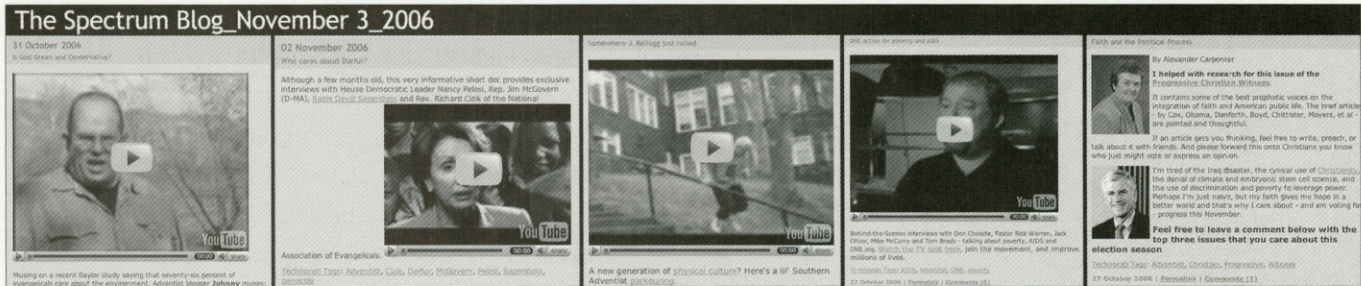


Touring the Adventist Blogosphere | BY ALEXANDER CARPENTER



BLOGOSPHERE. The word that was coined in 1999 as a joke and recoined in 2002, as the blogging community adopted it, is a collective term that encompasses all blogs as a community or social network, according to *Wikipedia*. It is an important concept for understanding blogs. "Blogs themselves are essentially just the published text of an author's thoughts, whereas the blogosphere is a social phenomenon," *Wikipedia* explains. "What differentiates blogs from webpages or forums is that blogs can be part of a shifting Internet-wide social network formed by many links between different blogs."

At the *Spectrum* Web site, the blogosphere has emerged as a new forum for graduate students and pastors, in particular, who tend to be the people within Adventism who have taken to blogging on Adventist history, contemporary culture, politics, art, and doctrine. Since spring 2006, the *Spectrum Blog* <<http://spectrummagazine.typepad.com>> has become a discussion among friends and a place for sharing many aspects of the Adventist experience.

"Blogs allow anyone to quickly post text and images to the Web without

any technical knowledge. This opens the Web to more publishing and distribution of information," according to Andreas Ramos, a blogger who has written a history and overview of blogs. There is also a history of blogging at *Wikipedia*, which says it evolved in the late 1990s from online diaries in which people kept running accounts of their personal lives. The form took off as Web tools were developed to make it easier to update Web sites, add comments to blog entries, and create links to other pages.

At *Spectrum*, Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson, a writer and designer who lives in Sacramento, California, and I started by blogging about our interests. Sharon posts regularly on art. She has interviewed artist Thomas Morphis, whose work appears on the cover of *Spectrum* this issue; featured a woman pastor-photographer from Finland; and shared links to religiously themed art exhibits. Politics and culture are of particular interest to me, so I've posted short films by Adventist filmmakers and written about progressive politics.

It did not take us long to find other Adventist bloggers on the Web and to discover fascinating commentary, images, and information. With comments from readers, interesting discus-

sions such as the one on the nature of God (pages 6–10) ensued. Here, then, are some of the highlights.

Nancey Murphy Blows the Adventist (Forum) Mind

BY ALEXANDER CARPENTER
October 23, 2006

NOW BACK from the *Spectrum*/Association of Adventist Forums conference in Coeur d'Alene, ID.

The theme, "Science and the Human Soul: reflections on the brain, hope, and love," featured excellent presentations by Nancey Murphy, Alden Thompson, and T. Joe Willey.

Fuller Theological Seminary professor (and GTU alum of the year!) Nancey Murphy presented three lectures on nonreductive physicalism.

Interestingly, while most Christians believe in trichotomism—humans are made of three parts (body, soul, and mind)—Adventists, while not often aware of it, are at least doctrinally physicalists. However, as Nancey illustrated, the philosophy of physicalism, while discarding the unscientific and extrabiblical idea of the soul, forces believers to reconceive how God interacts with the human mind as

Who's Who in the Adventist Blogosphere

Ryan Bell is senior pastor of the Hollywood, California, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and director of the Re-church Network. His blog's name is "intersectionslife::faith::culture::community" <<http://ryanbell.typepad.com>>.

