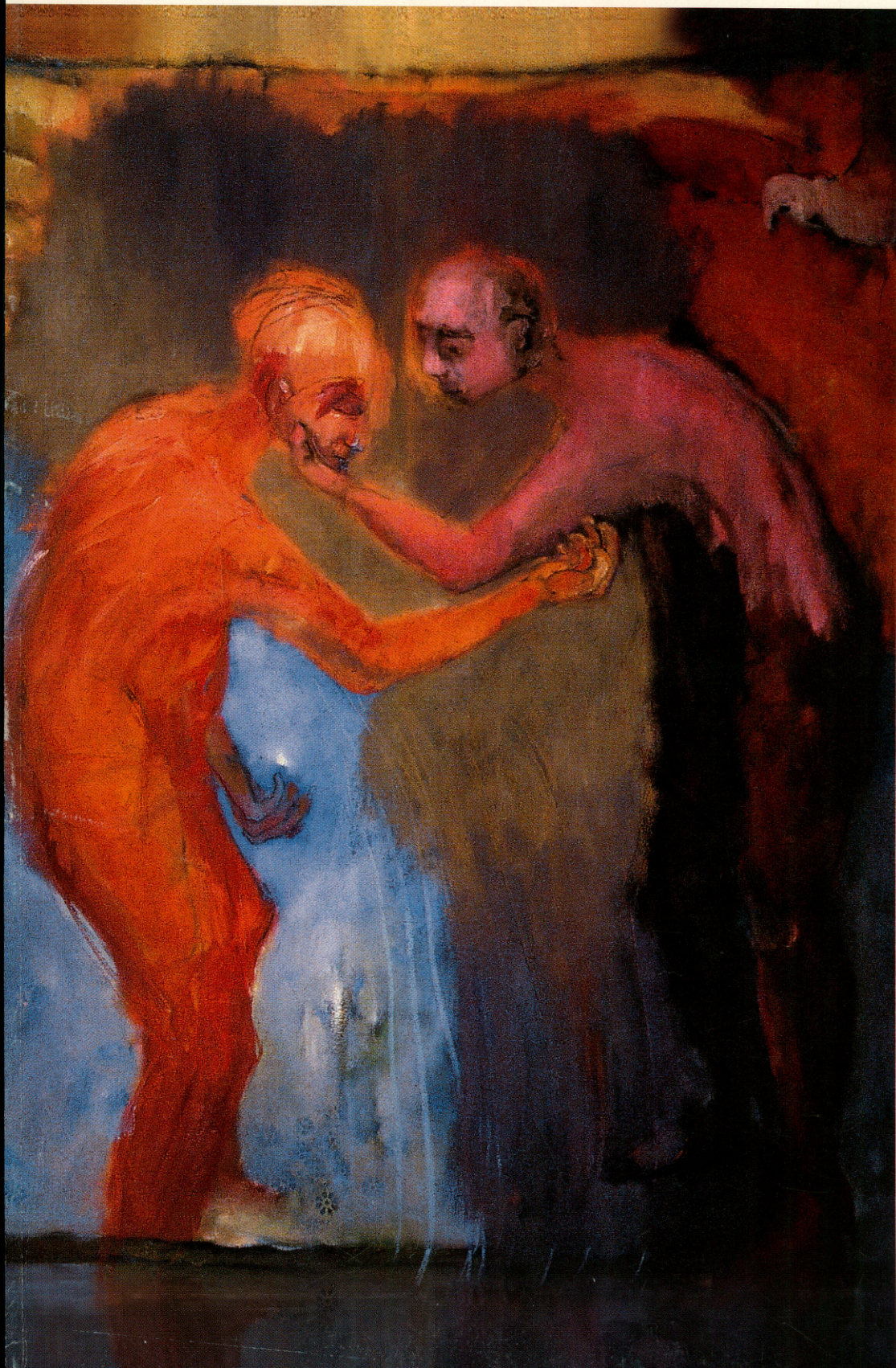


SPECTRUM

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Cross-Cultural Conversations

Palestinian
Refugees Tell
Their Stories

Journey to
Baghdad

The Tao of
the Sabbath

What I Learned
at the Movies

Imagination
of Cinema and
the Church

SPECTRUM

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About the Artist

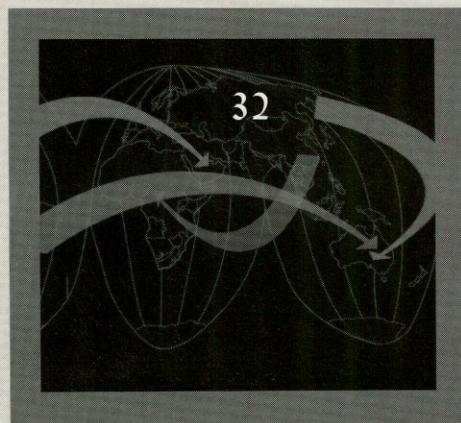
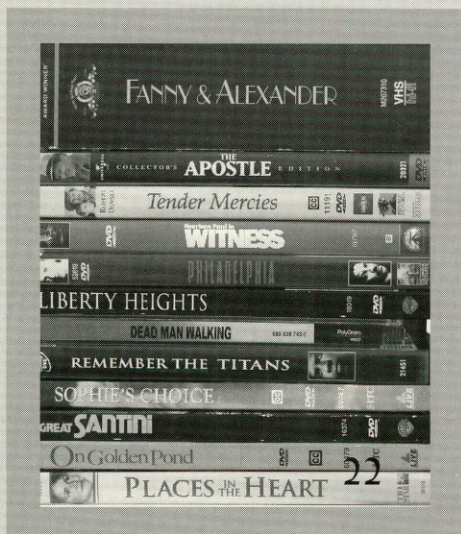
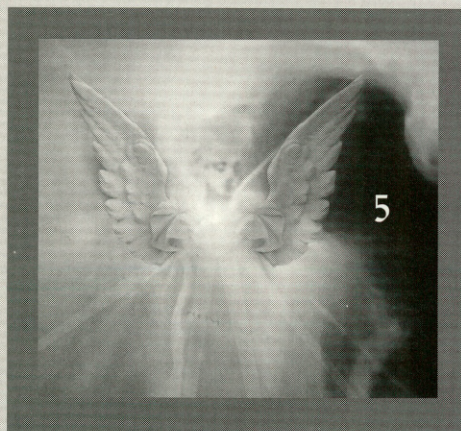
Lisie S. Orjuela is a painter living and working in Connecticut. She works primarily with oils on canvas. In her paintings she investigates different intellectual, psychological, and spiritual states—the more abstract aspects of life. All of her work deals with relationships of some kind—within the individual or between individuals.

About the Cover

Visitation III is one in a series of paintings dealing with Christian traditions. It was inspired by Mary's visit with Elizabeth in Scripture. Aside from the historical event, the image represents an encounter between two persons who completely trust each other. We see friendship enveloped in nonjudgmental attitude, openness, and acceptance beautifully exemplified.



Contents



The Bible

- 5 **Singing New Songs: Traditions in Conversation**
By Kendra Haloviak

Exploring Revelation's hymns and hearing the harmony of voices from different times and places.

What's Right with Movies?

- 14 **A Shared Hope: The Imagination of Cinema and the Church**

By Alexander Carpenter

Like the iconography of Scripture, spectacle draws spectators.

- 16 **Can Filmmaking and Christianity Coexist?**

A Conversation with Director Rik Swartzwelder

By Alexander Carpenter

The Least of These is only one of Swartzwelder's stories.

- 22 **What I Learned at the Movies**

By Adrian Zytoskee

Answering the big question with things we take for granted.

- 27 **Looking for a Good Movie?**

Christian Movie Reviews on the Web

By Lemuel Bach

Three sources to check for a Christian read of the current cinema.

Cross-Cultural Conversations

- 32 **Embracing a Legacy of Border Crossing: Cross-Cultural Engagement and the Integrity of Christian Witness**

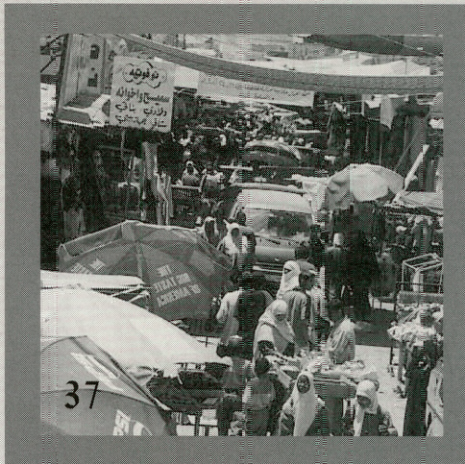
By Charles Scriven

Abraham's blessings began with the word *go*.

- 37 **Waiting to Go Home: Palestinian Refugees Tell Their Stories**

By Beverly Beem and Carmen Clark

Thirty-five years in a refugee camp and counting.



- 44 **Journey to Baghdad**
Malcolm Russell Interviews Lawrence Geraty
 A wedding brings the Adventist community in Iraq together for a celebration.
- 48 **Adventism in the Context of Japanese Culture**
By Junko Nakai
 No words, only deeds to tell the Christian story.
- 51 **When the Bells Toll**
By Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson
 Learning New Year's purification rituals as temple bells ring.

Sabbath Around the World, Around the Block

- 56 **The Tao of the Sabbath: Some Biblical Sabbath Texts Considered in the Light of the *Tao-te-ching***
By P. Richard Choi
 Why would God need to keep the Sabbath?
- 60 **New Explorations of the Sabbath**
A Review Essay by J. Paul Stauffer
 Invoking a conversation about the forgotten necessity for rest.
- 71 **Restoring the True Sabbath in the Ancient Kingdoms**
Sabbath Roots: The African Connection, by Charles E. Bradford
Reviewed by Douglas Morgan

75 Letters

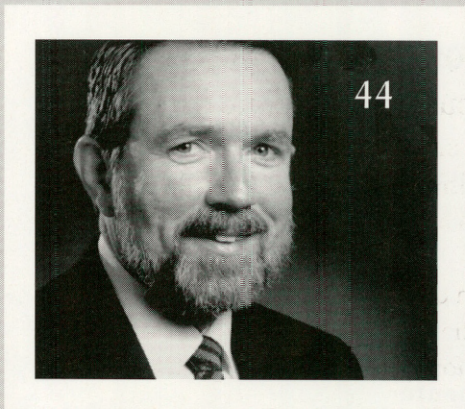
Editorials

- 3 **Laughter, Smiles, and the Year of the Sabbath**
By Bonnie Dwyer
- 78 **AAF Camp Meeting**
By Gordon M. Rick

Poetry

- Cover **Angel Waiting: Prayer for the Lost**
By John McDowell

Photo: La Sierre University



Laughter, Smiles, and the Year of the Sabbath

Where are we going? What awaits us at the beginning, at the turn of this year? “You are thinking perhaps that these are questions to laugh about.

“But perhaps we are going to laugh. . . . [I]t is difficult to dissociate a culture of hospitality from a culture of laughter or a culture of smile. It is not a matter of reducing laughter to smile or the opposite, but it is hard to imagine a scene of hospitality during which one welcomes without smiling at the other, without giving a sign of joy or pleasure, without smiling at the other as at the welcoming of a promise.”

So begins Jacques Derrida’s essay “Hospitality” in his newest collection of essays, *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002). I picked up my copy in November 2002 at the Toronto meetings of the American Academy of Religion, where I heard Derrida answer questions for two hours on subjects as diverse as prayer and atheism.

The French philosopher credited with starting the school of deconstructionist thought, Derrida answered the complex questions put to him in English with wit and insight that made me want to know more about this Algerian who grew up in a Jewish, French-speaking family. He turned ideas inside out as he examined them. If belief in God doesn’t go as far as possible in a number of critical steps, it is naïve, he said. In order to be authentic, belief must be exposed to absolute doubt. Belief implies some atheism. “I am an atheist,” he said, “but not as a position.” And so it went, with him crossing the borders of ideas in new and intriguing ways.

His session followed a particularly wonderful set of meetings held by the Adventist Society for Religious Studies in which “Theology as Conversation” had been the theme running through cross-cultural and cross-generational presentations by Adventist theologians.

This issue of *Spectrum* has grown out of those meetings. Just as Derrida turns to Abraham to bring together ideas of Islamic and Judaic hospitality in his essay, we turn to Abraham for ideas about border crossings and Christian witness with Charles Scriven as our guide. Our conversations range across continents, cultures, Scripture, movies, and books.

Although this issue ends with a cross-cultural discussion of Sabbath, it is only the beginning of such discussions this year. There are more new books on Sabbath that we want to share. Marva Dawn, the author of *Keeping Sabbath Wholly*, will be one of the speakers at the international convention of the Association of Adventist Forums in September in British Columbia, so I know we will have more to say about the subject. We’ll also be covering sacred space, looking at spirituality, talking with scientists about Genesis, and having great conversations along the way.

That’s where we’re going this year. Stay with us. We promise Adventist hospitality full of laughter and hope.

Bonnie Dwyer
Editor

The Bible



Holy, holy, holy,
the Lord God, the Almighty,
the one who was and is
and is to come. (Rev.4:8c)

Singing New Songs: Traditions in Conversation

By Kendra Haloviak

My earliest interest in theology was sparked by fascinating conversations in my parents' home on Sabbath afternoons as Seventh-day Adventists from different parts of the world filled our living room. Pastors and teachers sent from their conferences or divisions to the General Conference Archives and Ellen G. White Estate to reconsider their theological questions would do research all week assisted by my father, and then they would often share Sabbath meals with our family. I listened as our guests asked questions and enthusiastically shared their convictions.

It seemed that everything was somehow related—Ellen White's ministry, understandings of Scripture, views of salvation and the nature of Christ, considerations of last-day events, even church organization and policies. During those years in the late 1970s and early 1980s, several values came to the fore for my family: the importance of studying for oneself, the potential inherent in thoughtful questions, the necessity of dialogue with others, and the joy of discovery in community. As a teenager, I enthusiastically embraced my faith tradition as one engaged in the most interesting and important conversations imaginable.

My choice of dissertation topic as a graduate student—the hymns in the book of Revelation—emerged from almost twenty years of theological conversations. Those important conversations on Sabbath afternoons had often emphasized the victory of the slain Lamb, and drew me to the sections in Revelation that most clearly celebrate this victory.

Numerous conversations with Roy Branson about moral imagination, worship, and social ethics opened up new theological categories and cross-disciplinary questions. Teaching the book of Revelation to Seventh-day Adventist college students allowed me to witness a hunger for the book as one that touched their lives in the present—in a United States without

Sunday laws, yet with huge social challenges. Experiencing one of Charles Teel's liturgical celebrations last year in Chicago confirmed my conviction that Revelation's hymns provide key moments within the narrative that anticipate an amazing future and thus compel moral response. Graduate school introduced me to a literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, whose insights into language and meaning offered new and exciting strategies for reading Revelation with an eye to ethical responsibility.

As I explored Revelation's hymns, I heard voices in conversation from different times and places. Especially in the hymns, Hebrew prophetic, Jewish apocalyptic, and Christian liturgical traditions collide and collaborate.¹ The traditions present in the hymns remain in conversation throughout the narrative. The theology of the book of Revelation is embodied in different traditions that are being remembered and re-formed. The theology of the book of Revelation is conversation!

Like the people in my parents' living room, the voices singing Revelation's hymns considered the relationship between their community through time, and the world around them. They wondered about their faith tradition in light of new theological convictions. Their convictions suggest to Seventh-day Adventists, and all who value this final book of the Christian canon, that using this text to shut down conversation is fundamentally opposed to the nature of the book itself. Rather, to embrace this work is to join a great multitude in conversation without end.

Meaning as Conversation

One of Mikhail Bakhtin's insights is his understanding of literary genre, or form of writing, as "form-shaping ideology."² Rather than genre as the neutral container of meaning, genre is inseparable from meaning, a particular way of envisioning human experience. The Seer uses the apocalyptic genre because he has to; it is the best way to grasp and articulate the meaning of his worldview.³

Ideas do not appear out of nowhere. A text arises out of a particular setting, from specific voices, which are in conversation with other voices. Many scholars suggest that the earliest Jewish apocalyptic works arose out of communities that were wrestling with how to respond in a new social context of persecution.⁴ Thus, apocalyptic literature grew out of new experiences in which other genres of literary expression were no longer adequate.⁵

The Seer remembers this context as he creates his Apocalypse. The experiences of Jews under Antiochus are recalled by this Christian writer of the Roman

Empire. As the Seer writes from his context, he remembers the second-century apocalyptists and he remembers their conversations with the Hebrew prophets.⁶ In order to express his Christian convictions concerning God and God's relationship to humanity, the Seer needs elements of both prophetic and apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature's focus on the future must be reshaped in light of the conviction that Messiah had already arrived within human history. Jewish apocalyptic literature's view of a restored justice only at a future radical break in human history had to be re-formed when the Christian apocalypticist believed that the future had arrived in the historical figure of Jesus the Christ.

For the Christian Seer of Patmos, something significant had already happened within human history. The apocalyptic genre is modified by contemporary Christian experience. Apocalyptic literature's future focus entered a conversation with prophetic literature's emphasis on present, earthly realities. The Christian literary landscape was suddenly exploding with temporal and spatial possibilities.

In the book of Revelation, worship moments, especially the hymns, hold these conversations together. In the hymns, the apocalyptic genre's vast cosmic scope remembers the experiences of the prophets, their calls and convictions, and the earthly social contexts of singing and service. The following section considers the conversations between prophetic and apocalyptic traditions in the first of Revelation's sixteen hymns.

The Trisagion: Revelation's Hymns as Traditions in Conversation

The book of Revelation's worship scenes contain elements atypical of apocalyptic texts. These elements highlight the apocalyptic genre in conversation with the prophetic genre. The Seer repeatedly revisits the view of God and humanity depicted in prophetic literature.

Typically, an apocalyptic work emphasizes the huge gap between the divine or heavenly realm and humanity. Almost every compositional element in an apocalypse stresses this distance, including out-of-this-world imagery, strange spatial and temporal realities, a cosmic canvas that includes bizarre creatures and holy beings, and the end as a radical break from present social-historical realities. Whether a tour of other worlds or a review of history, the visionary's limitations are punctuated by the strange discord between everyday life and the experience of the

vision. The human, an onlooker to the events, usually requires a guide or intercessor or translator just to grasp the visual images minimally.

The beginning of Revelation 4 sounds a lot like any good apocalyptic text, complete with the assumption of a three-tiered universe,⁷ movement into the heavenly realm through an open door,⁸ and a throne room vision report that includes God enthroned and surrounded by otherworldly beings.⁹ A human visionary has entered the realm of the transcendent. Expecting to hear a review of the epochs of human history culminating in a radical end of time, John instead hears singing “day and night without ceasing” (4:8b).¹⁰

throne room vision report, when Isaiah sees the embodiment of God’s glory in the context of Judah’s temple. In the narrative account, no intermediary—neither human priest nor angelic being—stands between Isaiah and the Lord. After a brief description of the throne room, one of the winged beings proclaims:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. (Isa. 6:3)	Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God, the Almighty, the one who was and is and is to come. (Rev. 4:8c)
--	---

As in Isaiah’s vision, John’s includes otherworldly

The book of Revelation does not include a clear review of history.

The book of Revelation does not include a clear review of history.¹¹ It does not describe a journey through distant worlds.¹² It does not even involve an otherworldly guide who interprets what is going on.¹³ Instead, it is the figure of the exalted Christ who first interprets for John. The one who in 1:17-18 calls himself “the first and the last and the living one,” who “was dead,” but is “alive forever and ever,” says to John: “As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches” (1:20).

This same figure then continues by dictating to John the letters to the seven churches (2:1-3:22). The exalted Christ is the otherworldly guide. This is a fascinating re-formation of apocalyptic. In these first three chapters, there is no intermediary between John and transcendent divinity. Thus, the gap between the heavenly and earthly realms, between divinity and humanity, is softened. Instead of the vast distance typical of the form-shaping ideology of apocalyptic literature, John actually ends up a part of the worship scene (5:4-5, 13a).

By taking the main human character into the heavens and landing him before the throne, the Seer recalls encounters with the divine in throne room visions of the prophets, where the culmination of the experience was worship, not otherworldly journeys; where the human bowed before holiness, not history. The only place in the entire Hebrew Scriptures where one finds the phrase “holy, holy, holy,” is in another

creatures who give praise to God. This praise and its inclusion within the larger vision is remembered in Revelation 4, not only formally and linguistically, but also ideologically. The cultural values of the writer of Isaiah and the entire epoch that shaped those values enters, along with John, through the “door standing open in heaven.” The first five chapters of the book of Isaiah portray Judah as a people who no longer worship God faithfully. There are false idols in the land that are the creations of human hands (Isa. 2:8).

Revelation’s narrative revisits these ideas in the context of Jewish Christians who lived in the Roman Empire. Images from Isaiah 1-5 pulled into this apocalypse bring the prophetic genre into this apocalyptic work. For example, in both Isaiah the prophecy and Revelation the Christian apocalypse, Judah tramples God’s courts (Isa. 1:12; Rev. 11:2), Jerusalem acts like a whore (Isa. 1:20; Rev. 17), people worship the work of their own hands (Isa. 2:8; Rev. 9:20-21); therefore, they hide themselves in rocks and caves and caverns from the presence of God (Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; Rev. 6:15-16). In both Isaiah and Revelation, Judah acts like Sodom (Isa. 3:9; Rev. 11:8), placing material goods above all else (Isa. 3:18-23; Rev. 18:9-24), even human lives (Isa. 3:14-15, 5:8-23; Rev. 18:13b).

Having been created as God’s own vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7; Rev. 14:14-16), Judah, in both prophecy and



apocalypse, ignores the ways of her Creator and becomes a vineyard of wild grapes, that is, of bloodshed and injustice (Isa. 5:7; Rev. 14:17-20). Therefore, the wicked will be devoured by the sword (Isa. 1:20; Rev. 19:15), and then the city will again be called "the city of righteousness" (Isa. 1:26; Rev. 21:1-5a). It will be located upon Mount Zion (Isa. 2:3, 4:2-6; Rev. 14:1). There the inhabitants will be called holy (Isa. 4:3; Rev. 22:11), and God will be present day and night on Mount Zion (Isa. 4:5; Rev. 7:15-17; 21:3-5a), providing shade from the heat (Isa. 4:6; Rev. 7:15-17) for all who are on God's holy mountain. The book of Isaiah's image-shaping theology (view of God) and image-shaping ideology (view of human existence) enter into the book of Revelation.¹⁴

The vision of the throne room recorded in Isaiah 6 carries much more than a hymn into the book of Revelation. It also carries a way of thinking about humanity's relationship to a holy God. Isaiah brings ethics into this apocalypse. Within the book of Isaiah, this worship scene witnesses to everything that Judah could have and should have been, and to all that God already was. This particular prophetic work portrays human existence as moved by the divine to immediate action in the earthly present. All of the earlier accounts

concerning worship and moral action (Isa. 1-5) are present in the experience of Isaiah before the heavenly throne (Isa. 6).

In this first hymn of the book of Revelation, readers can notice the conversation between the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions. Careful readers of the hymn sense the presence of earlier ideologies and their former contexts. While expressing his apocalyptic view of human experience, the Seer includes a perspective on human experience from a prophetic context.¹⁵ The Seer and his first-century social location are joined by a fellow traveler, the writer of Isaiah, of generations earlier. The Seer's apocalyptic view of the ultimate transcendent reality includes the prophetic encounter with an immanent divinity.

As the Seer creates an apocalyptic work with heavenly beings in continuous praise to God, conversations with prophetic literature pull the prophet Isaiah and the nation of Judah into the scene. Revelation invites readers to see like John and like Isaiah, to hear living creatures and seraphs singing. The scene of apocalyptic praise in the transcendent realm is also an encounter with an immanently present God who calls all heavenly and earthly beings to true worship and social justice.

These conversations between genres are multidirectional. The transcendent realm takes on the ideology of prophetic throne room encounters, and the throne room visions of prophets are given cosmic significance in the context of the book of Revelation. The Seer changes the Trisagion from "holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:3), to "holy, holy, holy, the Lord God, the Almighty" (Rev. 4:8c). This is an example of how the Seer takes the prophetic view of God and humanity and expands them across time and space.

The "Lord of hosts," or "Lord of armies," connotes the heavenly lord of a localized, earthly realm. For the Seer, this description is changed to "the Lord God, the Almighty," which expands God's authority to a universal domain, including supernatural beings and powers. Whereas the writer of Isaiah portrays a God concerned with the future of Judah, the Seer's apocalyptic canvas involves all of humanity from all times and places. The use of "the Almighty" declares this conviction.

The hymnic lines that follow each Trisagion are also important. In Isaiah, the hymn concludes: "the whole earth is full of his glory." The Seer changes the passage to: "the One who was and is and is to come." In apocalyptic, the earth, even the whole earth, is not a large enough realm! Apocalyptic literature expands the scope of the vision to involve the entire cosmos. "The whole earth" is too limited. The God who cannot

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—BILL JOHANSSON, editor, *Adventist Review*

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be confined by space is also located throughout all time: “the One who was and is and is to come.” Divinity permeates all locations in space and time.

If the reader had not already heard a version of this phrase twice earlier in the book of Revelation (1:4, 8), it would be shocking because it contains an unusual formula that shifts from time to space. Since the first two sections of the description, “who was and is,” denote existence in time, readers expect the phrase to conclude “and will be.” Instead, the description, the first Christian use of this divine description, ends with: “and is to come.”¹⁶ The Lord God Almighty, the recipient of this praise, will be described with similar language throughout the book of Revelation (1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5).¹⁷

In the first appearance of the divine title, the One, “who is and who was and who is to come” is the source

Lord, God the Almighty are similar, as both are referred to as reigning. In addition, the obvious absence of the phrase, “is to come” in this part of the narrative (in contrast with the earlier descriptions in 1:4, 8; 4:8c) suggests that the arrival of God, and the reign of the Messiah and God Almighty have already begun!

There is one final account of this title found during the third bowl plague. In the “solo song” in 16:5b, an angel cries out: “you are just, who is and who was, the holy one, for you have judged these things.” Later voices respond using some of the language found in the Trisagion for the One seated on the throne: “Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just.” However, within the narrative, it is the Christ-figure who judges (19:11); that is, he who is called “the word of God” (19:13b) and “king of kings and Lord of lords” (19:16b).

Whereas the writer of Isaiah portrays a God concerned with the future of Judah, the Seer’s apocalyptic canvas involves all of humanity from all time and places.

of “grace and peace,” along with the seven spirits and Jesus Christ (1:4-5). In the second appearance, the voice of the Lord God declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8a), which is then followed by the further identification of the speaker, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

It is interesting that this declaration and description follow directly after the description of the parousia in 1:7 where the word “to come” is also used: “Behold he is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.” In verse 7, the figure of Jesus Christ “is coming.” In verse 8, the Lord God Almighty is the one “who is to come.” It seems that the Seer’s Christian convictions concerning the divine nature of the exalted Christ and his proximity to God allow him to blur the descriptions of the two here and throughout the book of Revelation.

Later in the narrative, during another hymn (11:15b), loud voices in heaven declare that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.” Then immediately the twenty-four elders sing to the “Lord, God the Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.” Once again, the descriptions of the Messiah figure and the

Christian convictions re-form apocalyptic visions. As an apocalyptic text, Revelation is able to express the cosmic ramifications of worshiping Christ. Christ is God. Christ is judge. Filled with Christian ideology, the apocalyptic genre is never the same. A Christian apocalyptic genre is born!

Revelation’s hymns remember the prophetic call to worship and social justice as all of creation sings before the throne. At its most “apocalyptic” moments, the book of Revelation is in conversation with prophetic literature’s portrayal of God’s relationship to humanity. Revelation remembers the prophetic works and elevates them, creating a new masterpiece out of their ideas and contexts, now being celebrated from a new perspective, a new place.

The new place reflected the relatively small Christian communities that worshiped Jesus within large cities of the Roman Empire. John J. Collins states that, “The worship of Jesus, and the way in which divine imagery is applied to him, marks perhaps the most fundamental point at which Revelation departs from Jewish precedent.”¹⁸ Christians experienced new ways of seeing



and responding to human existence, which required new ways to articulate their experiences.

The Seer's apocalypse includes throne room encounters and the worship of Christ. This combination creates a conversation between the transcendent, which so often overshadows all activity in apocalyptic literature, and the realm of human experience. Similarly, the future eschaton so often the focus of apocalyptic literature, maintains a conversation with the present experience of those in worship before the throne of God. Careful readings observe this textual richness created by conversations among Hebrew prophetic, Jewish apocalyptic, and Christian liturgical traditions. Contemporary readers enter this work needing ears to hear the ideological medley found in its hymns. Revelation's theology is conversation!

Singing New Songs: Conversation Without End

In a recent conversation, Fritz Guy told me that good theology has at least three qualities: it is humble in its claims, respectful of the mystery, and (here he paused and grinned) . . . fun! I suggest that the Seer embraces all three qualities.

First, the Seer is humble in that he respects various

voices. As he creatively and passionately creates his narrative, he does so keenly aware of those who have gone before. Rather than claim a superior theological position, he engages the traditions he loves so much.

The Seer is also respectful of the mystery of theology as he places different views of God and God's relationship to humanity side-by-side in his work. Ideas carried in Hebrew prophetic, Jewish apocalyptic, and Christian liturgical traditions all contribute insights into the mystery that remains mystery, and before whom all creatures bow in worship and praise.

And the Seer seems to have fun creating a text full of scenes of worship, where each reading is a new song! Remembering the believing community through time, the congregations of Asia Minor sing hymns made even more meaningful through their new experiences, convictions, and contexts.

Seventh-day Adventists have long embraced the final book of the Christian canon as crucial for their theology and mission. If this book shapes our theology, then, like the Seer, we must be humble in our claims, respecting the different voices within our tradition, among our fellow believers, and in the world around us. Rather than close down conversation, the book of Revelation invites others to join in! We should eagerly anticipate the ways new voices will enrich our readings

The advertisement features a watercolor illustration of a village with several buildings, including a church with a bell tower, set against a light sky. The text is overlaid on the image. At the top, the word "SPECTRUM" is written in a large, serif font. Below it, in a smaller font, is "THE JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF ADVENTIST FORUMS". In the center, the text "VISIT THE ONLINE COMMUNITY" is displayed. At the bottom, the website address "www.SPECTRUMMAGAZINE.ORG" is written in a large, serif font.

of this unique apocalypse.

