
Global Adventism— 1990 and Beyond

Adventists are increasingly turning their attention to the 1990 General Conference session. Last year (Vol. 19, No. 2, November 1988) we invited a cross-section of North American Adventists to share with Spectrum readers what they would say if they were asked to address the delegates of the 1990 General Conference session. In this issue we have invited individuals from around the world to also write their visions of the church.

Our contributors include laity and church employees, males and females, representatives of first- and third-world countries. We invite our readers to share with us letters that give their own hopes for the church, 1990 and beyond.

— The Editors

Doing Beautiful Things For God in India

by Shirani de Alwis

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "If God were to appear in India, He would have to take the form of a loaf of bread." Evangelism for the church of the 1990s must be conducted through everyday concerns that affect the lives of people. As a South Asian woman, an educator, and a second-generation Adventist, I would like to posit five such recommendations for the church.

In the 1990s I would like to see my church *straining every nerve to eradicate illiteracy*. Professor Sharma predicts that India will have the world's largest illiterate population by the year 2000—500 million! The task is a common one for the world church: illiteracy exists in the developed countries too. Using worldwide Adventist experts and Christian teaching materials, the church should undertake a drive to eradicate illiteracy by the year 2000.

In the 1990s, I want my church to be in the vanguard of bringing *relief to millions under yokes of oppression*. A third of India's workforce, 142 million, are child laborers. These children suffer from diseases induced by the cumulative effects of hard labor, lack of rest, undernourishment, and atrocious living conditions—all this, even though employment of children under 14 years of age is forbidden by law.

In addition to the child-labor problem, the drop-out rate of children in grade one is 60 percent in India! The reason for both problems is poverty, where it is essential that children augment the family income. The challenge to Adventist education is to meet this need. The church must set up Adventist vocational schools that are different—schools with curricula that will help develop functional skills, with an emphasis on values education, enabling the youth to take charge of their lives. To design school programs that will meet the needs of the village, to provide vocational skills, to set up workshops and small factories where these skills can be practiced, and to provide remuneration are all necessary aspects of such a program.

In the 1990s, I look to a church, in the developed and developing world, that will pool its resources (human and financial) in a caring *ministry to the handicapped*. Of the 15 million handicapped children in the world, three million live in developed countries, and 12 million in the less-developed countries. Special-education services are available to only one percent of the 12 million. With a large majority of the Adventist church membership living in the less-developed countries, it is imperative that programs be provided for such children. By training Adventist teachers in these methods, and providing them with the needed resources, we can help these children.

Recently, through correspondence with the North American Division Office of Education, it was learned that millions of dollars were invested

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in developing a reading-education program for North America, and that comprehensive curricula have been developed for teaching exceptional (learning disabled and gifted) children. Since we, in the less-developed countries, have no such financial resources for our teachers and researchers, could we, as the world Adventist church, set up a committee of educators who function as part of the Office of Education at the General Conference, to adapt research, and to culturally attune materials for Adventist world teachers? This would certainly build a sense of oneness and camaraderie that marks a global church with a mutual sharing of expertise.

I long for a church in the 1990s that will recapture the very essence of Adventism—a *climate conducive to thinking*. Arnold Reye, a veteran in the field of Adventist educational work in Australia, says that in Adventist circles, “thinking has often been treated as a virtue in rhetoric and a sin in practice”! If the church is to nurture thinking, we must master the paradox—discipline and

flexibility—and create environments that offer strength without strangulation. In a very concrete way, the church must provide an atmosphere where the church member has the ability to develop ideas or concepts without fear of being condemned. An open forum to discuss issues, church journals that publish new thoughts without fear or favor, are means that can release the potential creativity of the church to meet the challenges of our times. Did not the inspired word addressed to Adventism say that

Every human being created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men’s thoughts. (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 17.)

Lastly, in the 1990s, as an Asian woman, I would like to see a church that *stands for the full humanity of women*. I live in India where 81.6 percent of all women are illiterate, where each day there is one rape every two hours, where burning of brides (dowry deaths) is a common news item in the daily papers, and where we see the spirit of womanhood broken, and the self-esteem of women crushed. Only a church that cares for human dignity can minister to needs such as these.