Greg Brothers pastors in Lincoln City, Oregon, and uses computers in his ministry. His blog names are "Oregon Adventist Pastor" <<http://oregonadventistpastor.blogspot.com>> and "The Adult Sabbath School Class" <<http://adultsabbathschool.blogspot.com>>. Check out his blog for regular commentary on the Sabbath School lesson.

Sherman Haywood Cox II, attends Vanderbilt Divinity School and is an advocate of computers in ministry. The name of his blog is "Adventist Pulpit" <<http://www.adventistpulpit.com>>.

Trisha Famissran studies history, theology, and women's studies at Claremont Graduate University. She has just started a blog named "Adventist Feminists" <<http://sdagenderjustice.wordpress.com>>.

Hobbes is a Ph.D. student in Adventist history and a lecturer in Seventh-day Adventist and other church history at an Adventist College. The name of his blog is "Hobbes' Place: An Exploration of Adventist History and Culture" <<http://hobbes.wordpress.com>>.

Ron Osborn is working on a Ph.D. in political science at the University of Southern California. His blog is "deserts of vast eternity" <<http://www.ronaldosborn.net>>. In April, he wrote on the moral ambiguity of conscientious cooperation.

Treva Osborn is an M.Div. student at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. The name of his blog is "Divergence" <<http://trevanosborn.blogspot.com>>. He has written on church growth and evangelism (see his "Diary of a Ministerial Intern" on page 69 of this issue of *Spectrum*).

Johnny Ramirez is a student at Azusa Pacific University. He writes about religion, ethics, politics, and life in his blog, "Johnny's Blog" <<http://www.johram.com>>.

Monte Sahlin currently chairs the board for the Center for Creative Ministry, a research organization and resource center that helps pastors, congregations, and other organizations understand new generations and how to engage with them. The name of his blog is "Faith in Context" <<http://msahlin.typepad.com>>. It carries commentary on religion, values, and contemporary issues.

brain. If consciousness springs from complex neural activity, what about God? And then, how are moral choices determined?

During the weekend, the *Spectrum Blog*, along with Johnny from *Johnny's Blog*, recorded Nancey as well as Alden's sermon and T. Joe's lecture on the brain. We will be editing them and will post them as podcasts in the next couple of weeks.

COMMENT

I'll be looking forward to the podcasts when they come. I never realized the difficulty most Christians face when they confront the latest findings on the brain and neurology until I spent some time on several Christian forums. I was really wishing I could have gone to this conference.

Posted by: perpetualstudent

October 23, 2006

Should the Government take Part of Your Donations?

BY MONTE SAHLIN

October 11, 2006

THE *New York Times* concludes today a four-part series of articles pressing the issue that religious organizations in America handle billions of dollars and do not pay any taxes. This is the latest in an ongoing push from several sources for religious organizations to be taxed, or to do away with the tax-exempt nonprofit category all together. The series is quite biased, in part, because it fails to make two important points:

1. Religion-based tax breaks are based in the Bill of Rights. Americans have the right to give money to religion and know that politicians are not skimming a percentage of it through taxes.

2. If those pushing for taxes to be applied to tax-exempt nonprofits get their way, it will ultimately cost Americans far more than the present arrangement. One of the reasons that taxes are higher in many European nations is because they do not have the same vigorous nonprofit sector that America has. Taxing nonprofits in America will diminish and possibly, eventually kill this sector and, either way, the government will take over the provision of the services (at higher cost, research shows) or America will become a nation with a much more primitive quality of life.

But that's not the whole story. There is a reason why religion in America is so vulnerable to this kind of attack. The

research done by the Ronsvalles documents the fact that churches in America spend 98 percent of what they are given in offerings and donations on themselves and only 2 percent on community service, evangelism, and other outreach activities. Besides being a monumental poor witness to what Christian faith is all about, this institutional selfishness clearly tempts secular people to ask why this activity should be protected from paying its fair share of the costs of police, fire, and other services which protect churches, along with the businesses and homes that pay the cost of these services.

If American churches were spending at least half of what they receive on public service activities that clearly make a contribution to community life, this issue would never have been raised. It really is our own failure as people of faith that creates this issue, which is increasingly out of control because it appeals to both liberals and conservatives.

