of contracting AIDS?”

“Pastor, I’m single. I can’t find a suitable Christian husband. I want to have a child. Would it be morally appropriate to be artificially inseminated?”

“Pastor, my 85-year-old grandfather is brain-dead. He has been in a coma for the past five years, and we have run out of money to pay hospital bills. Would it be right for us to pull the plug?”

New ethical issues continue to confront the pastor. How should the pastor handle these questions—especially when there is no clear biblical answer? In addition to showing the way that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, the Bible also contains principles necessary to guide us through our daily lives (see Ps. 119:105). But how does one go about discovering these principles?

In pursuit of a paradigm

Recently I have been searching Scripture for a strategy capable of resolving complex lifestyle quandaries. My exploration has taken me on a fascinating study of the moral problems encountered by the first Christians. We have one such case in Acts 15 dealing with an urgent matter: Should the Gentile converts to Christianity be required to be circumcised “according to the custom taught by Moses” (Acts 15:1)? This was clearly a major issue for the first-century church. True, it was a question of custom, and tradition—a ritual requirement that faithful Hebrew males had been performing for about 2,000 years as a special sign that they were God’s chosen people. However, the issue also had to do with ethics, behavior, and with matters important to the believing Christian.

Acts 15: a norm for moral decisions

The steps taken by the first-century church council that wrestled with this issue provides a normative pattern for moral decision-making. The potency and adaptability of this pattern are affirmed on the basis of principles basic to the Christian faith:

1. The church council was conducted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The believers stated, “The Holy Spirit has shown us that we should not place any extra burden on you” (verse 28, CEV).

2. The council based its deliberations and decisions on Scripture, rather than merely on human reasoning. The believers operated on the foundation of the Word of God. For example, one of the leaders stated that “this is entirely in harmony with the words of the prophets” (verse 15, New Jerusalem). Thus, a strategy based on divine revelation becomes a prime pattern for Christians who seek to base their decision-making methods and ethical approaches on God’s revealed Word.

3. The council involved leaders charged by Jesus to guide and advance the church. The early church recognized that its leadership had obtained the commission to disseminate the gospel and to preserve and protect the church. Peter, John, James, and Paul had the charge to evangelize, to teach and to disciple. Since they were authorized by
Jesus and worked under His auspices, the actions of the Jerusalem Council can be viewed as a representative strategy to be appropriately utilized by all subsequent believers.

4. The council held that its decision had implications for all believers. The decisions were obviously not restricted to only those originally involved in the debate on the issue. "This decision was . . . to be universally accepted by the different churches throughout the country," 1 This was clear by the way in which the believers disseminated their ruling “from town to town” (Acts 16:4).

5. The council understood the seriousness of the issue. The issue was not only doctrinal, philosophical, and theological. It was also an ethical concern, and a matter of moral significance. Circumcision had been enacted “in accordance with the Mosaic practice” (Acts 15:1, NEB). The word rendered “practice” comes from ethos, from which we derive the word “ethics.” Thus the issue had to do with lifestyle and a correct ethical conduct essential to the community.

6. The council for the first time addressed a major behavioral matter affecting the life and future of the church. Even though prior to this other issues had arisen, none of them had been of the magnitude and significance of this one. As one scholar states, this was “the greatest crisis with which the young church had yet been confronted, if indeed not the greatest crisis the church has yet faced in her history.”

In brief then, Acts 15 reveals a holy Spirit-directed, Bible-based, Christ-commissioned, universally-applicable, ethically-oriented, original paradigm for ethical decision-making. These six principles indicate a valid, divinely-inspired model for the pastor and the Christian community as they deal with any ethical problem they might face. John Calvin was right: “Here is prescribed by God a form and an order in assembling synods, when there ariseth any controversy which cannot otherwise be decided.”

A six-step strategy
Analysis of Acts 15 shows that several steps were taken by the Jerusalem council as they wrestled with the difficult question of circumcision.

Step one: the debate. To begin with, there was a serious discussion on the issue among those affected by it. Luke records “no small dissension and dispute” among them (verse 2, NKJV). When despite initial debate, no conclusion was reached, it was decided to seek for greater input from Christian leaders and other believers in Jerusalem. Thus, “Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question” (verse 2).

Step two: the delegation. A representative group of church members was assembled to address the issue. First there were the missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, who were on the front lines doing evangelism among both Jews and non-Jews and who had firsthand experience of the problems encountered in the field. Second, there were several regular members, some of whom were apparently affected by this issue (see verse 2; Gal. 2:1-5). Third, there were those who raised the issue of circumcision and promoted its continued practice. Fourth, there were leaders (apostles) like Peter and John who were giving guidance, nurture, and leadership to the church in other parts of the field. Fifth, there were church administrators, those who directed church affairs from Jerusalem (see Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23) and promoted sound teaching. Sixth, there were theologians, such as James and Paul, whose biblical approach was clearly needed to assist the church in coming to a reliable conclusion on the issue.

Step three: the deliberations. This representative delegation of missionaries, pastors, administrators, theologians, as well as lay members both for and against the matter became immersed in a wide-ranging open discussion. The precise steps taken in these deliberations provide an excellent model for conducting discussions on sensitive problems. These steps may be described as follows:

Personal testimonies. First, instead of going directly to the contentious issue that had precipitated the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas began with personal testimonies and “reported everything God had done through them” (verse 4). Even though this testimony included a description of matters related to the issue at hand, the attitude of thanksgiving and praise to God helped set the proper worship atmosphere and spiritual tone for the conference.

