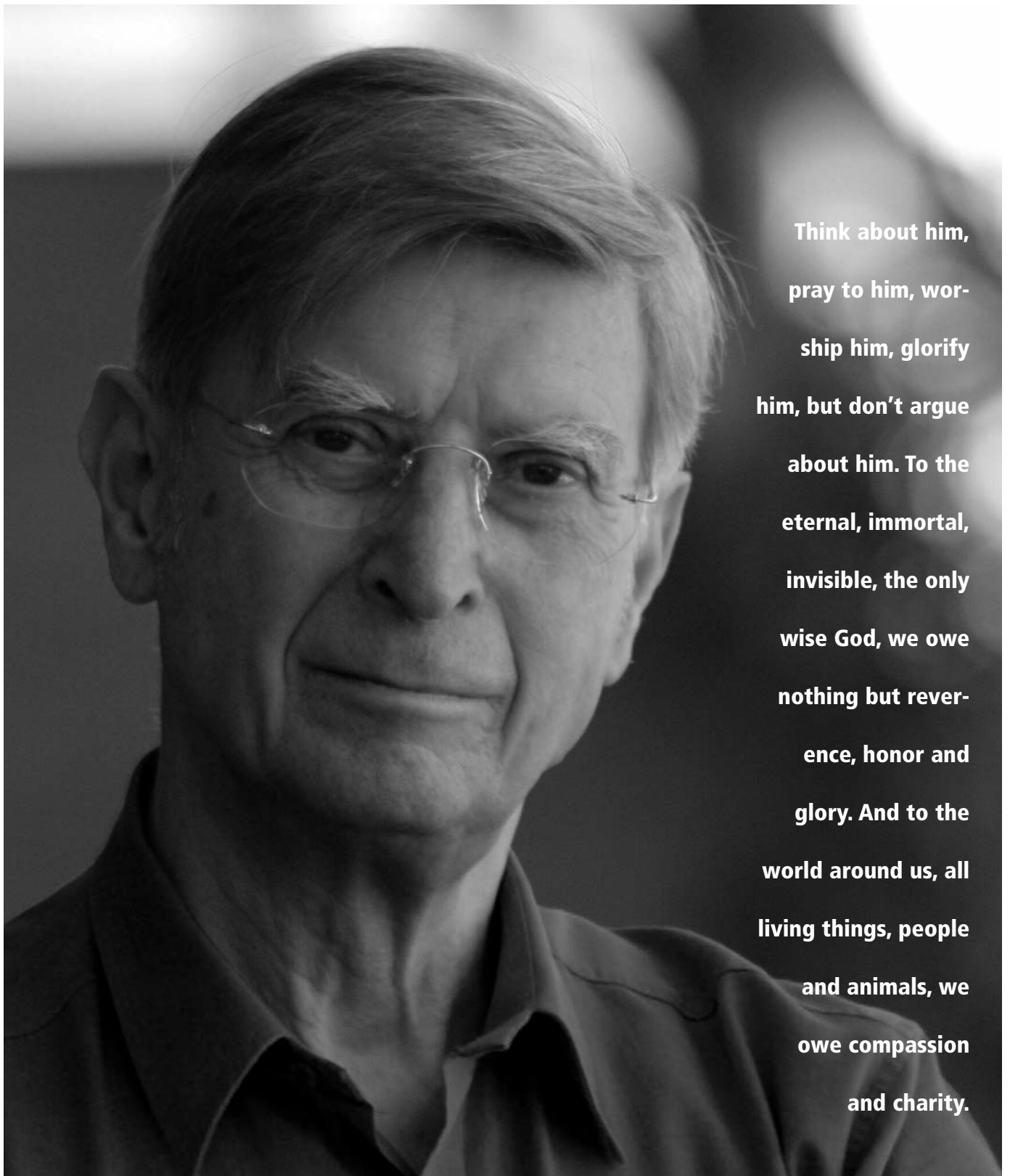


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Think about him, pray to him, worship him, glorify him, but don't argue about him. To the eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, we owe nothing but reverence, honor and glory. And to the world around us, all living things, people and animals, we owe compassion and charity.

CREDO | BY HERBERT BLOMSTEDT

The following talk was delivered at Mountain View Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, Mountain View, CA, on April 2, 2011.