If this book shapes our worship, then, like the Seer, we will stand in awe of the mystery—an Almighty God who meets people in earthly throne rooms, and a Christ who is God of the cosmos. Prophetic and apocalyptic views of the mystery join in conversation with Christian convictions concerning the Christ. Such conversation enriches human contemplation of the mystery. The apocalyptic view expands Christian

his painting according to a certain technique. In real fact, seeing and representation merge. New means of representation force us to see new aspects of visible reality, but these new aspects cannot clarify or significantly enter our horizon if the new means necessary to consolidate them are lacking. One is inseparable from the other.”

“The same is true in literature. The artist must learn to see reality with the eyes of the genre. A particular aspect of reality can only be understood in connection with the particular means of representing it. On the other hand, the means of expression are only applicable to certain aspects of reality. The artist does not

If this book shapes our mission, then each new choir member enhances the continuing conversation, which is the life of the church.

worship across all time and space, even as the prophetic view reminds Christians of a God who calls people to true worship and social justice.

If this book shapes our mission, then each new choir member enhances the continuing conversation, which is the life of the church. Remembering the believing community through time, our congregations sing songs from new experiences, considering ways to embody the songs in our contemporary contexts. For all whose voices join the great multitude, it is conversation without end.

Notes and References

1. David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1997), 52a:314–17, identifies sixteen hymnic utterances within the narrative of the book of Revelation: 4:8c, 11; 5:9b–10, 12b, 13b; 7:10b, 12; 11:15b, 17–18; 12:10b–12; 15:3b–4; 16:5b–7b; 19:1b–2, 3, 5b, 6b–8. See also, Michael A. Harris, “The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 4–16.

2. For Bakhtin, meaning can only occur through contemplation of the entire creative work as a particular form that embraces a particular perspective on human experience. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Poetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 282–83, begins its exploration of Bakhtin’s understanding of genre with the following description: “[A] genre, understood as a way of seeing, is best described neither as a ‘form’ (in the usual sense) nor as an ‘ideology’ (which could be paraphrased as a set of tenets) but as ‘form-shaping ideology’—a specific kind of creative activity embodying a specific sense of experience.” Mikhail Bakhtin and P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 134, states: “The process of seeing and conceptualizing reality must not be severed from the process of embodying it in the forms of a particular genre. It would be naive to assume that the painter sees everything first and then shapes what he saw and puts it onto the surface of

squeeze pre-made material onto the surface of the work. The surface helps him to see, understand, and select his material.”

3. For purposes of this paper, “Seer” refers to the recipient of the vision, the narrative’s implied author. Several times within the narrative, the “narrator” will identify himself as “John.” Jewish apocalyptic literature carries a pessimistic view of the human situation, whose only hope for societal justice is divine interaction. Thus, apocalyptic literature emphasizes the transcendent realm and a future break in history.

Setting itself to be the true reality “unveiled” for the few who can “see,” apocalyptic literature remains intrigued with strange symbolism, celestial geography, and future epochs. The human visionaries within the narratives are constantly reminded that the world of apocalyptic is far from their own. The assumption of such literature is that the most important aspects of reality cannot be seen by humanity and need unveiling.

This idea is underscored by the presence of an otherworldly being, usually an *angelus interpres* (interpreting angel), who guides both the human’s interpretation of the vision and his journey. The human’s abilities are inadequate to the task. He requires outside help. The gap between what is human and what is transcendent remains stark.

The canvas for apocalyptic literature is the entire cosmos. Apocalyptic ideology is vast in scope, claiming spatial and temporal comprehensiveness. From the vantage point of the transcendent, apocalyptic literature considers the whole of human history. The visionaries, suddenly unlimited by temporal existence, can see the past and future as clearly as the present. In order to capture the whole of human history, apocalyptic literature must include the end of human history as currently experienced. Thus, this genre anticipates a future punctuated by a radical break from what is currently and historically known. Apocalyptic literature also expresses a heightened sense of good and evil. Ambiguity is minimized. Good and evil are given supernatural force through embodiment in mythic figures and events. The loyal are not described by their nation or culture, but by their choices for God in the midst of oppressive affluence and persecution.

In apocalyptic literature, human social history is on the



Revelation's hymns remember the prophetic call to worship and social justice as all of creation sings before the throne

decline. From all earthly perspectives, evil appears to be winning the day. Faithlessness and accommodation, deceit and violence rule the affairs of the earth. However, the greater, revealed reality affirms the ultimate defeat of evil and all those who attach themselves to it. Apocalyptic literature concludes that although only divine interaction into human history can eradicate evil and its consequences and vindicate the loyal, such action—a type of eschatological judgment—will indeed occur. The resulting radical break will be so pervasive that individual human bodies, cities, entire civilizations, and the cosmos will be transformed. Even people who have died will be able to experience this transformation through resurrection.

For discussions of the ideology of apocalyptic literature, see D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 104–57; and Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, trans. Margaret Kohl, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 22 (London: SCM, 1972), 18–35.

4. The consensus among scholars concerning the birth of Jewish apocalyptic literature is during the first half of the second century B.C.E. John J. Collins, “From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, John J. Collins, ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 1:147, says: “The first major cluster of Jewish apocalyptic writings originated in the period shortly before and during the Maccabean revolt.”

5. When a genre is carried into a new context, the genre must be modified since, like life, the creative event is not merely discovered, but also shaped. New understandings of human experience and new social experiences yield new genres. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 277, state: “Literary forms change not because devices wear out, but because real people create new ways to understand their changing lives.”

6. Consider ways the ideology of Hebrew prophetic literature differs from the ideology of Jewish apocalyptic literature (note 3, above) in expressions of God and God's relationship to humanity, descriptions of time and space, eschatology, and social ethics. Apocalyptic literature keeps wrestling with its literary ancestors. A conversation between the ideology of the prophets and the ideology of the apocalypticists is maintained, particularly in the hymns of the book of Revelation.

7. A typical feature of apocalyptic literature, the book of Revelation also hints at this view in describing the one like the son of man having the keys to the door of the underworld (1:18). The earthly and heavenly realms fill out the rest of the three-tiered universe. For examples, see I Enoch, Apocalypse of Ezra, and Testament of Abraham, in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 1:13–89, 571–79, 882–902.

8. Aune, *Revelation*, 281, discusses this open door as a typical feature of apocalyptic denoting a scene of revelation. For example, see I Enoch 14:14b–15, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 20–21.

9. For examples, see I Enoch 14, 71, and Testament of Levi 2:6; 5:1, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 20–21, 49–50,

788–795. In the throne room scene of Revelation 4–5, there is repeated use of the words translated as “around” or “circling” (4:3, 4, 6, 8). The throne is surrounded by a rainbow (4:3), by twenty-four thrones with elders upon them (4:4), and by four living creatures described as having eyes all around (4:6b–8). Other descriptions of images and beings that surround the throne room include: lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder (4:5a), seven torches (4:5b), a sea of glass (4:6a), a host of angels (5:11), and finally all living things (5:13). The same Greek word is used in 7:11 to describe another scene of worship.

10. Aune, *Revelation*, 303, notes that the only other example of ceaseless praise found in an apocalyptic work is Testament of Levi 3:8.

11. It certainly does not include one in Revelation 4–5. Although some interpreters of the book of Revelation base their entire reading of the book on a review of the epochs of human history (specifically, and in different ways, the historicist and futurist approaches to Revelation), I agree with John J. Collins and the Apocalypse Group of the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project that the book of Revelation does not include a historical review.

12. Although this is certainly a visit into the heavenly realm, it is not the beginning of a tour of celestial places like most Type II apocalypses. Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979):71, says: “John is not led from region to region in the beyond as is typical in works of the journey type.”

13. Some suggest that there is never an angelus interpres as in typical apocalyptic texts. An elder will provide some guidance in 5:5; 7:13–17, and an angel, eager to avoid being worshiped by John, will give some direction to him in 19:9–10; 21:9–14; 22:1a, 6, 8–9. But they never actually interpret for John (5:5; 17:1).

14. These motifs from Isaiah are all from material just prior to (in anticipation of) the throne room scene and Isaiah's encounter with divinity in chapter 6.

15. Aune supports this further by interpreting the repeated phrase “in the Spirit” (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), as “in a prophetic trance.” See Aune, *Revelation*, 283; and G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John, Black's New Testament Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1966), 59.

16. Aune, *Revelation*, 303.

17. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation, New Testament Theology*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28–30, includes a fascinating discussion of these phrases.

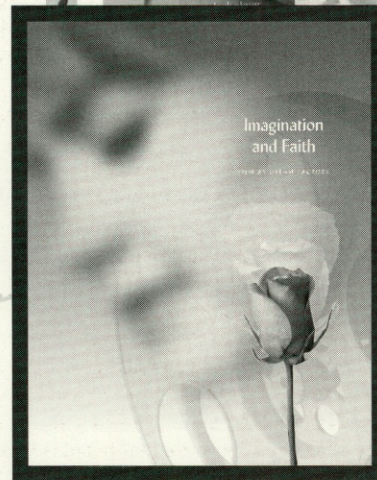
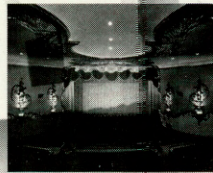
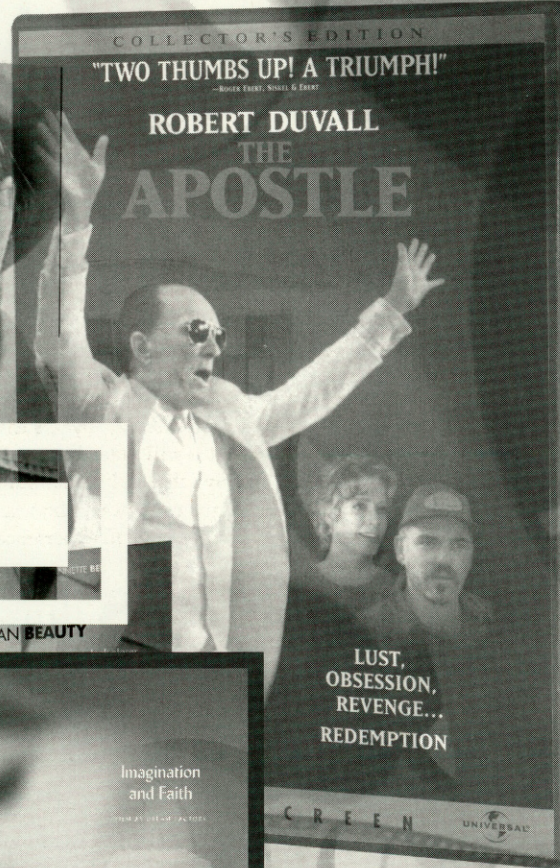
18. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 274.

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FANNY & ALEXANDER
A Film by
INGMAR BERGMAN



ROBERT DUVAL



What's Right with Movies?

A Shared Hope: The Imagination of Cinema and the Church

By Alexander Carpenter

Film, like faith, “gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of realities we do not see” (Heb. 11:1 REV). For about one hundred years, cinema and the church have negotiated separate spheres of the sacred and secular. Easily posited against each other, film and religious faith are often viewed as mutually exclusive, or even overtly antagonistic. This antipathy often appears as religion attempts to reassert its identity in the face of secular expansion. Sometimes these ideological boundaries have softened, from Cecil B. DeMille’s classic biblical epics to contemporary Power-Point sermons that now employ movie clips.

Recognizing this inherent ambivalence within modern Christianity’s attempt to isolate itself from the world, twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich suggested, “[T]he religious and the secular realm are in the same predicament. Neither of them should be in separation from the other, and both should realize that their very existence as separated is an emergency, that both of them are rooted in religion in the larger sense of the word, in the experience of ultimate concern.”¹

Thus, the secular should not be automatically dismissed as the enemy of religion, but recognized as a reflection of the same sacred search. Beyond their surface separation, perhaps cinema and the church share an ultimate concern: participation in the collective human hope for transcendence.

Early History of Cinema and Church

Everyone has heard the negative voices in religious circles that attack Hollywood and bemoan the lack of good, clean movies. But in the early days, when the moving picture emerged as a new form of media, opinion varied as to its value.

In 1910, Thomas A. Edison wrote an editorial for *The Congregationalist and Christian World* that explained the reasons he had conducted experiments in moving pictures in 1887. He wrote, "it is obvious that the motion picture is an important factor in the world's intellectual development. This general diffusion of information is having and will have a great uplifting effect on the morality of mankind."²

Boldly placing film on the side of God, one pastor wrote an article reprinted in the *Nickelodeon* stating that the moving picture was a "new enemy" of Satan. He added that film was "part of the equipment of the up-to-date church . . . almost as necessary as a janitor, an organ or the . . . pews of oak."³ As early as 1911, pastors were noting that films could be used effectively in prisons and ministry among the urban poor. The revivalist with a moving picture projector was perhaps a precursor of the modern evangelist, roaming the conference district with laptop and presentations in tow.

Criticisms of the nascent film industry centered on constant concern over the morality of the stories. In addition, American Christendom wrestled with movie attendance on Sunday. Some religious leaders expressed concern over this new competition and attacked moving pictures as a temptation for Sunday amusement. Film historian Terry Lindvall writes: "The theaters and nickelodeons were subtly, and most probably unconsciously, competing with churches for leisure time and money, as well as supplanting them in telling the old stories and myths."⁴

One of the most common criticisms of the theater was that it focused attention upon the human self rather than reinforcing the Christian virtue of unselfishness. In response, some religious leaders counterattacked critics on socioeconomic grounds, asking why the rich could watch similar stories live at the opera, while the poor man was denounced for seeing a show on film.

As early as 1909, the moving picture periodical *Nickelodeon* printed the article "Missionaries and Moving Pictures," which showed that churches and mission organizations were able to find a practical use for moving pictures. The article stated that "Hymns were thrown upon the screen at intervals while the audience sang."⁵

Lindvall writes that "before the end of the decade, *Moving Picture World*, *Motography*, and *Nickelodeon* would puff the cinema's triumphal replacement of the

saloon . . . that moving pictures were aiding the Temperance Movement, by keeping men inside the theatre rather than aimlessly wandering into bars."⁶

By 1920, the church and the cinema were at a zenith of symbiosis. In fact, over one hundred churches in New York city were using Hollywood produced films in their Sunday services. The Methodist convention even commissioned a film from D. W. Griffiths, for which it built the largest outdoor screen to that date.

But as the decade progressed, several public Hollywood scandals aroused the ire of American Protestants, which confirmed conservative worries about the moral influence of film. As the 1920s continued, without saloons to attack, this separation between faith and film widened as the Church reacted against the social changes of modernity and turned toward its fundamental roots.

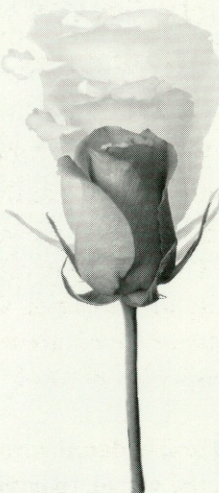
Experiential Relationship Between Cinema and Church

In his book *The Seventh Seal*, critic Melvyn Bragg writes:

And the cathedral, where congregations gather to see the great illuminated stories in glass, to watch the ritual performances on the stage of the altar, to follow, through the calendar, the great epic of Christianity with its

heroes, its villains, its disputes and digressions, its strange character parts, its compelling story-line, can be seen as the cinema of the pre-celluloid era.⁷

Clearly, both cinema and the church have employed similar devices to deliver their messages. Participating in the expression of human ultimate concern, cinema and the church draw from the same human communicative needs. These include story, sound, and image.



Story

Plot is memorable; language is portable. Without memory, faith falters, and without the word, faith disappears. Union of these, through story, gives us our soul.

There is something transcendent about the cinematic story. Wesley Kort writes that "character in narrative . . . [provides] an image of human possibilities or a paradigm of human potential."⁸ The mythos of film communicates a collective vision of what it means to be human. Like religion, film creates a culturally connected community. It promulgates our shared experiences, weaving our stories together, revealing a meaning bigger than the individual. Film circulates a truth universal, creating a congregation of shared ideas and emotions.

This canonical narrative of human experience, often of redemption, teaches us how to be better humans. Through story, film defines the good and the bad in a compelling and catholic manner. Think of John Wayne's characters, or *Dirty Harry*, or *The Godfather*. Cinema helps us know who the bad guys are, how we mess up our lives, abandon our friends, or fail to confront evil. It interrogates humanity's

tough questions, who to love, why we sometimes act destructively, and what is the meaning of redemption, the miracle of second chances.

Film incarnates our heroes and heroines. Humans have always used stories of their heroes to help explain why things happen and how to react. Our heroes have always been humans who were extra special. They are like us, but different, a little beyond, giving us something for which to strive. Aphrodite embodied beauty, Odysseus cunning. Dido teaches us about unrequited love. Gilgamesh explores the borders of friendship. Jesus Christ shows us divine love. Saint Francis of Assisi teaches us about compassion. Morgan Freeman informs us about duty. Woody Allen reflects our neuroses. Julia Roberts, Nicole Kidman, and Brad Pitt embody success and beauty.⁹

Celebrities today are modern saints. As mythic heroes, celebrities seem to transcend the mundane. The larger-than-life projection of ordinary people deifies them. Following their published exploits, the audience mixes reality with filmic fiction. Medieval believers read popular books called the *Lives of the Saints*. Just like any religious canon, the cinema story inspires through the union of human actors and transcending story.

Film is the most popular of shared American storytelling faiths. To watch film is to participate in

Can Filmmaking and Christianity Coexist?

A Conversation with Director
Rik Swartzwelder

By Alexander Carpenter

CARPENTER: How did you start making films?

SWARTZWELDER: I started in grade school, way before the video explosion. After my grandfather passed away, I asked my grandmother for his Super 8 camera, tripod, and home editing system. I got the neighborhood kids to act parts, we'd stay up late, and I'd recruit my family members. In a lot of ways, for me, it was like breathing. Plus, it really gave me something

to throw myself into after my parents divorced.

Part of the fun was that, as a kid, I could create a film world where I could control how things ended up. I think that is why so many of us love happy endings so much. The control that they require is so hard to find in real life.

CARPENTER: Why do you make films now?

SWARTZWELDER: When we premiered our latest film, *The Least of These*, in Washington, D.C., we did it at an art theater next to a documentary called *Porn Star*. At first I was really uncomfortable because I knew a lot of people coming to see my film would be offended by that title. But the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. Because that, to me, is the point. When we can have a story like *The Least of These*, which might nudge people toward God, side by side with a film called *Porn Star*—that is the reason I make movies.

CARPENTER: So, do you consider yourself a Christian director?

SWARTZWELDER: I wouldn't want to put myself in that kind of box. I prefer just being a director who is

our plot, to know ourselves better. Stories, such as the Christian/Hebrew Scriptures, are a record of defining experiences, not primarily an historical record of events, but an existential reel, a canon of meaning.

Music

This “perceived similarity of cinema to religion,” film historian Terry Lindvall writes, “provoked Communist critic Moussinac to protest against the movies’ mystical appeal in its luxuriously decorated cathedrals/palaces, where worshipping spectators would become ‘intoxicated.’”¹⁰ Interestingly, it was especially the organ music that reminded Moussinac too much of the appeal of the church.

Music combines rhythms and melodies and is often the most effective component of church services and movies. Free from the physical restriction of space, music expresses both the time and the timelessness

of human desires. The individual who sings “It Is Well with My Soul” or hears John Williams’s soundtrack soar participates in a community where feelings are collected and magnified. Sound with image forms memory.

Remember Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” in *Apocalypse Now Redux*, an echo of bombastic hopes of glory, or Mozart’s “Clarinet Concerto in A major,” which expresses love in *Out of Africa*? Recall fear in the two-note ostinato of *Jaws* or the liberty in the remixed melodies of *Moulin Rouge*?

Aristotle praised the theater because it gives people a place to go and watch their hopes and fears acted out on stage, causing them to be realized, shared, and purged. Greek theatrical choirs expressed the feelings of the audience, and most church appeal songs are used for precisely the same purpose. This cathartic realization happens as a group hears and feels the experience.

The revivalist with moving picture projector was perhaps
a precursor of the modern evangelist, roaming the conference
district with laptop and presentations in tow.



also a Christian. I don’t see myself exclusively as a religious filmmaker. At this point in my journey, I don’t feel compelled to make Bible movies or end-time movies. For now, I am much more fascinated by the contradictions and complications of trying to live today, in our postmodern world.

CARPENTER: You have done writing, acting, and directing. Which do you prefer?

SWARTZWELDER: It is all a fun process, but my favorite is probably writing. It’s the life of the story. You start with a script, then you bring in actors, and, if they are good, their own ideas will come out and sharpen the story even more. It’s also the one and only time in the process when there is virtually perfect control.

Next to writing, I’d have to say I like editing. It’s writing with pictures. It’s a close second. Actually, you could even call editing the final stage of the writing process.

CARPENTER: When you first became a Christian, did you feel any tension between your new beliefs and

your interest in film?

SWARTZWELDER: Absolutely. I was living in Florida at the time, writing for a sketch comedy show, like “Saturday Night Live.” We did that show for two and a half years and it got to be pretty successful. We sold out every show and it started getting bigger, and then I got into film school at the University of Central Florida in 1990. That was the same film class that included the guys who made *The Blair Witch Project*.

All of this was happening as I was making the decision to become a Christian. I wasn’t sure if filmmaking and Christianity could coexist. So I left film school. I traveled around the country. Ultimately, I ended up committing my life to Christ in January 1991. Then I moved back to Florida and worked as a maintenance man for a retirement community—all I did was read my Bible and go to church. It was an intense time.

Then, my mom called from Ohio. I had a great aunt and uncle in their nineties who were connected with Columbia Union College (CUC). My mother

Image

The cathedrals of the Middle Ages used religious iconography to tell the stories of the Bible, to remind people of their duties, and to show them what heaven and hell would look like. The stained glass and statues, the frescoes and wood carvings created a living canon of faith.

Martin Scorsese writes about his early memories of the movie theater. "The first sensation was that of entering a magical world—the soft carpet, the smell of fresh popcorn, the darkness, the sense of safety, and, above all, sanctuary—much the same in my mind as entering a church. A place of dreams. A place that excited and stretched my imagination."¹¹ Whether through the image of the priest or pastor backed by choir, illuminated stained glass, or megachurch video projection, sacred iconography incarnates the theater space.

Film genres inhabit a visual grammar, a familiar landscape of the mind: the compelling evil of Dark Vader's mask, the tempting red rose petals of *American Beauty*, the stark figure of Death in *The Seventh Seal*, or crazed Jack Nicholson yelling "Heeereee's Johnny" in *The Shining* while leering through the just-hacked hole in the door that separates him from his terrified wife.

called and encouraged me to go up there and take care of them and finish my degree. At CUC, I studied communication and religion and was getting a lot of encouragement to go into the ministry.

When I finally chose to attend Florida State University's graduate film school instead, I was told by some very loving but possibly misguided people that I was hardening my heart to God. That was tough stuff for a young Christian to hear.

CARPENTER: What part of film appealed to your new beliefs as you returned to the camera?

SWARTZWELDER: I saw very few films for a couple of years. I just kept praying and studying.

Then I saw three films in particular that nudged me toward graduate film school: *Leap of Faith*, *Groundhog Day*, and *Searching for Bobby Fisher*. Those three films told really compelling stories and said something on a level that affirmed to me that films could be entertaining and also something more. And then, honestly, I prayed.

Like the iconography of Scripture, spectacle draws spectators. The horned and hollow-eyed beasts of Daniel and Revelation have provided more than just an explanation of world events. They also solicit attention, like a horror movie poster. "A whole volume could well be written on the myths of modern man, on the mythologies camouflaged in the plays he enjoys, in the books that he reads," writes Mircea Eliade. "The cinema, that 'dream factory,' takes over and employs countless mythical motifs—the fight between hero and monster, initiatory combats and ordeals, paradigmatic figures and images (the maiden, the hero, the paradisaic landscape, hell, and so on)."¹²

Pioneering French film critic and Christian André Bazin reportedly quipped that film is a record of the everlasting face of God. The church is the body of Christianity, the daily incarnation, where the word is made flesh, visible, aesthetic. The cinematic image is the script incarnated, the text of life, illuminated manuscript.

The Hope of Faith and Film

Church and the cinema employ similar means, but to what end? Tillich has suggested that this common denominator is the experience of ultimate concern.¹³ So what is this ultimate concern of faith and film, of the religious in the broader sense? According to Kath Filmer, religion offers

It was a difficult decision, but I realized that as a Christian I had a worldview to share beyond the jokes of that comedy show. As great as it was, it was just entertainment. It was about making people laugh, which is good, but there is more. It's better to make people laugh and think. That's the challenge.

CARPENTER: You spoke about laughing and thinking. What would be the ideal effect of your work on an audience?

SWARTZWELDER: That is a hard question to answer. Good films are entertaining, which is not inherently bad. The best sermons are entertaining. The best parables are entertaining, in terms of conflict and compelling characters. I want my films to be entertaining, but more. I used to believe that a film should change someone, but I'm not sure I necessarily believe that anymore.

CARPENTER: What do you mean, "change someone"?

SWARTZWELDER: I think that it is very rare that someone watches a film and is immediately a different

people a framework for “looking at and explaining the human condition, and seeing in it something for hope,” as both reflector and directors of human experience, in which cinema and the church seek hope.¹⁴

Film expresses common experience, thereby creating a shared memory—just like attending church. Common vocabularies and common hopes link society together. Richard Rorty writes, “the vocabularies are, typically, parasitic on the hopes—in the sense that the principal function of the vocabularies is to tell stories about future outcomes which compensate for present sacrifices.”¹⁵ Religious communities not only share cultural/moral practices, but also ground these in an ultimately faithful vision.

Jesus told his followers to possess the faith of a child. Many sermons and books have been presented on what that childlike faith really is. Often simple, naïve, obedient to authority, or evangelistic, certainly pure, perhaps it is also imaginative. It might at first seem necessary to dismiss imagination from religion, perhaps in an attempt to get at reality, but pure reality gives

no transcendence, no hope. Without hope faith is dead.

Western traditional religion has always been uncomfortable with de-ploying the imaginative arts, often banning visual art, novels, plays, dances, and film because of the compelling fantasy world they present. But perhaps it is a bit of rivalry. What person hasn't dreamt at one time or another about what heaven will be like? These dreams of heaven are often tailored to fulfill personal needs and desires: gold mansions, country homes with vineyards, ruling planets, talking with animals.

This sounds like some movies. Film is often accused of being mere escape, but then so has religion. Perhaps the antipathy that popular religion expresses toward cinema stems from the fear that motion pictures provide a more accessible escape from the reality of the immediate. Instead of telling people to read and use their imaginations to construct heavenly pleasures, popular film gives it on demand and in Technicolor.

Just like any religious canon, the cinema story inspires through the union of human actors and transcending story.



person. Not impossible, but rare. Which is why I am not a big fan of most conversion movies, you know, where the gang leader becomes a preacher or whatever in ninety minutes or less.

Most folks watching those flicks are already converted anyway. Now, there's even talk about making fifteen-million-dollar Christian movies, which is a lot of money to spend on choir robes for the converted, on something explicitly religious.

CARPENTER: And artistically dubious.

SWARTZWELDER: Possibly. The last thing the church needs is more celebrity culture. We don't need a movie star version of the contemporary Christian music scene. We don't need Christian stars with entourages asking for 13 bottles of Evian or 10.4 cucumber sandwiches with the crusts cut off with exactly 1.9 ounces of tofu mayonnaise.

Oliver Stone has called cinema and the media “a drug.” A lot of the big, multimedia churches are trying to compete and hold people's attention with

the same techniques as the entertainment world. I think that this can ultimately exhaust us.

Now, please don't get me wrong, I participate in multimedia churches and am blessed by them. But sometimes, I just long to shut my ears and eyes to the noise and lights, and embrace the stillness of God.

On the other hand, some people think that unless art is explicitly religious then it can't be spiritual at all. Funny though, someone can be a Christian dentist and that doesn't mean that every client gets a gospel presentation. For some reason, artists are given different expectations.

CARPENTER: So perhaps we don't need a cross on every canvas?

SWARTZWELDER: Exactly. I believe that the passing along of stories that nudge people toward God is sacred work. Just like Jesus did. In all of his parables, most of which were not blatantly religious, many do not contain a conversion experience. They've lasted for centuries, nudging people toward a fuller

Conclusion

Both the church and the cinema fill a similar need of humanity: the will to hope. In their book *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*, Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart explain:

The quest for meaning, truth, goodness and beauty is closely bound up with hope as an activity of imagination in which we seek to transcend the boundaries of the present, to go beyond the given, . . . in search of something more, something better, than the given affords us. . . . Hope is a matter of both knowledge and will (we know what has happened before, and we know what we desire) but is characterized above all by the application of imagination and truth to a future which is essentially open and unknown. . . . Hope is, in this sense, an activity of imaginative faith."¹⁶

Much has been written and visually explored about film as dream factory. Much of the Judeo-Christian paradigm is constructed from the hopeful dreams and visions of its prophets. It is this imaginative aspect of

movies that visibly intersects with religion. Film and faith are both visionary experiences, and visions are imaginative spectacles, concerned with ultimate meaning.

The four highest grossing films (not necessarily aesthetically equal) in the last twelve months all celebrate imaginative hope. These are *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*, and *Spiderman*. Clearly, people are drawn to stories, music, images that transcend reality. Humans desire saviors, hope for the future, and triumph over evil. Movies are a reification of our dreams. Sci-fi, kung fu, Mary Poppins—it is all miracle.

Film, like faith, is a form of imaginative self-transcendence. By telling our collective stories, playing our tunes, and appealing to our eyes, cinema and the church allow people to protest in the face of the present, to say “no, there is something beyond all this. Something better.” It is a projection, a forward-looking to our deepest hopes, dreams, aspirations, fears. It is also a critique, giving people a voice to say they want something better.

Faith and film articulate our deepest concerns, thereby giving substance to our hopes and transcending the realities we see.

understanding of the spiritual.

CARPENTER: Filmmaking is full of artistic tension as the visions of the writers, producers, actors and directors are all mixed together. How do you work all that out?

SWARTZWELDER: Creative people do tend to have healthy egos and appreciate their share of control. So sometimes there is tension, but that is not always bad. I am still learning, and I enjoy the collaborative process. I appreciate it when someone has a good idea that makes the overall vision better. The Christian virtue of respecting different ideas applies here, too. I have been saved by others on countless occasions.

CARPENTER: You mentioned that you are still in the learning process. Who do you learn from?