Inclusive participation. Second, those who were promoting circumcision were permitted to share their views. These believers, who were formerly Jews, said: “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses” (verse 5). Thus the assembly demonstrated fairness and open-mindedness. It was willing to give a fair hearing to all.

Sustained discussion. Third, after the believers had presented their case, the group “gathered to study this problem” (verse 6, EB). They did not jump to hasty and premature conclusions on the subject, but there was “much discussion” (verse 7) of the issue.

Theological considerations. Fourth, after extensive consultation, “Peter stood up” (verse 7, EB), and began sharing his personal experience and testimony. He highlighted the character of God, noting that it was God’s desire to offer salvation to these people—“the Gentiles were to hear and believe the message of the gospel” (verse 7, REB). This all-wise God had revealed His generosity in giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, “just as he had given his Spirit to us [Jews]” (verse 8, CEV), and in cleansing their hearts from sin (see verse 9). Thus, by focusing on the character of an omniscient, benevolent, and supremely fair God, who saves and sanctifies, Peter provided a solid theological basis from which to consider a perplexing moral problem.

Next, Peter underscored God’s concern for people. He questioned why some were wanting to promote the continuation of circumcision, adding, “You are putting a heavy load around the necks of the non-Jewish brothers. It is a
Step four: the decision. At the end of the discussion and deliberations James led out in formulating a resolution. He began by saying “I don’t think we should place burdens on the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19, CEV). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see verse 28), he recommended that the council “should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (verse 20). That this listing of ethical requirements is evidently based on the Word of God can be seen from the very next comment of James: “For Moses has been preached in every city” (verse 21). The conjunction “for” is a translation of the Greek gar, which is chiefly used to explain the reason for something. In other words, James was basing his counsel on “the Law of Moses” (verse 21, CEV). Further proof of this reliance on Scripture becomes evident in verse 29, where the council rearranged the sequence of these prohibitions, placing them in the same order as those in Leviticus 17 and 18. Thus, it is plain that while new converts were welcomed into the Christian communion, they were to adhere to certain biblical ethical standards.

Step five: the communication of the decision. Once the Scripture-based conclusion had been finalized and recorded, “the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 15:22). Two respected leaders, Silas and Judas Barsabbas, were asked to accompany them as they delivered the written decision of the council (see verses 22-29), and “to confirm by word of mouth” (verse 27) what had been decided. While the issue of circumcision had apparently been a major concern in Antioch, the Jerusalem Council obviously wanted this decision to have a larger circulation “to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia” (verse 23). First, however, the decision was taken to Antioch, “where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter” (verse 30). It was well-received, for “the people read it and were glad for its encouraging message” (verse 31). Later, Paul continued to disseminate widely these clearly articulated ethical standards as he “traveled from town to town” (Acts 16:4) on his missionary journeys.

Step six: the development. Apparently the leaders who delivered the information about the decisions of the council did not simply present the letter and then leave. Rather, Silas and Judas Barsabbas remained, “spending some time there” (Acts 15:33), saying “much to encourage and strengthen the believers” (verse 32, NRSV). Also, Paul and Barnabas “remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord” (verse 35). Later, as Paul continued to spread the requirements forged out by the council, he “urged them to follow these instructions” (Acts 16:4, CEV). “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (verse 5). Thus it is evident that, in addition to delivering the decision of the council, these leaders spent time encouraging and developing the faith of the members.

Challenge to the church

Despite the fact that the Jerusalem Council met 2,000 years ago, the approach is still relevant. Moreover, since this pattern of decision-making was divinely directed, it is fully trustworthy as an acceptable and reliable system for contemporary Christian consideration.

While it is not suggested that this is the only way for pastors and church members to address ethical issues, it does provide an inspired paradigm for the appraisal of pressing ethical issues in the local and even the corporate church.

Load that neither we nor our fathers were able to carry” (verse 10, EB). Because of his interest in the spiritual and psychological welfare of the believers, Peter recommended that no unnecessary burden be placed on them. This others-directed emphasis was crucial in the deliberations over this issue.

Finally, Peter focused on Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Recognizing that salvation does not come by works, he affirmed: “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved” (verse 11). Peter’s reference to Jesus as “Lord” is significant, for it indicates that Christians are called to willingly submit their entire lives to their Master, Jesus Christ, allowing Him to direct their behavior and lifestyle. In other words, Peter pointed out that Jesus is both Saviour from sin and Lord of life. Thus, by means of a balanced focus on Jesus, Peter furnished the council with a sound Christological foundation from which to examine an intricate ethical quandary.

Acknowledging providence. Fifth, once the council created a God-focused, compassionate, Christ-centered framework for decision-making, it took time to acknowledge God’s providential leading in taking the gospel to non-Jews. “The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling them about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them” (verse 12).

Scriptural validation. Sixth, James, who appears to have been the leader of the convention (see verses 13, 19; cf. Gal. 2:9), spoke up in support of Peter. He indicated that Peter’s personal experience was valid because it was firmly based on the Scriptures. He said: “This agrees with what the prophets wrote” (Acts 15:15, CEV), and then quoted from Amos 9:11, 12. James noted that the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles was in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In other words, Peter’s testimony could be considered a trustworthy guide because it was in harmony with the objective Written Word of God.

† Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages in this article are from the New International Version.


Ten reasons we need those great hymns

Bill O’Connor

The great hymns of Christian history expand the mind, illuminate the understanding, and excite the soul.