[Note: *The New York Times* published a portion of this posting in its "Letters" section on Sunday, October 15, 2006]

The Moral Ambiguity of Conscientious Cooperation

BY RON OSBORN
April 2006

A WEEK AGO Thursday, Seventh-day Adventist and American hero Desmond Doss died in his home in Alabama at the age of 87. Doss, who like my grandfather chose to serve during World War II as an unarmed medic, is the only conscientious objector in US history to have been awarded the Medal of Honor. He earned America's highest military

award for his actions in Okinawa, where he repeatedly put himself under enemy fire to rescue wounded men. During one battle, Doss carried 75 men out of a fire-swept area and lowered them by rope down a cliff to safety, returning repeatedly and without regard for his own safety onto the battlefield until there were no more men left to be saved.

The power of Doss's noncombatant stance, which he described not as conscientious objection but as "conscientious cooperation," seems to me to lie in the influence he had on his fellow soldiers. It might be that other kinds of pacifists who put their lives on the line (such as the Christian Peacemaker Teams in Iraq) would also impress some soldiers with their bravery. But a "conscientious cooperator" in uniform is uniquely and powerfully positioned to model an alternative ethic to other soldiers during violent conflicts. Terry Benedict's 2004 documentary, *The Conscientious Objector*, shows the transforming influence of Doss's life on the men in his fighting unit, with several of these soldiers—who initially had only contempt for Doss—actually weeping on camera as they recall Doss's humanity and courage in the midst of incredible brutality.

As I have reflected on Doss's story, and on the Adventist position during World War II in general, I have, however, grown increasingly uneasy with the Doss legacy. Doss, as a human being, was morally exemplary and it is right that we honor his courage. But "conscientious cooperation" is a more morally ambiguous and problematic ethic than the Adventist Church has so far grasped. The problem with the ethic is spelled out in John Yoder's book, *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Short-*

comings of Religious Pacifism. Yoder catalogs and critiques more than 20 non-violent positions ranging from selective conscientious objection to strict pacifism. One of his chapters is devoted to what he calls "The Pacifism of Cultic Purity," and the illustration he offers is none other than the Seventh-day Adventist Church!

Yoder suggests that Adventists have sought to keep their own hands clean in wars and to protect the rights of Sabbatarians because of a legalistic preoccupation with commandment-keeping, yet have failed to develop a wholistic social ethic or coherent theology of peace. This failure to relate matters of personal morality and obedience to larger questions about structures of power produces a kind of moral schizophrenia that I think is all too apparent in many of Doss's personal statements about his devotion to "God and country." The "cultic purity" pacifist refuses to even touch a weapon on the one hand, but is eager and willing to serve the military in every other way possible, actually tending to idolize the flag and the "war effort."

Over time, the internal contradictions and incoherencies of the "conscientious cooperator" ethic lead to a moral slide or erosion of first principles. The contradictions are resolved not through a renewed commitment to nonviolence but through greater devotion to the military as an institution. We therefore find ourselves in a situation today in which thousands of Adventists, who have probably never heard of Doss, are voluntarily fighting and killing in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, not as conscientious objectors (they did volunteer after all), nor as Doss-like "conscientious

cooperators," but as conscientious combatants. This, too, seems to me to be an undeniable and tragically ironic aspect of the Doss legacy for the Seventh-day Adventist church.

COMMENT

"A coherent theology of peace"

I like that a lot.

Hyveth Williams and the Campus Hill pastors and church saw some of its members leave after she prayed a general prayer of peace and did not, to the satisfaction of the dissenters, sufficiently bless or distinguish a young congregant about to head off to Iraq as an armed combatant.

It seemed that, as you said, the internal contradictions and incoherence of the "conscientious cooperator" ethic showed themselves in that congregation.

Posted by: Johnny

The Sabbath—Celebration of Community

BY SHERMAN HAYWOOD COX II, M.S.

April 21, 2006

"THE SABBATH is about individual rest, the church has turned it into a day of corporate worship." So say many I have come in contact with. Such an individualistic understanding of the Sabbath divorces the Sabbath Keeper from one of the greatest blessings of the Sabbath, which is a celebration of community. In fact Leviticus 23:3 reminds us that a holy convocation or meeting was required of the community in the Hebrew Bible. It was to have elements that would be kept in community. In addition, the Sabbath was not just to benefit the Sabbath keeper.