SWARTZWELDER: Whenever I write a new script I send it out to some writer friends in Los Angeles to have them critique it. They are vicious with it, which is what I want. I also have some friends who are directors and we talk together about shots, about

mistakes. This is where some DVDs are great, too.

Listening to the director's commentary is like film school in your living room. But the best training I received as a writer was that comedy show. For those two and a half years, I got to do a lot of writing and make a lot of mistakes that not a lot of people will ever see, thankfully. Learning by doing is my best teacher by far.

CARPENTER: Who are your influences?

SWARTZWELDER: In terms of influences, I have to give a lot of credit to Frank Capra, especially for *Meet John Doe*, a film he made starring Gary Cooper in 1941. Also Barry Levinson (*Diner*, *Rain Man*, *Wag the Dog*) as a writer/director. I admire their work greatly.

I know this question regards cinematic influences but, honestly, my biggest influences have been and continue to be the people of faith around me who believe in what I'm trying to do and their relentless encouragement in the face of impossible odds.

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2. 95.29 (July 9, 1910): 46.
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4. Ibid, 105.
5. "Missionaries and Moving Pictures," *Nickelodeon*, Jan. 1909, 10, 16.
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7. Melvyn Bragg, *The Seventh Seal* (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 10-11.
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9. Clearly there is a place for evaluation here. Do these celebrities help or hurt our quest for meaning? Does popular film all too often perpetuate stereotypes and reduce serious issues to limp lines and contrived solutions? I am intentionally avoiding rating film content. This essay concerns the function of film and faith. It is a description—not a validation—of how film appeals to its audience.
10. Lindvall, *Silents of God*, x.
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15. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 86.
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Whether through the image of the priest or pastor backed by choir,
illuminated stained glass, or mega-church video projection, sacred
iconography incarnates the theater space.



In particular, this is true of Bryan Zervos, the executive producer of *The Least of These* and the upcoming *Old Fashioned*. His stubborn refusal to give up on me or the idea that making movies can be a noble endeavor has made all the difference. Columbia Union College was also exceptionally helpful with the production of *The Least of These*.

Now, I'm not trying to slip in a commercial for CUC here, but it is important to point out that filmmaking, though a lot of fun, is a difficult task. It is easy for institutions as well as individuals of faith to throw stones at Hollywood. It is another thing all together to rally behind those who are trying to "create cathedrals" of light and image and sound and emotion and thought.

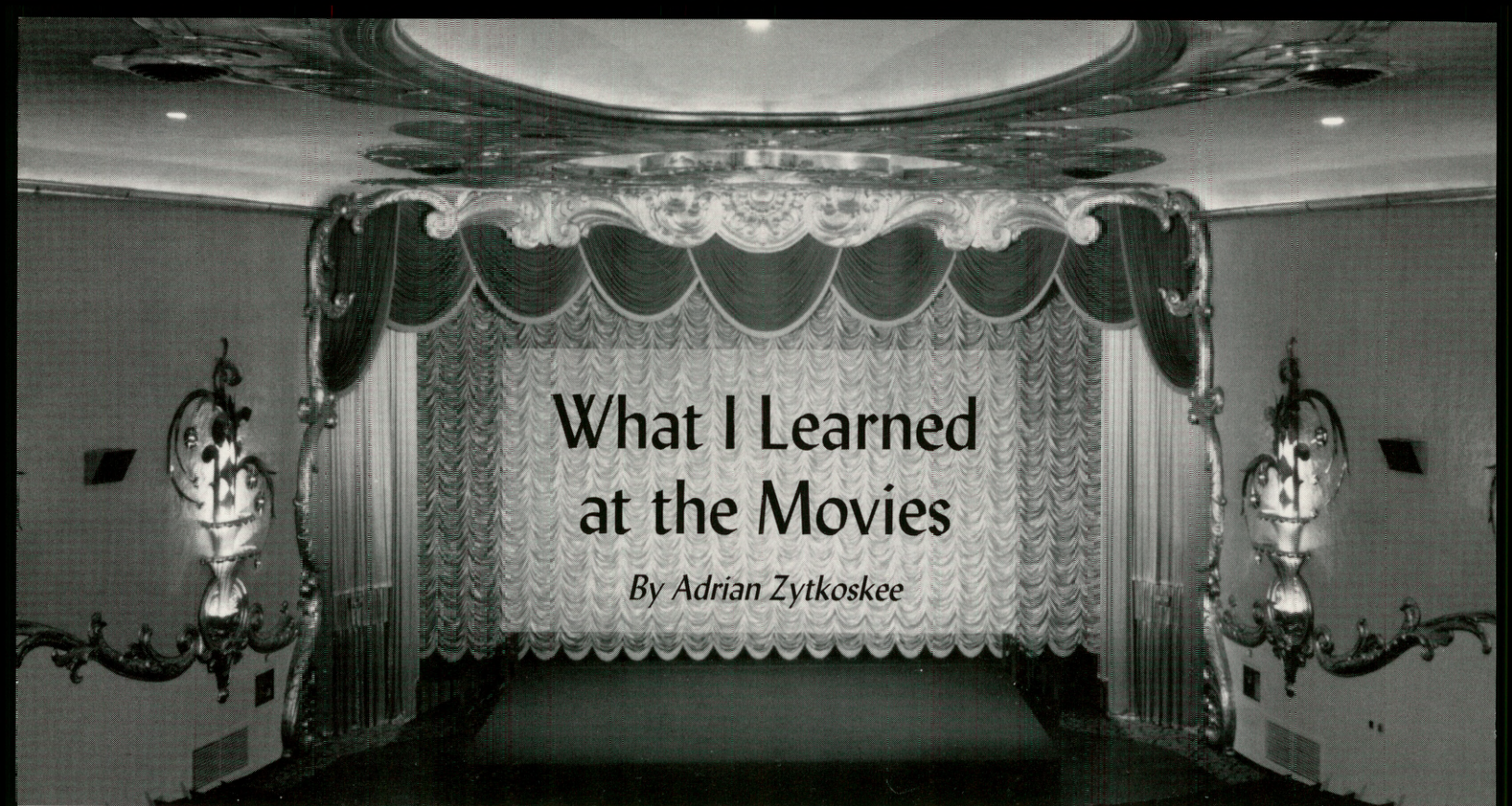
It is vitally important that faith communities invest not so much in the attack of movies they oppose, but rather in those artists in their midst who are struggling.

CARPENTER: What are you working on next?

SWARTZWELDER: God willing, a romantic comedy

called *Old Fashioned*. That's about all I can say at the moment. We're planning to shoot this fall, but it looks as though the success of *The Least of These* might actually affect our start date.

Then, after *Old Fashioned*, we've got another project we're cookin' up. Best advice I ever got in this biz is, "Enjoy it while it lasts." So, for as long as it lasts, I'm just glad to be able to use what Orson Welles called "a great paint box" to tell meaningful stories.



What I Learned at the Movies

By Adrian Zytkoskee

Photo: © 2002 Crest Theatre,
Sacramento, Calif.

Some people collect sermons. They have a whole library of taped sermons by a favorite preacher. They are moved and inspired as they listen to these sermons—sometimes over and over. They share them with friends and mutually rejoice in the blessing they have received.

I collect movies. Scores of DVDs. Some are laser discs from an earlier technology. A few are on VHS format. I seldom rent movies because if the movie in question is good I will want to see it many times, and if it is not good I will try very hard, with the help of some trusted movie critics, not to see it even once.

My friends all know that I collect movies. They also know that I take good movies seriously and that I enjoy it greatly when family and friends also appreciate these movies.

Why am I telling you this? Am I comparing movies to sermons? I see that I have asked two questions, but the answers are fairly simple. I am telling you about this hobby of mine, which has become an avocation in my retirement, because I have learned so much and I want to share what I have learned with you. I am comparing movies to sermons because, although I have learned much and received many blessings from sermons, I have learned more and received greater blessings from movies.

I will try to make my case but, as I do so, always remember that support for what I am about to say is experiential, not axiomatic.

Aren't Movies Dangerous?

The most traditional among us will worry that I am standing "on Satan's ground." Others will caution about the dangers of shoveling out a room

full of manure to find the hidden pony. (Interestingly, Ronald Reagan used this graphic anecdote to illustrate optimism.) Finally, and on a bit more sophisticated level, some will caution me about the dangers of buying into and supporting a corrupt culture in which movies are at the center. I take these concerns seriously and, in an effort to engage the argument, I will list a number of more specific reasons why I think movies can be dangerous.

1. They can be a waste of time.
2. When you support movies by renting or purchasing them and/or buying tickets to theaters, you may be supporting people or endeavors you don't believe in.
3. Movies can tell you lies.
4. Movies may feed cynicism.
5. The more sophisticated moviegoer may be tempted to scorn those whose tastes are simpler and more shallow.
6. Some movies may be of inferior quality.
7. Movies can give a distorted and negative picture of God.
8. Sometimes you are ashamed after watching a movie and happy that no one else watched it with you.

Review the list carefully. Then ask yourself this question: Does each item on this list also describe a danger you might encounter at church?

I would like to leave it there, but if this article is to start on an honest basis I must confess another danger for me in movies. My profound respect for good movies does bring out, from time to time, my curmudgeonly side. Some of my friends call it my Andy Rooney phase.

For example, while watching *Terms of Endearment* in a theater, I became so frustrated with the group behind me, whose members were chatting constantly and laughing at all the wrong places, that I could take no more. I stood up, turned around, and said to the startled miscreants, "Why don't you go to a movie you can understand?"

When watching a movie at home with a group of friends, one of whom is distracting the rest with talk, I have also been known to put the movie on pause until the talker realizes that all attention is on him or her and that until he/she stops talking the movie will not resume.

The final example of my unpleasant behavior comes when a TV watcher is asked whether he or she has seen a particular movie, and responds, "I think I saw parts of it." I sometimes say, "Well, I wouldn't know what that

feels like because I have never had the experience of seeing part of a movie, at least not a good one."

Love Affair with Movies

I was raised a Seventh-day Adventist. The Church of my youth believed that going to movies was wrong. Many members still condemn moviegoing, but since the advent of television the argument is not as clear as it once was. Still, I can remember being taken as a very small boy to see newsreels, which were considered okay.

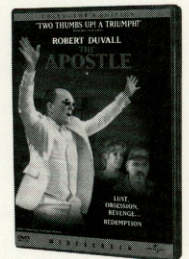
How excited I was as I watched my dad buy admission tickets while I stood to one side finishing my orange sherbet cone, the closest thing we had to ice cream during those wartime days. Then we would go into the cool, dark theater, stumbling to find seats during the continuously running film, and settle in to the portentous voice of the newsreel commentator, who described events in the European and Pacific theaters.

Hearing the word *theater*, I visualized events depicted in it as somehow taking place on a stage. Undoubtedly, the highlight of those early moviegoing days was the time we saw a depiction of the bloody battle for the Pacific island of Tarawa. There, standing in a line of battle-weary Marines, was my maternal uncle, taking his helmet off and showing the hole where a bullet had struck.

Subsequently, my father became an Adventist minister, and, more specifically, the superintendent of schools and youth leader for an Adventist conference in the Midwest. Part of his job was to preview 16mm films for showing in church schools.

One film he brought home was a dramatized version of the persecution of Quakers in seventeenth-century London. As I saw rocks flying through windows and families cowering in fear, I was certain that I watched a realistic depiction of the persecution about to come upon me and my family, since certainly we lived in the time of the end.

At that time, I attended a church school/junior academy, which, in today's parlance, would be called "an inner city school." It was a surprisingly unsheltered environment. I remember hard-core pornography being passed around on the school yard. We smaller boys admired one of the tenth graders because the story of his brother, who was not involved in law enforcement, had been featured on a radio program called *Gangbusters*.





"South Park" creator Matt Stone talks about growing up in Littleton, Colorado, and the effect it had on him, in *Bowling for Columbine*.



Skipping school, hanging out at Taco Bell, talking to Mike about violence, health care, and world politics, in *Bowling for Columbine*.

I also recall a sixth grader who sought and got attention by exposing himself on the playground to members of both sexes.

I tell these things because of a startling irony: None of my fellow students went to movies. Apparently, this was a great sin equaled only by that of eating pork. (Fortunately or unfortunately, as the case may be, my understanding of what constituted pork was cloudy and I enthusiastically ate wieners and bologna with my maternal relatives, never thinking for a moment that I was eating pork.)

Not until I was fourteen and about to become a junior in an Adventist secondary school was my percolating affair with movies consummated. The occasion was a triple feature, no less, and one of the features starred Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. This was dangerous ground.

I did not become a moviegoer in earnest until my freshman year in college. Being a relatively unrestricted "village" student, I went to three or four movies each week. Midway through my college courses, I met and married my wife, who has been with me almost fifty years. Moviegoing then became more enjoyable because I had a dependable companion and, after the movie, could discuss with her what we had seen at a local drive-in, which featured burgers, fries, and shakes at two meals for a dollar.

But this affair with the movies could not last. After all, I had decided to enter the "work," that is, church employ. One day, I came home to the little converted garage in which my wife, new baby daughter, and I lived and announced that I was turning over a new leaf, which excluded moviegoing. My wife cooperated, so I began a monastic period in terms of movie attendance. This enforced abstinence lasted for more than twenty years.

However, as with some religious celibates today, I was not completely faithful to my vows. Without

telling anyone, I went to such scandalous films as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Mary Poppins*, *China Syndrome*, *All the President's Men*, and *The French Connection*. But I avoided movies in theaters until discovering that theaters with huge wraparound screens called Cinerama were considered safe, probably because they showed mostly travelogues at first. I went openly to a few of these theaters, usually accompanied by fellow teachers or ministers.

Meanwhile, my children were growing up and surreptitiously attending movies. My wife knew because she saw the ticket stubs. (They told us they had gone bowling, an irony because bowling had been forbidden when we were growing up.) We tried hard to limit their moviegoing, but television undermined our best arguments.

One of the common arguments against moviegoing at that time was the supposedly poor environment of theaters. This was a weak argument, at best, because movie theaters had no environment other than being a better place to see films than on TV or in an auditorium. Critics produced quotations about guardian angels being left at the door of theaters, refusing to accompany their charges into such wicked places. But this convinced almost no one and gave rise to a slightly sacrilegious joke that the entrance to a movie theater was the safest place to be because of all the angels congregated there.

I finally decided to break my vows and attend a good movie with the whole family, some of whom were already adults and married. I knew my wife would be happy to make this change, but would be worried about what others, including our children, thought. Soon after, a copy of *Time* magazine arrived at our home, and featured in it was the soon-to-be-released film *Kramer vs. Kramer*. Our family, along with some close friends, went to the movie, laughed and



Arwen (Liv Ullmann) assures Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) of his destiny as leader of men, in the *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.



Frodo (Elijah Wood) learns that there may be another way into Mordor, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

wept, and felt remarkably blessed.

And so I come to the point of my story: to share things I have learned at the movies—mostly during the last twenty-five years

What I Have Learned at the Movies

Something I have learned to my disappointment is that many Adventists are not very discriminating movie watchers. I can think of at least two reasons. One, currently not as prevalent as it once was, is expressed by the English proverb, “In for a penny, in for a pound.” Or, to provide a scriptural foundation, consider the text that maintains we have broken all commandments if we have broken one. From another perspective, if you picnic with the devil, why worry about which table you choose?

The other reason is similar: the apocalyptic idea that the world is corrupt and evil, and that it will soon be destroyed. What possible good could come out of it? Both of these reasons tend to depict discrimination between good and bad movies as a waste of time.

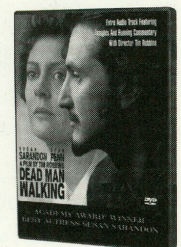
In contrast, I will discuss positive lessons, insights, epiphanies, and so forth that I have learned from watching good movies and taking them seriously. This discussion reflects my discovery that there are good movies and bad movies, which has nothing to do with the official rating system and is not purely subjective. Although tastes may differ, with some people liking some movie genres that I do not, there are still rational, objective criteria for evaluation.

These criteria may be stated in many ways. Here

are mine, organized into categories. These criteria are not designed to be used as one watches a movie, especially the first time.

Rather they should be used afterward. I like to use a one-to-ten scale, considering a movie good if it ranks high on at least two or more criteria and bad if unusually low on two or more.

1. Truth: A truthful movie says something about humans or the human condition that we instinctively know to be true. Fiction and fact are irrelevant here.
2. Honesty: This differs from truth because it deals with internal consistency. A movie should be true to its own premises, exhibit careful attention to detail, and demonstrate internal plausibility.
3. Respect: Moviemakers should respect characters in their films even though those characters might be flawed. A movie should not be contemptuous of its protagonists.
4. Beauty: A good movie is cinematically beautiful. Even more important, in my judgment, it has good writing.
5. Engaging: I don't want to attend a movie that has me looking at my watch every few moments. Some movies engage through suspense, for example, *Jagged Edge*. Others fascinate through a clash of cultures, for instance, *Witness*. Some hold viewers spellbound through a “there but for the grace of God go I” feeling, as in *A Simple Plan*, whereas others captivate through philosophical challenge, for example, *Fanny and Alexander*.





(Ian McKellen) Gandalf returns from his battle with the Balrog as Gandalf the White in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

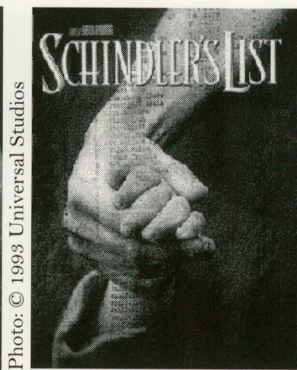


Photo: © 1993 Universal Studios

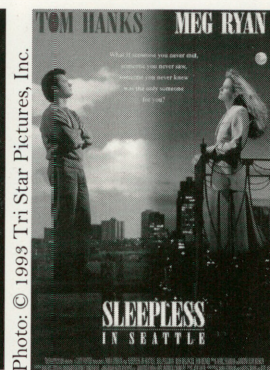


Photo: © 1993 Tri Star Pictures, Inc.

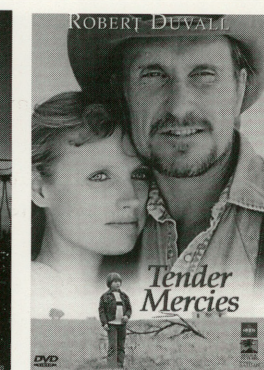


Photo: © Universal Studios

One of my all-time favorites, *African Queen*, taught me that I could choose to see the glass half-empty or half-full. The dark view is to see Katherine Hepburn's character as losing her faith while becoming secular and involved with a questionable character named Charlie, played by Humphrey Bogart. The brighter view is to see her becoming a better and nicer person, and to understand that her influence and love helped Charlie shed his misanthropic, self-centered ways.

Babette's Feast helped me fully understand for the first time why Mary Magdalene was commended by Jesus for her extravagant gift, whereas the apparently more deserving Martha received no special commendation.

Spalding Gray, in the fascinating monologue film *Swimming to Cambodia*, graphically posits a cloud of evil that encircles the earth and every so often touches down in places such as Hitler's Germany or the Cambodia of Pol Pot. Three unquestionably great movies that help us see the definition of that terrible cloud while at the same time celebrating the triumphant individual human spirit are *Schindler's List*, *Sophie's Choice*, and *The Killing Fields*.

Christ commends us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Doing this takes imagination and the ability to see the world through other people's eyes, particularly the eyes of those who have experienced bigotry and condemnation. *Philadelphia* is a moving example of many such films. On a similar theme, but triumphantly celebrating the unity that can come from diversity, is *Remember the Titans*.

Conventional wisdom assumes that Hollywood is opposed to family values and, consequently, to families themselves. Two of the most entertaining films I have

seen that depict and honor families that are flawed in differing ways but that still represent honor, duty, faithfulness, and love are *Moonstruck* and *Liberty Heights*.

One very popular genre of films is called romantic comedy. The solemn among us will find it a challenge to derive any spiritual lesson from such films. But two of my favorites in this genre effectively portray the tenderness and longing that God has placed in our romantic human relationships, and they do so without resorting to on-screen depiction of sexual resolution for these longings. These movies are *Return to Me* and *Sleepless in Seattle*.

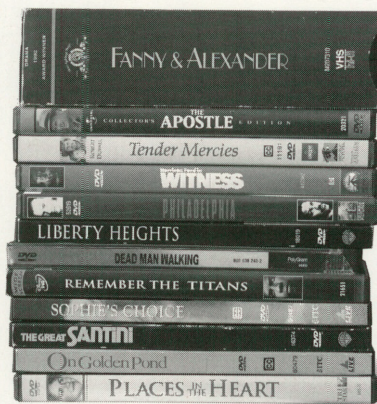
The Bible is a book of many stories. As far as I can tell, God and his ways are better understood through stories than through propositions.

To the surprise of many, not all of the Bible stories are about righteousness and triumph. Some of the Bible characters are significantly flawed. Two films that demonstrate goodness in unlikely vessels are *The Great Santini* and *The Apostle*. It is not a coincidence that one of my favorite actors, Robert Duvall, stars in both.

I learned from *Witness*, a film that is almost perfect, to understand better different cultures and their

approaches to faith. With regard to the word *witness*, many of us have been educated to believe that failure to witness may cause souls to be lost. We call this *evangelism*, which emphasizes personal salvation. However, if we take seriously Jesus' own witness in the Sermon on the Mount we see a very strong ethical and social component.

One current example of a man committed to an ethical message he considers vital is Michael Moore, who has written, directed, and acted in *Bowling for*



Columbine, a documentary many believe will be the most watched and significant documentary ever made. Readers for whom this movie resonates can witness for what they believe by taking friends to see this movie. Although they might disagree with Moore's perspective, they must still recognize the movie as a persuasive and artistic presentation. If a credible opposing side exists, let a worthy documentarist come forward and make the movie.

Erik Erikson, the late great developmental psychologist, constructed what became known as the eight stages of life. Each stage involves a conflict that, if satisfactorily resolved, builds toward a successful resolution of the next stage's conflict. The last stage, which is where, to my astonishment, I find myself, involves the conflict of integrity vs. despair.

Two films that help us to look squarely but sympathetically at what it means to grow old with integrity and what it means to be still alive are the popular *On Golden Pond* and *Wasn't That a Time*, a documentary of a folk singing group called the Weavers and their last concert.

I will never forget the surprising and intensely moving communion service at the end of *Places in the Heart*. That scene made the idea of Christ's Kingdom, so misunderstood by his disciples, become real in a small town in Texas suffering through the Great Depression.

I have saved the two best movies for last. A most moving portrayal of simple love, which results in redemption, is found in the film *Tender Mercies*. If you haven't seen this movie get the DVD and watch it. If you think it too slow and somewhat boring, go see the latest James Bond film and enjoy the contrast, but when you tire of the nonstop action return to *Tender Mercies*.

Watch and listen as Mac Sledge, a recovering alcoholic country singer played by Robert Duvall in an Oscar-winning performance makes one of the most poignant movie speeches ever made. While distractedly hoeing in his garden, he speaks of his daughter's death in an automobile accident caused by her drunken husband. "I don't trust happiness," Mac concludes, "I never have and I never will." However, redemption, followed by happiness he has never known, does come to Sledge.

A number of Christian songs depict Jesus as a good friend. Some even suggest that he is our only true friend. I don't know exactly what it means to describe our relationship with the Divine as friendship. But I do know that the only way I can understand, worship, feel the presence of, or experience the Divine in any way is through another human being.

Of all films ever made, *Dead Man Walking* most effectively portrays God's love and unconditional

Looking for a Good Movie?

Christian Movie Reviews on the Web

By Lemuel Bach

Many Christians enjoy watching movies, but they worry about which ones are "good" in several senses of the word. The following Web sites may be one way for readers to find the best movies.

ChristianityToday.com

I found ChristianityToday.com's movie reviews fiendishly difficult to locate. Usually, if I want to read about a movie online I go to MSN.com, click on "entertainment," and then go to "movies" to be quickly linked to pictures and short reviews. But on *Christianity Today's* homepage, the category "entertainment" conspicuously lacks the subcategory "movies."

Using ChristianityToday.com's search engine, the visitor can type in either a movie title or "film forum" and find reviews. Then they can read the most current ones, all of which are written by Jeffrey Overstreet.

Overstreet's reviews are surprisingly well-balanced, probably because he quotes a wide variety of sources, both secular and religious, in favor of and against whatever film he reviews. These sources vary from *Rolling Stone* to *Focus on the Family*.

Overstreet adds his own opinion, which is connected both to his Christian beliefs and to his knowledge of good films. He even recommends age groups appropriate for films under review.

HollywoodJesus.com

I disliked this page at first, and loudly expressed that opinion to others.

This site tries to cater to a wide audience. The home page says, "Everyone welcome! Hindus, Jews, Christians, Wiccans, Muslims, New Agers, Atheists, Agnostics, Gay, Straight. Come in. Enjoy. Post your views!"

CONTINUED PAGE 29

mercy. In the movie, Susan Sarandon, who plays the true story of Sister Prejean, a courageous nun, whispers in the ear of a convicted murderer played by Sean Penn on his way to the death chamber, "Matthew, the last face you see will be the face of love."

The Big Question

I have described a lifelong love affair with movies. This is an important part of my life, but not the part I once considered most important. My greatest concern was how to answer the big question. The big question can be asked in many different ways but always seeks to answer that which is most basic and helps us gain insight into the one best way of living, the one key that gives meaning to our apparently random and chaotic existence.

Where did we come from and when? What is the meaning of and reason for evil? Why does a blood sacrifice get rid of evil? What exactly happens when we die? Am I certain that my church's complex and literal scenario of the Second Coming, the New Jerusalem, the final attack by the wicked, the affirmation of God's plan by the righteous, and the live-happily-ever-after conclusion will happen just as my church has predicted?

If these elements are all or in part not literally true, then what *are* the meanings of our lives? How do we explain the tragedies around us? How do we relate to the miracle of birth and the apparent finality of death? What is salvation and how do we obtain it?

When I attended one of the Church's boarding academies, one of our week of prayer speakers asked the big question. Each meeting, he sang in a nice tenor voice, "Are You Ready for Jesus to Come?" I had no doubts as to what that meant. It meant quitting sinning and knowing what sin was. But I had tried in the past, and two weeks was probably my record for sinlessness. So I approached each week of prayer with an attitude of "not this time." Then the pressure would become too much and I would move from grudging reluctance to tearful surrender and start the cycle once more. This time, I would succeed; I could not bear to fail again.

Later, someone described this as legalism and told me that I could let God answer the big question. All I needed to do was spend time each day with my devotions—early morning was recommended—and I would lose the desire to sin because God would abide in me. For

years I tried to develop a devotional life so that I could experience what others testified to.

I concluded that salvation depended on an introspective approach and that I would surely know it if Christ truly abided in me. I experienced some of the angst and terror that Calvin's followers in Geneva must

have felt as they frantically searched their souls to see if they were among the elect or damned. I actually longed for the days of simple legalism when I knew what was expected of me.

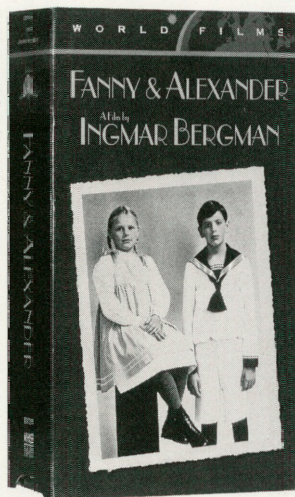
During this period, the pastor of a college church I attended told me that the answer to the big question was easily found. The explanatory principle that answered everything was the great controversy between Christ and Satan. I had become more contentious through the years, and this explanation, which I thought simplistic and pious, was more than I could take. I told the pastor that in the

many statistics and research design courses I had taken I had learned that a plus/minus theory could explain everything after the fact, but predict nothing in advance.

I then tried another approach. I knew that the two basic building blocks of our church were crumbling under constant attack. The first was the authority of Ellen White, the nineteenth-century founder of our church, who was thought to have a prophetic gift. She herself never claimed to be equal to the Bible prophets, but she had great influence in our church, even long after her death. Her counsel convinced me that I would be lost unless I developed a consistent and satisfactory devotional life.

Many others in our church were living lives of guilt and/or rebellion because of the way Ellen White's writings had been interpreted. The fact that she was dead and could neither defend nor explain herself made it easy for those in authority to use her as an instrument of control. Finally, it was shown incontrovertibly that her writings were not all original. For me, her writings then lost much of their former authority, which had been greater than Scripture because they were more explicit and, unlike cultures reflected in the Bible, originated from one more like ours.

The second building block was the apocalyptic expectation of the soon-coming Savior. Our church came out of the nineteenth century Millerite movement, which, using a complicated series of dates derived from Daniel and Revelation, predicted that the Second



Coming of Christ would occur in 1844. Events of the time—including the terrible Lisbon earthquake in 1755; the Dark Day of 1780, a frightening event in New England probably triggered by forest fires to the north; and a spectacular meteor shower in 1833—were all thought to be signs of the end.

However, Christ did not return in 1844, and the Adventist Church grew out of the disappointment and went on to remarkable growth and success. But the Millerite dates have lost their prophetic cachet as they receded into the past. A state of extreme readiness could not be maintained as the generations sped by.

So I turned to the living church, the community of believers of which my paternal and maternal families had been part for four generations. When I looked at our hospitals, schools, mission program, program for disaster relief, and media savvy, I was proud to be an Adventist. I felt that the answer to the big question could be found in the “community of faith,” to use a term beloved by theologians. I resolved to work within my community, to help make it worthy of the exalted status I had given it.

But, to my disappointment, I found that community riven by mistrust and accusations of heresy. I wanted the community to be the standard for justice, honesty, mercy, tolerance, and support for one another, and, finally, for humility as opposed to self-importance. But I found the opposite.

Examples are many, but I will limit myself to only a few. For example, one top-level church leader called religion teachers in Adventist colleges “a cancer that must be excised.” In addition, my church, which had long prided itself on not having or conforming to a constricting creed, but of following instead the Bible as a living document, held a heresy trial. A jury of “peers,” that is, religion teachers, found him guilty, even though the members of the jury were not honest about their own far less orthodox views. Perhaps most disappointing was the loss of perspective and balance in the community and its reaction with fury to mild and healthy efforts to satirize these developments. Here were shades of Erasmus.