The church, like society, is male dominated. Women are permitted to do “housekeeping” for the church, but on any decision-making body or committee of the church that interprets Scripture, determines church policy, or furnishes leadership, their presence is negligible or often absent altogether. Almost 80 percent of the Southern Asian students sponsored for high school, college, or graduate studies are male. How can the Adventist church, whose membership is 60 percent female, draw women from the periphery to its hub? The church must somehow sensitize both male and female members to an awareness of the value and potential of women that leads each one to Christian action. The church must foster a new partnership role in the family and a sharing of household responsibilities that will enable women to participate equally in church ministries. Even the language of the church of the 90s must be nonsexist, using comprehensive terms denoting humanity first and sex designation next.

The church must explore ways to make the full participation of women in its polity real. Mainly due to the unavailability of ordination for women, women have avoided taking theological training. Seminaries should encourage female applicants to theology departments, so that more seminal theological thinking from a woman's perspective will be a resource of the church in the 1990s.

Women must be given more visibility at the 11 o'clock church services. Full participation, irrespective of sex, should be the guiding principle for women in the church of the 1990s. Full participation cannot come about until women have the means to realize their own potential, and come to believe that they can change their present status in the church by changing themselves first. Since self-esteem is a social product that emerges within the framework of social interaction, the need of the 1990s is a church that restores the esteem of woman, the esteem that comes of being made in the image of her Maker.

In the third-world context, the words of the patron saint of the poor, Mother Theresa, must be heeded. She spurs us to action when she says, "Don't give of your abundance, but do something beautiful for God." Let us, the church, seek courage to be bold for Him through the Holy Spirit, who alone can help us effect changes in church structures and practices.

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The Family of God: An Aussie View

by Thomas H. Ludowici

As I ponder the fact of my church moving towards 2000 A.D., I can't help but think of the song line, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God."

The Adventist church family does many things well, and as a family member I am proud of these

endeavors—an excellent educational system, a person-centered health care approach, an innovative health food industry, extensive publishing, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and welfare work, a life ministry, evangelism in developing countries. While these are all excellent attributes, the church, as it approaches the year 2000, must both expand its horizons and make some course corrections.

Horizons

To do this, we cannot simply look back to our 19th-century beginnings. While those beginnings are an important reference point, our theology must continue to develop, even as acknowledged by the preamble to the 27 fundamental beliefs. Our theological focus is not to be on historic Adventism: we have at times missed the guidance of God because we are determined to still live in the 1880s or the 1950s. True, it may be more comfortable for me to believe what I was taught 35 years ago, but God does not call me to live in the past. His bidding is to focus my faith on living for him now and in the future.

In the South Pacific Division, we have recently established the Christian Center for Bioethics at Sydney Adventist Hospital. This is the church's second such center (the first being the ethics center at Loma Linda University). The efforts we are making to deal with ethical issues are causing many people in Australia to look to Adventists for leadership in this new and challenging age of the technopolis. The church in other divisions should also be prepared to address the complex issues that are bound to arise as people experience the effects of advancing technology, and its impact on life and relationships. Especially because of the church's commitment to health care, it cannot ignore the opportunity to become a leading Christian voice in ethics in our world. Perhaps, in some institutions, we could afford to divert some of our energies, currently absorbed in less productive exercises, and channel them into ethics.

Thanks to ADRA and other church welfare work, we are able to reach the lower echelon of

society, but a vast deficit exists in the church's impact upon the upper classes. Ellen White's challenge to us in this specific ministry is yet to be taken seriously. While our media presentations and our health-care institutions attract the upper class, much that takes place in local congregations fails to capitalize on this attraction.

Course Corrections

The ecclesiology that I have understood from Scripture insists that the Spirit has led and still leads the church. That being so, we need to acknowledge that the Spirit is calling us to move forward quickly in at least five ways.