In recent years worship and praise choruses seem to be replacing old hymns. The idea isn’t all bad. Many worship services need greater spontaneity, depth of emotion, and congregational involvement. Praise and worship choruses help to meet this need. But should this entirely displace the singing of traditional hymns? I think not. Here are 10 reasons to keep singing hymns even as we sing contemporary songs.

1. The great hymns keep us in touch with our Christian heritage. “A Mighty Fortress” takes us back to the Reformation and allows us to hear the words of Martin Luther. “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” exposes us to the music of Beethoven and lets us revel in the melodic mastery of one of the great composers of church history. The hymns of Charles Wesley immerse us in the spirit of the Wesleyan revival. Depending on our denominational heritage, the hymns we sing remind us of our founders, our history, and our doctrinal distinctives. Without the great hymns we would lose touch with our past.

2. The great hymns expose us to some of the greatest music ever written. “How Great Thou Art” comes from a Swedish folk melody. “Be Still, My Soul” is Jean Sibelius’ “Finlandia.” Our hymns set before us music from the centuries. Some go back as many as 800 or more years, while others date from the turn of the century, and still others (in the newest hymnals) come from the present decade. With all their advantages, many choruses lack that rich, broad musical variety and heritage.

3. The great hymns expose us to superb poetry, with the most beautiful words ever penned. Consider the words of Katharina von Schlegel from “Be Still, My Soul”:

“Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide.
In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: the best thy heav’nly Friend
Thro’ thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

“Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

“Be still, my soul: the hour is hast’ning on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.”

4. The great hymns give our worship a sense of majesty and beauty. The great cathedrals were built to convey a sense of the greatness and majesty of God. Their vaulted ceilings were designed to direct our attention upward. Often their acoustics gave one the feeling of being part of a heavenly choir. Many of the early hymns were written to complement the sublime sense inspired by those cathedrals.

Though we seldom build cathedrals anymore, and though our worship has
become more personal and intimate, there is still a place for being deeply moved by our Creator's majesty. Though some choruses achieve this goal admirably—most notably Jack Hayford's "Majesty"—the hymns usually do it better. Who can ever forget, having sung it even once, the sense of God's greatness evoked by such hymns as "How Great Thou Art," or the deep appreciation summoned by "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"?

5. The great hymns embed Christian truths in our minds and hearts. Some say they can't memorize; as a result they seldom attempt to commit God's Word in their hearts. Without our even realizing it, the hymns do that committing for us. Christians who couldn't quote 10 verses of Scripture could easily sing dozens of hymns that are based on or directly drawn out of Scripture. There are any number of Christian concepts tucked away in our minds ready to be pulled out when we need them, and they were put there by the repeated singing of the great hymns. Thanks to our hymns we know that God is faithful, that He provides a firm foundation for our lives, that we should "Take Time to Be Holy," and that God's love will not let us go. Our hymns teach new truth every time we sing them.

6. Singing great hymns is one of the most effective ways the church has of teaching Christian doctrine. Systematic theology is often communicated in a dull, dry way. If you announce that you're going to preach a series of sermons on the attributes of God, most people will yawn and quietly slip into a silent homo mode. If you conceive and build a thematic service around each of the attributes of God and let the great hymns do the teaching, people will learn about God without knowing they're being exposed to theology that would be taught by a course. Let the great hymns do the teaching, well-implemented thematic service mode. If you conceive and build a theme centered around each of the attributes of God, most people will recognize it, the hymns do that communicating for us. Some say they can't memorize; as a result they seldom attempt to commit God's Word in their hearts. Without our even realizing it, the hymns do that committing for us. Christians who couldn't quote 10 verses of Scripture could easily sing dozens of hymns that are based on or directly drawn out of Scripture. There are any number of Christian concepts tucked away in our minds ready to be pulled out when we need them, and they were put there by the repeated singing of the great hymns. Thanks to our hymns we know that God is faithful, that He provides a firm foundation for our lives, that we should "Take Time to Be Holy," and that God's love will not let us go. Our hymns teach new truth every time we sing them.

Who could sing such hymns without gaining a deeper appreciation and understanding of our heavenly Father?

7. The great hymns contribute to the depth of our Christian experience. Choruses tend to appeal to the emotional side of the worshiper. The hymns excite our emotions as well as our minds; as a result, even our emotional response is deeper. You can't reach much deeper into eternal truth than when you understand the God found in Walter C. Smith's "Immortal, Invisible."

"Immortal, invisible, God only wise, In light inaccessible hid from our eyes, Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise"

"Unresting, unhaasting, and silent as light, Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rules in might; Thy justice like mountains high soaring above Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love."

"Great Father of glory, pure Father of light, Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight; All laud we would render: O help us to see 'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee."

8. The great hymns help us to lift our hearts to God. No thinking Christian could sing the hymn just quoted and not be moved toward the Lord. Such hymns take us out of ourselves, out of our problems, out of the pressures of the present moment, and into the throne room of God's majesty. There, along with Isaiah the prophet, we cry out, "My eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isa. 6:5, NIV).

9. The great hymns exalt and magnify the Lord Jesus Christ. The hymnwriters had an experience with Christ that had to be explained, an encounter with Him that had to be shared. They put the very heart of their experience and encounter into their hymns. Many of Charles Wesley's hymns once had several more verses than we sing today. Some of the stanzas were so personal to the writer himself that they can hardly be sung by anyone else. Listen to the intensely personal nature of the first and last stanzas of Wesley's "And Can It Be?"