Exodus 20:10 reminds us that all who are in contact with the Sabbath keeper would benefit from the rest of

the Sabbath keeper by not doing work that would normally be done for the Sabbath keeper. Even the animals were to be blessed by the Sabbath. We are told in Exodus 23:9–10 that even the land was to keep a "Sabbath-year"; this would expand the blessing of the Sabbath to include even the creation itself. Thus the Sabbath is communal and affects not just the Sabbath keeper, but also all those who are involved with the Sabbath keeper. If the church will be a Sabbath-keeping church it must be a benefit to all who are in community with it.

A Sabbath-keeping church must see itself as one that makes sure that its Sabbath keeping is not an individual endeavor. It is one that must affect others. It is one that even those who are not Sabbath keepers must be blessed by. It is one that all those who are in relationship with us are affected by. The Sabbath-keeping church must throw away any totally individualistic gospel that ignores the communal aspects of that gospel because the very idea of Sabbath is communal.

COMMENTS

I agree completely. Adventism, true to its historical roots, is intractably pietistic and individualistic. What else can you expect from a church that grew up in the middle of the 1800s—the renaissance of modernity. So for us Sabbath has been more about private, internal holiness and pietistic (even sentimental) notions of religion. What it lacks is the Isaiah 58 prophetic edge, which we need to recover. I believe it starts, as you suggest, by letting go of our idolatry to individualism.

Posted by: Ryan Bell

April 21, 2006

Yes... American Individualism can totally obscure the communal aspects of religion. I

believe that the Sabbath keeping church must have a commitment to the justice that the biblical vision of the Sabbath contains as well as a commitment to community in that the very idea of Sabbath assumes community...

Posted by: Sherman Cox II

April 26, 2006

You pose an interesting comment regarding a community-based day of worship. I, too, have pondered this concept in the past and believe this to be a major part of worship. I feel that our sabbath worship style, based on Calvinist/Methodist worship, needs igniting. Let's put some passion into our programs. Let's reach out to the community. Isaiah 58 is a good start to understanding what the Sabbath can/should entail. Break the mold. Reach out. Celebrate.

Posted by: Azza

April 26, 2006

Do Evangelistic Campaigns "Work"?

BY RYAN BELL

May 27, 2006

A FEW DAYS AGO I was a part of one of those unfortunate conversations about whether evangelistic campaigns or public evangelism still "work." The question always leaves me wondering, "what do we mean when we say 'works'?" Normally I think these conversations primarily have the pragmatic concern of church growth in view. Therefore, the question is more accurately, "does public evangelism still produce church growth?" The proponents say yes, the detractors say no. My comment: does it really matter?

I think you can demonstrate fairly accurately that done "right," public evangelism can produce church growth. At least the proponents will

produce the statistics that show this. The detractors have their own statistics, but I think both sides completely miss the bigger issue.

Whenever we speak of something in the church “working” we must realize that we have a particular view of the church in mind. We have to ask “works for what?” So, on this particular day, as I was listening to this conversation and thinking to myself, “I’ve been here before,” I found myself consumed by this question:

What kind of assumptions must you make about the nature of the gospel in order to embrace public evangelistic campaigns as a methodology?

The more I worked on this question in my head the more I realized that it comes back to a notion of the gospel as an “it.” I wrote a post on this back in January called, *The Gospel is not an “it.”* Reading that post will help you understand what I’m saying. The evangelistic campaign, born as it was in the modern era in America, is a methodology perfectly design for transmitting a decontextualized, propositional, static, objective truth.

So, if the gospel is not an “it” then evangelistic series are not admitted. It has nothing to with whether they “work.” In many ways I am so grateful that in my context they do not “work.” This reality forces us to deal with the real gospel—the kind that has flesh and blood and takes shape in neighborhoods.

COMMENTS

I was interested in your statements “does public evangelism still produce church growth?” “does it work?” and your comments “does it really matter? along with “The Gospel is not an “it.””

I believe public evangelism works if there is a possibility of an individual becoming a disciple of

Jesus Christ. “Does it matter?” Only if you believe as I do that church growth means the growth of the body of Christ, his bride, and the fullness of him who fills everything in every way is growing. I love public evangelism, private evangelism, anything, if it produces disciples of Jesus Christ.

If people see the gospel as an “it”—can they still enter the kingdom of God? Or do you have to have the right understanding of the gospel to do so? Can a person enter the kingdom by finding a treasure in a field, burying it, and not telling the owner about the treasure, raise money to buy the field and then own the treasure? Interesting methodology and motivation for entering the kingdom. I believe we can take people who join the church via a propositional approach and still make disciples.