Ordain Women. It is amazing that as a church we have been ordaining men for nearly one-and-a-half centuries and yet we have never developed a theology of ordination. As soon as this is done, it will become apparent that women must also be ordained to the gospel ministry. This action cannot wait until every segment of the world

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church agrees, because cultural conditioning will prevent such a total agreement from ever occurring. Women have a magnificent contribution to make in ministry, and it is imperative that the way become open for this to occur, so that the church may move forward in its gospel proclamation.

Elect Youth to Leadership. We need to discover new ways to attract our youth into the employment of the church. I applaud the youth who sense their Christian witness in the various professions and careers where they work, but the

church also needs more young women and men to become involved in denominational structures. This will require a rethinking of employment practices, provision of opportunities for advancement, and a more open approach to youth. The student-missionary program is an exciting example of what can happen when young people are given opportunities for service. Those of us already involved in denominational service need to encourage innovation and not be threatened by youthful minds which will, at times, challenge the ways that we do things.

Decentralize Denominational Power Structures. The church will benefit from a wider input at all levels of organization. Presently it is only at the local congregational level that the voice of the laity is dominant. Ask any conference or union president the number of committees on which he serves. Chances are, his other duties preclude his attendance at many of these, or the sheer number of committee appointments makes it humanly impossible for him to apply his mind constructively to most of the issues involved. Often this leads to a "let us not move too quickly" response to important—and creative—solutions and ideas. The church can grow in leaps and bounds when we are ready to move forward, acknowledging the fact that the Holy Spirit has gifted every believer for the benefit of the church. We do not need new programs to train the laity; we need to give the laity more authority to exercise their spiritual gifts under the direction of the Spirit. To involve more laity in many aspects of conference, union, and General Conference endeavor will free up more of the clergy to fulfill their calling of "ministry." Too often, busy administrators have little time or energy left to minister to those with spiritual needs. We could begin to solve this problem by placing a larger number of laity on our executive committees so that they were in the majority, instead of in the traditional minority, or "balance" proportion.

Reconstruct Finances. The local conference struggles under a crushing financial load because so much of its tithe dollar is exported to higher organizations. In some instances, the same seems to apply to the local congregation and its funds. This situation must be more than "studied"—it

must be rectified in the next quinquennium. I know of local churches and conferences that are losing the battle to maintain their current level of outreach, simply because there is so little money remaining for local operating purposes. Allowing the local church or conference to have access to more of its funds would be in no way denying the world mission of the church. However, it would mean that the church could grow and develop in its primary mission territory—its own locality.

Relish Differences. With the Spirit's leading we shall enter into revival evidenced by a greater acceptance of, and friendliness toward, the different and unique in our communities. Without effecting changes such as these, the church will be inhibited in fulfilling its world commission. Such will be a tangible demonstration of our response to Jesus Christ, the head of the church.

By 2000 I will sing with greater joy, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God."

Thomas Ludowici is chaplain of the Sydney Adventist Hospital.

Caribbean Adventism Is a Youth Culture

by Edith G. Marshalleck

While the central content of the Adventist message remains the same, in the third world, the compass, the style, and the delivery have to be different.

First, with such a high percentage of third world population being young people, the Adventist message must be targeted more to the youth. It must be set in the context of their sociological and psychological realities. For example, from my third-world perspective, both young girls and boys leave the church during their teen years, partly because of peer pressure to prove sexual maturity. For boys, there is also the pressure of finding employment and pursuing commonly accepted manly behavior. Additionally, as we move toward the 21st century and

third-world development, young adults will be increasingly influenced by the media—television and video especially—which will accelerate secularization and the drift from the church.

Second, the Adventist message must be based on authentic and valid scholarship. With increasing educational opportunities and higher standards in many third-world countries, it is imperative for the message to rest on well-researched information. In our efforts to "get to the point," significant details are omitted in our preaching and literature.

The older members in the church must lead by example, rather than by precept. They must demonstrate the reality of a daily, personal walk with God.

For example, we fail to trace the gradual weakening of Sabbath observance in the early Christian church and present instead a sharp and decisive change of the Sabbath mandated by Constantine in 331 A.D. When further study reveals other contributing factors, faith is weakened. This would not occur were the full facts expressed from the beginning. The discovery of new facts should never deter us from bringing them to light. Examination of these against the known Bible positions will throw more light on the Bible positions themselves, and broaden and amplify our understandings. The young people will thereby gain confidence to explain and defend their faith.

