



Top Ten Amazing Facts about Amazing Facts

Regarding the Merger with 3ABN

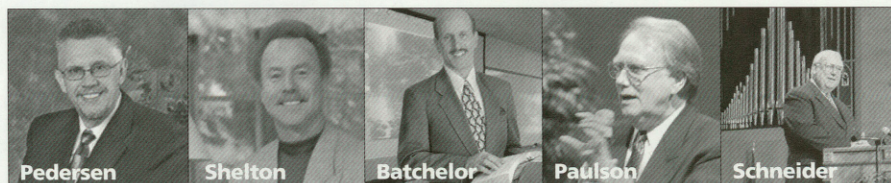
BY BONNIE DWYER

When Three Angels Broadcasting network and Amazing Facts announced in April that the two organizations planned to merge, there was much speculation about who would lead the organization and what it would mean. As of June 20, there were signs that the deal was in major trouble. Or, "dead in the water," as one official described it. Here, then, are ten facts that may explain why.

TEN. Amazing Facts is not truly an independent ministry. It is a supporting ministry of the Northern California Conference and Jim Pedersen, president of the NCC, chairs the Amazing Facts board. The assets of Amazing Facts cannot be transferred without the vote of the Northern California Conference Executive Committee, which is a major part of the constituency of Amazing Facts.

NINE. A lengthy letter from General Conference president Jan Paulsen and North American president Don Schneider to Amazing Facts and 3ABN listed concerns about the planned merger.

EIGHT. Employee credentialing may be a major deal breaker. The denomination would most likely decline to credential the employees of 3ABN.



Credentialing of employees is one thing that the Northern California Conference does for Amazing Facts.

SEVEN. One deal breaker for the Northern California Conference would be any suggestion of a property transfer to an entity outside the denomination.

SIX. Becoming a denominational entity could negatively affect the fund-raising efforts of 3ABN.

FIVE. Danny Shelton's personal and legal problems present a major liability.

FOUR. Doug Batchelor's responsibilities as senior pastor of the Sacramento Central Seventh-day Adventist Church need to be clarified.

THREE. Control of the 3ABN programming could be another deal breaker.

TWO. The more likely merger is Amazing Facts with Weimar Institute. That merger is on track to strengthen Amazing Facts College of Evangelism, Church Empowerment, and Health Programs, rather than broadcasting.

And the number **ONE** Amazing Fact about Amazing Facts is that

Doug Batchelor's mother-in-law is his administrative assistant. (Perhaps if Danny Shelton had hired his mother-in-law he would not have the problems he is now experiencing and talks of a merger would have remained only a dream.) ■

Radical Method, Radical Christ Discussed at Church Conference

BY ANSEL OLIVER/ANN

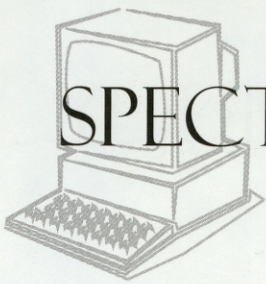
Learning new methods of evangelism brought together about 100 Adventist Church leaders, communication professionals and technology experts from around the world for the fourth annual Global Internet Evangelism Forum at Newbold College in Bracknell, Berkshire, Britain, June 28 to July 1.

"Those who are still not with us need to know that there is a deliberate approach to the Internet in the church," said Rajmund Dabrowski, communication director for the Adventist Church world headquarters, which sponsored the event.

"Some are stuck with the predictable approach to evangelism," Dabrowski said.

However, he was encouraged from the energy and amount of newcomers at the event "buying in" to utilizing technology, even if people had different ideas on what the conference was about.

Source: Adventist News Network.



Bloggin' the Twenty-Eight:

The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ | BY RON OSBORN

June 26, 2007

Campmeeting 2.0: Bloggin' the 28 Adventist Beliefs
By Alexander Carpenter

Welcome to a summer series of posts around the Adventist blogosphere exploring the ethical call of Adventist beliefs. Behind this experiment lies a simple question: How does this belief translate into habits or actions today?