"And can it be that I should gain An interest in the Savior's blood! Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay Fast bound in sin and nature's night; Thine eyes diffused a quick'ning ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off; my heart was free; I rose, went forth and followed Thee."

There is another verse to that hymn that is even more personal and more exalting of the Lord and His saving work.

"No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine! Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine, Bold I approach th' eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ my own."

10. The great hymns do more than other resources to help us actually worship God. If you have entered into the poetry of the verse quoted in this article, you have worshiped as you've read. The power of the great hymns is such that you can't be exposed to them with an open heart without worship taking place. The hymns, carefully planned and scheduled in worship, pave the way for great preaching, giving the message a better chance of making a lasting impact. Without the hymns where would some of us poor preachers be?

We need the choruses of worship and praise. They excite the emotions, lift our spirits, and help release us to glorify the Lord. We also need the great hymns. They expand the mind, illuminate the understanding, and excite the soul.
Annie called me on a winter afternoon. “I want to be baptized in your church,” she said.

Complete strangers rarely volunteer for baptism around here. I made an appointment to meet her at church on Sabbath morning. “Just look for an overweight girl with blond hair,” she tells me.

Her description proves accurate. She’s about 40, short and broad, with a round face, blotchy complexion, and light-blue eyes. Her stringy hair is tied up at her neck, with a part like a lightning bolt. Between the hem of her too-short skirt and the tops of her too-short stockings white flesh bulges. She carries a huge Revelation Seminar Bible, which she’s adorned with a homemade cover that looks like it was made by a 5-year-old at Vacation Bible School.

She is instantly in my face. Annie has developed a method of keeping people from dismissing her: she talks without a break for you to respond or end the conversation.

After church she corners me. She works in a small factory, she tells me. She lives alone, and seems to have few friends: what she describes as friends sound to me like people who make fun of her. She has never been married or had a boyfriend, but I get the impression that she has a remarkable fantasy life.

She’s just finished a Revelation Seminar in another city, she tells me, and she wants to join a church close to home. As she talks, I become convinced that she is seeking a relationship with the Lord. I’ve never held the opinion that conversion must be proven by the ability to acquire an encyclopedic knowledge of doctrines; nonetheless, I find Annie has learned the material.

It’s not difficult to decide that Annie should be baptized.

But there is something that troubles me. Annie has found the Lord. But will Annie find a church home?

Annie is not impoverished. She has a job. She is responsible, in her way. Annie, it seems, is functional.

But Annie is not quite normal, either. She would stand out like a sore thumb in any group, and even more so in a church on the fringes of Stanford University. My members are thoroughly kind and Christian. They will do whatever they can to accommodate her. But Annie, I can see already, is going to be a difficult fit.

After her baptism, people make a game attempt to include her. Someone invites her to a Bible study and prayer group. She is so needy that she dominates the evening. She has poor boundaries, telling things that she shouldn’t, cycling through emotions that seem to make no sense. After just one evening the other members are exasperated; by the third the group has been totally absorbed into Annie, and people begin dropping out.

In Sabbath school I see some young visitors whom I’d like to encourage to choose our church. But during the lesson discussion Annie takes over, with nonstop nonsequiters and pointless tales of her life and hard times. I can see that the visitors aren’t enjoying it; for that matter, neither are the rest of us. I don’t expect to see my visitors again.

As I circulate among the pews between services shaking hands and
greeting. Annie grabs hold of me, begins a new story, and won’t let me go. Eventually I escape; but later she will grumble to me that I snubbed her.

Even one-on-one meetings are harrowing. What starts out as a half-hour visit turns into two hours, with me spending the last three quarters of the time trying to extricate myself for other errands.

As weeks pass, I see people leaving a space around her—psychological and physical. A month later she ceases to come. When I call her, she complains that she has been left out.

And she’s right.

I hold an idealistic view of what the church should be. It should be a place where the needy come for help. A shelter for those from the highways and byways. A fueling stop where spiritual emptiness is filled. A hospital for sinners.

That’s the ideal; let’s talk about things as they really are. In truth, I could instruct and push and scold my church for the next 10 years about what they should do, and in the end I know would blame them very much for trying to leave space between themselves and someone who clings and dominates. It is, in fact, a testimony to their own psychological health that they maintain their stability in the face of Annie’s all-encompassing neediness.

But what about Annie?

I’ve never seriously doubted that Annie was seeking the Lord and that the Lord sought her. She sought the Lord’s church, too—but we didn’t find her.

On one hand, I wonder if it’s fair to expect that every church should meet the needs of every member. Were we equipped to fill Annie’s needs? Ethnic church pastors tell me that they meet separately from the rest for language and cultural reasons. In a way the same thing is true of Annie. We didn’t share the same culture. And although we and she spoke English, we never really spoke the same language.

On the other hand, it is hard for me to accept that when the Lord drew someone like Annie to Himself, we could not keep up our end of the bargain. It speaks volumes about the culture we Adventists share: one that doesn’t easily make room for God’s odder children.

Could another congregation have ministered to Annie? Perhaps. And yet I hear similar stories from other pastors.

As long as we minister, we will be not just ministers to souls, but also ministers of relationship and group process.

And as long as we minister, we will have Annies.