Third, the message must be delivered in a language that is current with the young—a language to which they and their peers can respond with empathy. There is, therefore, need for more carefully researched understandings of the sociology and psychology of specific national cultures. Cultural biases are often denied rather than fully explored. The reason for our diverse, often subliminally influenced behaviors and responses should be understood.

It is necessary to develop a wide variety of programs that will hold the physical, mental, and spiritual interests of the predominantly youth culture of the third world. To be an attractive

option, the Christian subculture must assume greater vibrancy.

Perhaps most importantly, the older members in the church must lead by example, rather than by precept. They must demonstrate the reality of a daily, personal, meaningful walk with God. They must reach out to the young people—as older friend to younger friend, as older counselor to younger follower, as older traveler to younger hiker—together seeking the heights. Especially in the third world, youth are not just the future. Youth are the present reality.

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Education—The Hope of Africa's Awakening Giant of a Church

by Mutuku J. Mutinga

At the onset of the decolonization of the African continent about three decades ago, an eminent British prime minister stated that a "wind of change was blowing across Africa." Indeed it was, because now almost the entire continent is free—comprising 54 independent nations. Africa has been previously referred to as "a sleeping giant"; the fact is, Africa is "an awakening giant."

African problems are enormous, almost matching its size. Larger than many people realize, Africa is the world's second-largest continent, occupying one-fifth of the earth's total land surface. Africa encompasses the world's largest deserts—such as the Sahara—and tropical forests; the equator as well as temperate zones both north and south; the high mountain peaks of Kilimanjaro and the world's deepest lake, Lake Tanganyika. Best of all, one finds in Africa the Seventh-day Adventist church.

The Adventist church in Africa is one of the fastest-growing churches in the world. Indeed, church growth has been so rapid that it has caught Adventist leadership by surprise. On Sabbath morning, most urban churches—even those built within the last decade—cannot accommodate the crowds, 70 percent of which are young people.

These young people are different from the older generation in terms of their having better education, social standing, and greater exposure to socio-economic problems, such as drug abuse and unemployment. Those who minister to this caliber of new Adventists will have to meet their needs and match their expectations. "Ministry" to this new generation will have to include teachers, health workers, preachers, and technology developers. The situation poses a tremendous challenge to the church leadership of the 1990s.

The greatest challenge to the Adventist church beyond 1990 will be to encourage participation at all levels of church life and to develop skills of members to respond to the needs of their communities. Specifically, in the continent of Africa, church members must be trained to shoulder all aspects of the Adventist church's work.

Happily, in the past decade or so, Adventist institutions of higher learning have been established on the African continent to prepare its people for service. Although, in my view, this should have been done long ago, it is very commendable that the church now operates four universities in Africa. It is my belief that tremendous progress can be realized if even more of the meager resources of the Adventist church members in Africa were sacrificed to the development of these institutions.

Such enduring growth also needs the concern and help of our lay brothers and sisters abroad, whom the Lord has blessed with financial means and capabilities. They must come forth and participate in these endeavors. Also, there is need for our brethren who still have missionary strength, vision, and the willingness to give of themselves, to offer their talents. Africa's very young Adventist educational institutions can foster growth in Adventist membership and service; they can expand the influence of the church for good in society to an extent unprecedented in the

history of Adventism.

Today one can witness, on a daily basis, in many countries of Africa, a people so thirsty for the Word of God that one only needs to stand with a microphone in many of our city streets and an audience gathers. During a single evangelistic crusade, evangelists bring in new believers by the hundreds, even thousands.

These new believers must be shepherded and educated according to the biblical way of life. Adventist church leadership will have to mobilize financial and manpower resources throughout the world church to build and strengthen institutions of higher learning that will train workers equipped to meet the emergency of shepherding both current and rapidly multiplying large congregations of better educated, more prominent, converts.