Centuries before Jesus' birth, Jewish apocalyptic writers, struggling to understand the theological meaning of Israel's exile in Babylon, concluded with paradoxical audacity that pagan oppression was the result not of YHWH's weakness but of his actual justice and strength: Israel was being punished by the Creator God for its failure to keep the covenant.¹ Things would grow progressively worse, Jewish eschatology predicted, until a final, decisive moment when God would at last send a warrior-prince to restore his Chosen People to their rightful place among the nations.

Jewish apocalyptic literature used cosmic and fantastic images to describe this future event, but Jewish hopes were firmly rooted in the realm of concrete, earthly politics. When God's kingdom arrived, it would be plain for all to see by three material facts: (1) the Davidic monarchy would be restored in Jerusalem with unparalleled justice and prosperity; (2) the Temple would be rebuilt with unsurpassed splendor; and (3) the downtrodden Jews would emerge a triumphant superpower with their pagan enemies humiliated and defeated beneath them.

Jesus shared many of the basic assumptions of this traditional Jewish eschatology. He declared that oppression

would increase before finally being overcome by God's saving activity (Mark 13:7–13). He urged his disciples to be steadfast and courageous in the face of evil (Matt. 10:16–42). And he taught them to pray not for a "spiritual" kingdom somewhere in the sky but for God's kingdom to come "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

When Jesus talked about the kingdom, though, he did not talk about it in the future tense. Israel was still suffering under foreign oppression, economic injustice, and religious corruption. Jesus talked about the kingdom like it had already arrived. Even more shocking, the Gospel writers record, Jesus talked and acted like the kingdom was happening in him and through him. "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God," Jesus said, "then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20).

Jesus' kingdom announcement implied that conventional Jewish eschatology, with its vision of two successive historical ages, was either deeply flawed or had been gravely misread. Hebrew apocalyptic literature had depicted the coming of YHWH's kingdom as a dramatic, earthshattering event that would radically divide the old aeon from the new. But Jesus declared, against all of the seeming evidence, that the kingdom of God was an already present, in-breaking reality, manifest in his own life and program of miraculous healings, and best grasped through metaphors of secrecy, simplicity, and subversion.

The kingdom, Jesus said, is not like a conquering army but like a mustard seed that inexorably consumes the garden (Luke 13:19). It is like the yeast or leaven that invisibly causes bread to rise (Matt. 13:38). It is like a pearl of great price that only the passionate seeker will buy (Matt. 13:46).

In first-century Palestine, anyone talking about "the kingdom" was, by this fact alone, treading on perilous political ground. Caesar Augustus had already staked

out Rome's exclusive claim to kingdom vocabulary, and the cult of the emperor brooked no rivals. Caesar was, according to one public inscription, "the beginning of all things"; "god manifest"; the "savior" of the world who "has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times"; the one whose birthday "has been for the whole world the beginning of the good news (*euangelion*)."²

We should not be surprised, then, that Jesus encoded his kingdom politics in parables, metaphors, riddles, and cryptic sayings that did not explicitly defy Roman rule. But for those who had ears to hear, mustard seeds and pearls of great price were the rhetoric of a revolution. Jesus—the true Savior of the world—was calling for his followers to embody YHWH's actual kingdom of compassion and justice as over and against Lord Caesar's blasphemous parody.

He was telling them to incarnate God's reign in history by building a new kind of community—a countercultural "polis on a hill" (Matt. 5:14)—that would stand in nonviolent but subversive opposition to all those forces responsible for grinding down the poor, the weak, the ritually unclean, and sinners of every kind.

The fact that Jesus calls for his followers to incarnate or embody God's kingdom as a social reality in the present does not contradict but defines and animates Christian hope in the Parousia as a future event in space-time. According to John Dominic Crossan, Jesus proclaimed a sapiential as opposed to apocalyptic eschatology. *Sapientia* is the Latin word for "wisdom," and, according to Crossan, Jesus offered human beings "the wisdom to discern how, here and now in this world, one can so live that God's power, rule, and dominion are evidently present... rather than a hope of life for the future" (my emphasis).³

But the Jesus of the New Testament—the only Jesus we know—offers his disciples both a Way of living that manifests God's kingdom in the midst of the present reality and a hope for the future that invests this Way with its power and meaning.⁴ It is precisely because of their confidence in the Parousia that believers are free to live out the dangerous and demanding politics of the gospel. Conversely, it is only the social witness of believers that manifests Jesus' life and lordship over history to a watching world.