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—Pastor Marvin Glass

Summer 1995

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**UPDATE**

On June 1, 1996 Pastor Marvin Glass was ordained by the Iowa-Missouri Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Lay persons and pastors of all denominations who seek to advance their careers and skills through distance education in pastoral training can apply to Griggs University, the higher education division of Home Study International.
Seminary features third H.M.S. Richards lectureship on preaching and evangelism

A n inspiring teacher, an outstanding preacher, and an accomplished writer has been chosen to be the featured person for the H.M.S. Richards lectureship on preaching and evangelism for 1996. Mervyn A. Warren, chairperson of the Religion Department at Oakwood College, will deliver the lectures at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, October 20, 21, 1996. Warren has published an award-winning sermon in the first volume of Best Sermons (Harper San Francisco). In the Richards lectureship he will speak on the theme “Prickly Enquiries in the Side of Preaching.”

The Richards lectureship honors the life and ministry of H.M.S. Richards, Sr. (1894-1985). The lectureship began in 1957, was sponsored by the Columbia Union Conference and cosponsored by Washington Missionary College (now Columbia Union College). Fifteen years later it was revived on the campus of Andrews University. The first and second lectureships at Andrews University involved two speaking teams, Wilber Alexander and Winton Beaven in 1994, and Ivan Blazen and Louis Venden in 1995. Besides thus honoring an Adventist evangelist, Andrews University has become the home of some of the precious papers of H.M.S. Richards. The Adventist Heritage Center of the James White Library at Andrews University has received more than 125 boxes of historical records from the Voice of Prophecy documenting its growth from the 1930s to the mid-1980s. The Voice of Prophecy, founded by H.M.S. Richards in 1930, is the longest-running Christian evangelistic radio broadcast in the United States.

Benjamin Schoun, associate dean, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

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For more information, or to receive an application form, call 503-652-2225, extension 210, and ask for Genia.
Contemporary Christian Music is Christian Music

A candid discussion of the role of contemporary music in today's church

Michael Tomlinson

"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; . . . shout for joy before the Lord, the King." (Ps. 98:4-6, NIV).

Music is a hot topic within Christianity today. It's also a sizzling subject within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Nothing inflames the passions of the saints more than the worthiness or unworthiness of this or that form of music. Sadly overlooked is the reality that one's personal taste, culture, background, lifestyle, and the numerous other factors which dictate music preferences. Thus many sincere but dogmatic members of the church might be standing more for personal whim than biblical principle.

Music is common to all peoples, classes, and cultures. Every society shares an appreciation for music. The types of music are noticeably diverse indeed. But it is music all the same. So why is the issue of church music so controversial? Why does intolerance so often sit prominently on the front row when the music starts to play? Why is one form of music acceptable today, while a generation or two ago it was "demonic strumming, leading God's people astray"?

Dan and Peter Stevens, authors of Why Knock Rock? state: "As a language . . . music has the capability to communicate only to the culture which produces it. It often confuses outsiders, even as people with different languages sometimes fall prey to misunderstandings and frustrations due to communications failure. This occurs with music or different generations."

Put simply, people like what they like, and if something sounds strange or different, then for many "it's from the devil." But wait a minute! Just because I don't like something or have had a negative experience with it does not make it sinful or devilish. When I was in high school I was hurt in a waterskiing accident. To this day I do not water-ski. Is waterskiing therefore wrong? No, it's just not my favorite sport.

Comfort zones vary

Do some church leaders denounce Christian "rock" because they do not understand it or perhaps because they are blinded by generational prejudice or personal preference? They no doubt are leaders of integrity, but that doesn't prevent Adventist teenagers from rejecting religion for the lack of a legitimate way of expressing their own Christian identity. Like David, should not the present generation of Adventists be allowed to "fight in their own armor"?

In saying all of this, I am not promoting rock and roll. But I am defending a legitimate form of Christian music and testimony of faith in Jesus. I believe music itself is without moral qualities, either for good or evil. The question has more to do with what the music is employed to say or do than with the music per se. Paul Hamel, a conservative Adventist musician, implies the neutrality of instrumental music when he writes in Adventists Affirm: "Perhaps no melodic line is inherently wicked nor four-part harmonization unacceptable. Nor can I conceive of a series of chords that would be objectionable in themselves." How true, yet I find an inconsistency in Hamel's position when he deems Christian rock music as "out of place in church, no matter how orthodox the words might be," because of its association with "unacceptable, un-Christian kinds of behavior.

A double standard?

The problem is that somehow Hamel does not apply the same standard to secular classical music with its non-Christian roots and associations. Take, for example, the wedding march from Lohengrin, an opera libretto that he acknowledges is "based upon concepts far from Christian ideals." Yet he states: "Though it was not created for a sacred purpose, it is music that was artistically composed, in contrast to what is occasionally heard in our churches today." Evidently he regards contemporary Christian musicians such as Amy Grant, Russ Taff, Ray Boltz, and David Meece—a Juilliard graduate—as less than artistic composers. But on what basis? The only possible answer is personal taste.

Music can be good or bad depending upon its use. Consider how the Nazis played the music of Wagner to soothe
the emotions of their gas chamber victims while marching them to their deaths. Music used for evil purposes produces evil results, but let's not throw out the baby with the bath water. Eliminating the secular roots of Christian music would mean to say goodbye to the hymns of Martin Luther, whose music was borrowed from secular German folk tunes. Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century Christian, set the words of “O Sacred Head Now Wounded” to the tune of a German jig. In the new Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, a number of hymns would have to go, because they are based on contemporary secular tunes of their day.