If we fail today it may be too late tomorrow, and such a golden opportunity may never present itself again. For “who knoweth whether [we] art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

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Europe’s Dream: The Priesthood of All Believers

by Irmtraut Wittenburg

U ntil I received an invitation from Elder Wilson to attend the General Conference session and address you, the plans committee, here in Indianapolis, I had never been to the United States, never visited this land of the “American dream.”

America. When I heard that word, I always envisioned an enormous country, so big and so lovely that its people did not need anything else—except a large “mission field” outside. And there it was: Africa, Asia, Europe—just waiting to be

introduced to democracy and the “American Way of Life.”

It was this missionary thought that stuck, and still sticks with me most about America. It is found not only in politics, but in Adventism as well. When our pastors return from their studies at Andrews or Loma Linda universities, for instance, they come with their suitcases full of new American ideas. Their main point? Church growth. All this growth seems only to be possible through a lot of costly programs that offer answers

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to questions nobody is asking (at least in this part of the world).

My feelings toward America and Americans are not wholly negative, however. I have great respect for the open-mindedness of the American church members, and for their courage in discussing church problems. No topic seems to be excluded. I would greatly like to see such open discussion in my own country. Such conversation could be one of the first important steps toward the priesthood of all believers.

Certainly, all of us are familiar with the idea of the priesthood of all believers—at least theoretically. So I need not talk about baptism, the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual gifts God offers to all who follow Jesus through baptism. We know about it. But what do we do?

Look at all the struggles for the ordination of female pastors. As long as we believe in the Catholic idea of a two-class system of *laos* and *clerus* in our church, this discussion will remain necessary and important to convince our brothers and sisters, who still cannot believe it, that all of us are equal—men and women alike. But if we really practiced the priesthood of all believers, this discussion would become completely superfluous. When looking for a church member to fit a certain position or office, we would no longer have to consider the person’s sex, but simply his or her skills and abilities.

The priesthood of all believers implies a completely new “image of man.” In Germany we talk of “*menschenbild*.” It states not only that all people are equal, but that each person has at least one special skill that is needed to build up a church or congregation. This concept seems so very simple, but it has enormous effects on our conception of ourselves. Each of us is a gifted person. Our church is dependent on each of us. We each have value. We are all different parts of one body—Jesus’ body—and it does not matter at all that one part is female and the other male.

Practicing the priesthood of all believers offers us a completely new type of perception. We have to become aware of each other, to care for one another, and to watch each other very closely—in a positive sense—to find out the spiritual gifts of our sisters and brothers so that we can then encourage them to use and practice those gifts.

God might bestow spiritual gifts we never thought of as being necessary in our church. This is a tremendous opportunity for us, because these very spiritual gifts might be the ones to build bridges to our neighbors, friends, and colleagues—and to believers in other countries.

To truly be aware of somebody means to understand his or her needs and shortcomings. It means to consider his or her background. A strong commitment to the priesthood of all believers would help us to overcome cultural and sociological gaps. We would accept regional and individual differences, and encourage individuals in their uniqueness, while reminding them that unique gifts also bring responsibilities.

The struggle for the realization of the priesthood of all believers means far more to me than struggling for more “rights” for lay members. It means not distinguishing between lay members and pastors, or “officials,” at all! And it means giving more self-confidence and more responsibility to each church member. Do not think that such responsibility is easy to take. The priesthood of all believers does not leave the back door open, allowing us to expect all decisions, impulses, and activities to come from our pastors and presidents. Each one of us in our own individuality is responsible. For our church as a whole can never be stronger than its weakest part.

I want to take the risk of being a priest—with all the consequences. I want to be courageous, and therefore I need encouragement. My church can offer me this encouragement, and I am eager to give it back, in turn, to my sisters and brothers. The priesthood of all believers, while offering us opportunities to work together with our gifted (and democratically elected!) leaders, makes us dependent on one another and on God, not on church leaders.

This is what I expect from my church in the 1990s: acceptance and awareness of the individual; uprightness and honesty; open-mindedness; courage; self-confidence; and the consciousness that individuality of the parts is not an obstacle to, but a great advantage for, building up a healthy body—the body of Christ.

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