Absent such a witness, as Martin Luther King Jr. saw, there can be no authentic Advent hope. "Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the slums that damn them,

the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial."⁵

"The Favorable Year of the Lord": Economic Justice

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' first action at the start of his public ministry is to enter the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth and read from the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor... to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18–19). Only real debt cancellation would have come as real good news for real poor people, Ched Meyers points out.⁶

When Jesus claims the "favorable year of the Lord" as central to his vocation, he is therefore not assuming a "spiritual" as opposed to a political messianic role. He is, rather, directly alluding to a powerful vision of social justice contained in the Law of Moses that had been systematically suppressed and evaded by Israel's ruling elites for hundred of years, an economic ethic that would have come as welcome news indeed to the impoverished and exploited peasant masses of Galilee and Judea.

The "favorable year of the Lord" in Luke-Isaiah, Andre Trocmé and John Yoder show, is the Sabbath year or year of Jubilee commanded by God in the Hebrew Bible (particularly Lev. 25 and Deut. 15).⁷ Every seventh year, according to the Covenant, Israel was to enact a program of radical debt forgiveness, and in the fiftieth year land redistribution to benefit the poor. Among God's people, there was to be a systematic leveling of wealth on a regular basis and dismantling of what we would today describe as oppressive financial and banking institutions designed to maximize profits for creditors.

Jesus does not attempt to instate these Jubilee commandments in a rigid or programmatic way, but he does reclaim the basic principles, metaphors, and imagery of the Sabbath Jubilee for his followers.⁸ He has more to say in the Gospels about issues of wealth and poverty than any other topic—and his message remains as challenging for those of us who live in affluent countries today as it was for the wealthy Herodians and Sadducees in first-century Palestine.

Against the assumptions of laissez-faire capitalism—which posits a world of unlimited human needs, individualism, and competitive rivalry for scarce resources—Jesus

declares that we are stewards rather than owners of property, that God's creation is abundant and our earthly needs limited, and that God's liberation of Israel from slavery is normative for how we should treat the poor among us.

His warnings against capital accumulation and "Lord Mammon" are unrelentingly severe (Matt. 6:16–24; Mark 10:23–25). He tells his followers to live lives of dangerous generosity, giving and expecting nothing in return (Luke 6:30). He tells them to forgive each other's debts (Matt. 6:12), not to worry about their own material needs but to live out a lifestyle of trust and simplicity (Matt. 6:25–34; 10:9–10). And he instructs them to pursue justice actively (Matt. 23:23). Material care for the poor, the oppressed, and the hungry, Jesus declares, is the primary mark of discipleship—and the only question at the final judgment (Matt. 25:31–40).

Jesus' radical economic teachings were epitomized among his early followers in the practice of "breaking bread," which was not originally a rite of sacral liturgy or mystical symbolism but an actual meal that embodied Jesus' ethic of sharing in ordinary day-to-day existence.⁹

When the Holy Spirit is poured out at Pentecost in the book of Acts, the practical result is that believers voluntarily redistribute their property. "And all those who believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. . . . breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart" (Acts 2:44–46).

The Apostle Paul also emphasizes the sociopolitical nature of the Lord's meal, delivering a blistering rebuke to those upper-class Corinthians who excluded poor believers from their table fellowship and sated their own stomachs while other members of the community went hungry (1 Cor. 11:18–22).

"You Are All One in Christ": Equality in the Body of Believers

We can begin to see, then, why Jesus' message had such an electrifying effect on the impoverished and socially marginalized peasants of first-century Palestine who flocked to hear him speak—and why he so frightened and angered those guardians of public "order" for whom divisions of wealth and class were a useful rather than an oppressive reality.