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully;... Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. —1 Tim. 1:3–8, 17. KJV

When I was invited to speak to you here in Mountain View, I first hesitated. After all I have enough to do, and my mission is primarily in music. I prefer to speak with my hands and not with words. But you asked me some time ago to be an honorary member of this church, and I am happy to be back with you. For once I don't have to turn my back to my audience!

You may wonder about the title of my topic. *Credo* is a Latin word and the first word in the famous Nicene Creed, written in the fourth century under Emperor Constantine, which means "I believe." It was intended to unify the beliefs of the Christians who had been struggling with different opinions, especially about the nature of Christ. Some, like the Arians, believed that Christ was not a part of the Godhead, but a later created being. This threatened to pull the church apart, much like it had been in Ephesus, as we read in 1 Tim. 1:3–8, 17. Paul uses his most ironic language and says that false teachers had turned to "fables and endless

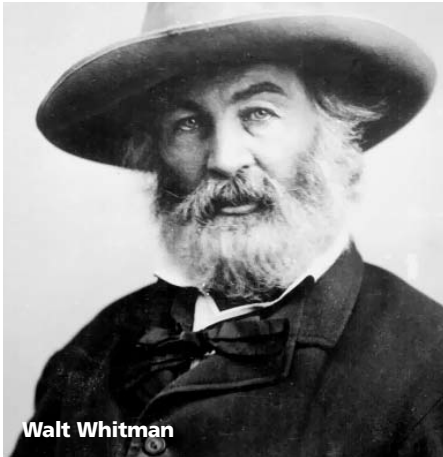
genealogies," to "vain jangling... Understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." And even worse, the church members loved it. Paul accuses them of heaping "to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3).

Now the young church decided that Christ was co-existent with the Father from the very beginning: *genitum, non factum*, "born—not made." But that is not very clear either, and in almost two thousand years we have not come very much closer. Arguing about this poses more questions than answers, as Paul rightly observed. We simply have to admit that we cannot fathom in our limited language the great mystery of an infinite "GOD."

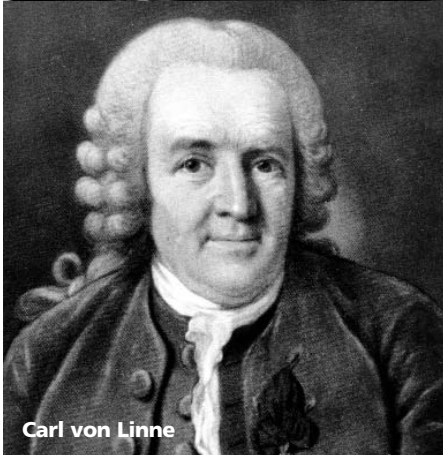
Paul draws the right conclusion: "Now the end of the commandment is charity" (1 Tim. 1:5). And he draws the bottom line in the concluding verse: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 5:17).

The great American poet Walt Whitman was on the same track when he penned his version of the Ten Commandments in the prose preface to *Leaves of Grass*. They are positive—"Thou shalt nots"—and they are very American. They begin like this: "Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants." And then comes the only negative command: "Argue not concerning God." What wonderful advice. Think about him, pray to him, worship him, glorify him, but don't argue about him. To the eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, we owe nothing but reverence, honor and glory. And to the world around us, all living things, people and animals, we owe compassion and charity.

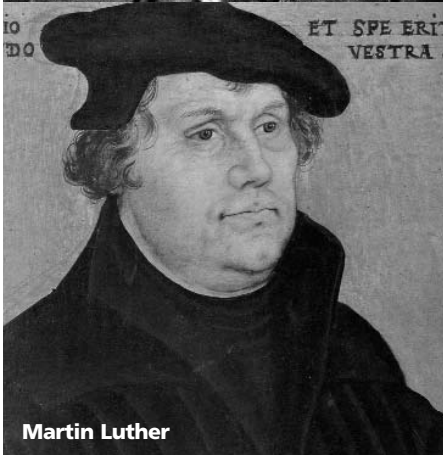
Our own church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has debated many times about whether we should have a creed in order to set things straight, to define who we are,