If the church community did not hold the answer to the big question, where could I find it? I attempted to integrate philosophy, particularly epistemology, with my basic Christian orientation. How do we know that anything is true? I reviewed once more the notes from a seminar I took from Karl Popper, perhaps the twentieth century’s preeminent philosopher of science. He taught us that we could never know for certain what was true but we could be quite certain of

Flashing lights and rainbow-colored letters accompany this welcome. Still, the site is easy to use. Pictures from movies, each a link, are spread out on the home page. A single click on a picture takes the visitor to an enormous page for each movie, which includes other pictures, written reviews, and theatrical previews.

These reviews don’t seem as spiritual as those on *Christianity Today’s* Web site because, I think, the intended audience is so broad. Of course, that broadness might be good at times. For example, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* doesn’t have an especially spiritual message, and one shouldn’t try to force one out of it. On the other hand, the reviewers use *Solaris* to bring up questions about life after death, for example, because *Solaris* itself raises such questions.

CinemaInFocus.com

This is a user-friendly site. Just click on “movie reviews” to see an extensive list of movies, each reviewed in this site’s consistent style. In addition to being user friendly, CinemaInFocus.com is also visually simple, unlike the garish and sometimes distracting HollywoodJesus.com.

The reviews on this site discuss the basic idea and story of each movie. Then, near the end, they relate their reviews to spiritual questions or ideas. The reviews often raise questions about human nature, the nature of the universe or of God, or how to live a good life. The reviewers even add numbered discussion questions, giving their essays the feel of Bible studies. This is one site that *did* raise tough questions about *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

That’s a quick look at places on the Web for Christian movie reviews. In *Titanic*, I wept when Rose said that Jack had saved her in “every way a woman can be saved.” Not only do I believe movies can evoke emotion, I also believe they can express Christian beliefs.

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those things that are false.

I drew some comfort from these ruminations, but this was an intellectual odyssey without color, imagery, or spirituality, and thus lacked the power to motivate and satisfy. I turned once more to the movies and, surprisingly, found a satisfactory answer to the big question.

Ingmar Bergman as Theological Mentor

I had seen *Fanny and Alexander*, a beautifully filmed epic in Swedish with English subtitles, twice. But not until I viewed it the third time did I recognize the way it explicitly sought to answer the big question. The movie is autobiographical, as are many of Bergman's films.

Alexander is a young boy and Fanny his younger sister. They are raised in an extended family with lots of color, noise, food, celebrations, and love. There is also a considerable amount of dysfunctional behavior. Alexander's father runs a theater, which includes action on a life-sized stage and a small puppet stage. The little world of the puppets fascinates Alexander.

This idyllic existence ends when Alexander's father dies and his mother marries the handsome but stern bishop. The colors in the film turn stark, and the life and music disappear. As in the film, Bergman's experience with Christianity left him bitter. For Bergman, Christianity was the last place to seek answers to the big question. But Bergman's film, although rejecting the Christianity he grew up with for lacking the ultimate answers, looks to other worldviews. Judaism, non-Judeo-Christian religions, and paganism all get their turn with their own color and imagery. But they all fall short.

Near the end of the film, Gustav Adolf, an uncle to Fanny and Alexander and the oldest surviving son in his family, gives a speech at the close of the extended family's beautiful and sumptuous Christmas dinner. Gustav has previously been described as a man who is especially "kind to young women," but despite his well-known flaws the family is prepared to listen.

"My dear, dear friends," he begins.

"I am more moved than I can say. My wisdom is simple and there are people who despise it. But I don't give a damn. (Forgive me Mama. You think I am talking too much. I will be brief.) We Ekdahls have not come into the world to see through it. We are not equipped for that. We might just as well ignore the big things. We must live in the little world. We shall be content with that. . . .

"Let us be kind, generous, affectionate, and good. It is necessary and not at all shameful to

take pleasure in the little world. Good food, gentle smiles, fruit trees in bloom, waltzes. . . . My dearest friends. I am finished. And you can take it for what you like, sentimental pleasures or the pitiful babbling of an old man."

However, for me, this "pitiful babbling" contains a profound truth that I only discovered after years of searching, and then with the help of a movie. I now know that the big question can never be answered by philosophers and theologians with their comprehensive worldviews. It cannot be answered by scientists probing the edges of alternate realities.

The big question is answered best by things we take for granted. By the "face of love" in *Dead Man Walking*; by Tess Harper's prayer, thanking God for his *Tender Mercies*, as Robert Duvall drives up and down the highway fighting his urge to drink away the sorrow caused by his daughter's death and finally comes home saying, "I'm not drunk. I stopped at the liquor store but I poured it out. I drove by and saw you and Sonny watching the TeeVee. Did you see me drive by?"

The big question is answered best by living in the small world described by Gustav Ekvahl. For me, that world is defined by the daily companionship of a partner I have had for almost fifty years. The small world includes the e-mail correspondence with grandchildren who are emerging into the adult world, completing their education, and finding life partners.

The small world is blessed by the comfort of old friends visiting, reminiscing, and, yes, watching movies. The small world even includes the natural process of growing old, rejoicing each day one's health is good enough to be outside walking together, the willingness to face death without fear because, like Paul, we can claim to have "fought a good fight." Citing Erikson, we can maintain integrity and reject despair.

I close with one more movie reference. Meryl Streep was interviewed on "Actor's Studio," a regularly shown television program. One standard question asked of all interviewees is, "What will be God's first words when you see him on that great Judgment Day?"

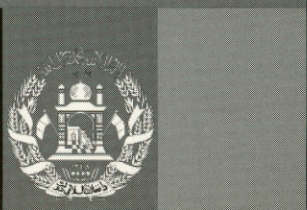
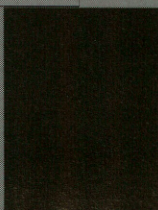
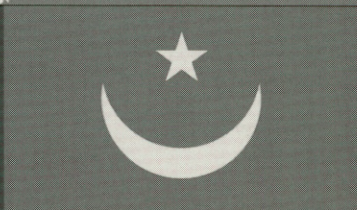
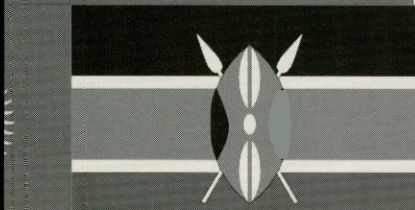
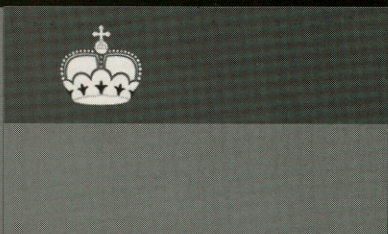
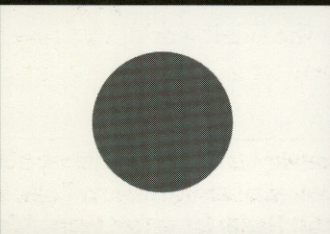
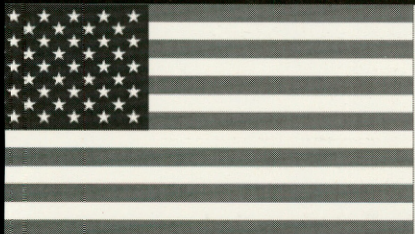
Her quick response was, "Everybody in."

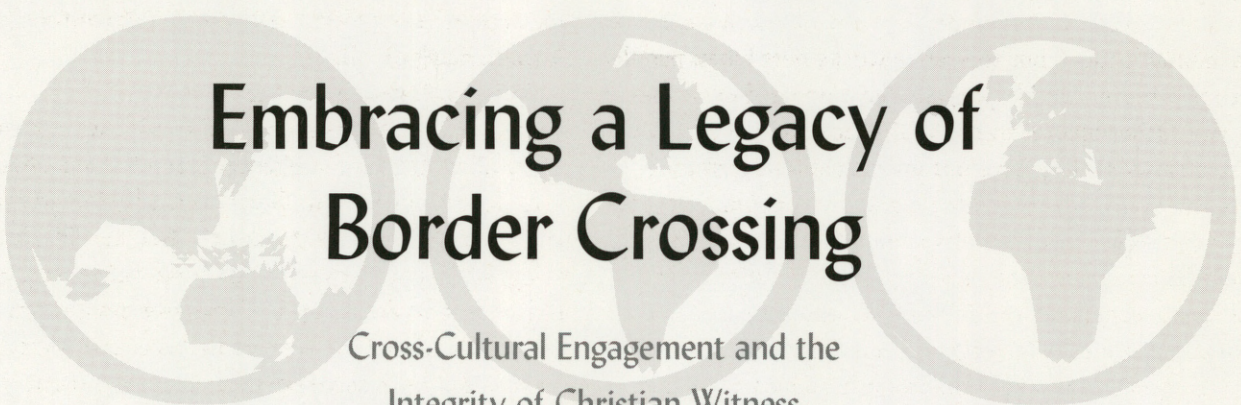
In the small world, that may be enough. Movies can help us to keep living in that world.

After serving as an educational superintendent in three conferences, teaching at two colleges, and working with Adventist Health for sixteen years, Adrian Zytoskee retired as a senior vice president in 2000. He currently lives in Placerville, California.



Cross-Cultural Conversations





Embracing a Legacy of Border Crossing

Cross-Cultural Engagement and the
Integrity of Christian Witness

By Charles Scriven

You meet others every day. Some look and sound the way you do. They are “your people.”

Some are different. They wear baseball caps at weird angles, and you don’t. They eat fried okra, and you eat mashed potatoes. They talk fancy and you talk plain. They’re richer than you, or poorer.

The differences may involve conviction, life-shaping belief. Some people are Catholic, and you’re Pentecostal. Some vote Republican, and you vote Democratic. Some go on and on about injustice, and wink at infidelity. Others dwell on personal values and hard work, and go along with a society of haves and have-nots.

Now and then you meet people—on television or, these days, right where you live and work—who are *really* different. They have a whole different religion from yours. They grow long beards, or cover their hair and faces, or they shave their heads and wear wispy robes and live apart from the hurly-burly in communities of meditation.

Some people, you learn, use animals for food that you thought were household pets, or find genital mutilation of infant girls acceptable, or train children to blow themselves up for a cause. And from another perspective, it may be just as shocking that you give the elderly so little honor, or consume so much of the world’s resources, or drive around dressed in a bikini.

Variety is a fact. The dark side of variety is reckless passion for what “my people”—the people I know and identify with—think best. All too often, this passion churns into violence, leaving behind a rubble of broken hearts and dreams. Think Bosnia, Rwanda, Palestine, Angola, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka. Recall the ferocious discord of American inner cities, now and then still breaking out. Remember the World Trade

Center. The places are familiar, and the list long.

One solution, widely put forward, is tolerance. It's a fashionable ideal, but tolerance works best when people are prosperous and happy, and have no need of scapegoats. Otherwise, even the well educated may turn on the strangers they have put up with and kept at arm's length, little known and little understood. Our parents and grandparents were alive when Germany, then the best-educated country in Europe, skidded into ever-deeper resentment and self-doubt, and in the end turned its murderous rage against the Jews.¹

You may marvel at "the basic similarity of humans / And their tiny grain of dissimilarity,"² and that tiny grain may be as winsome as the changing seasons. But it may also set minds on edge, make voices shrill, goad people into savage acts.

That is why the encounter with others is no matter of indifference. Attention must be paid: when you meet another person, you hold the future in your hands. Whether you enhance that future or debase it depends on how you feel, think, and act. And the Christian responsibility for these interactions cannot be overstated. Worldwide, if not in the developed countries, religion has growing influence, and among

the world's religions, Christianity, so one authority declares, will leave on the twenty-first century the deepest mark of all.³

What will that mark be?

It is said that a man dressed as a clown appeared at the trial, in 1997, of a Frenchman who was charged with deporting Jews to Germany. The defendant was said to have done this during the Second World War, when the French government cooperated with Hitler, and Jews who ended up in Germany most often met with death. After the war, he had escaped notice and risen to an impressive position in government.

The clown suit was an expression of outrage; it dramatized the absurdity of what had happened. But the man who wore the clown suit was barred from entering the courtroom. Nevertheless, he returned in street dress. He attended the remainder of the trial, and when the guilty verdict was finally announced, a court attendant heard him say: "Without truth, how can there be hope?"⁴

How can truth come into play when you encounter others? How can exchanges among persons who are different from one another build hope and not despair?

According to the Bible, God addressed human

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brokenness by challenging a man and his family to become repairers of brokenness. Abraham and his seed, God declared, would be the bearers of blessing for all, the first peacemakers. The Hebrew people had no interest in abstract truth, no interest in knowledge for its own sake. But they did have a passion for saving truth, for knowledge applied to human need and aimed at the healing of relationships. Without saving

selves; and what is more, this woman belonged to a culture and an ethnic group the Jews had little time for.

But she knew the reputation Jesus had for healing, and her daughter was desperately ill. So, prostrating herself, she begged for healing mercy. According to Matthew, Jesus ignored her. And the disciples, who thought her a pest, urged him to "Send her away" (15:23).

At this Jesus opened his mouth: "I was sent only to

It was in the going—in the long journey to a strange world and world of strangers—that Abraham and his seed would become the first peacemakers.

truth, there could be no hope.

When God said "all the families of the earth" would be "blessed" through Abraham, the first word was "Go." "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house'" (Gen. 12:1-3).⁵ It was in the going—in the long journey to a strange world and world of strangers—that Abraham and his seed would become the first peacemakers.

Connecting with people who are different would be, in other words, their daily lot. They would be strangers themselves, and would, as God said another time, love the strangers they met (Deut. 10:19). In crossing borders, they would bear the blessing, and instead of merely tolerating others, they would interact with them.

One of the best border-crossing stories to emerge from this legacy is about Jesus' entrance into the region of Tyre and Sidon. The story shows the difficulty of truthful encounter with another, and it shows the rewards that follow effort, even halting effort.

In Tyre and Sidon and its surroundings, strangers abounded. The Greek-speaking city dwellers looked down on Jewish farmers in the countryside, and the Jewish farmers looked down on them. Ethnic tension bristled. When Jesus arrived, he had already collected followers and established a ministry of teaching and healing. But he had also begun to sense the danger in his mission. Herod, the puppet governor, had executed John the Baptist, a man whose vision Jesus largely shared. That execution seemed ominous.

Feeling the strain, Jesus entered a house, hoping, Mark tells us, that no one would know he was there (7:24-30). But a woman found him. This was in itself remarkable. Women then had no right to assert them-

the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). According to Matthew, that's how he saw his mission, and that's why he was ignoring the woman's supplications: she was a Canaanite, outside the house of Israel. When she persisted, Jesus dismissed her with a pointed ethnic reference: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (15:26).

As a boy, Luke tells us, Jesus had sat long hours listening to the rabbis and asking questions. He had been eager to learn. Luke says that as he grew in years, he "increased in wisdom . . . , and in divine and human favor" (2:46, 52). Now, encountering a person who was different from him, and who refused to be docile, Jesus was about to grow again. The woman, hearing his sharp words, would come back with an eye-opening rejoinder.

For Canaanites, unlike the Jews of the day, dogs could be pets, and around the table this woman was familiar with, even the dogs ate. Around her table, in other words, mercy knew no boundary. And so, bending Jesus' words to her own purpose, she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (Matt. 15:27).

In the story Matthew tells, these words changed Jesus' mind. From then on, his mission expanded. Stunned into wider concern, he healed the woman's daughter, and directed his attention to Gentiles as well as Jews.⁶

Jesus was not one to be always suspending judgment. That may be the fashion when mere tolerance is the ideal and you learn not to judge other persons or other cultures. But Jesus did make judgments about others, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Still, he was not set in his ways, not boxed into

himself and unable to see or learn from another person's point of view.

Not that the border-crossing legacy is easy. The Gospel account shows Jesus enlarging his outlook by seeing with other eyes and feeling with another's heart. But it also brings to life the struggle that may go along with this, and the value of another's assertiveness against our own resistance to larger vision. When you meet another person who engages you in life-changing conversation, you meet a gift from God. In Matthew's account, the Canaanite woman was such a gift to Jesus.⁷

All this suggests a standard for being human in a world of difference: self-confidence enhanced by humility. You have a point of view, and you embrace it with passion. You undertake a mission, and you pursue it with passion. But your passion is not the reckless vehemence that says "my people" know it all; it's not the wanton self-regard that veers to the edge, or goes over the edge, of violence.

The passion proper to the border-crossing legacy tries to look with other eyes and feel with other hearts. It takes a position and works for a goal but is neither self-sufficient nor self-satisfied. It is eager to find seeds for new vision and new being in the challenge of another person's face, another person's point of view.⁸

So in the give-and-take of conversation, you learn about others and learn about yourself. With the faithful, you share life in a community of conversation. You reach out to one another, listening and learning, and you acknowledge the Canaanite woman—the stranger, the seeker, the antagonist—whose life and words undermine complacency and summon you to growth. Again and again, you seize together the gift of new understanding; again and again, you craft together a more faithful way of being the people you are called to be.

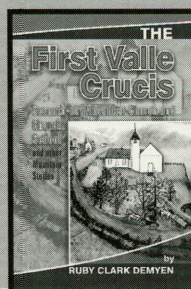
The journey of Abraham goes on and on; border-crossings never cease.

When you live the Christian faith, you remain, of course, always on the journey of Abraham; your border-crossings always take their cues from Jesus. The biblical story, with its climax in the "Father, forgive them" of the cross (Luke 23:24) and the joyous turnaround of resurrection, gives strength and guidance every day. You follow where the story leads. You adjust as conversation casts new light upon the path. And you pray never to drift with the wind of fashion, never to bend to the will of those with stony hearts and paltry sympathies. Blessing for all is the

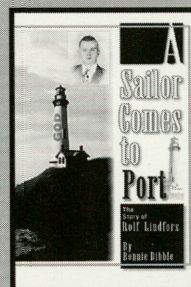
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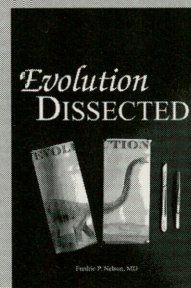
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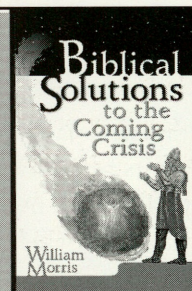
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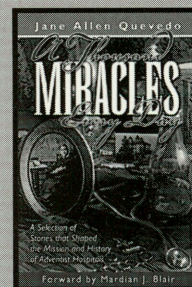
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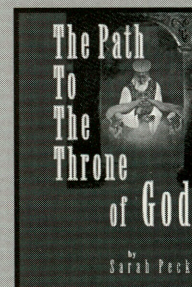
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grand and inviolate ideal. The way of Jesus is the means to its realization; it is how the ideal comes to be on earth as it is in heaven.⁹

Staying true when you're crossing borders is no easier than staying open. Following the resurrection, Paul broke a path to the Gentiles, and the blessing God had promised Abraham spread across the world as it never had before. Paul and generations after him encountered pagan others, others marked by the sins and sway of Rome. In their conversation with these others, they sought to understand them and to share their own understanding, and they invited them to join their congregations. Christian generosity was more inclusive than what the pagans knew, and many found that generosity compelling. Under the impact of the wider witness Paul began, the church advanced in numbers and in influence.¹⁰ It also took a catastrophic turn.

Despite Paul's reminder that the seed of Abraham is "the root that supports you" (Rom. 9:18), the church pulled away from the Hebrew people, abandoning the Sabbath and diminishing Jewish affirmation of the body and the earth. Christian interest in the joys and tasks of earthly life shriveled, and the comprehensive hope of Scripture became a largely otherworldly fixation.

What is more, the Church began drifting into partnership with Rome. Even though Jesus had refused to cozy up to Herod, forgetful Christian leaders allowed their community to take on the trappings and attitude of empire. This further eviscerated Christian witness. The Church became, more often than not, an unholy echo of political establishments, whether imperial, democratic, fascist, or otherwise.

Knowledge wrung from darkness, it turns out, is darkness still.

The encounter with others makes for friendship; it opens minds to deeper understanding and doors to wider peace. But the danger, well exemplified in the Church's compromise with Rome, is the kind of inattention that imperils the inviolate ideal and defining way of Israel's God. Encounter with others makes authentic witness possible, and puts it gravely at risk.

But the risk was there to begin, when Abraham left the security of the familiar for the adventure of mission. When you are Christian, and you embrace the border-crossing legacy, you run the risk; you pray for deliverance from inattention and humility to change

when inattention makes you reckless.

And you live from the hope that springs eternal by the grace of God, the hope that keeps your eye focused on the day when the dark side of variety in human affairs gives way to the winsomeness of peace and a single "pulse of harmony and gladness" will beat "through the vast creation."¹¹

When things go right, that is where the encounter with others takes us.

Notes and References

1. See, in Theodore Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996), the chapter on "Why toleration has never been enough."

2. As Czeslaw Milosz does in his poem, "Eyes," in *The New Yorker*, Aug. 19 and 26, 2002, 76.

3. See Philip Jenkins, "The Next Christianity," in *The Atlantic*, Oct. 2002, 53-68.

4. The incident became the basis for a work of fiction, Michel Quint's *In Our Strange Gardens*, reviewed by Richard Eder, "A Clown Whose Message Is No Laughing Matter," *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 2001, E39.

5. Throughout, Bible quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

6. Matthew's account, on which I have mainly relied, is in 15:21-28; besides commentaries, I have consulted Judith Gundry-Volf, "Spirit, Mercy and the Other," in *Theology Today* 52 (1995): 508-22.

7. For a literary reflection on the value of the other, consider C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1969). What Lewis says about reading has affected how I think about conversation with others. "The necessary condition of all good reading is 'to get ourselves out of the way,'" and to seek the enlargement of "mental being," not just the enlargement of "self-esteem." These quotes are from pages 93 and 115.

8. My language here reflects Emmanuel Levinas, on whom Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), has written helpfully.

9. As for the centrality of Jesus, this is what John teaches when, in 16:12-15, he says the disciples will learn many things they cannot now bear, and says, too, that the Spirit who guides them will always "glorify" Jesus.

10. An arresting account of this growth is found in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Stark argues that the steady growth reflected superior moral vision and the prospect, for converts, of benefits they could not otherwise receive.

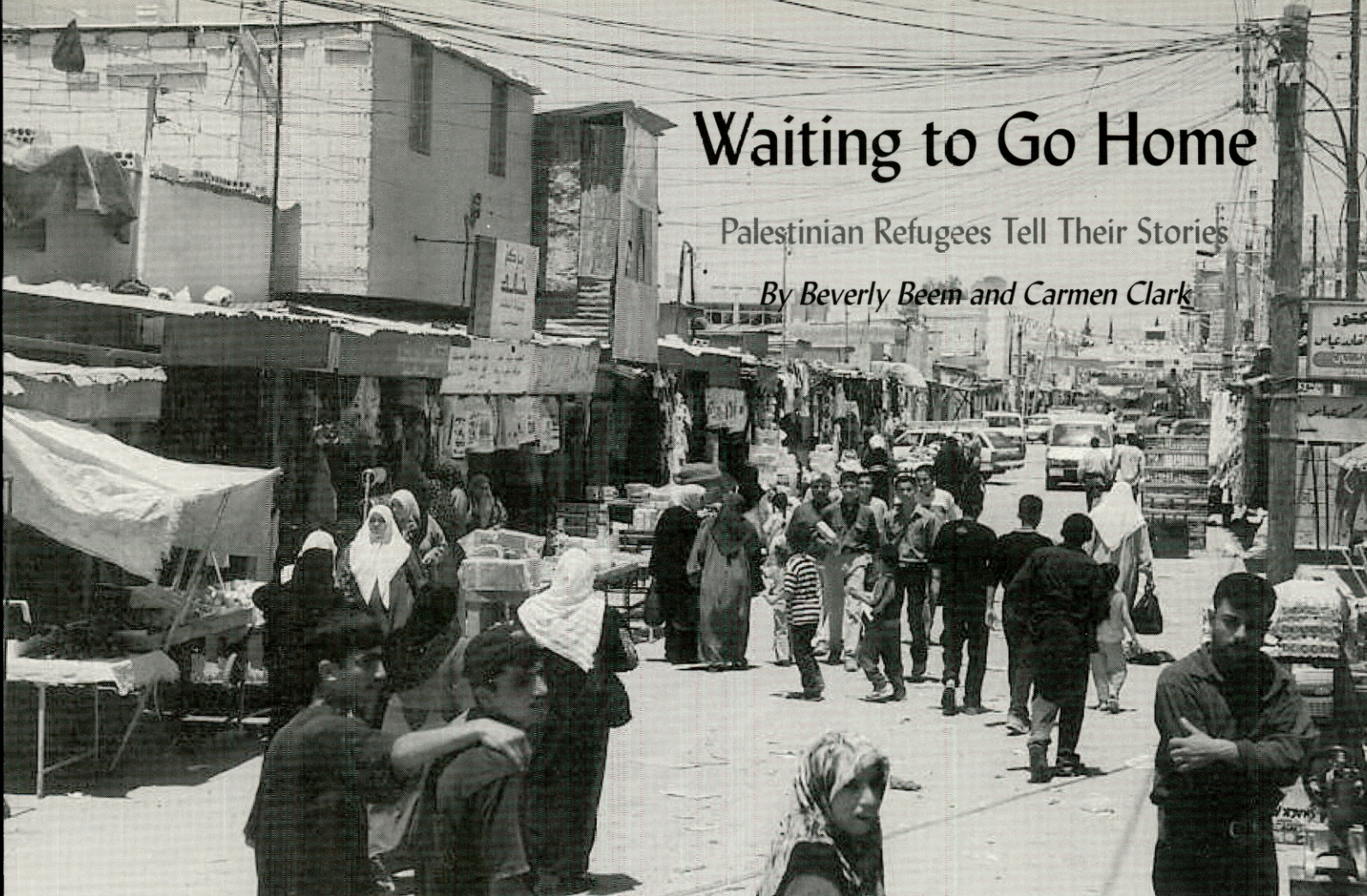
11. Ellen White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1950), 678.

Charles Scriven is president of Kettering College of Medical Arts.

Waiting to Go Home

Palestinian Refugees Tell Their Stories

By Beverly Beem and Carmen Clark



Street in Baqa' refugee camp, Amman, Jordan. Photo: Carmen Clark

Are the streets always this crowded or are all these people out for market day?" we asked Imad as he drove us through the narrow streets of the Baqa' refugee camp on the northern outskirts of Amman.

"No," he said, "it is always like this." The roads were filled from one side to the other with people weaving among the small shops and stands. We were American women looking for the Jordanian Women's Union, where we hoped to learn more about the Palestinian women who lived there.¹

While Imad, a Palestinian man of about thirty-five, navigated, we turned our attention to the sights and sounds that passed by our window. "What is this?" we asked, pointing to the leafy branches with pods we saw being sold along the streets.

In answer, Imad stopped and a young merchant handed us a bundle of fresh green garbanzos to eat right off the stem. But we weren't there for sightseeing. We had a more serious purpose. We wanted to talk to the Palestinian women in the camp to learn their stories.

We had a lot to learn about why these refugees were there. We looked to the Jordanian Women's Union, a center established to aid women in domestic, legal, and social concerns, to help us. We were ushered into a simply furnished room where we were immediately greeted with tradi-

The refugees used concrete to build structures of only one floor at first,
then they added another story or two with more permanent roofing
because it seemed their stay would be prolonged.

tional Arab hospitality. We were full of questions, which Imad, who now became our interpreter, conveyed for us.

What is this place? Who are the people who live here? How did they get here? What is their experience? What did they leave behind? What are their lives like now? What is their hope for the future?

The Baqa' refugee camp was set up during the Six Day War, which Israel and its Arab neighbors fought in 1967. When Israel occupied territory, taken from Jordan and Egypt, many Palestinians in those regions, fearing for their safety, abandoned their homes and fled to the surrounding countries. Many went to Jordan, where food was provided and tents were quickly erected to house the influx of refugees.

One hundred twenty thousand people currently live in the camp on one to two square kilometers of land, or about one-half of a square mile. Our hosts pointed to pictures on the wall of people packing to leave their homes from the occupied territories and making their way on foot to what they believed would be a short stay away from home. Many thought they would return to their homes when the fighting died down, but when they attempted to cross back into the West Bank they found the roads blocked.

They and their children and grandchildren are still there, thirty-five years later, many still hoping to go home. Even some of the elderly among them, whose whole lives have been shaped by the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, believe they will live to see their homeland again. They are from Jaffa, Haifa, Hebron, Nablus, and the surrounding villages.

Some left their original homes in 1948, when they were pressed out by the establishment of the state of Israel and fled to the West Bank, which was administered by Jordan. Then in 1967 they fled again from the West Bank to the camps in Jordan and other sur-

rounding countries. In each case, the move was thought to be a temporary escape from the violence; refugees felt they would soon go home. Now they wish they had not left their land, even if their homes were destroyed and loved ones killed. They understand how difficult it is to return.

In the beginning, each family was allowed ninety square meters, which is less than one thousand square feet, regardless of the family's size. At the outset, each family had one space, but now extended families have grown to include three or four family groups in the same space.

It soon became clear that the refugees would not return home within a matter of years, and temporary structures with walls and tin roofs replaced the tents. The refugees used concrete to build structures of only one floor at first, then they added another story or two with more permanent roofing because it seemed their stay would be prolonged.

Aside from houses, the camp has many shops, which serve the everyday needs of the community, and Palestinians who achieve a level of prosperity are most likely to be in business. A college education is valued, and a family often saves money to send one child to college. However, after graduation these students often find that few jobs are available for Palestinians. This situation makes it difficult for a family to raise its standard of living. Families that can afford to move out are free to leave at any time, but they usually stay close to keep in touch with friends and family, who are still part of the camp community. Most people who live around Baqa' are originally from the Baqa' camp. Some are reluctant to move out, believing that such a move is a denial of their hope of return to their homeland.

After our orientation at the Jordanian Women's Union we went to several homes to talk with the people. Here we would see how the history of the

migration and the statistics of building sites were translated into the lives of families. Our visit in each home was totally unexpected, but we were greeted warmly, immediately welcomed with offers of tea or coffee and served with Arab hospitality, even before our hosts or hostesses knew who we were or what we wanted.

As we entered the first home, we walked through an enclosed cemented courtyard and into a small room, about twelve by fourteen feet, which served as a bedroom and living room, as well as the pantry for the kitchen. A refrigerator and a cabinet of tea sets stood along one wall. Narrow foam pads were stacked against another. The pads were taken down and spread on the floor for sleeping at night, then taken up again during the day so the room could be used as a living area. Three rooms serve an extended family, which currently includes twelve people in residence. The ceiling was made of tin, and when the rains come it leaks.