But Jesus challenged not only structures of economic injustice and inequality in first-century Palestine. He also

challenged patterns of social inequality, hierarchy, and domination of every kind. In his treatment of women, of children, of Romans, of the ritually unclean and sinners of every stripe, Jesus repeatedly and provocatively overturned deeply ingrained cultural and religious assumptions about who was "first" and "last," "above" and "below" in the eyes of God.

There is no place in God's in-breaking kingdom, it turns out, for "great men" or "rulers" who "lord it over" others through the exercise of political or religious authority. Such, Jesus tells his disciples, is the way of the "Gentiles," that is, the pagan unbelievers and Roman occupiers. But among his followers, Jesus declares, "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matt. 20:26–28; Mark 10:43).

Jesus goes so far as to command his followers to avoid using honorific titles of any kind, including the title of "leader." The only title Jesus permits is an address of familial equality and solidarity: "brother" (Matt. 23:6–10). In the polis of Jesus, the New Testament suggests, there simply are no individuals in positions of status or hierarchical control.

Instead of offices, the earliest Christian communities appear to have been ordered along quasifamilial lines and according to the idea of spiritual gifts, including gifts of teaching, preaching, and stewardship. Spiritual gifts are charismatic, functional, provisional, and divinely rather than humanly bestowed. They are not restricted to special classes, genders, or tribes, for "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28).

The most prominent functionaries in the early church, the "elders" or *presbyteroi* who helped to preside over the households where the early Christians gathered, were to lead by humble example rather than by "lording it over" the younger believers (1 Pet. 5:1–3). The title of "priest" or *hiereus* (the root from which the English word hierarchy derives) is not applied to any Christian in the Gospels or Pauline corpus (although in Rom. 15:16 Paul does describe himself by way of metaphor as a minister who works "as a priest" presenting God with "my offering of the Gentiles").¹⁰

Jesus is the only person described (in the book of Hebrews) as a priest for the church; but he is the final priest who makes all priesthood obsolete—not merely the performance of ritual sacrifice, but also the office, pomp, and circumstance of priestly authority and hierarchy itself.

"Do Not Resist an Evil Person": Nonviolent Enemy Love

It was the fatal error of many Latin American liberation theologians to conclude from Jesus' concern for economic justice and his summons to radical, nonhierarchical community formation that the Way of Jesus may be harmonized with the way of violent revolt against oppressive social, economic, and political structures. But Jesus of Nazareth, unlike Judas the Galilean, taught his disciples to turn the other cheek, to put away their swords, and to love their enemies as themselves. Perhaps the most important hallmark of the politics of Jesus lies in his teaching and example of nonviolent enemy love.

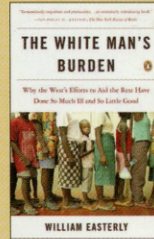
Jesus' ethic of nonviolence finds its fullest statement in the Sermon on the Mount, which is presented in Matthew's Gospel in a programmatic fashion as the new Torah, a definitive moral charter to guide the community of believers.¹¹ Jesus does not seek to negate or overturn the Law of Moses with his own novel teaching, but to reclaim the deepest meaning of the Law by intensifying and internalizing its demands. The Law forbids murder, Jesus forbids even anger. The Law forbids adultery, Jesus forbids even lust.

When it comes to the matter of violence, though, Jesus does not simply radicalize or intensify the Torah. On this point—and this point alone—he decisively alters and actually overturns the teaching of the Hebrew Bible:

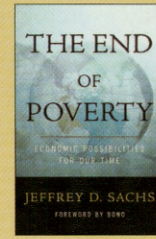
You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:38–45)

The *lex talionis*—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—is spelled out in several passages in the Hebrew Bible, but particularly in Deuteronomy 19:15–21. If in a criminal trial a witness gives a false testimony, the Law declares, that person must be severely punished in order to preserve the social order. "Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (v. 21). Political stability is the goal and fear is the mechanism by which it will be achieved. Jesus shatters this strict geometry, however, with a startling injunction: "Do not resist an evil person." This does not imply passive capitulation to violent

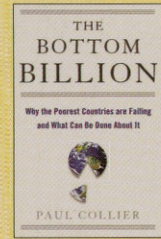
For Further Reading



The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good, by William Easterly. (Penguin Press, 2006)



The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time, by Jeffrey Sachs. (Penguin Press, 2005)



The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done about It, by Paul Collier. (Oxford University, 2007)

UN Millennium Development Goals

Selected targets to be met by 2015



1. Halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day.
2. Ensure all children complete primary school.
3. Educate boys and girls equally.
4. Reduce the mortality rate among children under five by two-thirds.
5. Reduce the maternal mortality rate by three-quarters.
6. Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other major diseases.
7. Halve the proportion of people without access to safe water and sanitation.
8. Increase aid and improve governance.