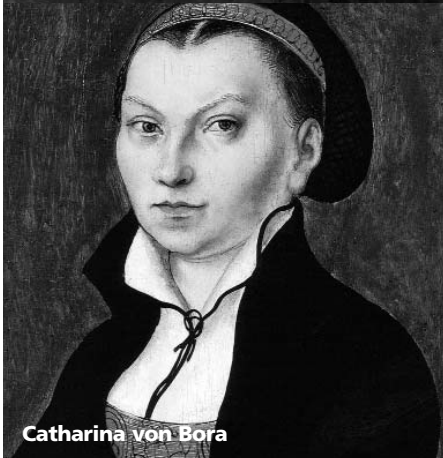
Walt Whitman



Carl von Linne



Martin Luther



Catharina von Bora

to bind us together in a common unified worship. But for good reasons our leaders have always turned it down. One reason is that it puts up barriers that we don't want. The Bible should be our only creed, they have argued. We do have a set of fundamental beliefs, but they are not written in stone and can be modified.

However, the worldwide situation is very different today compared to when our church was young. Nineteenth-century America was basically a Christian country that stood for liberty, and where more or less everybody went to church regularly. New religious movements sprang up like mushrooms in the forest, and these groups needed to define their special brand of Christianity as precisely as possible. The road to the Present Truth got narrower and narrower. As the French say, *Vive la différence!* (Long live the differences!) In the arts and sciences we often say a little humorously that "the devil is in the details." But for countless religious groups their god was found above all in the details.

Today the background for the Christian scene is almost completely secular. People in Western Europe consider churches an anachronism, and they attend only on special occasions, if at all, perhaps for a wedding or a funeral. In Sweden, for example, those who regularly attend church services are perhaps around five percent of the population. Talk about God, sin, and salvation is not understood at all and considered irrelevant for modern society. It is a little different in the United States where perhaps half the population still regularly attends a church, synagogue or mosque. I recently saw a

big headline in a German newspaper: "Is God American?" It may look like that—and I once heard a good old SDA say that she was sure English would be the official language in heaven.

Since the relative number of professed Christians in Western society is constantly decreasing, the differences between the churches seem less important, and what binds us together gains weight. I am convinced that the specialties of each church are necessary for theological research and advancement. This is also what Ellen G. White stressed: we must always search for "new light." But in the daily life of the Christian, the emphasis lies on another level. We will not be saved because we are "right" and all the others are "wrong," but because God through his abundant grace has changed our lives.

What use is it to talk to people about subtle details of God's salvation plan when they have no concept of God whatsoever? Our first missionary duty must now be to bring God to people's attention. We cannot prove his existence. No scientific or philosophical arguments have ever been able to do that. The only convincing argument is a real personal experience. A life lived as in the presence of God is a powerful testimony that does not go unnoticed.

The great Swedish naturalist Carl von Linné, who in the eighteenth century laid the foundations for a *Systema naturae* (1735), a nomenclature for flowers and animals that is still in use today, was such a man. Over the door to his bedroom he placed a motto which read, *Innocue vivito, numen adest* (Live unimpeachably; God is present).

The great reformer Martin Luther, whose wife Catharina von Bora was a woman of noble rank, once surprised her husband by saying, "Martinus, God is dead!" He was shocked. "What are you saying? Of course God is not dead. What do you mean?" She answered, "You act as if God were dead." Perhaps he had a day when he doubted his mission—had he gone too far? Thousands were killed because of his preaching. Perhaps he just had one of his frequent bad tempers—he was a noted choleric. At any rate, he appeared to act as if God were dead, or at least forgotten, out of reach.

For too long the Bible has been primarily used to prove that we are

"right" and all others accordingly are "wrong." But to be Christian is not the same as confessing to certain doctrines. It is a way of life, a life in "charity," as Paul said to Timothy. The sum of all the great religions, for Jews, Christians and Moslems, is found in the Golden Rule: *Treat your neighbor as you want them to treat you.* Or as Confucius termed it five hundred years before Christ: *Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.*

Jesus said: *This is the law and the prophets* (Matt. 7:12). All the rest is "commentary." All scripture could be interpreted as teaching us compassion.