Our hostess was Umm Mahmood, from Hebron. The “umm” means “mother of.” Many times, friends never know the real name of a woman because she uses a name that means “mother of her first-born son.” Similarly, the father is known as Abu Mahmood.

We asked about her family. She said she has ten children and thirty-three grandchildren. Two of her children are still at home. We later learned that these ten children are sons, and that she also has seven girls. She had lived in a small town outside Gaza, which Israeli soldiers took over in 1948, forcing her to move to Hebron. We knew something of the political situation, but not of her experience. That was what we wanted to understand.

“What was it like to be in Hebron during the war?” one of us asked. They feared for their lives, she explained. Smoke bombs filled the villages, and rumors of the rape and mutilation of women by Israeli soldiers

Photo: Carmen Clark



Another street in Baqa' refugee camp, Amman, Jordan.

spread like wildfire through the villages, inspiring terror. She remembered how she smeared grime from the bottom of cooking pots on her face in order to look ugly. She and her girlfriends thought that if they were ugly the soldiers would not harm them.

As she spoke, Imad declined to translate details. Muslim instincts and sensitivities also motivated many to leave Palestine; men felt it a matter of duty and honor to protect the women in their families. When the war was finished and the danger over, they expected to return home in ten to twelve days. They buried their valuables near their homes and walked toward the West Bank, carrying only water and the few possessions needed for the trip.

She told us, “Americans believe we are killing Israelis for nothing, but we are fighting for our homeland.” Looking at us directly, she added, “If an American were to take everything of yours, what would you do?” At this point, she suddenly realized we were Americans. She was very embarrassed and looked down silently, apparently feeling that she had insulted her guests.

We quickly let her know that it was OK, that we wanted to know how she really felt, and, with just a momentary pause, we continued the conversation. With a sweep of her hand around the room, she looked at us and demanded, "Is this house good for anyone in America?" It was a rhetorical question, and in our silence she went on: "We can be cold and that's OK; we can be hungry and that's OK; but we just want our land. We are good people. We just want peace, but we want to have a life and land—a good life. We want to be left as we are on our own land."

Umm Mahmood is waiting to return to Palestine.

Upon entering the second home, we arrived in a small open courtyard and sat on stools that our hostess provided. Immediately, the traditional hospitality was served. The hostess also came from the Hebron area. Her family's reason for leaving Palestine in 1948 was also fear. For several years, while Palestine was under the mandate of the British, British troops had gone house to house taking all the weapons from the Palestinians, including even the cooking knives. Without any means of protection, the Palestinians instinctively fled after hearing about fifty-eight people who were killed in Deir Yassin and of twenty-seven who were killed elsewhere, at a wedding.

We asked, "How long did you have to pack and leave?"

She answered, "Two days, and then we started walking." At that time, she was eighteen years old with two children. They didn't return because, again, they were afraid. Two of her family were killed and her house was immediately occupied by Israelis after the family left.

Four women were all talking at once. Word spread through the neighborhood that we were there, and more women came from other homes to meet us and join in the conversation. They were all angry and wanted to



Photo: Carmen Clark

Cars and people share the street in Baqa' refugee camp, Amman, Jordan

tell us their stories, and we were eager to hear them.

One woman who joined the conversation told us her mother's experience. Her mother went to fetch water and was separated from her daughter. Village people nearby told her to go and look for her daughter in a group of lost children a short distance away. If she could not find her daughter, they told her, she should just take any one. There were many children separated from their families and in need of new parents.

The Palestinians left the occupied towns and villages in groups. Women and children led the way, and the men formed the rear guard, putting themselves between their families and the Hagganah, the Israeli militant group that followed them. The Palestinians expected to return after the fighting ended.

"It was planned to have it happen like this," the woman said, meaning that they would leave thinking the move was temporary only to discover that they could never return. More recently, people have stayed at home during the Intifada. Even when their houses and shops are destroyed, and hospitals and schools are massively damaged, they will not leave. They will stay in the rubble. They know from their experience in 1948 and 1967 that if they leave they will not return.

Our hostess showed us the smiling picture of her

“Is this house good for anyone in America?”

Our hostess showed us the smiling picture of her “sister’s son” from Jenin, the concept of nephew always being expressed in relational terms. He was a second-year student at the university. Then she showed us his picture in the newspaper, where he was depicted carrying a machine gun. He had been a suicide bomber in Jerusalem during the recent visit to Israel of U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell.

“What motivated him?” we asked. “Why would he do such a thing?” His aunt recounted how two of his friends had been killed by an Apache helicopter while driving in the West Bank. Five friends of the two young men were all equally willing to execute a suicide mission as revenge, and the day before they flipped a coin to decide who would go. Her nephew was chosen.

The woman told us that at first the family was puzzled and angry that their own son could do such a thing, then they were sad, and finally they were proud that he had sacrificed himself for the common cause of the Palestinians and were glad he had gone to be with God.

“What else was there to do?” she continued. “Sharon’s retaliation creates hundreds more willing to do this. There is just too much anger. If Sharon thinks he has won, it is not true. Fight stone for stone!”

The third home we visited was in a different refugee camp, Wahdat, inside the city of Amman. We were offered seats on a couch in the small living room about ten by ten feet. The husband was present, as well as the wife and one married daughter. A college-age son later joined in the conversation, as well. Twelve family members, including two students, live in this house. All the children greeted us with kisses as we sat down to talk and enjoy the tea.

When asked why they had left Palestine, they answered in a manner similar to the others we had heard. They were afraid. The daughter compared their experience to what had recently happened in

Jenin. We told her that Americans were very concerned about what had happened in Jenin, that the pictures they saw on the television news were horrifying.

Her response was immediate and passionate: “This has been going on for fifty-four years and *now* you take notice because of Jenin?”

Among the Palestinians to whom we talked we found a general perception that America shares in Israel’s guilt. The helicopters from which the Israel defense forces shoot missiles are American. The weapons and most of the funding are American. The Palestinians see no corresponding concern for Palestinian interests. American politics, they believe, is controlled by powerful Jewish lobbyists.

“If America gave Palestinians 10 percent of what they give Israel, that would make a difference for us.” What they want, they said, is freedom, peace, and land. “It’s just land, just land. That’s the issue. There is no reason to attack Israel if we have our land. It is fighting guns against knives. All we have is rocks.”

Palestinians consider the American government complicit in the bloodshed that has stained a land holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, but they are quick to separate the American people from their politics. While offering us more tea, one hostess said, “People are people, and we can believe that the American people mean well.”

We asked, “Is there anything we can do as individuals to help you?” She responded: “Just tell our stories.”

So, here we are, telling their stories.

Everywhere we went, we realized that we were looking at people with stories to tell. We knew something about the story of Mohammad, the cook at the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in



Palestinians consider the American government complicit in the bloodshed that has stained a land holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike.



Umm Mahmood and some of her grandchildren with Carmen Clark.
Photo by Imad

Amman. He, too, had come to Jordan in two stages.

In 1948, Mohammad was ten years old, living with his parents and brother and three sisters in Zakariyyeh, a small village in the middle of Palestine. He remembers hearing the news of the invasions of villages along the coast to villages inland, from the sea to the hills.

The migration started in 1947, but Mohammad and his family stayed in their village until 1948. He said, "My own story is how we became refugees. Israelis came to take our villages, village by village, until they came closer to us," he said. "They would come to a village, destroying and killing, and the people would run away. The soldiers came at night and planted mines to explode houses. When they came to the village next to us, our parents with the

other parents of the village took the women and children out of the houses and into the fields at night, so that if the Israeli soldiers came at night, no people would be in the houses."

"One night they came and took four people from the fields and took them five to ten kilometers away and killed them. We didn't know that they killed them; we only knew that they took them, but later people discovered that the victims had been killed. We spent the nights in the fields and the days in the village for about two months before the Israeli soldiers took the village. In October 1948, our family left the village for good. We went to a village near Hebron and were there about one month."

Mohammad and his family heard that camps for refugees were being built in Jericho. Because they had no money to buy a house, they needed to move. They were unable to take anything with them, not even papers or deeds, only the clothes on their backs and the keys to their houses. They lived in the Jericho refugee camp for twenty years, first in tents, for about two to three years, and then they were able to build small houses with reeds for roofs. They expected to go back to Zakariyyeh in a month or two, or maybe six months or a year. For twenty years, they expected to go back.

Mohammad worked as a cook in the Albright Center in Jerusalem, but there was no transportation between Jerusalem and Jericho except by foot. Many walked along the tortuous thirty-five kilometer road between the two cities. One day when Mohammad had walked three-quarters of the distance, an Israeli army truck stopped the group he was with and told them to wait.

"We want to bring trucks to carry you," they said. They brought the trucks, which carried them not to Jerusalem but to the Jordan River. The soldiers then told the group to cross the river.

"We didn't want to cross," Mohammad said, "but they started shooting and we had to cross the river. My family—my wife and three-month old twin sons—was in Jericho and I was in Jordan. Fortu-

Photo: Carmen Clark



Khala, one of the staff members, in the door of the Jordanian Women's Union

nately, I had friends in Jordan and could stay with them for three months and my family was able to come and join me. But we were refugees again—with nothing. Since we were from the West Bank we had Jordanian citizenship and I was able to work.”

Now that Mohammad has established himself and his family in another place we wondered if he, too, still wanted to go back. We asked him if he wanted to return if the situation changed.

He said, “I have been a refugee twice. There is nothing worse than being a refugee. People can be very poor in their own homeland and feel very happy. Unless you have been a refugee you don’t know how people look at you. If a Palestinian state appears, the question is who will be allowed to go to it. If allowed, of course, we will go at least to take our children there and plant them there again.”

“What makes it difficult for refugees is to see their own homeland occupied by another people who have no right to be there and to be strangers in another people’s homeland. You see strangers in your home and you are a stranger in another’s home. If you have a homeland you can go anywhere and then always go back home. You are never lost because you always have a place to go.”

Notes and References

1. All quotations are reconstructed from the authors’ collective memory.

Beverly Beem is a professor of English at Walla Walla College. She is working with Doug and Carmen Clark to study the geographical sites connected with the biblical book of Judges. Carmen Clark is a bookkeeper in a dental clinic in Walla Walla, Washington. She helped dig at Tall al-‘Umayri and worked as the site’s object registrar.

Beverly Beem wishes to acknowledge with thanks the generosity of the Faculty Research Grant Committee of Walla Walla College, which allowed her to visit Jordan.





Journey to Baghdad

Malcolm Russell Interviews Lawrence Geraty

Editor's Note: When we learned that La Sierra University president Lawrence Geraty had visited Baghdad in 2002, we thought our readers would appreciate hearing about it and gaining some insight into the Adventist Church in that country. We asked Malcolm Russell, an expert on the Middle East, to interview Geraty for *Spectrum*. Both Russell and Geraty lived in Beirut, Lebanon, as children while their parents served as missionaries.

Today there are 204 members belonging to three churches in the Iraq Field, which is part of the Middle East Union Mission and the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists. The beginning of the Adventist Church in Iraq dates back to 1911, when Bashir Hasso, a native of Mosul, Iraq, went to Beirut as a student at American University. There he read the book *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* by Uriah Smith and was baptized. Upon returning to his native country he shared his faith and by 1928 had seven persons ready for baptism. That was when the church in Iraq was officially organized.

RUSSELL: Dr. Geraty, *Spectrum* readers know you as the president of La Sierra University and possibly also as the president of ASOR, the American Schools of Oriental Research. Last summer, you visited Iraq, a somewhat unusual move for an American. Would you share with *Spectrum* why you took that trip?

GERATY: I traveled to Baghdad last August as a pastor, not as the president of a university or an organization of academic archaeologists. I was asked to perform the wedding of Fatta Nahab, a La Sierra alumnus and family friend. His mother is the daughter of Ghanim Fargo, for decades a faithful leader of the Adventist community in Iraq. Her mother is a Hasso, once the most prominent Iraqi Adventist merchant family. When these Christians friends asked me to come, I agreed.

RUSSELL: But there are sanctions and all sorts of difficulties blocking

trade with Iraq. You can't just call up your travel agent and ask for a ticket and a visa. How did you manage to get there?

GERATY: For my part, things were relatively simple, and I reached Baghdad in the comfort of a jet airliner rather than the buses that bounce along the long, hot, and bumpy highway from Amman, Jordan. My hosts arranged the Iraqi visa, and because U.S. sanctions prohibit payment for flights to Iraq, they also provided an airline ticket on a regularly scheduled Royal Jordanian Airlines flight. Of course, Arab hospitality covered my stay in the country.

RUSSELL: As an American, did you experience any unusual events while traveling?

GERATY: From the moment others on the flight realized that I was not only a Westerner but also an American, they were surprised and even shocked. But to a person, they were pleased that an American was visiting the country. They helped me with advice on filling out the immigration forms, even recommending a hotel to list as my local address. Unlike most of the other passengers, I managed to clear the airport without paying any *bakhshish*, or tips.

In contrast to the unfailing graciousness of ordinary Iraqis, the official line was bitterly antagonistic. For example, in the jetway to the new and attractive Saddam International Airport terminal, there were no anti-American posters, but every fifty feet or so the floor was inscribed with the words "Down [with] U.S.A."

RUSSELL: What were your general impressions of Baghdad?

GERATY: The first thing that will overwhelm a summer visitor is the heat. The thermometer hit 118 degrees Fahrenheit while I was there, so daily life naturally becomes nocturnal. Wedding festivities, for example, seemed to last until 4 a.m. or later.

From the air-conditioned comfort of a room high in the Meridian Hotel (renamed, after the Gulf War, the Palestine Hotel, but still commonly called the Meridian), I could look out over a city that missed the real estate boom that has transformed most other capitals during the last twenty years. Bomb damage from the Gulf War is not evident, even at street level, but there are only a very few buildings of twenty stories or more. By contrast, apartment buildings of six or eight floors are common.

Closer up, Baghdad is very crowded, with a "Havana" look to it: clean streets, but buildings in even the better part of town are turning shabby and decrepit, though not yet slums. Cars somehow still keep running, although many of them were imported

before the Iran-Iraq War two decades ago. One difference with Cuba, of course, is the cheap price of gasoline. Priced in U.S. dollars, it's virtually free.

In public, there's little flashiness or style, and people show signs of the hard living during the past two decades. For most Iraqis, conditions were frequently dreadful, and it sometimes shows. For example, I don't think I saw a single pudgy person the entire time I was there. Making ends meet is a challenge for the vast majority, including government officials, and paying *bakhshish* on almost every occasion has become a normal way of life. Millions of nearly worthless dinars are redistributed that way. Nevertheless, everything seemed calm and quiet; life went on as normally as it could.

RUSSELL: Did people speak freely to you about conditions?

GERATY: You must remember the circumstances: Adventists are few in Iraq, and American visitors much scarcer. Clearly this was not an occasion for anyone to reveal any private political aspirations for their country. During the entire visit I never asked anyone for a political comment, and I never heard a single criticism of the president, Saddam Hussein. The comment commonly heard about life was simply "It's hard." As a university administrator, I can imagine, for example, how difficult professors must find life: low pay, no foreign textbooks, a scarcity of laboratory equipment and materials, virtually no opportunities to research and publish. . . .

RUSSELL: But surely Saddam Hussein was ever-present; the press mentions the many posters and frequent statues of him.

GERATY: Certainly there's a real cult of personality around the Iraqi leader. It's very evident in the statues at every bridge and major crossing. On the other hand, nobody talked to me about him or the situation—and it was not my role to ask them.

RUSSELL: Arabs not talking politics? Isn't that unusual?

GERATY: People were unfailingly gracious and kind, happy to see me and to welcome me. But discussion of politics was excluded. As I said earlier, I went to Iraq as a pastor, to minister to believers in Christ, who under these circumstances often feel isolated and discouraged. So direct political discussions were out.

Nevertheless, I picked up a sense that people clearly worried about the future. They conveyed a



Members of the SDA church in Baghdad.



Vocal group of the SDA church in Baghdad.

sense of apprehension, anticipating difficulties or even war with the United States. Others, however, seemed actually indifferent to an impending war because of the hopelessness they feel about the future and about anyone in the outside world really wanting to make life better for them. Life is clearly hard in a country that in twenty years has suffered two wars and a decade of sanctions. Naturally there is concern about the losses and hardship another war would bring.

RUSSELL: Could you tell us a bit about that Adventist community?

GERATY: A bittersweet atmosphere surrounded the wedding and a separate engagement reception for another couple while I was there. First of all, despite many hardships in the past, the Adventist community in Baghdad enjoys a great deal of religious freedom. In contrast to prohibitions in Saudi Arabia and some of the smaller Gulf states, believers meet regularly and openly.

The ideology that inspires the ruling Ba'hist party was originally secular, and Muslim fundamentalism is much less influential in Baghdad than in any capital in the Arabian peninsula. Indeed, Mrs. Saddam Hussein has apparently paid goodwill visits to the Adventist Church and those of other denominations at Christmastime, even leaving generous donations.

The Baghdad church itself is impressive. On a major thoroughfare, it is beautifully decorated, with both organ and piano, and has a commodious fellowship hall as well. These facilities are sometimes used by Christians of other denominations for special services. The Adventist pastor is an Iraqi, and the youth pastor a Jordanian who grew up in the Amman

orphanage, and is now married to an Iraqi. Some of our members have managed to live quite well.

Nevertheless, in common with much of the Middle East, many would like to emigrate, particularly to the United States. The bride whose wedding I performed might be considered one of the lucky ones, marrying an Iraqi-American physician and leaving the country for southern California. But the joy of the occasion must have been marred, in many hearts, by the recognition that the bride was leaving the community and country.

RUSSELL: What about the wedding and related ceremonies? Were they culturally North American Adventist, or Arab?

GERATY: Most American Adventists would have felt quite at home with many features of the wedding ceremony, down to the Bible boy and flower girl. However, one local custom caught my eye. Following the wedding rehearsal, accompanied by much ululating, each of the unmarried women and older girls dipped a finger into henna, the herbal dye much used in the Middle East. At the wedding ceremony the next day, they still retained that stained finger. Unfortunately, my post-midnight flight left before the reception reached its full extent.

RUSSELL: Apparently at one point technology came to rescue human failing.

GERATY: It certainly did. The leading conductor in Baghdad, apparently one of the country's best musicians, had been hired to play the organ and piano for the ceremony. However, he arrived at the wedding rehearsal with his head bandaged after suffering some sort of accident. By the third or fourth line of music,

it was apparent that the poor man's coordination had been greatly disturbed, either by the wound or the medication for it, and his attempt to make music sounded, well, horrible.

Fortunately, one of the groomsmen came to the rescue. An accomplished musician himself, he performed the pieces and recorded them on his computer, then for the wedding he played the piano and organ using his computer recording. It worked very well.

RUSSELL: So much for United Nations sanctions that probably ban the sale of such a computer to Iraq,

our annual conference in Toronto in November.

RUSSELL: In conclusion, with the prospect of war increasing steadily, what is your viewpoint about a possible American attack on Iraq?

GERATY: As Christians, we personally should be searching for a peaceful solution to the crisis. Certainly no one in any Western nation admires Saddam Hussein. Certainly, too, the international community of nations has legal and moral justification to ask for inspections to ensure there are no weapons of mass destruction. But if America is really interested in

The Adventist community in Baghdad enjoys a great deal of religious freedom.

citing its possible military use. Since your presence was somewhat unusual, did you make any remarks beyond the normal wedding homily?

GERATY: I did. At the suggestion of the groom's grandfather, Ghanim Fargo, I expressed my solidarity with the people of Iraq, and spoke of my hope as an American that my government "will play a constructive role for peace and justice." On another occasion, I helped the leaders of the Adventist Church in Iraq draft congratulations and best wishes to the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

RUSSELL: Did you make any archaeological contacts at all during your visit?

GERATY: Only one. Accompanied by one of our active laymen, Basim Fargo, I visited the director of the Department of Antiquities, a former professor from Mosul, in the north, honoring an appointment with him made for me by my friend, the director of the Department of Antiquities in Jordan. The Iraqi official had heard of Adventists, and this provided an opportunity for Basim to explain the Adventist lifestyle, health principles, and the Sabbath, a constant point of confusion in the Arab Middle East that leads on occasion to our being identified as Jews. The director's response was appreciative. Incidentally, I believe the Seventh-day Adventist Assyrian King List found by Siegfried Horn is still on exhibit in the museum that I took the opportunity to visit again.

After discussing the very difficult circumstances of Iraqi archaeology, including missing volumes of important journals, as president of the American Schools of Oriental Research I invited the director to

reducing terrorism, the Arab-Israeli conflict is the issue America needs to confront and help resolve.

It's also worth mentioning that Iraqi Christians would find religious freedom significantly worse under a radical Muslim fundamentalist regime like Iran's, or the Wahhabi rule of Saudi Arabia. The Iraqi alternatives to Saddam Hussein are worrisome, and neighboring countries, especially Syria, Turkey, and Iran, are unlikely to avoid the temptation to meddle in the uncertain politics that would likely accompany any new regime.

Personally, I hope for a rapid conclusion to the weapons issue, a peaceful end to the embargo, and then an opportunity for the Iraqi people to rejoin the human race on their own terms. Iraqis deserve to be known as I have come to know them: smart, urbane, gracious, hospitable, and with all the human feelings the rest of us have!

RUSSELL: Thank you very much.

This interview is based on notes taken Friday, Sept. 6, 2002, during a visit that Lawrence Geraty made to Andrews University.

Malcolm Russell is professor of economics and history at Andrews University. He holds a doctorate in Middle East Studies and International Economics from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

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Adventism in the Context of Japanese Culture

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By Junko Nakai

In the beginning was the Word” is a central belief of Christians. However, this is a foreign concept within Japanese culture. *Fugen Jikko* (no words, only deeds) eloquently expresses society’s values in Japan. The trustworthiness of words is judged not by the words in and of themselves, but by the status and trustworthiness of the speaker. Words are regarded and treated lightly, whereas the committed human relationship is believed to be fundamental to one’s existence in society.

Compared with Western countries, Japan has an ideology that gives much higher status to awareness of one’s position in a group than to individual self-expression or self-assertion. In Japan, human relationships are vital: the first, the last, and the most important part of one’s life within society. At the core of Japanese society is an underlying group consciousness. In Japan’s earlier agrarian society, this group consciousness was recognized by the concept of *ie*, literally, “the household.” Actually, the word meant more than that: “a corporate residential group,” or the managing body of the premodern enterprise.¹

Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan shifted from feudal agrarianism to a modern industrial and technical society.² The concept of *ie* was used by employers and community leaders in the establishment of corporations and other urban institutions. The interaction between an individual and the larger group in such organizations is based on both loyalty and a high degree of emotional involvement. Nakane Chie explains:

This emotional approach is facilitated by continual human contact of the kind that can often intrude on those human relations which belong to the completely private and personal sphere. Consequently, the power and influence of the group not only affects and enters into the individual’s actions; it alters even his ideas and ways of thinking. Individual autonomy is minimised.³

Although modern Japanese society is undergoing radical change, group consciousness known as *uchi* (the colloquial term for *ie*), still

persists on various levels of society. Employees refer to their own company as *uchi*. The group recognized as *uchi*, to which loyalty is owed, can be a family, a class or school, a village, a town, an organization, an institution, a company or, indeed, Japan itself.

In Japanese society, there is a clear hierarchy inside the group. The group comprises accumulated vertical relationships of pairs that consist of two persons in a senior-junior relationship. The senior takes care of the junior, and the junior recognizes *On* (or indebtedness) and repays the senior with *Chusei* (loyalty). "*On* in all cases signifies a load, an indebtedness, a burden, which one carries as best one may."⁴ A sense of unity is achieved by every member fulfilling the role based on this "vertical principle," as expected within the framework of society.⁵ Harmony is the ultimate virtue, and consensus is the principle of decision making.⁶

In such a society, individual identity is subservient to that of the group. Usually the values and judgment of the head of the *ie* are unanimously accepted. In such an environment, it is extremely difficult for any member of the group, especially one of junior position, to make a stand distinct from the consensus of the group.

Employees who keep the Sabbath or abstain from alcohol can be regarded as stepping out of this *uchi* group and lose their position in society.⁷ This brings a conflict—between a person's old and new identity, between one's old *uchi* identity and new Adventist identity. The *ie* system and Christianity are inherently incompatible.⁸

Another aspect of Christianity foreign to Japanese culture is the concept of monotheism. Christians worship the One True God and consider the worship of any other god idolatry. Such exclusiveness, such a clear distinction between good and evil and right and wrong, is foreign to the Japanese mindset. The Japanese prefer unity to dichotomy, mixed colors to primary colors. They prefer harmony to confrontation between the righteous and the evil. Japanese people are tolerant of religious syncretism.

Many Japanese homes have both a Buddhist altar and a Shinto shrine. In accepting Christianity, some Japanese have simply absorbed it into their belief system along with their other religious beliefs, or consciously selected only whatever elements suit them or their lifestyle. However, the Adventist emphasis on the significance of in-depth Bible study and absorption of God's Word into all aspects of a believer's life does not sit easily with an eclectic approach to religious beliefs.

Although concepts such as monotheism and

Sabbath observance are entirely alien to the Japanese mindset, there are many examples of how societal and cultural prejudices are changed and overcome through immersion in God's Word.

Take the example of Murata Wakasa, a high-ranking samurai leader of the frontier guard in southern Japan in the 1860s. Local fishermen brought him an English New Testament that they had found floating in the sea. Intrigued by the book, Murata made inquiries and found that it was part of the Christian Bible. He purchased a Chinese version to read. He sent a man to a Christian missionary in Nagasaki, ostensibly to procure books, but in reality to acquire answers to his many questions.

He was convinced that what he read was true. When he requested baptism, he was warned about the political and social risk involved, since Christianity was still strictly prohibited in Japan. Nevertheless, he was determined to follow Jesus. He said: "Sir, I cannot tell you my feelings when I first read the account of Jesus' character. I had never heard of such a person. I was filled with admiration, overwhelmed with emotion and taken captive by His nature and life."⁹

Murata's encounter with Jesus took place over the pages of the Bible. What about Adventists? It is by being "People of the Book" that Adventists have advantage over other Japanese Christians. By absorption of God's Word through in-depth Bible Study and by daily reading of the Sabbath School lesson quarterly, a Japanese person can start to understand the importance of monotheism and observance of the Ten Commandments.

In a society that has no absolute values to follow, biblical teachings give Adventists a solid foundation upon which to base their judgment and ethical and moral decisions. In a society where traditionally words are treated lightly, the Word of God emerges in the minds of the believers and earnest seekers for the Truth as a solid foundation.¹⁰ Biblical words work hand in hand with a Christian life and witness and are vital for the absorption of Adventist doctrines in Japanese society.

In 1889, Abram La Rue, an Adventist pioneer literature evangelist to the Far East, visited Japan to distribute English literature. The owner of an inn in Yokohama, where he stayed for two weeks, was so impressed by La Rue's humble Christian personality that he said, "If your Church is built here, I will become a member."¹¹ This seems to be the prototype of the Japanese perception of, and often motivation for, conversion to Christianity. For

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Japanese people, Christianity is strongly identified with the character and lives of those who carry the message. The message of Christ is not viewed in isolation, separate from the messengers.¹²

In 1896, W. C. Grainger, the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary, arrived in Japan, accompanying his student, T. H. Okohira. Grainger gave Bible studies to young Japanese people, stating, "We are endeavoring

1943, all Adventist pastors and elders (forty-two in number) were arrested, imprisoned, and interrogated, and four were martyred. All church property was seized, and mission work came to a halt.²⁰

Contemporary Japanese society is strongly secular. Religious education has been forbidden in public schools in Japan since 1899, a position upheld during the American reorganization of the education system in 1945.

The trustworthiness of words is judged not by the words in and of themselves, but by the status and trustworthiness of the speaker.

to teach the Bible, and not any particular doctrine, except as it comes up in our lessons."¹³ His approach combined with his "Godly character" attracted many who had no background knowledge of Christianity.¹⁴

In 1899, Grainger and Okohira established a monthly journal, *Owari no Fukuin* (The Gospel for the Last Days). The content of the magazine focused on biblical doctrines and the health message. The magazine related biblical prophecies to wars and other current world events, drawing the readers' attention to the fulfillment of prophecy. The key message was: "Come out of Babylon" and prepare for the Last Days, which were at hand. It is questionable whether the call to "Come out of Babylon" (that is, Sunday-keeping churches) was relevant, let alone effective, in a society where more than 99 percent of the population was non-Christian.¹⁵

Late in the nineteenth century, Protestant churches presented themselves as a unified Japanese Christian Church.¹⁶ In 1873, through their concerted efforts, the ancient Prohibitory Edict against Christianity was lifted, opening the door widely and publicly for Christian mission work in Japan. The next decade saw the completion of the Japanese Bible translation as the fruit of their joint efforts. By emphasizing a distinctive message, the Adventist Church was criticized for stealing members from other churches.¹⁷

In the 1930s, another conflict arose when the government, as a part of the militarism of the day, enforced emperor worship as an expression of the nation's gratitude for his On.¹⁸ Buddhists and Christians, whose teachings were thought to threaten the militarism of the day, had been persecuted since the late 1920s.¹⁹ Those who believed in simple Adventism became the victims of an intensified persecution. In

In a 1973 survey entitled "The youth of the world, the youth of Japan," the following response was given to the question, "Do you have a religious commitment?" Four out of five Japanese youths had no religious beliefs. Seventy-four percent replied that they had no interest in religion.²¹ In the words of Mori Mikisaburou, Japan is a haven for atheists.²² Yet, as with other cultures, there is a common yearning to know what the future holds and to find what meaning life holds. Many popular magazines aimed at Japanese youth today invariably have columns dedicated to fortune-telling.²³

As stated above, Japanese people focus on people rather than abstract ideas. In this setting, Adventism's interaction with Japanese society has affected the way in which Adventists portray themselves. Shimada Masumi, director of evangelism for the Japanese Union Conference once encountered an earnest seeker who pleaded with him: "Please reveal the Life of Christ living in you." He concluded that the ultimate task of evangelism was not to provide evangelistic programs, but to nurture Adventists who can answer this ardent need of people to see Christ reflected in their character and lives.²⁴

The Adventist Church has also had to respond to this need on an institutional level. In the 1970s, the *Signs of the Times* radically changed its editorial strategy, shifting its focus from a discussion among Adventists to a dialogue with other Christian writers. *Signs of the Times* is now the best-selling Christian magazine for non-Christians in Japan.²⁵ However, the Church in Japan, as in other countries, has long taken a holistic approach to evangelism. The medical ministry has been the right arm of the Church from the early days. A Seventh-day Adventist college and the

Tokyo Sanitarium Hospital were both established in the 1920s. Following Ellen White's leading, the early missionaries, along with their Japanese converts, set out to minister to the needs of the society around them.