Could it be that all our hymns have been significantly influenced by the music of their day? It might be well to allow Christians today a little latitude to think and act for themselves in exercising their own preferences in harmony with their own consciences. Whatever our personal musical tastes may be, let's remember that our youth are entitled to their own preferences too. However we feel about contemporary Christian music, it is Christian music.

Different from secular rock

Contemporary Christian music differs from secular rock in four major areas: lyrics, lifestyles, goals, and graphics. In each of these areas the Christian artist attempts to lift up Jesus Christ and/or the Christian lifestyle. Millions find the music beneficial in maintaining their walk with Christ and the continual state of prayer advocated in 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Barbara Jepson, writing in the Wall Street Journal, observes: "The issue, I think, is not whether this mix of the sacred and secular is inappropriate, but how effectively it works. As a believer and a music journalist, I have three criteria: Does the spiritual content encourage, exhort, or confront me in some way? Second, is the music appealing? Finally, does the music suit the text...?" She proceeds to show how contemporary Christian music amply meets these spiritual requirements as faithfully as any type of traditional Christian music.

By beholding we become changed (see 2 Cor. 3:18). Those who fill their minds with secular messages, whether positive or negative, invariably will become more secular. However, those who listen to contemporary Christian music are filling their minds with a Christian message. This, coupled with a faithful devotional life, will result in spiritual fruitfulness. But for many young Adventists the traditional or old-fashioned means of worshiping God just "doesn't cut it." It simply does not communicate in a way with which they can identify. And that is certainly not simply because they have, as some would rather thoughtlessly assert, been "corrupted by the world."

In the early 1970s, former secular rock musician and disk jockey Bob Larson denounced Christian rock music. He is, in fact, the source most often quoted by Adventists who wish to disparage contemporary Christian music. Sadly, they quote the Larson of the past. In the 1980s, after interviewing musicians and listening to and studying Christian rock, Larson has changed his tune. Now he eagerly endorses this form of music as a healthy Christian alternative.

Youth who abandon Guns 'n Roses or the Red Hot Chili Peppers for Christ need a healthy and youthful alternative—good quality music that positively motivates them and speaks of the love of Jesus. If forced to swallow the music of an earlier generation that they do not like, they will eventually turn against it—and against the church that robbed them of vital generational and personal meaning.

Contemporary Christian evangelism

Today young people, particularly teenagers, live for music. That is their passion. For some it is their life. Understanding this might provide a degree of caution when we are tempted to try to reach youth with religious music from the 1950s, 1940s, or earlier. Would it be wrong for a young evangelist to recruit good Adventist singers with a contemporary delivery and hold a campaign geared for ages 30 down to the late teens? Billy Graham notes that 85 percent of all conversions to Christ happen to those 18 years old or younger. With all this in mind, if such a campaign were held in an industrial culture, would it be at all successful without the use of carefully chosen contemporary music?

Contemporary Christian music is one means of translating the Seventh-day Adventist message into a language that will be understood by the present generation. If Adventist musicians could enjoy the support of church leaders in expressing the three angels' messages in a more contemporary way, we would see an upsurge in winning as well as holding young people. If we could be granted the freedom for such expression, we would unquestionably ease the hemorrhaging of youth from our church.
Worship and music: natural but uneasy mates

Continued from page 4

who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions" (Rom. 14:1, NRSV). We all stand or fall before our own Master, who is able to make us all stand (verse 4). Allow everyone to be convinced in his or her own mind (verse 5). We do not live or die only for ourselves (verse 7). Don’t judge one another, for we will all be judged by God (verses 10-13). In your need to express Christian freedom, never put a stumbling block in the way of another (verses 13-15, 21). The kingdom of God does not consist of our opinions about this or that, but peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (verse 17).

We are to pursue what creates peace and mutual upbuilding, that is, what pleases our fellow human being for the purpose of building him or her up (verse 19; Rom. 15:1-3). Finally, we are to welcome one another in the same way Christ has welcomed us (verse 7).

Historical perspectives on change in worship music

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9 Friedrich Blume, Protestant Church Music: A History (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), pp. 29-35. For a list of contrafacta used in the early Lutheran church, see pp. 32-34.
10 Ibid., p. 125.

9 “Not allowed to sing that tune or this tune? Indeed! Secular music, do you say? Belongs to the devil, does it? Well, if it did, I would plunder him of it. ... Every note and every strain and every harmony is divine and belongs to us” (William B. Booth, quoted in B. Boom, Sing the Happy Song: The History of Salvation Army Vocal Music [London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1978], p. 115).
11 During the earlier Middle Ages the congregation had participated in the Mass by singing the Kyrie. Credo, Sanctus/Benedictus, and Agnus Dei (Wilson-Dickson, p. 41).
13 The first psalters both in England and in the United States contained only the text without the music. In addition, most people did not read. A practice of psalm singing had thus developed in which the minister or a deacon would read aloud or sing the first line of the psalm ("lining out"), which was then taken up by the congregation; each successive line of the whole psalm would be sung in this fashion. One can imagine the results of such a practice: "In singing two or three staves the congregation falls from a cheerful pitch to downright grumbling, and then some to relieve themselves mount an eighth above the rest... and besides, no two men in the congregation quaver (decorate the tune) alike, or together, which sounds in the ears of a good judge, like five hundred different tunes roared out at the same time" (T. Walker, The Grounds and Rules of Music Entertained [Boston: 1721], quoted in Wilson-Dickson, p. 184).
17 Ibid., pp. 96, 97.
19 As early Seventh-day Adventist worship styles reveal, this theory can be very misleading. See Ronald D. Graybill’s article “Enthusiasm in Early Adventist Worship,” Ministry, October 1991, pp. 10-12.
20 Luther had solved this tension by giving a new meaning to the old tune, the secular language, so to speak, gained sacralization through a new association. Friedrich Blume comments on this: “Protestantism preserved the medieval classification of the world, with secular art subjected to an intellectual discipline characterized by piety and churchliness. Under these conditions the disparity between sacred and secular music could at first hardly become a problem” (Protestant Church Music, p. 29). Starting with the latter part of the seventeenth century, this principle became increasingly difficult to realize because of the impact of humanism, which would bring about an ever-growing gap between the secular and sacred worlds.
Sing the song of gladness

Continued from page 6

"Thou Art My Shepherd" and "Fairest Lord Jesus."