Source: UN; <<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html>>.

There is nothing sentimental, naïve, meek, or mild about Jesus' Way of dealing with enemies.

people but physical nonretaliation as a dynamic and creative force in human relationships.

By exemplifying the courage and forgiveness of the Beatitudes, the believer confounds and shames the aggressor, creating an opportunity for the hostile person to be reconciled with God. By absorbing undeserved suffering and not retaliating in kind, the disciple destroys the evil inherent in the logic of force. Instead of an endless cycle of bloodshed, fear, and recrimination, there is shalom, there is peace. There is nothing sentimental, naïve, meek, or mild about Jesus' Way of dealing with enemies.

When we recall the concrete historical realities of Roman occupation in first-century Palestine, the shocking and scandalous political implications of Jesus' teaching of nonviolence immediately become clear. To grasp the forces arrayed against Jesus and his fledgling kingdom movement, we have only to imagine the fate that would befall a charismatic young man from a rural village in present-day Iraq should he travel to Baghdad with a band of followers and begin publicly announcing that God, through him, was about to free the land from the yoke of foreign occupation—and that prominent imams and respected government officials were vipers and hypocrites—and that the insurgents should lay down their weapons and love their enemies as themselves. Subversive? Disturbing? Dangerous? Clearly. Yet this was precisely the path that Jesus followed in his perilous journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem.

Whether Jesus' Way of nonviolent enemy love leads to an ethic of strict pacifism, as John Yoder convincingly argues, or whether it allows for Christians to engage in what Glen Stassen calls "just peace-making" (preventive or "policing" actions that involve use of force in exceptional cases but remain sociologically and morally distinct from the calculus of war making), the presumption of the New Testament is therefore overwhelmingly against believers killing their fellow human beings for a "just cause," whether as social revolutionaries (on the

Left) or "just warriors" (on the Right).¹²

There is not one word in the New Testament to support Linda Damico's claim that Jesus' concern for the liberation of the poor led him to embrace "the violence of the oppressed."¹³ We must ponder whether disciples can even legitimately serve as military chaplains insofar as chaplains are not allowed to proclaim fully Jesus' teaching and example to soldiers, but must ensure that "all efforts... maximize a positive impact on the military mission" and "enhance operational readiness and combat effectiveness."¹⁴

Against the above reading of Jesus' kingdom announcement—as essentially subversive of political authority, involving concern for matters of economic justice and social equality, and giving rise to a community of nonviolent nonconformity with power—some scholars have quoted Jesus' aphorism: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17).

According to Geza Vermes, this saying indicates that Jesus was not concerned with the burning political matters of his day but remained a wandering, apolitical sage who only accidentally and somewhat naïvely stumbled into conflict with the Jerusalem authorities.¹⁵ Did not Jesus also say "My kingdom is not of this world"? Vermes's reading of Jesus as an apolitical rustic rabbi fails, however, to account for the historical and narrative contexts for Jesus' words and actions in the Gospels.

When Jesus says his kingdom is not of this world he does not mean that his kingdom has nothing to do with this world; he means that his kingdom does not derive its tactics, platform, or goals from any of the competing political movements of his day, and particularly from the zealots: "If my kingdom were of this world *my servants would fight*... but my kingdom is not *from here*" (John 18:36 NKJV, emphasis mine).

Nor is "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" an abstract teaching about the separation of political and religious matters.

The aphorism is Jesus' answer to a specific, historically inscribed trap devised by a group of Pharisees and Herodians, whose goal is to force Jesus into one of their rival camps.