Until I find something better I will still encourage those who are trying public evangelism and church growth. I am probably more skeptical of those in the emerging church movement who often seem to be second or so generation Christians who have a lot to say but don’t seem to have many runs on the board.

I was talking to Erwin McManus of Mosaic recently and he told me about being approached by the Los Angeles Times, I think it was, to do a story on his and other emerging churches. (Erwin doesn’t seem to like calling his church an emerging church for some reason!) They then came back and said they were not doing the series as they had not found any emerging churches growing. They did a story on his church, but he was glad they hadn’t called his an emerging church.

We planted a church just north of Sydney, Australia, a few years ago to be amongst Australian pagans. Starting with three people we currently have just over two hundred attending. We have three ex-witches, ex-prostitutes, etc., becoming disciples and I am having a fantastic time. Some think the gospel is an “it,” some think it is a person, while others just love the community. All are at different stages as disciples and I call it church growth and I think it matters.

Posted by: Wayne Krause

May 29, 2006

I feel “whether something works” is “on the table” and a legitimate question to ask with respect to evangelism, church growth (whether or not it is measured in numerical terms), and the gospel.

Not everything that grows and works is the gospel; but I feel, whether it is an “it” or a living, dynamic interaction of God, working through specific human beings in a specific time and place, at the end of the day (although full fruition may take years, or even a lifetime), the gospel must ultimately manifest itself in (some sort of) growth and must “work” by affecting and positively changing the lives of those touched by the gospel.

Protestations and laments about the numerical success of “cheap-grace, consumer-driven” megachurches by members and leaders of shrinking, dying, totally ineffectual churches who insist they alone have the right/true/authentic theology, methodology, and liturgy, kind of reminds me of the complaints of the English redcoats in the Revolutionary War, who insisted they were “real” and better soldiers, but blamed their losses on the American revolutionaries, who, instead of lining up in proper military rank and file on the battlefield, used guerilla tactics by moving unpredictably and randomly while firing from behind rocks and trees!

Having said all that, I am not a great fan of public evangelism, as commonly implemented today, for exactly the same reason you point out—the gospel presented as abstract, propositional truths. While the argument can be made that this is only a means to an end, and that relational and contextual truths could follow later—my obvious question is—WHY? Why teach something that will have to be unlearned later? Perhaps it is precisely the reason it is second- and later-generation SDAs who are the leading skeptics of an evangelistic system that promotes a propositional truth, since it is they who have had to live with the simplistic,

judgmental, rigid consequences; and have had to painfully relearn lessons that should have been passed down by preceding generations.

As a fourth-generation Adventist lay person, I struggle to find better ways, methodologies, and values that, I, personally, can pass on to my children that will make them evangelists of a wonderful, dynamic, progressive, relational "truth." I would hope my three sons will be part of a fifth generation of Adventists who will have better tools to promote this gospel of Jesus Christ in their time and context, rather than a mere mental assent to (an estimated?) 128 fundamental doctrines.

Posted by: Neville Salvador

May 29, 2006

This discussion connects with an idea I have been toying with under the provisional label of "anti-evangelism"—that sometimes we should measure our evangelistic "success" by how many people we don't turn off/away from Jesus. My thinking was sparked by an article in *Spectrum* last year by Daniel Reynaud, reflecting on Adventist TV as a poor method of evangelism because that method of communication tends to entrench people's pre-existing beliefs. Thus, while some people are moved toward accepting God, they are those who had an existing interest, while those who tend to be skeptical are confirmed in their skepticism and in a way further "innoculated" against the gospel. I guess the biblical terminology would be their hearts are hardened.

This is yet an idea-in-progress, but Matthew 18:6 suggests serious consequences for those who cause "little ones"—those of little faith—to sin and turn them away from God.

Of course, such an idea would be misunderstood by some who would use it as an excuse for non-evangelism and criticized fiercely by those who adopt the "whatever means necessary" approach to dragging one more soul

into the kingdom. There will always be those who choose against the gospel, but should we be careful that by the way we present it to them we might be assisting them in stepping further away from God?

Would our assessment of whether evangelism "works" be different if we were to add up the positives but offset them with the negatives? And just how would we do that? Would five baptisms outweigh fifty people who are disgruntled, confused, or otherwise discouraged by the same evangelistic endeavor?