This change in editorial strategy symbolizes the diversified approaches taken by the Japanese Adventist Church in the postwar era. In order to meet the people where they are, various approaches have been taken, as the Church also attempts to cater to the community's diverse needs. For example, Adventists take a leading role in nonsmoking campaigns and have successfully spearheaded a campaign to introduce nonsmoking carriages in Japan's famous bullet trains.²⁶

An integrated approach to presenting the Adventist message as a total—and attractive—life and lifestyle package can be seen in a number of ways in Japan. What makes Adventism attractive to the eyes of nonbelievers? Shraishi Takashi, the present editor of the *Signs of the Times*, believes the goal in presenting the Adventist message should be “To present every doctrine as gospel, including the ones distinctive to Adventism. If we can present examples of happy Christian lives, keeping the

Sabbath, happy precisely because of keeping the Sabbath, it will be the strong witness.”²⁷

The Adventist Church in Japan believes the answer to this question is to continue catering to the common needs of humanity, in providing places where all can meet; happy Adventist homes; hospitals and health centers; vegetarian restaurants and cookery classes; college, schools, and kindergartens for a well-balanced education; volunteer social services; outreach over the Internet and other media; and hospices and homes for the aged.²⁸ Through these efforts, the core values of Adventism can be portrayed.

Perhaps in this regard, Japanese Adventists have something to offer Adventists of other countries. People everywhere are crying out to see Christ lived in us and through us, but perhaps that voice is a little louder in Japan.

In conclusion, the Japanese way of perceiving Christianity is by identifying it with those who profess it. Living in a society where human relationships are of utmost importance, Japanese people are keenly sensitive to—and per-

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When the Bells Toll

By Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson

Winters were dry and cold in Yokohama. Lawns turned a brittle, frost-bitten brown, and the sky was a cold, white backdrop behind the glittering facades of pay-by-the-hour love hotels that lined Highway 16. On the other side of the highway from the love hotels lay a vast expanse of black soil that in the spring would be planted with root vegetables. And beyond those fields, on a small hill fenced in by wild bamboo, stood our house, one among four houses that comprised the Adventist missionary compound.

Constructed to American scale but logistically unfit for Japanese weather and the cost of living, our large, drafty house had, at its heart, a wood stove that at best heated the central living room alone. I was nine when we moved to Japan, and I remember that we caught colds again and again that first winter until we learned to dress for the weather and for the house. Our seeming physical frailties were only symptoms of the other demons we faced during those first few months in a new country: the language barrier, culture shock,

politics, and changing family dynamics.

We were Christians in a country where less than 2 percent of the population was Christian; we were Americans—of Japanese descent, but Americans nonetheless—in a largely homogenous culture; we were trying to find our place in the land of my father's ancestors and my mother's immediate family. It was harder than we had ever imagined, perhaps harder than we could even admit to ourselves. I think there were many times that first year when we wanted to start all over again.

As our first New Year's in Japan approached, I remember my mother recalling and resurrecting traditions and rituals that she had practiced as a child growing up in the suburbs of Tokyo. More than twenty years had passed since my mother had left Japan as a teenager, and now she passed on these traditions to my brother and me for the first time.

For dinner on New Year's Eve, my mother cooked *toshi-koshi soba*, buckwheat noodles in a savory broth. “For long life,” she explained. We sat down at a dark-wood table, just the four of us—all four of us—and ate to long life. The house was cold; the fire never

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ceptive about—human character. Since the Second World War, the Adventist Church has changed its evangelical focus to a diversified approach aimed at catering to the diverse needs of the Japanese people. This approach has led to greater recognition of Adventism within Japanese society. For Japanese people in particular, the essential method of absorbing Adventist Christianity is through study of the Bible and the personal experience of a Christ-filled life.

The future of Adventism in Japan lies in continuing to take an integrated approach in which every doctrine is presented as gospel. In a society where latent group consciousness persists and where individual autonomy is minimized, the most effective way to lead a person to an encounter with Christ is through the example of a Christian life and character, through a quiet personal witness of Christ's love living within.

Notes and References

1. Nakane Chie, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 4, 8, 10.
2. During the Meiji Restoration, which occurred in 1867,

ruling power in Japan was returned to the emperor from the Shogunate. At the same time, Japan started to experience a period of radical modernization through a rapid succession of dramatic reforms that established a centralized government and opened Japan to Western civilization. The intellect and influence behind these reforms was a missionary, Guido F. Verbeck, of the American Dutch Reformed Mission. Verbeck had won the confidence of Japanese leaders as a trustworthy advisor through his Christian character and conduct. He became an advisor to the Japanese Privy Council, invited by former pupils, to whom he had taught in early 1860s the U.S. Constitution and New Testament Bible as the foundation of American civilization. Archibald McLean, *Epoch Makers of Modern Missions* (New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1912); and James I. Godd, *Famous Missionaries of the Reformed Church* (n.p.: Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1903). See also, W. E. Griffis, "Verbeck of Japan: Citizen of No Country," archives of the American Dutch Reformed Mission, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Rutgers University.

3. Nikane Chie, *Japanese Society*, 10.
4. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1947), 101.
5. Modern Japanese society is stratified vertically, and inside each organization, or ie, vertical principles are at work in accordance with the hierarchy within the group. See Nakane Chie, *Japanese Society*, 23-60.
6. See Crown Prince Shotoku, Seventeen Injunctions to the Ruling Class, written in A.D. 604.
7. Within the last decade, Japanese society has undergone

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burned hot enough, but as the warm broth filled our bellies, our spirits were strong. *Here we are in a new country, with exciting new traditions and foods and people all around us. We've survived the first few months. All the future lies ahead of us. Anything is possible.*

We did not know then how almost anything *would* happen—how the coming years would so radically mold our family and challenge us on many levels—how we would come out of Japan different people than when we had arrived—how we would grow older and softer inside and maybe a little more scarred on the outside. But at that moment, that first New Year's in Japan, everything was simple and new. Something like a Sabbath rest had fallen over Japan. Families all over Japan came together like ours to eat long-life noodles that night. It was a time for renewal, for fresh beginnings.

In preparation for the holiday, houses all across Japan had been repaired and cleaned inside and out; debts had been repaid; worn garments had been replaced. Stores had closed their books and doors for the year. Three days worth of symbolic New Year's dishes had been prepared in advance; each dish signified something auspicious, such as good health, fertility, good harvest,

happiness, or long life.

And when the clock struck midnight on New Year's Eve, the ritual of purification rang out across Japan. Through the dark, starless night came the haunting sound of temple bells echoing across the land—over the black fields and city lights and love hotels, over our small missionary compound. All across Japan, the temple bells tolled exactly one hundred and eight times. Man has a hundred and eight sins, according to Buddhism, and hearing the deep ring of these gongs is said to purify him from his transgressions of the past year.

It's a beautiful symbol, I think. I know that we needed those bells that first New Year's in Japan. In those first few months in our new home, we had—although no more or less than at any past or future time—already sinned against each other in small, unseen ways. Seeds of hurt and growing apart had been planted. We had wounded each other unsuspectingly and carelessly. We needed to be purified, to forgive and to be forgiven—a little foot-washing of the soul. As much as anyone else, we needed to be cleansed sin by sin, a hundred and eight times over, at least.

The bells were healing that night. I was lulled into sleep by their rhythmic song.

further radical changes. Since the introduction of a two-day weekend, Sabbath observance has been less of a problem for Japanese believers. However, the pressure to conform is still present.

8. Katsumi Nakamura also pointed out this incompatibility in *Kindai Bunka no Kozo, Kirisuto-kyo to Kindzi* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1995), 356-57. Some historians believe that this inherent incompatibility actually had a positive effect on Japan, as it played a symbolic role in liberating individuals from the ie system during the Meiji Era. Suzuki Norihisa, "Juyo no Shoso," *Nihon Shukyo Jiten* (Tokyo: Koubundo, 1985), 549.

9. As the source of this story, see McLean, *Epoch Makers*, 258-64; and Godd, *Famous Missionaries*, 254-56. As an Adventist example, during the interrogation by police inspectors during the Second World War, Sadamitsu Morita, elder of the Hiroshima church, answered all questions by referring to biblical texts. When he was summoned to court, the investigation document was 10 cm thick, full of biblical texts. Interview with Mrs. Morita for Voice of Prophecy radio program.

10. For example, consider remarkably influential Christian leaders like Uchimura Kanzo and Yanaihara Tadao. Yanaihara's solitary protest against the war with China, which he supported with biblical texts, was a symbol of Christian conscience backed up by biblical values. He was expelled from the Imperial University of Tokyo, but welcomed back after Japan's defeat in the Second World War. He later served as the president of the University of Tokyo.

11. Tsumoru Kajiyama, *Shimei ni Moete* (Yokohama: Japan Publishing House, 1982), 158.

12. On this point, J. Liggins, the first Protestant missionary to land in Japan, stated in a letter to the

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Twenty years have passed since that first New Year's in Japan. Over the years, I have heard the New Year's bells tolling a half dozen times or more. Now my brother and I are more or less grown up. My parents have completed their missionary service in Japan, and ultimately all of us returned to America, where at New Year's we join other Americans in greeting the coming year with fireworks and fanfare. We uncork bottles of fizzy apple juice and kiss each other with abandon when the clock strikes midnight.

All this joyous uproar is beautiful in its own way, but as I wearily make my way to bed during the first few moments of the New Year, I sometimes find myself listening for the quiet tolling of the temple bells. No matter where I am or how old I've grown, I am always in need of a little cleansing, a little forgiveness—a hundred and eight times over, at least.

Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson is a writer and translator in Sacramento, California. She lived in Japan for six years and ten summers, with her parents whose missionary service there spanned almost two decades.



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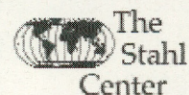
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home mission in the United States in August 1861: "Living epistles of Christianity are as much needed in Japan as written ones." *Spirit of Missions*, Aug. 1861. Guido F. Verbeck explained the change in attitude of the Japanese toward Christianity from initial prejudice and hostility to understanding and trust: "The Protestant Missionaries, as a body, had gained the confidence and respect of the people. . . . [Their] gaining of the people's confidence was a consequence, under the blessing of God, of the patient labor, the Christian character and conduct, and the teaching of the missionaries themselves, . . . the nature of Christianity being naturally identified by the Japanese with the character and lives of those who had come to bear it to them. Verbeck, "History of Protestant Missions in Japan," Proceedings of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of Japan, held at Osaka, Japan, April 1883, in *Proceedings of the General Conference of Protestant Missionaries in Japan Held in Tokyo October 24-31, 1900* (Tokyo: Methodist Publishing House, 1901), 754.

A survey of motivations for conversions in the Meiji Era (1868-1912) indicates that Christian ethics, such as honesty, diligence, patience, loving care, good behavior, and sincerity, were the most appealing factors. *Nihon Shukyo Jiten* (Tokyo: Koubundo, 1985), 558.

13. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 27, 1897. The Shiba English Bible School was established in 1898.

14. Kuniya Shu's words, recorded in his diary and quoted by Kajiyama in *Shimei ni Moete*.

15. Because this journal was the only literature published by the Adventists in the early days in Japan, it inevitably carried the full weight of the responsibility for conveying the Adventist message, including the Church's distinctive doctrines.

16. "The Church of Christ in Japan" was established in 1872 by Japanese members baptized by missionaries of several denominations. *Nihon Protestant Dendo-shi*, 1:65. Unification of the Protestant churches was further institutionalized by the military-led government during the Second World War.

17. In Verbeck, "History of Protestant Missions in Japan," however, the Seventh-day Adventists have a detailed entry of one page.

18. "On" is always used in this sense of limitless devotion when it is used to show one's first and greatest indebtedness, one's

Imperial On." Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 101.

19. W. G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 185-86.

20. One result of this investigation, however, was recognition of Adventism by E. Kinoshita, the leading thought police inspector (*tokka*, under the Home Ministry) in charge of investigating of Seventh-day Adventists. He confessed, "If Christianity is based on the Bible and Christian Church is the people who believe in the Bible, the Seventh-Day Adventist is the real Christian Church. However, now when Japan is fighting a war, the people with such belief must be imprisoned." Private communication with Toshio Yamagata. So impressed was Kinoshita with the Christian character of an Adventist science teacher, T. Yamagata, that he sent his two sons to be educated at the Adventist Mission College. Private communication with C. Kinoshita, E. Kinoshita's daughter-in-law.

21. Survey by the Prime Minister's Office, in Toshio Yamagata, *Jinsei no Sentaku* (Yokohama: Japan Publishing House, 1978), 18.

22. *Ibid.*, 20.

23. In another survey conducted in 1973 and 1978, a conspicuous increase in the younger generation's interest and belief in secular mystic objects, such as miracles and fortune-telling, was reported, in addition to a general trend of increasing interest in gods or Buddha. Survey on sex, religion, and nationalism by Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK), Japan's national broadcasting company.

24. Masumi Shimada, "Dendo no Genten (The fundamental principles of evangelism)," *Adventist Life*, Feb. 1999. In his article, Shimada quoted words of Warren Hilliard from a class of his in evangelism: "(The goal of) evangelism is (to prepare) the people." (Translation by the present writer.) Hilliard had reported at the second business session of the Hokkaido Mission in 1968 that the baptisms of the mission in the past were the result, not of public evangelism, but of "the witness of friends and relatives who were Christians." Hilliard, "Hokkaido Holds a Camp Meeting in Japan," *Far Eastern Outlook*, Aug. 1968, 5-6. See also, Yamagata Masao, *Light Dawns Over Asia* (Philippines: Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 1990), q.v. "Japan," 47.

25. Takeda Tetsuzo, a priest in the Japanese Episcopal Church, has recommended it as a wonderful magazine, and it outsells all other Christian magazines. Private communication with Hirota Minoru, under whose editorship the journal shifted its approach.

26. As chair of the National Non-Smoking Association, an Adventist pastor led the successful effort.

27. Shiraishi Takashi, former president of the Japan Union Conference, was interviewed in December 2001.

28. The Japanese population is rapidly aging; one out of four people in Japan is older than sixty-five.

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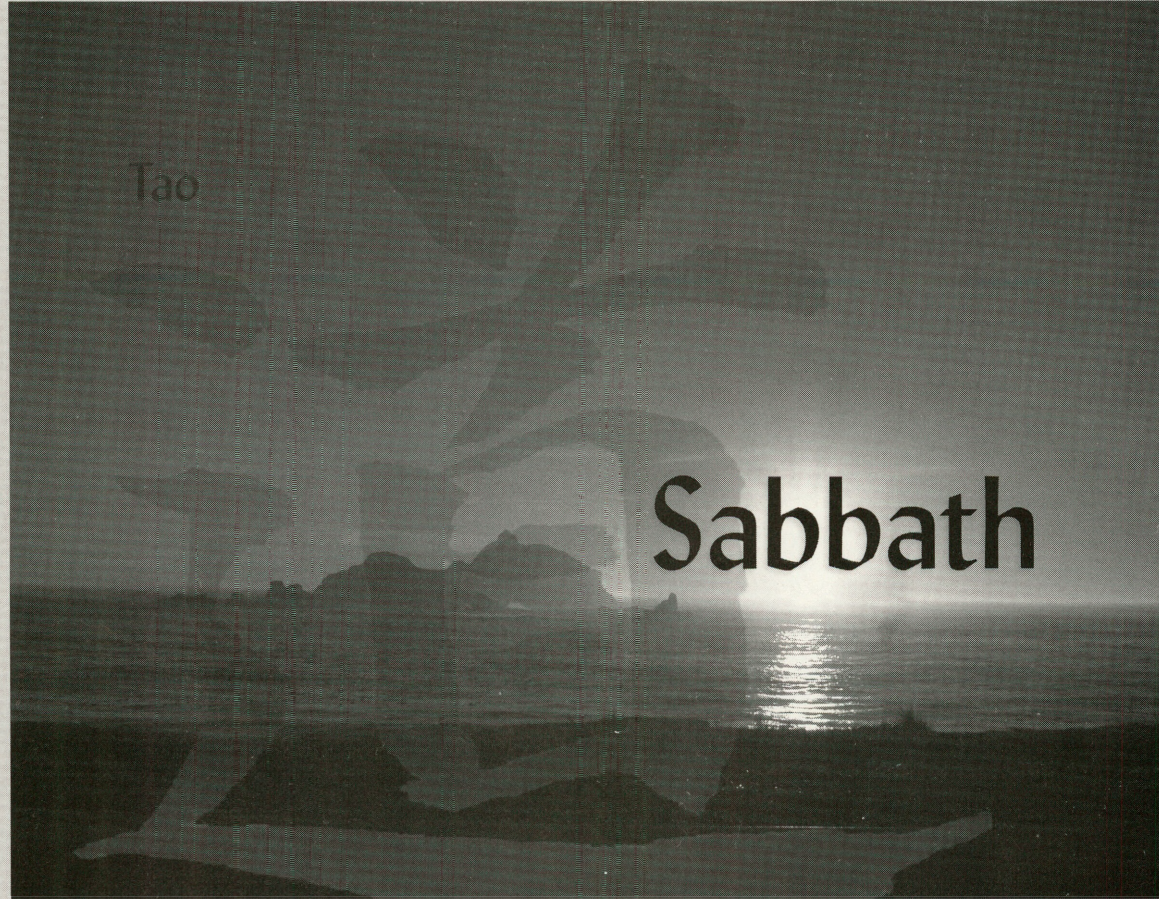
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Sabbath Around the World, Around the Block

Calligraphy by Pei Hou Lin

Photo: Jennie Auman

The Tao of the Sabbath

Some Biblical Sabbath Texts Considered
in the Light of the *Tao-te-ching*

By P. Richard Choi

The philosophy of Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu has been described as a poetry that “has a truth that goes straight to the heart of nature and of man.” In the past it has inspired excessive missionary enthusiasm, which tended to portray the *Tao-te-ching* as a Chinese prophecy of Christ. In this article rather than dabble in all manner of East Asian religious texts we will simply attempt a dialogue between some biblical Sabbath texts and the *Tao-te-ching* of Lao-tzu.¹

At this point, it should be remembered that the classical writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu are not to be confused with the religions of Taoism. Not only did the Taoist religions begin to form about four centuries after Lao-tzu, who lived in the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (sixth century B.C.E.), but they had rather separate and possibly animistic beginnings.²

Cessation of Work

To many Sabbath keepers, especially young ones, Sabbath observance is often problematic because they do not know what to do on the Sabbath. The question—What is lawful to do on the Sabbath?—itself is, in a way, an oxymoron because the Sabbath commandment clearly tells us that on this day we are to do nothing:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work. (Exod. 20:8-10)³

Few, however, are comfortable with the idea that *doing nothing*, referred to in these verses, really means *doing nothing*. Nearly all feel that, here,

doing nothing means *doing something that is right*. This view has some biblical basis because it is based on the way God himself kept the Sabbath. We are told in Genesis 2:2 that “on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.” Apparently, even as God the Sustainer of the world rested (presumably without doing any work), the operation of the world did not come to a screeching halt, but went on as usual.

It is clear that God must have been doing *something* on the Sabbath. Jesus apparently thought so when he replied to those who challenged his Sabbath healings: “My Father is working still [on the Sabbath], and I am working [on the Sabbath]” (John 5:17). In the hope of bringing some light to the conundrum of how it is possible on the Sabbath to cease from all work, and yet still be working, I offer in this article a perspective from Lao-tzu’s *Tao-te-ching* and the writings of Chuang-tzu.

Many words, besides the “way,” have been used to translate the Chinese word *Tao* (道): “Reason, Providence, Truth, Virtue, or even God.”⁴ No single word has been deemed completely satisfactory. In fact, the *Tao-te-ching* itself does not make any direct statement about the Tao. The very opening words of the book deny that it is possible to pin down the Tao: “The *Tao* that is described as the *Tao* cannot always be the *Tao*. The name that is given as the name cannot always be the name.”⁵

The understanding of this mysterious word *Tao* is probably best gained directly from the mystical text of the *Tao-te-ching* itself. According to the *Tao-te-ching*, the Tao is like: food that has not been seasoned or prepared (無味; ch. 35); a piece of wood that has not been improved upon (無名之樸; ch. 37)⁶; a regular rock (路路之石) instead of a well polished gem (ch. 39); an empty room or an empty bowl (ch. 11)⁷; or muddy (that is, untreated) water (濁; ch. 15). The Tao is pristine, like a very deep canyon that cannot be accessed (谷; ch. 15), and pure like a yarn that has not been dyed (素; ch. 19).

The common thread that runs throughout these metaphors is the quality of being untouched by humans. In other words, Tao for Lao-tzu refers to that which is in perfect harmony with the pristine rhythm of nature. In the words of Y. C. Yang, to experience Tao is “(1) to know nature, (2) to be natural, and (3) to interfere not with nature.”⁸

Interestingly, in this context, Lao-tzu uses the well-known expression *wu-wei* (無為)—“non-activity”—to sum up the experience of the Tao, referring to the most proper form of human existence. The

understanding of “non-activity” is perhaps best captured in the satirical and humorous writings of Chuang-tzu. In his second discourse (齊物論), he likens the human *doing* and *experiences* to a howling wind that passes through an immense forest, creating great noise and violent movements (2:5). Eventually, however, even the monstrous wind dies down and returns to the original calm, that is to say, to non-activity.

However, Chuang-tzu, seems to go much further than Lao-tzu because he relegates the existence that consists of activities and particularity to the realm of dreams. For example, after a dream he wondered whether he had dreamed he was a butterfly, or whether a butterfly had dreamed that it was Chuang-tzu (2:32). His point is that, like a wind or a dream, all forms of particular existence arise out of non-activity and non-being and eventually return to non-activity and non-being.

Even with his idiosyncratic understanding, Chuang-tzu, like Lao-tzu, understands the Tao as referring to a state of being that is in perfect harmony with the most pristine state of being. In fact, for Chuang-tzu, even, or perhaps particularly, the human intellectual activities of giving names to things and making distinctions between things are a deviation from the pristine state.⁹

To illustrate this point, Chuang-tzu likens human intellectual activity to captured monkeys that became upset when told they were going to get three acorns in the morning and four in the evening, but became elated when their captor changed his mind and told them that, instead, they would get four acorns in the morning and three in the afternoon (2:13; 朝三暮四). Similarly, human norms, knowledge, and doings merely amount to different ways of “monkeying around” with the same reality without being able to affect change in its fundamental makeup.

Chuang-tzu tries to demonstrate how far afield from the “real” reality the human conception of beauty is by saying that a fish would swim away in panic if the “most beautiful” woman were to approach it (2:23). For Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, anything that, to any degree, requires human intervention or articulation for its continued existence is a deviation from the Tao. Accordingly, for them, nonactivity refers to a doing that does not interfere with, that is to say, a doing completely at peace with the pristine rhythm of nature. It does not refer to not doing anything at all.

Seen from the perspective of the Tao, the biblical

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commandment not to perform any work on the Sabbath has interesting implications concerning human interference in nature. To begin, the call for cessation of work on the Sabbath implies that the work of humans, being that of subduing the creation under their domination (Gen 1:28), necessarily interferes with its pristine rhythm. Conversely, not doing any work on the Sabbath means turning aside from work in order to harmonize one's life with the pristine rhythm of the creation.

Thus, the biblical injunction to keep the Sabbath from sundown to sundown (Lev. 23:32), and to keep from igniting a fire on the Sabbath (Num. 32:35), are perhaps an order to put out, on the Sabbath, the artificial lights that keep humans awake and working at night and to return to the rhythm of nature, going to sleep when the sun sets and waking up when the sun rises.

The institutions of the sabbatical year and the jubilees also perhaps coincide with the principle of the Tao. On these years, according to Leviticus 25:8-15, the ground is to lie fallow, undisturbed in its original rhythm, debts canceled, and people allowed to return to their original ancestral homes.

Therefore, the Sabbath is not a day on which one does nothing. Rather, it is a day on which one does nothing artificial, that is, nothing that is external to or intrudes upon the original rhythm of nature. In many ways, then, the Sabbath is the Tao; and the Tao is the Sabbath. Like the Tao, the Sabbath lurks behind the entire realm of human existence—biological, social, political, and economic—and silently beckons us to return to the unadorned simplicity and rest of the original creation.

The Rhythm of the Sabbath

Although largely mystical in orientation, the *Tao-te-ching* is a utopian piece of literature with practical consequences.¹⁰ For example, it teaches that when the ruler conforms, without any deviation, to the rhythm of nature, everything will automatically turn out perfectly:

When I practice *wu-wei* (無爲), the people will,
Of their own accord, become transformed (化).
When I love keeping myself quiet, the people will,
Of their own accord, live correctly (正).
When I do no administration (無事), the people will,
On their own, become wealthy (富).¹¹

In my view, this kind of utopian vision has had something of a subversive effect on society. According to

Milton M. Chiu, "the Taoists tended to withdraw from government offices and urban living and seek seclusion and isolation in the mountain regions. They loved to live modestly and enjoyed nature."¹² Consequently, it comes as no surprise that many Chinese have come to feel that "[the *Tao-te-ching*] has no great value for the common, everyday practical relations of human life."¹³

Although it could be argued that the history of Sabbath keeping has shown, in some Sabbatarian circles, similar phenomena, and that in some ways the ideals of Isaiah 58:13-14, resemble those of *Tao-te-ching* 57, the utopian vision of the Sabbath is different from that of Lao-tzu in important ways.

First, the Sabbath calls for a regular rhythm of rest and work, not only allowing but blessing activities that, like farming, may not strictly accord with the original rhythm of nature. Second, the call for Sabbath keeping denies the possibility that there could be human activities that do not intrude upon and interfere with the rhythm of nature: all human activities interfere with nature's own rhythm, pure and simple. Otherwise, at least for those whose activities perfectly conform to nature, the Sabbath would be unnecessary. Human work is simultaneously sacred and intrusive.

The most fascinating concept in this connection is the notion that God kept the Sabbath (Gen. 2:3; Exod. 20:11). Why would God need to keep the Sabbath? It appears to me that even God's own creative work constitutes an intrusion upon the pristine condition of the universe that is even deeper than nature itself, and is itself subject to the second law of thermodynamics. Psalms 102:25-28 eloquently states:

Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They will *perish*, but thou dost endure; they will all *wear out* like a garment. *Thou changest them* like raiment, and they pass away; but thou art the same, and thy years have no end. (Italics mine)

The creation is inherently unstable, and the inevitable entropy of all matter cannot be prevented. Perhaps the keeping of the Sabbath on a weekly basis and every seven years, in which the intrusive work of humans regularly comes to a halt for brief periods of time, is meant to delay the final and inevitable deterioration of the creation.¹⁴ In the *Tao-te-ching*, the rhythm of life consists of surge and ebb, development and destruction, and rise and fall. In this ever-constant "movement, flow, and change" that patterns life, one

The Sabbath is not a day on which one does nothing. Rather, it is a day on which one does nothing artificial.

encounters the Tao at its lowest point, in the valley of existence.¹⁵

Similarly, the Sabbath is experienced as humans bring their activities to a halt, along with their insatiable desire to impose improvement upon nature, and descend with abandonment to where they can find the lowest possible common denominator with the rest of the creation. As harsh as it may sound, perhaps it is during these brief moments in which the intellect-induced activities of humans recede that the rest of creation catches its breath and heals itself.¹⁶

Conclusion

My aim in this article has been to explain the concept of cessation of work from the perspective of the Tao. The keeping of the Sabbath, as described here, is difficult to carry out even on the personal level, and it is even more unlikely to be carried out on a larger scale. But I wanted to raise to the level of consciousness the warnings, inherent in both the *Tao-te-ching* and the biblical concept of the Sabbath, that human activities are at odds with the rhythm of nature, and if allowed to continue unchecked, we will hasten our own self-destruction, which is perhaps evident from the unprecedented worldwide ecological and political disturbances that we are experiencing today.

By understanding the consequences of our nonstop activities, we can hopefully put things into perspective, and, God willing, delay the loss of what we cherish most: life.

Notes and References

1. Concerning the history and current trends, as well as the difficulties, involved in *Tao-te-ching* research, see Julia M. Hardy, "Influential Western Interpretation of the Tao-te-ching," *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching*, L. Kohn and M. LaFargue, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 165-88.

2. See W. J. Clennel, *The Historical Development of Religion in China*, rev. ed. (London: Percy, Lund, Humphries, 1926), 63-80, for details of the Taoist religions. See also, Y. C. Yang, *China's Religious Heritage* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943), 143: "The Taoist philosophy and the Taoist Religions are very different from each other." I cite these older works because they are eyewitness accounts of the Taoist religion in pre-communist China.

3. All Bible quotations are from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

4. Yang, *China's Religious Heritage*, 148.

5. My translation. The opening bicola 道可道非常道 名可名非常名 is very difficult to translate but its basic meaning is reasonably clear.

6. Compare chapters 15, 19, 32; Lao-tzu very often uses 樸 as a metaphor of the nature's pristine rhythm.

7. According to some scholars, the word *empty* (虛), can have a metaphysical meaning. See Yong Ok Kim, *Nojarwa 21 Seghi* [= Lao-tzu and the 21st Century] (Seoul, Korea: Tong-Na-Mu, 1999), 1:189-95.

8. Yang, *China's Religious Heritage*, 155.

9. Kang-nam Oh, *Chuang-tzu* (Seoul, Korea: Hyn-Am-Sa, 1999), 88-89.

10. Benjamin Schwartz, "The Thought of the Tao-te-ching," in *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching*, Kohn and LaFargue, 189-95. I agree with Schwartz that *Tao-te-ching* is not only mystical, but also "multifaceted" (189). I disagree that the mysticism of the *Tao-te-ching* is as metaphysical as Schwartz makes it out to be (compare pages 194-95).

11. Chapter 57; my translation.

12. Milton M. Chiu, *The Tao of Chinese Religion* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 273; Yang, *China's Religious Heritage*, 159.

13. Yang, *China's Religious Heritage*, 152.

14. In chapter 51, Lao-tzu hints that he is not against productivity, but that his aim is to remind humans that the Tao is the fountainhead of all things, indeed life itself (道生之, 德畜之, 物成之, 物成之). Lao-tzu does not suggest a regular cycle of returning to the origin of life, unlike the Sabbath. Rather, he believes that if one remains with the Tao, the rest will take care of itself.

15. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Berkeley, Calif.: Shambhala, 1975), 192.

16. Compare Kang-nam Oh, *Tao-te-ching* (Seoul, Korea: Hyun-Am-Sa, 1995), 145, 275.

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New Explorations of the Sabbath

A Review Essay by J. Paul Stauffer

Wayne Muller. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999.

Donna Schaper. *Sabbath Sense, A Spiritual Antidote for the Overworked*. Philadelphia: Innisfree Press, 1997.

Marva Dawn. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989.

Dorothy C. Bass. *Receiving the Day, Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*. San Francisco: Jossy-Bass, 2000.

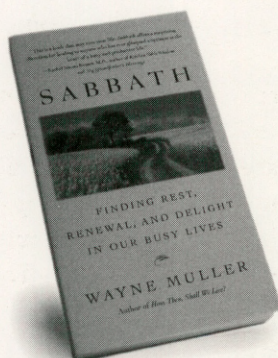
It's not exactly new. A couple of centuries ago William Wordsworth complained:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

Henry Thoreau, retreating to the shores of Walden pond for an experiment in living deliberately, was motivated in part by his observation that his neighbors in Concord lived lives of "quiet desperation."

Protests against the deadening pressures of our lives, our frenetic busyness, our drive to achieve ever greater social and financial success and its material concomitants, have never been more common, or more strident, than they are now. I do not know whether, despite the promise offered by labor-saving devices, most of us are truly more harried, more frazzled, than in times past, when certainly the hours of labor for most people were much greater than they are today. But one cannot deny the widespread perception that many of us, possibly most of us, live lives in which there is simply not time enough.

An interesting result of the seriousness of a perverse drive to work harder and longer is the appearance of a number of books about Sabbath, Sabbath as a cure or at least a palliative for the hurried pace of contemporary life. These books, at some of which we will be looking, are not by Seventh-day Adventists or Jews but by Christians of disparate background and emphasis who offer insights into the enrichment that Sabbath can bring to the Christian life.



Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives

Wayne Muller, author of *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* explains what he means by Sabbath: Throughout this book I use the word *Sabbath* both as a specific practice and a larger metaphor, a starting point to invoke a conversation about the forgotten necessity of rest. Sabbath is time

for sacred rest; it may be a holy day, the seventh day of the week, as in the Jewish tradition, or the first day of the week, as for Christians. But Sabbath time may also be a Sabbath afternoon, a Sabbath hour, a Sabbath walk—indeed, anything that preserves a visceral experience of life-giving nourishment and rest. (7)

Muller is an ordained minister, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School. He is also a therapist, the founder of Bread for the Journey, an organization dedicated to serving families in need, and a director of The Institute for Engaged Spirituality.

This is a very readable book. Its prose moves effortlessly with a pervasive poetic quality. Its short chapters, usually only about four pages long, are rich in anecdote and allusion, and are grouped under these headings: Rest, Rythm, Time, Happiness, Consecration, A Sabbath Day. Each of the chapters is followed by Practice. The “Practice” sections usually include an illustration or anecdote or poem followed by a specific practice, a sort of warm-up exercise.

For example:

Sabbath time is enriched by some period of intentional silence. Choose a period of time or an activity—such as a walk or hike, alone or with someone you love—when you will refrain from speech. Notice what arises in silence, the impulse to speak, the need to judge or respond to what you see, hear, feel. Notice any discomfort that arises when you are not free to speak. . . . I seek out silences, I delight in them. They seem sweet, safe, a Sabbath, a genuine sanctuary in time. (55, 56)

The introductory chapter, entitled “Remember the Sabbath,” introduces the themes that are extensively developed and elaborated in subsequent chapters: the loss of the rhythm between work and rest, the supposition in our time that action and accomplishments are better than rest, the seduction by the promises of more, “more money, more recognition, more satisfaction, more love, more information, more influence, more possessions, more security” (1).

Even in the doing of good works, of seeking peace and healing in the world, attempts to solve problems of human need are too often hurried, frantic, and made less effectual by their being unaccompanied by the gift of time. Muller cites his participation on boards and commissions with generous and compassionate people who are “so tired, overwhelmed, and

overworked that they have neither the time nor the capacity to listen to the deeper voices that speak to the essence of the problems before them” (4).

Muller asks, “How have we allowed this to happen? How did we get so terribly lost in a world saturated with striving and grasping, yet somehow bereft of joy and delight? I suggest that it is this: we have forgotten the Sabbath” (5). Much of what follows plays variations on these two principal themes: the tyranny of our submersion in activity, whether work or play, and the joys and blessings of Sabbath rest.

Repeatedly there are lyrical passages that celebrate Sabbath time.

Like a path through the forest, Sabbath creates a marker for ourselves so, if we are lost, we can find our way back to our center. “Remember the Sabbath” means “Remember that everything you have received is a blessing. Remember to delight in your life, in the fruits of your labor. Remember to stop and offer thanks for the wonder of it.” (6)

Again:

We, too, must have a period in which we lie fallow, and restore our souls. In Sabbath time we remember to celebrate what is beautiful and sacred; we light candles, sing songs, tell stories, eat, nap, and make love. It is a time to let our work, our lands, our animals lie fallow, to be nourished and refreshed. Within this sanctuary, we become available to the insights and blessings of deep mindfulness that arise only in stillness and time. (7)

His most scathing critique of our brashly acquisitive society is in a cluster of chapters, “Why Time Is Not Money,” “The Gospel of Consumption,” and “Selling Unhappiness.”

To illustrate the inadequacy of expressing a nation’s well-being simply in economic terms he offers this ironic list of examples:

Every time someone gets cancer, the G.D.P. [Gross Domestic Product] goes up. Every time an infant dies, the G.D.P. rises. A drive-by shooting improves the economy by \$20,750. If the victim dies, and there is a murder trial, the benefit to the economy leaps to well over \$100,000. An oil tanker spill can



contribute between five and twenty million dollars of "growth"; the benefits of an airline crash or terrorist bombing can be far greater. And consider the value gained from trade with countries our own State Department has cited for torturing their citizens. In 1995 alone, this boon added an estimated \$400 billion to our national worth. And so it goes: Land mines, civil wars, church burnings—each provides a boost to our bountiful economy. (111)

Now this seems unusually bitter for Muller, but it illustrates the intensity of his concern for the subordination of human values to the drive for economic and material success. All the values associated with the Sabbath stand in opposition to that subordination.

In his chapter entitled "Legalism and the Dreary Sabbath," he notes, though he does not emphasize, the thirty-nine rabbinic prohibitions regarding work on the Sabbath. It has been common among Adventists to think of the Sabbath as observed by Orthodox Jews as encumbered with a deadeningly specific collection of prohibitions.

Of course we have only to look back among our Adventist selves to find many of us who remember their childhood Sabbaths primarily for their don'ts. Except for briefly deploring, with examples, legalistic Sabbath observances, Muller does not dwell on the negative side. He, like the writers of the other books considered here, makes a number of references to Jewish writers, including Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose emphasis is not on prohibitions, but on the joys and blessings of the Sabbath.

Interestingly though, after Muller's brief look at the legalistic Sabbath early in the book, he comes back to it in a much later chapter, entitled "The Tyranny of Choice," where he offers a novel justification for Sabbath rules. He cites one Jewish scholar who credits the traditional thirty-nine prohibitions against working on the Jewish Sabbath with giving birth to "the most precious, inestimable pearl" of Sabbath tranquility.

In other words, the prohibitions free us from choice, which, he says, is different from freedom and can be painful because one can suffocate in a "sea of options." The restrictions or prohibitions function as boundaries. Recalling the necessity of surrounding his garden with a small fence to keep out destructive rabbits, he observes that

The Sabbath is a patch of ground secured by a tiny fence, when we withdraw from the endless choices afforded us and listen, uncover what is

ultimately important, remember what is quietly sacred. Sabbath restrictions on work and activity actually create a space of great freedom; without these self-imposed restrictions, we may never be truly free. (143)

Among the practices Muller recommends, I was particularly impressed by statements in a number of places about blessing others as an aspect of experiencing Sabbath. He notes that in the Friday evening meal welcoming the Jewish Sabbath the father blesses his children. A Jewish friend tells him: "The candles and the wine are sweet, but when I put my hand on my daughter's head and bless her, and offer a prayer for her strength and happiness, I can feel all the generations of parents who have blessed their children, everyone who has come before, and who will come after." (46)

Then Muller makes this suggestion for "practice":

There are many ways to offer your blessing. You may bless your children, your lover, your friend, by placing your hand on their head, and offering a prayer for their healing, their well-being, their happiness. Let them feel the truth of your prayer in their bodies. When this happens, many report feeling the physical blessing actually enter their body. It is as precious as it is free—completely gratuitous. . . . Another practice invites us to bless strangers, quietly, secretly. Offer it to people you notice on the street, in the market, on the bus. "May you be happy. May you be at peace." Feel the blessing move through your body as you offer it. Notice how you both receive some benefit from the blessing. Gently, almost without effort, each and every blessing becomes a Sabbath. (46-47)

The idea of blessing others is very attractive. In Paris one Ascension Day, I stood among others in the south aisle of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the church crowded with worshippers. From the apsidal end came the procession of participants, led by the archbishop who would be officiating in the service. As he progressed down the aisle and around through the nave he kept making a sign of blessing over the whole congregation.

As I watched him, I thought how wonderful it would be to be able to believe that one could effectively confer a blessing on great numbers of people by making that priestly gesture. I was then and continue to be skeptical about the efficacy of a generalized blessing, which seems rather like magic. But I was also envious. I concluded that I cannot confer a blessing on someone else but that

I can breathe a brief prayer to God, who does the blessing, and that appears to be Muller's intent.

The skeptic within me, however, becomes uneasy at Muller's suggestion that the one doing the blessing and the one being blessed may, as in the "practice" quoted above, feel "the physical blessing actually enter their body."

Muller exhibits what one might call an eclectic spirituality, using illustrations and drawing inspiration from a remarkable variety of religious traditions. He says: "I have . . . tried to offer a rich mixture of practices from various traditions, including my own Christian tradition. Some form of Sabbath time is practiced by Jews and Christians, by Buddhists and Muslims, Hindus and native tribes around the world" (12).

It should probably be pointed out that since he treats these religious traditions with apparently equal respect, some Adventist readers may be uncomfortable, for example, when they come upon a juxtaposition of Buddha and Jesus in such a passage as this:

The practice of Sabbath is like the practice of taking refuge. In Buddhism, one takes refuge in the Buddha nature, and in the wisdom of the Buddha and in the family of the Buddha. In so doing, we join the company of all those who have sought healing and liberation, we surrender into that place where Buddha-nature already lives within us, and we align our intention with our innate, natural perfection. Thus, when we sit in meditation, all the saints and ancestors send us loving-kindness, as they accompany our each and every breath. Jesus offered this same beautiful practice to his disciples. Make your home in me, he said, as I make mine in you. The kingdom is within you, he reminded them, alive and miraculous this very moment. I am with you always: When you come to rest, you will feel me. You will remember who you are, that you are the light of the world. (9)

In my first reading of the book I felt that I was more often in touch with the therapist than the minister. I felt that Muller's conception of Sabbath slighted the command to keep it holy, that he was offering Sabbath observance as conducive to good mental health. I discovered, however, that that impression had been

created mostly by the practices, the short "warm-up" exercises that close each chapter. On a second reading I found a reverence for the Sabbath as a spiritual experience. I still think that the therapist comes through more strongly than the minister, but the minister is usually there, especially in the innumerable passages that celebrate the beauty and delight associated with Sabbath.

It is obvious that Muller indeed loves Sabbath. He mentions being introduced to a Jewish congregation as "a Goy who loves Shabbos!" He is attracted to some of the traditional practices of the Jewish Sabbath,

**I was particularly impressed by statements
in a number of places about blessing others
as an aspect of experiencing Sabbath.**

particularly the Friday evening welcoming of the Sabbath with a special meal with candles, a Sabbath prayer, and blessing of the children.

In the last section of the book he offers examples of practices followed by people he knows, sharing his own family's practice in "Sabbath Morning":

Sunday mornings we gather our children, Sherah and Maxwell, into our bedroom. We sit together in a circle and light a candle, then meditate for about five minutes. We then take turns offering a prayer for someone we are concerned about, and also offer a prayer for something we are thankful for. . . . Finally, we dedicate a certain amount of money from everyone's allowance—usually a few dollars every week—to be given away, and we discuss who we think could most benefit. It is usually up to the children to decide—we merely offer suggestions. The children seem to like this part the best, knowing that someone in the world will receive the blessing of our having sat together for a few moments around a candle in a bedroom. (225)

In Muller's work, I find a writer, himself clearly an acknowledged Christian, whose work about the



Sabbath seems designed to appeal not only to other Christians, but almost equally to readers with little or no religious leanings, who are living strenuously busy lives and who might be attracted to a day of rest for their spirit's sake.

We leave Muller with this quotation:

So let us remember the Sabbath. Let us breathe deeply in the rhythms of life, of the earth, of action and rest. Traditionally, Sabbath is honored by lighting candles, gathering in worship and prayer, blessing children, singing songs, keeping silence, walking, reading scripture, making love, sharing a meal. Just as we must wait until the darkness falls before we can see the stars, so does the Sabbath quietly wait for us. As darkness falls, as the light of the world fades and disappears, we light the inner lights, the lights of home and refuge. Our steps take us home, and the light draws us in. (11)

Sabbath Sense, A Spiritual Antidote for the Overworked

Sabbath Sense begins with this sentence: "The idea for this book came to me when I realized that my husband and I and our three children had more fun than other people" (13). Donna Schaper, the author, goes on to explain that her husband is Jewish and that she is a United Church of Christ minister, in fact an "area minister" with oversight of a hundred churches. Their family practice with regard to Sabbath is celebrating "Sabbath on Friday nights with Hebrew prayers and the lighting of the candles, and celebrating the Christian Sabbath on Sundays." She adds that they also "celebrate Sabbath moment to moment by intentionally breaking from work in various ways to honor Spirit" (13).

And it is that part of Sabbath celebration, what she calls "Sabbath Sense," that this book is about. Granting that the practice of former times, when stores were closed and families came together to worship and to renew their relationship with God, is largely lost in our culture, she declares that the "sense of Sabbath as spiritual leisure is still very much needed in our time-starved world. . . . Sabbath," she says "is a state of mind, not a day of the week (14, 19).

Whereas on the one hand she dissociates Sabbath sense and Sabbath, on the other she remembers.

When I was a parish pastor and conducted my own

Sunday services, I got a taste of what good Sabbaths are about. They are times to remember the ancient texts and to think about them in a contemporary context. They are a time to sing. They are a time to forget about ourselves. A time to be quiet together. A time for filtered light. A time for lit candles. A time for preludes and postludes, marked beginnings and endings. Sabbath is a time to let go of the past, to receive a blessing, to be reminded that it is possible to go on. Sabbath is a time to learn more about the core of the universe. It is a time to be in sanctuary, safe space, to look out the windows and know we are safe inside. (29)

Having become an Area Minister (equivalent to a bishop) she finds less "Sunday Sabbath" in her life. She says she has learned to be less "churchy," realizing that "Neither God nor Sabbath is caged in the church" (30). It was this change in Sabbath experience that led to the writing of the book. She has, she says, "a lust for Sabbath" (34). She likes "its interruption of ordinary time with sacred time," and shares her private rituals, which, she says, are quite physical (36).

Sabbath Sense is the strategy for any spiritual fitness plan. . . . My personal Sabbath strategies are my garden and my writing. . . . They give me a simple enough story about which to effervesce. Formal religion has not done that for me for a long time. . . . I do not find God so much in religion but rather outside and under religion. In religion I am a doer; outside I have the space for being. In Sabbath Sense, we have a chance to play, to be. (111, 112)

Like Muller, Schaper has much to say about the frantic pace of our work-driven lives, a motif incessantly present throughout the book. The first chapter trumpets that theme under the title "Sabbath, the New Play Ethic, Dethroning the Idol of Work."

Insisting that the work ethic does not work, Schaper proposes instead a play ethic in which the connection between work and happiness is restored. It is never entirely clear how one switches from the work ethic to the play ethic, though the implication is that it is by developing Sabbath sense, by deliberately setting aside time and withdrawing periodically, even if briefly, from the obligations of duty. "Sabbath as a new ethic of play separates 'must' from 'may,' duties from desires, obligation from freedom." (25)

Sabbath can be anything it wants to be . . . secret . . . subversive . . . surprising . . . serendipitous [ellipses hers]. Working but not working. Playing at work. Connecting your inner self to your outer self. Tuning out in order to tune back in. Spontaneous pre-vacationing. Planning a little unplanning. (69)

That piling up of a series of catchy and often clever phrases, which I take to be a sermonic device, occurs often. The thoughts seem to go by so rapidly that one can be somehow impressed without having time to consider whether they are just or not. Schaper likes opposing pairs, urging play rather than work; being rather than doing, desire rather than duty. "Doing," she says, "is a false idol."

And I paused for a while on this one: "Duty does not produce. Grace does" (53). I find myself unpersuaded; many of her observations may stimulate attention for a few moments but on reflection seem half-truths. I did not find "the play ethic" a meaningful metaphor for the spiritual experience she recommends.

Before I had reached the middle of the book I realized that I was not the right reader for *Sabbath Sense*. Finishing it and going through it a second time did little to change my mind. Although I am entirely sympathetic with her principal thrust—the importance of making time for spiritual rest by withdrawing from work or other involvements that are so engrossing—much of the time I found myself put off by what seemed to me overstatement, and her addiction to the catchy phrase. Frequently, I found myself going back to reread a turbid paragraph that failed to communicate to me. More and more I was arguing with the author.

Sometimes, the troublesome passages involve deliberate paradox, a device of which Schaper asserts she is very fond. This sample from the chapter, "Clutter-Free Living," I find undecipherable:

The problem isn't the chaos of modern houses so much as it is the sense of *defeated chaos*. Spring cleaning doesn't abolish chaos but rather liberates it from defeat, something like the French poet's concept in "Le Bateau Ivre": "Peninsulas washed adrift from their moorings never experienced a more triumphant chaos." Spring cleaning lets drifting moorings live a more triumphant chaos. That is the only goal it dares. Sabbath is not compulsive order; it is creative order. As such, it can include all the chaos it needs to include. Still,

it triumphs, chaos and all. (104)

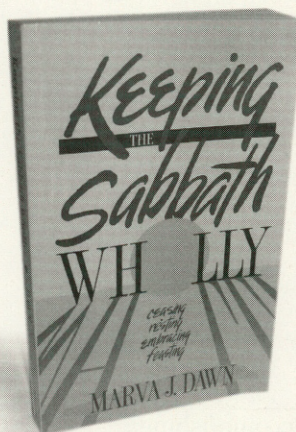
By the time I reached "defeated chaos" my left brain was at sea and never recovered from the ambiguities and non sequiturs of the rest of the paragraph.

Before I leave *Sabbath Sense*, I have a final quibble. Schaper says: "As Elizabeth Barrett Browning said, 'All that I had Hoped to Be and Was not / Comforts Me'" (113).

That, of course, is an inaccurate and overcapitalized quotation not from Elizabeth but from Robert Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

All that I aspired to be and was not
Comforts me.

I realize that I'm sounding like a crochety English teacher, unredeemed by the slightest tinge of postmodernism. That being so, I am sure I am not able to be fair to this book. Donna Schaper has splendid credentials. She is a graduate of the University of Chicago Divinity School, one of the first women to be ordained, cofounder of Women Organized against Rape, formerly associate chaplain at Yale University. She has written extensively and I am sure has found many sympathetic readers.



Keeping the Sabbath Wholly

Turning from Muller and Schaper to Marva Dawn's *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, one senses immediately an overtly religious spirit. The book breathes the devout piety of someone earnestly seeking the presence of God, who sees the Sabbath as a time in which to experience that presence most completely, who also acknowledges the Sabbath commandment as the basis for her observance.

At the outset, she tells us what she means by Sabbath:



I will not enter into the debate about whether the Sabbath should be observed on Saturday, the true seventh day of Jewish custom, or on Sunday, set apart by the earliest Christians as the Lord's Day. There are many reasons for emphasizing either choice. It has worked best for my own understanding of my faith to observe a Sabbath day (thus thankfully appreciating the roots of my faith in the insights, practices, and disciplines of the Hebrew people and responding to the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy), but to practice my Sabbath customs on Sunday (to recognize the Resurrection as the decisive event for Christian faith and life). (xi)

To Adventist readers, this book will seem clearly more "religious" than Muller's and, except for treating Sunday as Sabbath, more "orthodox." While also stressing the idea of delight, it more explicitly sees Sabbath observance as a sacred requirement established by God himself, though the author is at pains to say, "To keep Sabbath is not a legalistic duty. Rather, living in accordance with our natural rhythms gives freedom, the delight of one whole day in every seven set apart as holy" (xii).

Dawn is an author, a teacher, and a theologian. She has what I take to be a rather new doctorate in Christian Ethics and Scriptures and makes numerous references in this book to the work on her dissertation. In fact, I sense in the rigorous organization of *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* the influence of the discipline involved in writing the dissertation.

Her chapters are organized under four heads: "Ceasing," "Resting," "Embracing," and "Feasting." Each of these sections, as she explicitly points out, is composed of seven chapters.

To illustrate the clarity of her outline, these are the chapter titles in "Ceasing":

- Ceasing Work
- Ceasing Productivity and Accomplishment
- Ceasing Anxiety and Worry and Tension
- Ceasing Our Possessiveness
- Ceasing Trying to Be God
- Ceasing our Enculturation
- Ceasing the Humdrum and Meaninglessness

Each of the other three major headings has similar divisions.

In the first section and throughout much of the

work it is clear from the chapter titles that she has concerns similar to those of Muller about the extreme busyness, the drive to achieve, the preoccupation with accumulating things. But it is clear from other titles, such as "Ceasing Trying to be God" and "Ceasing our Acculturation," that she is urging a more explicitly Christian style of life. In "Ceasing Trying to be God" she observes that ceasing work on Sabbath signifies our reliance on God for our future. We acknowledge that we are not in control of our lives.

On that day we do nothing to create our own way. We abstain from work, from our incessant need to produce and accomplish, from all the anxieties about how we can be successful in all that we have to do to get ahead. The result is that we can let God be God in our lives. (29)

In her chapter entitled "Ceasing Our Enculturation" Dawn notes that as the Sabbath has been a means of setting the Jewish community apart from the world, so also keeping a Sabbath is a declaration that one is a member of Christian community, that is, "an alternative society," standing in contrast to the values of the pervasive culture in which we live. That sense pervades the book and is further elaborated in the third section with "Embracing the Values of the Christian Community." The result is that

Sabbath keeping changes our character. We will be irrevocably transformed by the commitment to a special day set aside for our relationship with God, and that transformation will result in thinking and attitudes and emotions and behavior consistent with the character of the God who is the focus of our Sabbath keeping. (97)

Such a statement clearly reveals the essential difference between Dawn's and Muller's rationale for Sabbath keeping. Although Muller personally might agree that God is the focus of our Sabbath keeping, that is not the emphasis of his work.

In "Spiritual Rest" Dawn says:

The greatest result of Sabbath resting is the opportunity to know the presence of God, no matter what our present circumstances might be. . . . In our Sabbath prayers, then, we request the profound rest of God. We ask him to embrace us within the tent of his peace, the very dwelling of his presence. (61, 64)

In "Intellectual Rest" she comments on a question frequently asked when she speaks about Sabbath keeping: What about ministers, Sabbath School teachers, organists, and choir members? She responds:

For me teaching a [Sunday School] class is utter delight and usually the setting for a new experience of the Holy Spirit's empowering. (I feel the same way whenever I play the organ, direct or sing in a choir, or give a sermon on a Sunday morning.) However, I do not do any studying or practicing for those tasks on Sabbath morning! All my studying must be done in the days or weeks beforehand. Then, when it is time for me to teach, the Spirit can bring to mind what I have learned and also give me new insights as I speak. . . . The Sabbath is a day for intellectual rest, so I want to be sure that I have done my homework before I lie down to sleep on Saturday night. (81)

Like Muller, Dawn is acutely sensitive to the problems of the poor and the troubled, and for her the values she finds in the Sabbath are closely intertwined with her social concerns. She says: "Both the intensity of my commitment to Sabbath keeping and the fervency of my desire to care about the hungry and to build peace in the world have been growing side by side over the last several years" (88).

My prayer has been that this book will reawaken a desire among Christians to keep the Sabbath. That prayer is extended by the petition that our Sabbath keeping in the church will also issue in justice keeping and peace keeping in the world. (94)

The "Embracing" section relates Sabbath keeping to our roles as Christians throughout the week, on keeping the Sabbath wholly, in that it focuses (1) on people rather than things, (2) on giving rather than acquiring, (3) on clarifying our "mission" through contemplating God's love, and (4) on working for peace and the relief of hunger.

Dawn begins with "Embracing Intentionality," that is, deliberately espousing and practicing what is

understood to be God's will in the life.

Sabbath keeping says clearly that we are not going to do what everybody else does. We are going to be deliberate about our choices in order to live truly as we want to live in response to the grace of God. We are committed to certain values and, therefore, live in accordance with them as fully as we can. Everybody else catches up on yard work on Sundays, but we have chosen to rest from work on our Sabbath day. Everyone else goes window-

The book breathes the devout piety of someone earnestly seeking the presence of God, who sees the Sabbath as a time in which to experience that presence most completely, who also acknowledges the Sabbath commandment as the basis for her observance.

shopping at the mall on that day, but we have chosen to cease the American hankering after possessions. We embrace the Sabbath day as a holy time for carefulness. (104)

Throughout the book I detect a tension between the danger of reducing Sabbath keeping to a legalistic duty and establishing certain restrictions that seem necessary to guard the Sabbath from the intrusion of the demands of over busy lives. She takes quite seriously the restrictions she has adopted for her Sabbath keeping. For example, after she observes that intimacy with God cannot be rushed, she says:

That is why keeping the Sabbath is so important—because on that day we never wear our watches at all. Except for attending certain specific hours of worship and Bible class, we have



the whole day long to move as the Spirit leads us. . . I can promise you that if you develop a lifestyle in which you spend one day as a Sabbath day without wearing a watch, you will be more able to accomplish all that you have to do on the days that you wear one. (xii)

She is very strict in interpreting "ceasing" of work on Sabbath, mentioning an occasion when after a Sabbath dinner a guest immediately began clearing dishes. "I had to ask her not to do that. Since I try to keep the Sabbath by not working, I wanted her to feel free to join me in that celebration." (103)

Citing the observation of Rabbi Abraham Heschel that whereas technological civilization is man's conquest of space, Judaism is "a religion of time, aiming at the sanctification of time rather than space," Dawn gives a chapter to "Embracing Time Instead of Space," declaring that "when we take the day to assess our use of time, we learn what is important . . . so that we aren't overcome by the tyranny of the urgent" (119).

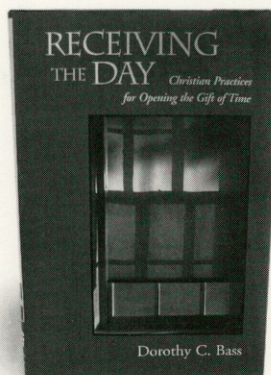
She extends the notion to investing in persons rather than things or status:

If we are cherishing time rather than space, we know that Sabbath keeping means an investment in individuals instead of in possessions and accomplishments. . . In our society it is difficult to embrace people instead of things, to cherish time rather than space. So much of our technologically efficient and materially exploitative culture militates against these values. . . Moreover, if we keep the Sabbath by embracing persons, that practice invites us to carry those same values into the other six days of the week. (122-23)

The final section is "Feasting." Dawn considers feasting on the eternal, with music, with beauty, with food, and with affection, and concludes that

All the great motifs of our Christian faith are underscored in our Sabbath keeping. Its Ceasing deepens our repentance for the many ways that we fail to trust God and try to create our own future. Its Resting strengthens our faith in the totality of his grace. Its Embracing invites us to take the truths of our faith and apply them practically in our values and lifestyles. Its Feasting heightens our sense of eschatological hope—the Joy of our present experience of God's love and its foretaste of the joy to come. (203)

This is an earnest and thoughtful book and I found in it much to admire. I must admit, however, that my admiration was tempered somewhat by its repetitiveness. The same good thoughts keep coming up in varying contexts. The author is to some degree the victim of her predetermined outline, which requires her to develop each section in seven chapters. Certainly the ideas in each section do not fall unforced into seven divisions. I puzzled about that, concluding that it had something to do with Sabbath as a seventh day, and found some support for that thought in a brief excursus into numerology toward the end of the book, which cited Samuele Bacchioni as its source (139).



Receiving the Day

The fourth book, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, by Dorothy C. Bass, is similar to *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* in its recognition of the sacredness of the day and in its author's earnest consideration of Sabbath values.

When I picked up the book, I assumed, wrongly, that the "Day" in the title was the Sabbath. I found, however, that the writer's main focus is on time, the gift of time, the opportunities offered us in that gift, the possibility and necessity of employing it for spiritual growth.

Bass concedes that

Numerous helpful works by economists, sociologists, historians, and management consultants have analyzed the shape of time in our society. However, almost no attention has been given to the deepest and most urgent dimension of our problem with time: the spiritual dimension. (xii)

In *Receiving the Day*, Bass provides an account of Sabbath keeping, but she also considers other practices "by which Christian people have sought to live faithfully in time." Following an eloquent opening chapter, "The Fullness of Time," the book is organized about time in the day, the week [Sabbath] and the Christian year. Thus, only the middle third of the book is devoted to the Sabbath, which is our concern here.

Bass opens the Sabbath chapters by recounting this experience:

I remember very clearly the moment when I first glimpsed the possibility that my Christian faith might be a source of guidance through the time crunch that was my life. It was a Saturday night, and a few teachers were sitting around a dinner table. Tomorrow, we complained, would not be a happy day. Great piles of papers needed grading, and we had promised our students that we would return them on Monday. And so we whined, and as we whined our complaints gradually shaded into boasts. Someone listening in might have thought that we were competing to see who had to grade the most, who worked hardest, and who was most put upon by the demands of his or her job.

Is our appreciation for the beauty of the Sabbath and its possibilities for spiritual enrichment as keenly alive as it might be?