The trap comes in the form of a question that appears to admit only one of two answers: Should Jews pay the poll tax to Caesar? If Jesus says they should pay the tax, he will have compromised with the Roman occupiers and betrayed his people. If he says that it is not right to pay the tax, he will have openly defied Caesar's authority and be guilty of sedition along the lines of the zealots.

But Jesus does not take either path in this false dichotomy. Instead, he deftly transcends and subverts the question.¹⁶ His reply contains irony, non-cooperation, indifference, and even scorn.¹⁷ Bring me a denarius, he tells his inquisitors (Mark 12:15), showing that he is not himself in possession of "Lord Mammon" while at the same time forcing his questioners to reveal that they are the compromised bearers of Caesar's image and divine title. Whose image and inscription is this? Jesus then asks, as if he did not know. So it is the Pharisees and Herodians, not Jesus, who are forced to bear recognition to Caesar in the story.

When told that the image is Caesar's (v. 16), Jesus at last declares that Caesar can keep his idolatrous scraps of metal: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." But what are the things that truly belong to Caesar? Does Caesar have the right to wage wars, to impoverish nations, and to inflict violence on God's people? Not at all, Jesus' listeners would have understood. Lord Caesar has no claim whatsoever on any human being; for human beings, unlike coins, are made in the image of God.

But what about the Apostle Paul's statement in Romans 13 that God has ordained secular rulers as agents of his will, as "avengers" who do "not bear the sword for nothing" (v. 3)? Do Paul's letters—the oldest texts in the New Testament canon—in some way contradict, invalidate, or "balance" Jesus' seemingly more radical words and actions in the Gospels, which were written some forty years later?

According to Martin Luther, the book of Romans is the New Testament's definitive statement on Christian politics, and it shows that we must serve God "inwardly" and the secular authorities "outwardly." "Therefore, should you see that there is a lack of hangmen," Luther wrote in 1523, "and find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the place."¹⁸

Protestants have been offering their services ever since. Yet Romans 13, Luther failed to see, is part of the same literary unit as Chapter 12, which ends with these words: "Repay no evil for evil... Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17–21).

Next come the instructions about submitting to earthly authorities. But lest there be any doubt on the matter, Paul returns to the theme of Christian nonviolence, driving his point home with systematic rigor. First, he instructs believers to render to all their due (13:7). Then he says that believers should owe no one anything except love (13:8). Next he defines what love is: "Love does no harm to a neighbor" (13:10). Read carefully, and in historical context, Paul is telling the early Christians in Rome, in the face of increasing persecution by a brutal and tyrannical pagan regime, to assume a nonviolent, nonrebellious stance as their reconciling ministry.

He is also telling believers to trust in God's controlling power over history. God can use the secular authorities and their pagan armies for his own redemptive purposes and, ironically, even as instruments of his justice. That is God's power and prerogative. But there is not one word in Romans—or anywhere else in Paul's writings—to suggest that believers should volunteer to serve in Assyrian, Egyptian, or Roman legions, or that violence is an acceptable tool for followers of the Way.¹⁹

Quite the opposite, Romans 13 makes clear: Christians are called to a different path. And it is precisely the political character of this path that explains the regularity and persistence of both Roman and Jewish persecution of the Jesus movement during the first three centuries of its growth:

*Mere belief—acceptance of certain propositional statements—is not enough to elicit such violence. People believe all sorts of odd things and are tolerated. When, however, belief is regarded as an index of subversion, everything changes. The fact of widespread persecution, regarded by both pagans and Christians as the normal state of affairs within a century of the beginnings of Christianity, is powerful evidence of the sort of thing that Christianity was, and was perceived to be.*²⁰

Resurrecting the Life of Christ

When we strip away the layers of ritual, culture, and abstract theology that have accreted to the Gospels over the past two thousand years, we thus find that although Jesus did not fit into any of the rival political categories or ideologies of his day—although he did not “run with the hares or hunt with the hounds,” in Wright’s words—he was nevertheless deeply, in fact centrally, concerned with politics: with questions of power, money, allegiance, and violence, and with the liberation of human beings from all forms of oppression, social and political as well as individual.²¹