Posted by: Nathan Brown

May 30, 2006

The hard data on whether or not public evangelism campaigns "work" is mixed. They do not correlate to church growth. Why? Because both growing churches and declining churches are equally likely to have public evangelism. Campaigns are equally likely to produce growth or not. (If you want to see the complete data, look at Chapter 2 in my book *Adventist Congregations Today*.)

Don't jump to the conclusion that this is because converts who join the church through public evangelism are likely to drop out. The data on that is a very high percentage of the people who join the church through public evangelism are still going to church after one year or even several years. And, people who are born into the Adventist Church are more likely to be dropouts than are those who are adult converts.

I agree with you that the question is really irrelevant. In fact, conventional public evangelism does work with some people. It is also true that there are many groups who cannot be reached by this method. And what generates church growth is never as simple as just yes or no on public evangelism. At no point in church history has one method by itself been determinative for church growth. Church growth is a far more complex reality and always has been.

Posted by: Monte Sahlin

June 1, 2006

This is a complicated topic and I don't think I've done a good job of really saying what I intended. Monte, I think you make my original point that the traditional evangelistic series works and doesn't work. It really all depends. The point you make in your book about it not being correlated to church growth is another interesting issue that would be good to discuss but wasn't really related to what I was trying to say.

What I was trying to say was that the question of whether a methodology works is a second order question. The first order question is what it is you're doing—in this case, what the church is for. What is really at stake here is the very nature of the gospel.

I think my question still gets to the heart of what I'm trying to say.

What kind of assumptions must you make about the nature of the gospel in order to embrace public evangelistic campaigns as a methodology?

So, whether I embrace an evangelistic series as a methodology in Hollywood has very little to do with whether it works to produce church growth. The question I would rather ask is, "Does this method produce a community of disciples who by their shared life together are a sign, witness, and foretaste of God's kingdom in a place?"

My experience is that it does not. Rather (and here I will disagree with Monte at my own peril), the evangelistic series is designed to communicate abstract, decontextualized truths. Maybe it's not designed to, but that's what it amounts to. The goal at the end is mental assent to these propositions.

Now, I know many of you are doing this better than what I've described and so I do not mean to disparage what you're doing. Keep up the good work. All I'm trying to say is that the pragmatic question of church growth doesn't even begin to scratch the surface for me. In fact, my fear is that this kind of evangelism does work. Maybe I'm just stubborn.

Monte, your observation about public vs. private raises a whole other set of issues that I'll save for a separate post. For now I'll simply repent of leaving the impression that I'm opting for private over public. My suspicion is that it needs to be more public, not less.

Posted by: Ryan Bell

June 1, 2006

I think Adventist Global Evangelism, which I'm sure has done a lot of good, is very problematic for how we view the Adventist message and how we do evangelism. Their big drawing card for getting people to go on one of their evangelistic trips is that if you go, you don't have to prepare a single sermon because they are already written for you. Whether you are from Tennessee or California, whether you are going to Guatemala or Nigeria, the same sermon is going to be preached based on the same PowerPoint presentation. I think this is extremely poor

methodology and does view the gospel as an "it" which is completely decontextualized.

I'm not a fan of the traditional evangelistic campaign, but I'm not going to fight against those who want to use it. My concern is the popular attitude in Adventist circles which says that if people aren't doing traditional evangelism, they aren't reaching out at all. People are framing it in a traditional evangelism or nothing false dichotomy.

This same attitude is found in the Seminary at Andrews now. As part of our graduation requirements, we have to do a field school where we help out an evangelistic series. Every semester there are several different locations around the country. However, they all are presenting the same six-week Revelation series that we've been doing for decades. There is no thought of innovative methods of evangelism but we are happy with the same old same old.

With that being said, Ryan, I think you are doing a great job of showing us how we

can be authentically Adventist while using fresh and innovative approaches to impacting our communities. Thanks for sharing your journey with us because it has really helped me gain a greater vision of how I can lead a community of faith that transforms everyone it comes in contact with.

Posted by Trevan Osborn

June 2, 2006

At the Spectrum Blog <<http://spectrum-magazine.typepad.com>> we have a regular potluck of blogs with related links (instead of linkettes). Join us. ■

Alexander Carpenter is a graduate student at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California.



Pastor Roy & Bennie Gee

AU '66

Auburn Gospel Fellowship

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10:45 A.M. Sabbath

TWO CONGREGATIONS ONE HOLY CHURCH



Pastor Rick & Nancy Kuykendall

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