That's when it hit me. "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy." This was a commandment, one of the ten laws in the basic moral code of Christianity, Judaism, and Western civilization, and here we were, hatching plans to violate it. . . . It is the commandment that caught my attention. But what drew me in is the music of sabbath, which sings of God, creation, and humanity in rhythms, tones, and words that help us know each more truly. Those who know, love, and keep sabbath can join the song, however haltingly we may do so. (45-46)

The first of the two chapters devoted to the Sabbath "sets forth the central affirmations about the contours and meaning of the day" (xiv) as expressed in the Bible and as illustrated in the lives of those who faithfully practice it. It also addresses the difficulties of observing Sabbath in contemporary life, especially as the extreme busyness and the multitude of competing interests have largely crowded out Sabbath observance from the lives even of those who are aspiring Christians. The second chapter offers guidance for those who wish to accept the practice, illustrated by the experience of those who are doing so.

Bass first looks at the beginning of the Sabbath as

the climax of creation, then visits what she calls the "Two Songs of the Sabbath" (46) the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 and that in Deuteronomy 5, concluding that

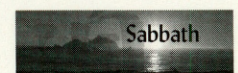
The two songs that resonate in the sabbath commandment call sabbath keepers into a dance that embodies fundamental affirmations about God's relationship to humanity: God is the generous creator who sanctifies time and the liberator who requires human beings to deal mercifully with one another. One song emphasizes the goodness of God's creation, the other social justice. (49)

Turning to Christian observance, Bass speaks of the sense of community and of a special sense of the coming together of time past, present, and future, in the Sabbath gathering of worshippers.

When these gatherings are graced by the presence of God's Spirit, something happens to time itself. In the present, in an hour or two of measurable time, those who worship plant their feet in a distant past and stretch their arms toward the future for which they yearn. Somehow, these three times blend together: the time of Jesus, the time of today, and the time of the great banquet God has promised will take place at the end of the ages. Holding hands in a cathedral and singing *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done*, we are in all three times at once. (55)

But faithfully observing Sabbath is not easy in our time. Here, though very much more briefly than in the other three works at which we are looking, Bass speaks of the competing demands of our society and of the fact that we feel we simply do not have enough time, and concludes with these words:

Just as society challenges sabbath, so sabbath challenges society. Ironically, the same forces that make it difficult to keep sabbath also make it a prophetic and relevant practice for our time. Exploring it anew is worth the effort. This exploration will be fruitful, however, only if we resolve to help one another, in



God's grace, to develop fresh forms of the practice of keeping sabbath that make sense within the complicated circumstances of our lives. (61)

Not surprisingly, Bass proposes rest from commerce, from worry, from work. She also suggests rest for creation, taking a cue from Jürgen Moltmann, a German theologian, who proposes a day without pollution of the environment.

As the earth grows fragile under the pressure of human misuse, we need to consider how we can spend our sabbaths practicing a way of life that is good for creation. . . . Keeping sabbath not only brings us closer to the earth but also begins the process of healing it. (67)

Bass has a suggestion for those for whom Sabbath rest and worship are impossible, citing the example of a nurse who had to work every other Sunday, but who took particular pains on those days to do something special for each of her patients so that those days might be marked as Sabbaths for them.

These two chapters, only a small part of a larger work concerned with the relationship of time to spiritual growth, are a mini-treatment of Sabbath as compared with the much more fully developed works of Dawn and Muller. They are, however, gracious invitations and, to some degree, encouraging exemplars for those seekers who have not yet made Sabbath keeping a meaningful practice in their lives. Bass makes many thoughtful and appreciative observations about Sabbath values. She closes that section of her work thus:

The Christian practice of keeping sabbath is also the gift of God. It offers welcome, not condemnation, losing its power if it is imposed on the unwilling or grasped self-righteously by those whose circumstances make it easy for them to keep sabbath. . . . Receiving this day means joining in a worldwide song of liberation, a song whose vibrations cut through our own forms of bondage and awaken us to the need of all people for freedom and justice. Receiving this day means singing Alleluia and being renewed in faith, hope, and love. . . . No other days can be the same, after this one. (77)

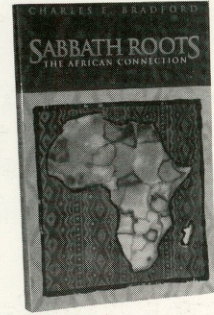
Do these books have something valuable to say to Adventist readers? Or are we likely to be deaf to their message because their authors are observing the "wrong" day? Is our appreciation for the beauty of the Sabbath and its possibilities for spiritual enrichment as keenly alive as it might be? Are we possibly so preoccupied with the "rightness" of our understanding of the importance of keeping the seventh day that we fail to experience the Sabbath as celebration and allow it to become routine?

I came away from these books appreciating the eloquently expressed sense of the serenity and the profound joy we may experience in our Sabbath keeping. Whether as a result of our careful observance we Adventists live less hurried and less harried lives, as these books promise, I do not know.

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Restoring the True Sabbath in the Ancient Kingdoms

Charles E. Bradford. *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*. Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1999.



Reviewed by Douglas Morgan

Adventists not of African heritage may be tempted to pass over Charles Bradford's *Sabbath Roots: the African Connection*, suspecting that it primarily serves a particular racial agenda. However, I think *Sabbath Roots* is a very important book for all Adventists precisely because it highlights the Sabbath as a potent symbol of liberation that links all people with bonds of equal dignity.

The "African connection" that Bradford establishes shows us that frequently overlooked movements, peoples, and prophetic figures in African history have borne courageous witness to the biblical Sabbath in resistance to institutional expressions of Christendom that had become syncretized with destructive imperial, racial, and ideological loyalties.

It was a similar perspective that put intensity into the sabbatarian convictions of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism in nineteenth-century Protestant America. Beyond simply the desire to adhere to the letter of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath message was for them a "testing truth." The seventh-day Sabbath was a sign of uncoerced loyalty to the pure, apostolic faith, at a time when the "sword" was again being linked with the cross to enforce Sunday observance—a deviation from scriptural teaching and a violation of the U.S. Bill of Rights.

Such an outlook, alloyed as it would become with exclusiveness and legalism, repels many Adventists in the twenty-first century and merely fails to stir others. Persecution over the Sabbath/Sunday question seems at best a remote possibility. Moreover, at the turn of the twenty-first century, 92 percent of the 12 million Seventh-day Adventists in the world live outside North America. Close to a third live in Africa, where the Church in mid-2001 was adding an average of 600 members per day. Furthermore, people of color now or soon will constitute a majority of believers in the Church's nation of origin—the United States.

For even traditionally minded believers, some of the particulars of a message of "present truth" directed to Anglo-Protestant America in the nineteenth-century have limited capacity to sustain passion. Perhaps the foremost significance of *Sabbath Roots* lies in its reformulation of a sabbatarian theology of history for a

church whose historical context and demographic makeup are dramatically different from what they were 150 years ago.

Africa, Bradford contends, has had a unique historical role in sustaining faithfulness to the biblical seventh-day Sabbath. He discloses deep historical currents of such adherence, which became an emblem of a radical Christian alternative to the dominant versions promulgated by the "European ecclesiastical establishment" that came in a package of white supremacy, delivered with the backing of overwhelming military force.

Since culminating a career of church leadership as president of the North American Division from 1979 to 1990, Bradford has devoted much of his time to research, writing, and speaking about the history of Christianity in Africa, particularly the sabbatarian dimension. In *Sabbath Roots*, he lays the foundation for his case with a discussion of biblical history and theology, highlighting the importance of Africa in the Bible and showing convergences between scriptural and some traditional African understandings of God.

Some may find his manner of mixing historical and theological discourse disconcerting initially.

However, Bradford is open and consistent about his methodology. By his own declaration, we see a preacher at work, using scholarly historical research to support theological insights drawn from Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White. His use of "history" is far more thorough, disciplined, and

symbol of freedom, justice, dignity, and equality, both in the Old Testament and in Jesus' proclamation of "an authentic theology of liberation" (59). For the powerless, the Sabbath asserts the right to just and humane treatment. For the powerful, it is a reminder of "their creature status,

southern Africa. Although the story in Acts 8 about the baptism of the Ethiopian treasurer for Queen Candace suggests very early transmission of the gospel message to that land, there is little documented evidence about Ethiopian Christianity until the conversion of King Ezana and the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia as the national church in A.D. 331.

From that time down to the present, Ethiopian Christianity has sustained a tradition of seventh-day Sabbath observance, although the exact nature and degree of uniformity in Sabbath practices was ambiguous during some periods. Until at least the fifth century, though, worship on the Sabbath (usually on Sunday, as well) was widely practiced throughout the Christian world outside the great centers of Rome and Alexandria. The staying power of some form of Sabbath observance appears to have been greatest in Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Nubia—all centers of dissent from the definition of the nature of Christ agreed upon at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. Among these, however, only in Ethiopia did there persist through the centuries a definite and prominent heritage of Sabbath observance.

That brings us to the heart of Bradford's case for a distinctive Sabbath-Africa connection: "African Christians were prepared by their unique position within the community of nations from antiquity, unspoiled by Hellenism and biases of the Latin Church, able to hear all sides of the question. African Christians were prepared to serve as a nexus between European Gentile Christianity and Judaism" (113). Embattled through the medieval and early modern centuries by enemies on all sides—Islamic, Portuguese, and regional

Perhaps the foremost significance of *Sabbath Roots* lies in its reformulation of a sabbatarian theology of history for a church whose historical context and demographic makeup are dramatically different from what they were 150 years ago.

intellectually creative than run-of-the-mill homiletic use of historical anecdotes.

Bradford utilizes the work of leading scholars such as Adrian Hastings, Elizabeth Isichei, and Lamin Sanneh, along with numerous more specialized sources, both Adventist and non-Adventist. Although he draws occasionally on the writings of Martin Bernal, the controversial advocate of Afro-centered historiography, Bradford makes clear that he is not claiming moral exceptionalism for Africans, or Sabbath keepers, for that matter. Nor is he arguing for Africa as the fountainhead of all that is good and great in human civilizations. The goal of his focus on Africa is a more inclusive and accurate understanding of history, as well as the meaning of the Sabbath.

In his biblical exposition, Bradford uplifts the Sabbath as

to save them from the devastating effects of hubris on account of their achievements and accomplishments" and, particularly as amplified by prophets such as Isaiah and Amos, "an antidote for racism and oppression" (60).

Historically, the distinctive role of the Sabbath in Africa centers in Ethiopia. The narratives in the *Kebrna Nagast*, the Ethiopian book of kings, about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and the eventual transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia, and, more indisputably, the presence and practices of the Falasha-black Jews in that country, indicate the presence of biblical and sabbatarian influences prior to the Christian era.

Bradford also presents evidence of Hebrew influences, prior to Christian contact, in the indigenous cultures of the Ashanti people of West Africa and the Lemba of

rivals—the Ethiopian kingdom, though weakened, survived with its own form of Christian faith at the center of national identity.

The most dramatic struggle came in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Portuguese empire builders tried to dominate Ethiopia politically and impose Roman Catholicism on it. Sabbath observance and other so-called Judaizing practices were prominent among the issues on which the Portuguese evangelizers demanded change. The Ethiopian king, Susenyos, seeking to forge an alliance with Portugal that would save his throne, accommodated the program of the Jesuit missionaries for bringing the Ethiopian church into conformity with Rome in 1625. Exaltation of Sunday at the expense of the Sabbath was part of the compromise.

However, the allegiance of the Ethiopian people to their heritage of faith proved more powerful than royal decree. Even among Ethiopians who explicitly converted to Roman Catholicism many were “circumcising their children and observing the Sabbath,” according to a Portuguese priest newly arrived in the early seventeenth century (149). When Sosenyos’s son, Fasiladas, took the throne after his father’s death, he was able to channel the powerful current of popular dissent over the attempt to foist Catholic “reforms” on the nation into a successful revolt that smashed the Portuguese-Jesuit project in Ethiopia.

Because of this early success in resisting the European intrusion and later successes that culminated with the victory at Adwa in 1896, which warded off European control at the zenith of imperialism, Ethiopia became a continent-wide symbol of independence and equality. According to historian

Adrian Hastings, it was a symbol of “enormous power,” standing for “independence from European control, Africanness, traditional culture, Christianity” (cited on 159).

Whereas Ethiopian Christianity inspired the entire continent more as a symbol than as a detailed religious program, Bradford points to several instances of African Christian movements that embraced sabbatarianism as a component of a Christianity free from European corruptions and control. Scholars such as Philip Jenkins, in his recent book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, increasingly stress the centrality of these independent churches to the history of Christianity in Africa.

Instances in the twentieth century where the sabbatarian strand prominent in these movements appears include the Vapostori, which became the largest independent church in Central Africa, and the VaHossana (also known as Apostolic Sabbath Church of God), which became widespread in central and southern Africa.

In Ethiopia itself, Sheikh Zakaryas launched a remarkable movement that began as a reforming endeavor within the Islamic community but ended up in 1910 as a new form of Sabbatarian Christianity. Though theologically similar to Ethiopian Orthodoxy, his followers and their descendants remained a distinct people, centered in the northwestern part of the nation. William Saunders Crowdy, born in American slavery, founded the Church of God and Saints of Christ in 1896. He held the Sabbath to be of central significance for black liberation, and his movement attracted a sizable following in Africa and the West Indies, as well

as in the United States.

Perhaps most remarkable of all the modern African advocates of Christian Sabbath keeping was the Zulu prophet Isaiah Shembe (ca. 1870–1935), who founded the Church of the Nazarites, which by the time of his death was one of the most influential churches in Africa. Shembe proclaimed the restoration of the true Sabbath, which the “ancient kingdoms” had tried to push aside. Shembe regarded these kingdoms and the Sunday they offered as a substitute alien to the spiritual heritage of Africa, and the Sabbath as essential to the freedom and welfare of the Zulu people.

The case for the Sabbath as deeply African as well as biblical obviously addresses the peoples in the African diaspora today with particular force. Bradford brings home the appeal with a view toward the Sabbath as an issue of ultimate loyalty: Sabbath to Jesus meant liberation, freedom, human dignity, and self-worth. This is the true meaning of the proclamation “Jesus is Lord.” Sabbath, therefore, stands for the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Africans on the continent and in the

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diaspora must bring this critical matter of the day of worship to the biblical test, under the lordship of Christ, as many of their fellow Christians have done. They must follow the testimony of Scripture, even if it means rejecting the traditions of the ancestors (212).

The theme of liberation runs throughout *Sabbath Roots*—liberation that, although not imposed by violent seizure of governmental power, nonetheless takes real world expression in all arenas of societal interaction. Here is where Bradford's work takes on a global significance and presents the Seventh-day Adventist Church with rich opportunity.

In North America at least, the emphasis of Adventist literature on the Sabbath in the final third of the twentieth century tended to move away from biblical proofs of the correct day and warnings of judgment against those who do not accept it or keep it properly. The

shift went toward emphasizing the Sabbath's experiential benefits for individuals and families and its role as a sign of God's grace and mercy toward individual sinners who find salvation through spiritual rest in his all-sufficient atonement. To the extent that this change increased appreciation for the Sabbath as a gift of divine love and sign of Christ's saving work on our behalf, it must surely be welcomed.

Is it possible, though, that preoccupation with a privatized realm of individual blessing, combined with the increasingly dubious relevance of Sunday-law centered end-time "scenarios," on the one hand, and increasing skittishness about any talk of apocalyptic beasts or being a "remnant" on the other, has thoroughly dulled the prophetic edge of the Sabbath message? Moving forward along lines inspired by *Sabbath Roots* could revitalize proclamation of the Sabbath as "present truth."

Non-Adventists have published a great deal of creative and rewarding scholarship on the Sabbath in recent years. For example, Bruce Birch, Richard Laughery, Ched Myers, and others have demonstrated that the weekly Sabbath, linked with the sabbath and jubilee years, gives structure to the entire system for social and economic justice set forth in the Old Testament and amplified in the New. The Jubilee 2000 movement to bring debt relief and economic opportunity to the poorest nations draws heavily on this scholarship.

For a world in which globalization has sharpened the gap between the haves and the have-nots, as well as inequities in access to education, health care, and economic opportunity, the Sabbath points to an obscured but central biblical theme that gives structure and content to liberation and equality. From *Sabbath Roots* we learn about the importance of a non-Western source for the preservation and restoration of the truth that Western Christendom did so much to deny.

For a world increasingly linked by economic structures and cultural influences but more bitterly divided than ever along religious, ethnic, and racial lines, the Sabbath message, which, Bradford demonstrates, owes so much to Africa as well as to the scattered faithful of Europe and Asia through the years, calls into being a community made up of every "race, tribe, language, and nation," united in worshiping "the maker of heaven and earth" (Rev. 14: 6-7), living together in love and justice.

What truth could be more for the present than that?

Douglas Morgan chairs the History and Political Science Department at Columbia Union College.

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Bonhoeffer's Niece Responds

I have enjoyed learning something about the Adventist Church and its history in Germany and found Roland Blaich's article in the winter 2002 issue of *Spectrum* especially helpful in this regard. I must say that I am astonished at the willingness of at least a segment of the church to be so self-critical.

With reference to my interview with Gary Blount (summer 2002) I would like to make a few small points.

1. From my interview one could get the impression that Bonhoeffer was a single child with seven servants. In fact, he was one of eight children who were brought up to show consideration to each other (and others).
2. Bonhoeffer's first stay in the United States was not because he wanted to defer his draft (that was the reason for his second short stay, seven years later in summer 1939), but because after taking his doctoral degree he was still too young to have his own parish.
3. I would like to emphasize that although as teenagers we liked the catchy tunes of some Nazi songs we sang

them in a mocking and critical spirit, and we knew from the beginning that the texts were awful and evil.

4. Due to the circumstances that are the subject of the interview, describing us children as "innocent" is not quite right. We knew enough about the Nazis to lose our innocence.
5. There was not a wide spectrum of opposition to Hitler in the 1930s. Opposition was impossibly difficult. We knew of one instance in which a group of conspirators was infiltrated by spies and its members executed.
6. My part in the resistance certainly was not that of a "significant actor."
7. The prison of my husband, Eberhard Bethge, was opened not by the Russians but by the guards themselves as the Russians approached the center of Berlin on April 25, 1945.

Renete Bethge
Bonn, Germany

Debating the Ogden Debate

In regard to the 2002 International Faith and Science Conference (*Spectrum*, autumn 2002), an open discussion of various views is commendable. However, more than ever Adventism needs to focus on the reality that there is good science,

and that there is bad science.

Experimental science that deals with testable and repeatable factors is quite good. Historical science that deals with interpretations of the past can be quite bad. As presently practiced, science is not just a means of finding truth about nature; science is also a secular philosophy that attempts to explain almost everything within a naturalistic (mechanistic) worldview.

Science made its greatest philosophical error well over a century ago, when it rejected God as an explanatory factor for nature. In rejecting God, science lost its credentials as a system that provides an open search for truth wherever that search may lead.

Science cannot find God as long as it insists on excluding him. Within its restricted outlook, science has come up with the concept of the gradual evolution of life over billions of years. This is the best model science has been able to produce, but it is becoming increasingly apparent that evolution falls far short of providing a satisfactory mechanism for either the origin or the advancement of life on earth.

Adventism needs to be particularly cautious in following those aspects of science that are constrained by a restricted secular philosophy.

Ariel A. Roth
Loma Linda, Calif.

Regarding your recent articles on the 2002 International Faith and Science Conference, the First Commandment, written in stone by the finger of Christ on Mt. Sinai, states: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:2). Christ taught creation and a future re-creation when seeing will be believing (true science), by his word.

Like the Pharisees of old, many world scientists assume an authority above Deity to denigrate the First Commandment and those of us educated in applied science as being unscientific.

Yet the theory of evolution, including theistic evolution, is so silly that only professionals could believe it, as evidenced by articles in *Nature* and *Science* magazines, with genetics that cannot be proved, transitional fossils that have never been seen, and fantasy evolutionary time, where chance has intelligence and the impossible is probable. At the same time, university debates on the fossil evidence of origins in the geological column are lost by evolutionists and won by creationists.

Theistic evolution is not compatible with membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church if Scripture cannot be believed and the authority of Deity is shared by so-called science. Nature is not an interpreter and is subject to man's reason. Only the Bible is an interpreter and can tell us that Christ died for our sins. These authorities are not comparable.

H. J. A. McMahon
Westmeadows, Australia

Creation Questions and Abortion

After reading the article authored by Anthony J. Zuccarelli and Gerald Winslow in the autumn 2002 issue of *Spectrum* ("The Test of Human Cloning"), I must commend you for reopening the dialogue about the beginning of human life. The authors cite in their article the argument that until day fourteen of human development science is unable to ascertain individuality and personhood because there is the possibility "for the embryo to split into two or more monozygotic offspring" (36).

The implication seems to be that there is no need to protect the embryo before day fourteen of gestation because we are not sure if we are dealing with one or more individuals. My question is this: Are two human lives of less value than one? Is the life of identical twins less valuable than that of a single individual?

Forty-five million people have perished since the United States legalized abortion, and we are condoning this by our silence, while Seventh-day Adventists publish ad nauseam about the Sabbath. Does this make sense?

We have demonstrated great concern for the health of those who have had the privilege of being allowed to be born, and we have championed the fight against the smoking habit. Have we considered that stopping abortion would add approximately eighty or ninety years to the lives of the victims of abortion?

Isn't it time that we did something about this?

Nic Samojluk
Loma Linda, Calif.

Speaking of Train Wrecks

As a "recovering Adventist," I would answer Fritz Guy's rhetorical question, "Is There a Train Wreck in the Adventist Future" (*Spectrum*, summer 2002), with one of my own: "Have you forgotten the history of Adventism, which is littered with other train wrecks?"

The "mother of all Adventist train wrecks" was probably the first one—the debacle of the incorrect prophetic interpretation in 1843/44.

Another "biggie" was in 1888 with the crisis over righteousness by faith.

In 1919, another train wreck—this one not widely known until published in *Spectrum* a number of years ago—was the secret 1919 "Bible Conference."

Reading Merikay McLeod's article in the same issue reminded me of yet another train wreck—the Pacific Press lawsuit over equal pay for women.

Do we remember Ron Numbers and the so-called "FDR" (Ford, Davenport, and Rea) train wreck of the 1980s? Donald Davenport was just one of a number of financial scandals, known and unknown.

Numbers and Walter Rea were responsible for bringing Ellen White's lack of literary integrity forward again. But, as was true in the past, as much as possible, it was hushed up and swept under the carpet.

So train wrecks are certainly not new to Adventism, and many have paid a personal price for these incidents—the "heretics," women, people of color, gays, and others.

There are other future potential train wrecks, as well. What if someone sues the Church in the United States over the genocide perpetrated by its employees in

Rwanda against other church members?

But the most serious train wreck I see in contemporary Adventism is its inability to deal with the failure of its own eschatological system and those of its prophet.

Harvey Brenneise
East Lansing, Mich.

Here is my response to the question "Is There a Train Wreck in the Adventist Future?" Yes, there is if we do not uphold the principles promoted by the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE).

Truth is like a circle, the strongest shape in plane geometry. The number of possible tangents from a circle is infinite, and the number of divergent ideas from the gospel over the last two thousand years is countless, far too many of them being in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Like desert streams, they get nowhere. The obvious aim of the IBMTE is to have our institutions and their employees keep within the circle and not tangentially fly off into oblivion.

About 66 percent of the board's members are known to hold doctoral degrees, and others are quite well educated. About 80 percent of the members of the IBMTE's Executive Committee hold doctoral degrees. Quite a few of these people are by no means "minimally educated in the scholarship and teaching of religion," but may not be of the same "color" as some of those not on the Executive Committee.

The fact that the board has members with viewpoints different from those of teachers of religion but who are still well-versed in the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy entitles it to be described as

"broadly based." It is arrogant and insulting to distrust these people. There is good reason to believe they will "stand for the right though the heavens fall." The aims of the board should be supported respectfully, diligently, and vigorously.

The advice of 1890 is forever relevant: "Again and again the angel has said to me, 'Press together, press together, be of one mind, of one judgment'" (Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 102).

M. P. Cozens
Cooranbong, Australia

I just read "Is There A Train Wreck in the Adventist Future" on your Web site.

Here is a quick note to thank you and author Fritz Guy for this insightful article on the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE). The thought police mindset that permeates the leadership in certain Adventist educational and leadership circles is disturbing.

I was saddened when I heard about the attempt to put all educators into a Jell-O mold and have them all come out looking the same. Then I became angry at the intellectual arrogance of those who would suggest such a process for "credentialing" educators.

The educational standard used by those pushing for authenticating the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventist educators is based on a forensic/legalistic model. It is rooted in a harsh view of God, a view that many thinking people reject.

Although supporters of this model veil their beliefs in euphemistic phrases about "Christ's love," the substance of their teachings tends to put forth a picture of a God that is harsh, arbitrary, and

vengeful. I, for one, reject this theological model and would not look forward to eternity with such a God.

I only hope that a number of church leaders have the courage to decline any involvement in this theological inquisition. If allowed to go forward, it will force people with intellect and knowledge equal to those doing the inquiring to reject the ongoing search for truth and to replace it with scripted theological lessons that are, in fact, based on other people's own interpretation of truth.

As Fritz Guy has stated, the IBMTE is dangerous. Everything possible should be done to reject it. We don't have a pope to tell us what to believe and think. We were "created in God's image with the power to think and to do." That is the beauty of the Adventist message.

It would be worthwhile to go back to Ellen White's writings on the Great Controversy and the fact that Satan charged God as being harsh, arbitrary, and vengeful. It would be sad to have Adventism present God in this same manner, under the pretext of insuring uniformity of belief.

Martin R. Ekrem
Brentwood, Tenn.

AAF Camp Meeting

Previously in this column I have written about how much the Association of Adventist Forums (AAF) means to me. Camp meeting also holds a dear spot in my memory, albeit primarily a childhood memory. Why?

I can still vividly recall many of the stories told in the Primary, Junior, and Youth tents by Uncle Arthur (Maxwell), Elder Eric B. Hare, and Uncle John (Hnatyshyn) at Camp Hope, in British Columbia, a beautiful place among the fir trees. There were also pretty girls from distant churches whom you got to see once a year—if you were lucky.

So you can probably imagine how excited I am anticipating combining my memories from Camp Hope with my AAF national conference experiences at the new Mountain View Conference Center near Hope, British Columbia, scheduled for August 28-31, 2003.

“Sacred Time . . . Sacred Space” will be the theme for the conference. Its keynote speakers will be Marva Dawn, Fritz Guy, Dan Lamberton, and Kim Barnes. As always at AAF meetings, there will be ample time for probing questions and vibrant discussions. Our host AAF chapter in British Columbia has arranged for outstanding musicians to enhance our time together. Mountain View Conference Center is known for its hearty, yet tasty cuisine, so count on wonderful meals.

In addition to the discussion sessions for which AAF is known, this conference will include time for activities such as hiking or fishing. The quiet mountain setting near the banks of the mighty Fraser River will provide opportunities to explore some of the Pacific Northwest’s most beautiful sacred spaces.

For those who want to see more of the Pacific region, Oakdale Travel is coordinating a post-conference tour to Alaska, September 1-12. A limited amount of space aboard the *Sun Princess* cruise ship has been reserved for a cruise that departs Vancouver on September 1. This tour will begin on the Inside Passage and go on to Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway, Glacier Bay, College Fjord, and Seward.

The tour will continue on land. It will include spectacular scenery from the luxurious *Midnight Sun Express* UltraDome rail cars as the group travels across the heart of Alaska to Denali National Park and north to Fairbanks. Included is one night in each of the spectacular Princess Wilderness Lodges, in the Denali National Park and at Mt. McKinley.

For the best cabins and discounts, book the Alaska CruiseTour before February 28, 2003, with Sue, Sharon, or Pam at Oakdale Travel. Their toll-free number is (877) 847-1701 (Pacific Time). Availability is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Additional information about this conference can be found elsewhere in this issue. I just wanted you to know about the possibilities available. I’m looking forward to seeing you at the AAF camp meeting, August 28-31, 2003.

Gordon M. Rick
AAF Vice President
and Conference Coordinator

2003 AAF Conference

August 28-31
Mountain View Conference Center
Hope, British Columbia, Canada

"Sacred Time, Sacred Space"

with featured speakers

Marva Dawn

Fritz Guy

Dan Lamberton

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2003 AAF Conference

Sacred Time, Sacred Space

August 28 – 31, 2003

Mountain View Conference Center, Hope, British Columbia, Canada

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*US estimates approximate due to varying exchange rate

mail registration form/payment to: **AAF 2003 Conference, PO BOX 619047, Roseville, CA 95661**
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Important: Because of February 28, 2003, deadline, book early to confirm most desirable outside balcony cabins and for possible discounts. Contact OakdaleTravel toll-free at 877-847-1701 (8-5 Pacific Time)—ask for Sue, Sharon, or Pam.

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Angel Waiting: Prayer for the Lost

By John N. McDowell



Sculpture by John N. McDowell, professor of English, Pacific Union College.

In air there is little to hold
the weight of divine light.

A full sunburst amounts to almost nothing.
Photons have so little luggage
to carry on their journey.
And such a long journey—all so impossible.
Yet here I am: all the evidence you need
ready to give you time to answer for your absence.

But before you do, you must know that I am
not one of those who dance the tarantella
on the head of a pin, however many guitars
and tambourines fill the blue vacuous air.

No, this is blood.
My gaze fixes flesh to stone.

Thus I wait for your return.

*But the truth of the matter
(I have been told not to reveal):
divine light bends and has more mass
than you know or
are yet able to measure.*

If you could see, no doubt
you would look with a touch of sadness, pity even,
at my somewhat weathered appearance.
Such travel, even at the speed of light, takes its toll.

Believe me, I understand the condescension,
the recognition of what you presume
is a fall from grace. The descent from heaven
takes longer than you think.

When you leave me you will enter a room
where no birds sing. If there are windows
the windows filter what little light there is
to a habit worn to lengthening incantations
tethered to stone walls built to shelter
keepers of bread and meditation
where only your prayers matter.

But listen, my wing feathers the late evening breeze—
what good is this loneliness, this passing nakedness—
hands with nothing left to do, with nothing audible
but reading light eternally?

I am required to bear
the burden of your vacant gaze every night
in the hope that you will eventually
unravel the mystery of my name.

If only you were standing next to me.

Flight is an illusion of feathers.

*I know the number of hairs
on your head.*

Still the weight of light I know
forgives.

I would like to hold you.
"Untie me," is the cadence of my every breath—
thin air gashed with the weighted color of roses.

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