For Jesus, the things that are God’s are not other-worldly things—the heretical, earth-denying claim of the Gnostics—but precisely this-worldly matters—matters of justice, mercy, and community. Jesus’ political stance, Jacques Ellul and Vernard Eller convincingly argue, may best be described as that of an anarchist—not anarchist in the popular sense of advocating destruction of property or the violent overthrow of governments (as in Damico’s reading), but in the root sense of the word: an arche—no

rulers, no dominion but God’s alone.²²

The anarchist dimension of Christian discipleship does not remove but in many ways heightens the demands of citizenship in a secular polity since service to God cannot be separated from loving service to humanity, and because violent resistance to “Lord Caesar” is no longer an option. Still, “We must be faithful in our own way,” Stanley Hauerwas reminds us, “even if the world understands such faithfulness as disloyalty.”²³ A church that does not stand “against the world” in fundamental ways, Yoder points out, “has nothing worth saying to and for the world.”²⁴

Followers of Jesus are not called to defend the ramparts of “liberal democracy,” or any other political system or ideology. Nor are they called to create a “Christian nation” in which Christian leaders assume control of the means of violence and power and exercise them for righteous ends. Rather, they are called to incarnate the kingdom of God by modeling an alternative or “remnant” community of economic justice, equality, and peace, with Jesus at its center. They are called to bear witness, amid all of the ambiguities and ironies of history, to the “minor-

2007: Our Sabbath Year of Jubilee for the Poor | BRIAN SWARTS, JUBILEE USA

“Proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants; it shall be a Jubilee for you.”

—Leviticus 25:9–10

“Must we starve our children to pay our debts?”

—Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania

About Jubilee USA and Debt Cancellation

It has been seven years since people of faith worldwide launched the Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel debts for the world’s poorest countries. Although some debt has been canceled, rich countries have not kept their promises. Today, this work is continued in the United States by Jubilee USA <www.jubileeusa.org>, a nationwide network of faith groups

working for justice for the poor.

As the national field organizer at Jubilee USA, I get the opportunity to speak to people of faith around the country about the Jubilee movement and how it changes lives. Like other faith-inspired movements, such as abolition or civil rights, Jubilee is a movement of conscience.

In the world’s most impoverished nations, the majority does not have access to clean water, adequate housing, or basic health care. These countries are paying debt service to wealthy nations and institutions at the expense of providing basic services to their citizens. The United Nations Development Program estimated in 2003 that thirty thousand

children die each day due to preventable diseases.

Debt service payments take resources that impoverished countries could use to cure preventable diseases. Debt cancellation frees up resources to reverse this devastating reality. Today, the world has committed to the UN Millennium Development Goals to cut global poverty in half by 2015. This can happen—and is happening—but we will only be successful if we end the resource drain caused by unjust and unfair debt collection.

Our 2007 Sabbath Year

Two thousand seven is a big year for the Jubilee movement—our Sabbath

ity report": the good news that Jesus' creative weakness is still God's saving strength.

If true to their calling, followers of Jesus may expect to pay a high price for their political witness and their refusal to play a part in the mechanisms of violence and coercion that lie at the heart of every social order, including the project of American democracy (the imperial "beast" of Revelation 13 marked by its powers of shock and awe—making "fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men"—and by its control of the global economy—dictating who is "able to buy or to sell").²⁵

They will at times be charged with being unpatriotic, ineffective, or irrelevant. Like the Anabaptists during the Protestant Reformation, they may face ridicule, social ostracism, and even persecution for their nonconformity with power. In some times and places, they will lose their lives as a result of their obedience to their Master.