Modern beat, something evil?

Is there something evil about the beat of modern music? All music has a beat. "Beat" is simply one of the elements of rhythm (along with accents and measures), and rhythm one of the elements of music. Even plainsong, the earliest "acceptable church music," has a beat. According to Scholes, "if music heard in church is good and sincere, and suitable to and expressive of words or thoughts to which it is allied, then the association of time and place will convert it into 'church music.'"[9]

What needs to be questioned is our motive for singing or listening, not the melody, beat, or instruments. Are we singing or listening to glorify God? Or are we only interested in a mindless escape which only directs us back into ourselves?

Long ago, in the fourth century, the council of Carthage gave some sound advice that we would do well to heed: "See that what thou singest with thy lips thou believest in thy heart; and what thou believest in thy heart thou dost exemplify in thy life."[11]

3 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 1527.
9 Ibid., p. 878.
10 Ibid., p. 183.
11 Sabin, p. 1524.
True evangelistic success

James A. Cress

Diligent personal work and the Holy Spirit’s role in the conversion process are sometimes obscured as we focus on technology, human ingenuity, and bright light ideas that spring to our minds.

As at least five divisions of the world church prepare to participate in our denomination’s largest-ever evangelistic event, it is important to reflect on the real secret of spiritual power in the process of bringing individuals to Jesus Christ.

Beginning October 5, 1996, a series of *It Is Written* public evangelistic meetings, conducted in Orlando by Mark Finley, will be beamed via a satellite across North America, South America, and the islands and countries of the Caribbean, as well as to almost all of Europe.

Attendees in more than 5,000 locations will hear the gospel downlinked to them from the live presentations in Orlando.

The process behind this event, termed NET ‘96, was crafted 18 months earlier in Chattanooga when the results of that inaugural event produced one of the largest baptism years ever in the history of the church in North America.

For local pastors, it will be tempting to rely on the glitz of technology or the brilliance of an outstanding public preacher and to forget the essentials of personal work and individual contact.

However, regardless of how well the speaker preaches or how smooth the technology operates, it is only when the gospel impacts the life of the individual that conversion occurs. Simply stated, this means people must be present to hear the message proclaimed if their lives are to be changed.

This reality moves the necessary emphasis for success away from Orlando and the featured evangelist and directly onto the local church members and pastor. “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as One who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

Far too often we emphasize making believers out of nonattenders when the easier path to active fellowship is in the body of Christ is making believers out of attenders. Notice the diagram:

![Diagram](Nonbelievers:attending Believers:attending Nonbelievers:not attending Believers:not attending)

Assuming that we begin with nonbelievers who are not attending church (bottom left) and that we must reach our objective of believers who are attending (upper right corner), by moving through the process of one of the other two boxes, it is sobering to see where, traditionally, we have put so much of our energy and resources.

Any program designed to keep nonbelievers isolated in their own homes away from the body of Christ while attempting to bring them to belief is less productive. Therefore, magazine subscriptions, television programs, radiobroadcasts, and even Bible correspondence schools are secondary to those activities that bring nonbelievers into direct contact with believers.

Attendance at participative programs, small groups, seminars, church services, or evangelistic meetings are all designed to get nonbelievers interacting with believers. Thus the individual nonbeliever will be impacted by those whose own lives have been impacted by Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, if we designate the horizontal barrier (broken line) from bottom to top in the diagram as a cultural barrier between nonattendance and attendance and the vertical barrier (dotted line) of the diagram from left to right as a spiritual barrier between nonbelief and belief, the church’s task becomes more distinct.

People help people cross the cultural barrier—“we don’t go there” or “we don’t attend church”—and thus place them where the Holy Spirit can most easily do His work of bringing them across the spiritual barrier from nonbelief to belief.

So the greatest task of NET ‘96, or any other evangelistic thrust, is to get people into relational proximity to other believers, which then allows the Holy Spirit to move them into relationship with Jesus Christ.

SPECIAL NOTE TO OUR CLERGY READERS OF ALL DENOMINATIONS

As described above, on October 5, 1996, Seventh-day Adventists will launch a major evangelistic thrust directed at reaching the nations for Jesus Christ. We value your input and critique of our effort. Please feel free to view any of these satellite broadcasts and hear an Adventist minister presenting biblical messages. Your evaluation is welcome and would provide a helpful insight into our ongoing evangelism program. For information on how to receive the downstream, call 1-800-226-1119.

PLEASE DIRECT YOUR EVALUATION OR INPUT TO JAMES A. CRESS.
A stenographer’s notebook

For years I would forget to bring up important items to the church board or various committees. Sometimes these were items that needed discussion, action, and assignment. Finally, I discovered a solution.