The Way of Jesus is ultimately the Way of the Cross. "To accept the cross as his destiny, to move toward it and even to provoke it, when he could well have done otherwise, was Jesus' constantly reiterated free choice," writes

Yoder. "The cross of Calvary was not a difficult family situation, not a frustration of visions of personal fulfillment, a crushing debt, or a nagging in-law; it was the political, legally-to-be-expected result of a moral clash with the powers ruling his society."²⁶

Because the Way of Jesus is the Way of the Cross, the politics of Jesus only fully make sense to those who see the dilemmas of power in "cosmic perspective," to those who are living in the light of Jesus' resurrection as the historical fact upon which the once-hidden meaning of the universe hinges. "As a mundane proverb, 'Turn the other cheek' is simply bad advice," Richard Hays points out. "Such action makes sense only if the God and Father of Jesus Christ actually is the ultimate judge of the world and if his will for his people is definitely revealed in Jesus."²⁷

Put another way, because following Jesus—not simply as a matter of individual spirituality but as a matter of concrete community formation—may involve real sacrifice, suffering, and even martyrdom, and because there is no guarantee that this suffering will be politically effective as the world measures effectiveness, there is no reason to fol-

Year. In Scripture, Jubilee is rooted in the practice of Sabbath. As an Adventist, I can see my own values and traditions reflected in this work. I was brought up in a church and a family where faith is a lifestyle and not simply a belief system.

For me, the Jubilee movement is about living out not only my faith, but also my commitment to "Sabbath" perspective on life. Adventists recognize the importance of the Sabbath—not simply as a day of rest, but also as a reminder of God's original vision for creation. In his first Sabbath sermon, Jesus proclaimed that he had come to bring Jubilee for the oppressed, and in honor of the Sabbath Year we are calling on God's people to do the same for those who live in slavery to debt and poverty around the world.

The Jubilee Act

During the Sabbath Year, we are calling on the U.S. Congress to pass the Jubilee Act (HR 2634), which will lead to debt cancellation for the sixty-seven poorest countries in the world. The highlight of the Sabbath Year is our "Cancel Debt Fast" advocacy campaign. It is a forty-day rolling fast, during which supporters of debt cancellation will fast for one day or more.

During their fast, supporters will call their members of Congress to urge support for the Jubilee Act. The "Cancel Debt Fast" runs from September 6 to October 15, and it ends with a Week of Action in Washington, D.C. On October 15, antipoverty advocates from around the world will meet for a prayer breakfast, public demonstrations, and lobbying on Capitol Hill.

What Does the Jubilee Act Do?

- Calls on the Bush Administration, the IMF, and the World Bank to keep their promises on debt cancellation,
- Calls for expanded debt cancellation for impoverished countries that will use the freed resources well and require debt cancellation to meet the Millennium Development Goals for cutting global poverty in half by 2015,
- Calls for new standards for responsible lending and creditor transparency, by calling for measures to address the problem of vulture funds, as well as audits of odious and illegal debts from the past. ■

low the Way of Jesus unless the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are one and the same.

If Roman brutality left Jesus buried somewhere in the hills of Palestine alongside all the other messianic revolutionaries of his day, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32). But if Jesus is who the New Testament writers say he is—the suffering Savior of the world who has overcome the principalities and powers and has defeated the final tyranny that is death—then let us "be imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1), bearing a more faithful witness to the Way of Jesus and the political shape of his life. ■

COMMENTS:

Ron, thank you for this probing piece. Your exegesis of Romans 13 is particularly enlightening and helpful.

Posted by: Chris Blake | June 26, 2007 at 09:13

Amen...This is a cogent, lucid exposition of "kingdom" theology. As Adventists, our read of the Gospels has tended to ignore the present aspects of Jesus' kingdom proclamation/teaching, misreading it as if it were only talking about the future end of the world.

Posted by: Zane | June 26, 2007 at 12:36

Amazing! Thank you, Ron. This is a gift. I'm sure when this is published in the journal, folks will see that the footnotes comprise a year or more worth of essential reading. Thanks for distilling your work with these issues.

But I have a question....When it comes down to real Christians coming to terms with the meaning of "witness" in real communities around the world, what is the role of the cross? Another way to ask this, maybe, is this: what you have written here is a powerful, political Christology. What kind of soteriology issues from this Christology? I have ideas about this myself, but I'm painfully curious what you would say about this. Wish I was traveling with you; we could discuss it as we bounced along on the bus.

Posted by: Ryan Bell | June 26, 2007 at 15:00

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