I took a stenographer’s notebook and attached tabs every few pages. Now I think of something that needs to be discussed and/or acted upon, I write it down in the notebook under the appropriate committee or board. The notebook is then referenced for all meetings. Committee and board action is often recorded along with the notebook item.

Now it is seldom that I miss bringing up needed items at meetings. It works for me and I’m sure it will work for you! — R. Vernon Babcock, Franklin, Ohio.

On losing and letting go

In every new experience, happy or sad, there’s a need to let go of what was. Until we do, we can’t appreciate what is.

Judith Viorst suggests in Necessary Losses, by “losing and leaving and letting go, that we grow.”

Here are six ways to make letting go easier:
1. Take time to say goodbye.
2. Stay in touch with your friends.
3. Accept what has happened.
4. Leave blame behind.
5. Help others be their best.
6. Look for the positive.

Loss is a natural part of living. When we let go of our demands for how our world should be, a load is lifted, and we make a remarkable discovery—who we are and “whose we are.” — William F. Chilton, Encouragement Ministries, Birmingham, Alabama.

Mission map

We advertise our Sabbath school mission emphasis by simply going to a color printer and having an enlargement made of the “mission map” on the back of the Sabbath school quarterly.

These make attractive posters for our various bulletin boards around the church.—Charles Mitchell, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Palm Springs, California.

A sermon in your back pocket

Even if you don’t prepare sermons a long way in advance, consider preparing at least one or two up to six months ahead of time (for example, think about the February “blahs” some time in September).

This then can give you a “gift week” when that date rolls around—a “mini-vacation” during which you can give extra time to a project, to pastoral visiting, or to a neglected family life, knowing that you still have a sound, carefully prepared message for the Sabbath.

A sermon that is prepared this far in advance makes up in reflection what it may seem to lose in spontaneity. Often letting ideas lie fallow gives them added depth.—Neil Parker, Deer Lake United Church, Burnaby, British Columbia.

Visitation and nurture

Visitation is an important means for nurturing church members. The nurturing done this way is unique; it has long-term effects and meets specific needs of parishioners. Often these needs cannot be met at church, so we need to get to the homes of our members.

Visitation can also help in preparing sermons that are relevant to the needs of the congregation. Through visitation I have been challenged to constantly study God’s Word to feed my flock appropriately. Visitation also helps to meet nonmembers who may be visiting the parishioner at the same time.

In large districts pastors may not know all the members by name, but through visitation they can get to know many of them on an individual basis. As members become acquainted with their pastor, they develop trust. Some weak members may grow stronger. — Douglas Mutanga, Nyahuri Mission, Murehwa, Zimbabwe, Africa.

Handbook for Bible Study

author is awarded Gold Medallion

Ministry congratulates Lee Gugliotto

Senior pastor of the College Heights church at Canadian Union College, Gugliotto has received a Gold Medallion from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association for his Handbook for Bible Study [Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995].

Publishers, authors, and guests from around the world attended the annual awards banquet held this year on July 13 at the Marriott Hotel in Anaheim, California. The Christian equivalent of an Oscar or Emmy, the award is the first for an Adventist author or publishing house.

An interdenominational panel of 200 experts trimmed the original field of 4,400 entries to five finalists in each of 22 categories. The group selected the Handbook as the Bible study book of the year because of its content, literary quality, design, and significance of content. Conominee Kay Arthur graciously told Gugliotto, “Your book deserved to win. I am awed by the contribution you have made to the church.”

Twelve years in the making, the Handbook is a comprehensive guide to understanding, teaching, and preaching God’s Word.

As Steve Bond of Broadman and Holman Publishers said to Gugliotto, “Your book is the new standard in its field. It will have a major impact on Bible study and preaching for many years to come.”

The product of a team effort, Handbook for Bible Study is available at most Christian bookstores. You may consult with the Review and Herald by telephoning the editorial staff at 301-791-7000. You can also arrange for seminars or speaking engagements with Pastor Gugliotto by phone (403-782-5548), fax (403-782-7779).


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Powerful Passages
Ron and Dorothy Watts
What happens when a person stumbles upon that "moment of truth" when the Written Word becomes the life-changing Living Word? Can the Bible possibly pack so much power that its words can transform darkness into light, non-believers into believers? Powerful Passages recounts the incredible and inspirational true stories of remarkable Christians throughout history whose pivotal moments in life were their first direct encounters with specific Bible passages. Paper, 160 pages. (US) 0-88419-641-5; (Canada) 1-55838-641-5.

Faith Never Shrinks in Hot Water
Linda Shepherd
Have you ever been in hot water? Gifted storyteller, speaker, and humorist, Linda Shepherd, has been there too. In this cheerful, yet moving book, Linda shares her lessons of faith as she doggedly piddled through life. Her insights and stories of her marriage, children, and family are sprinkled with joy, even while spiced with heartache. Delight yourself in Linda's special brand of wit and wisdom and you will discover how God is present in all your days. Paper, 160 pages. (US) 0-88419-642-3; (Canada) 1-55838-642-3.

In the Presence of Angels
Lois Mitashenko and Tim Crosby
Experience the remarkable presence of angels in the lives of ordinary people through this expertly compiled collection of contemporary angel stories. Lois Mitashenko, director/speaker for the Voice of Prophets radio program, and Tim Crosby have compiled a book of true angel encounters from their listeners. Beyond this, they've also included valid spiritual healing into the true power and mystery of angels. An inspiration to any heart that has been touched.