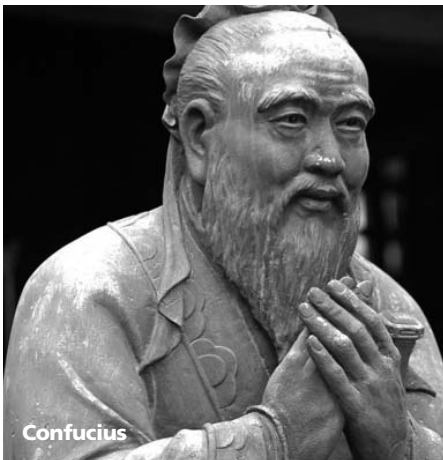
This is not to say that theological research is in vain. Personally, I must confess that I am also fascinated by religion as a science. I started once to

study the *Talmud*, the great commentary on the Hebrew Bible, and subscribed to the new Steinsalz edition. Rabbi Steinsalz, who is teaching in Jerusalem, is called a "once-in-a-millennium scholar." The *Talmud* proved to be too overwhelming for me, also financially, so I gave up after the twelfth volume, but I do have a complete *Mischna* in my library. It is the written version of an oral tradition of commentary from the third century after Christ. And, of course, I follow with great curiosity the findings of Adventist theologians, many of whom are my personal friends. They sometimes arrive at vastly different conclusions, but that does not disturb me at all. On the contrary, it proves their scholarly independence and is worthy

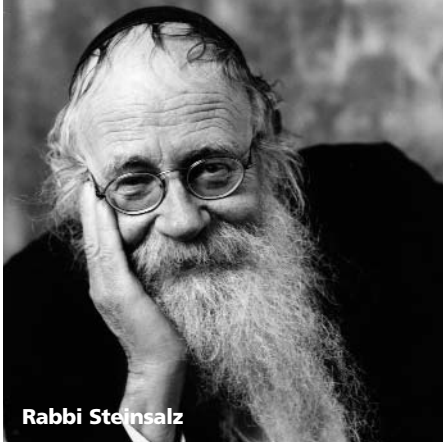
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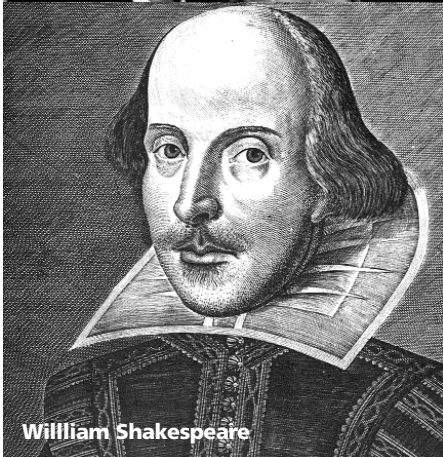
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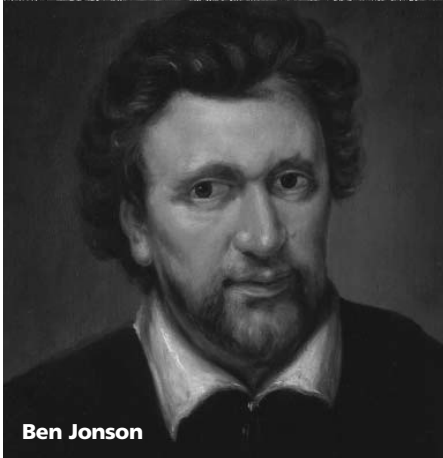
Confucius



Rabbi Steinsalz



William Shakespeare



Ben Jonson

of serious discussion. What we need is a healthy debate culture that is compatible with Christian ideals.

It is amazing how much Adventist theology has changed, even during my lifetime. This is amazing because religion by its very nature is conservative, especially when it gets institutionalized in an official “church” that needs to preserve its identity. Perhaps we don’t notice it because changes come slowly and gradually and do not affect our daily life and weekly worship. But they become noticeable, sometimes strikingly or even painfully, when we meet fellow believers who have been isolated for a long time. In Germany, for instance, many immigrants have come from countries that were formerly behind the iron curtain, like Romania. They are very conservative and often upset over the views and practices of their Western brothers and sisters. They have not experienced the gradual change in the West and are shocked. What is unfortunate is when these groups do not respect each other, and the result is isolation or even separation. It need not happen when Christian compassion is the reigning principle.

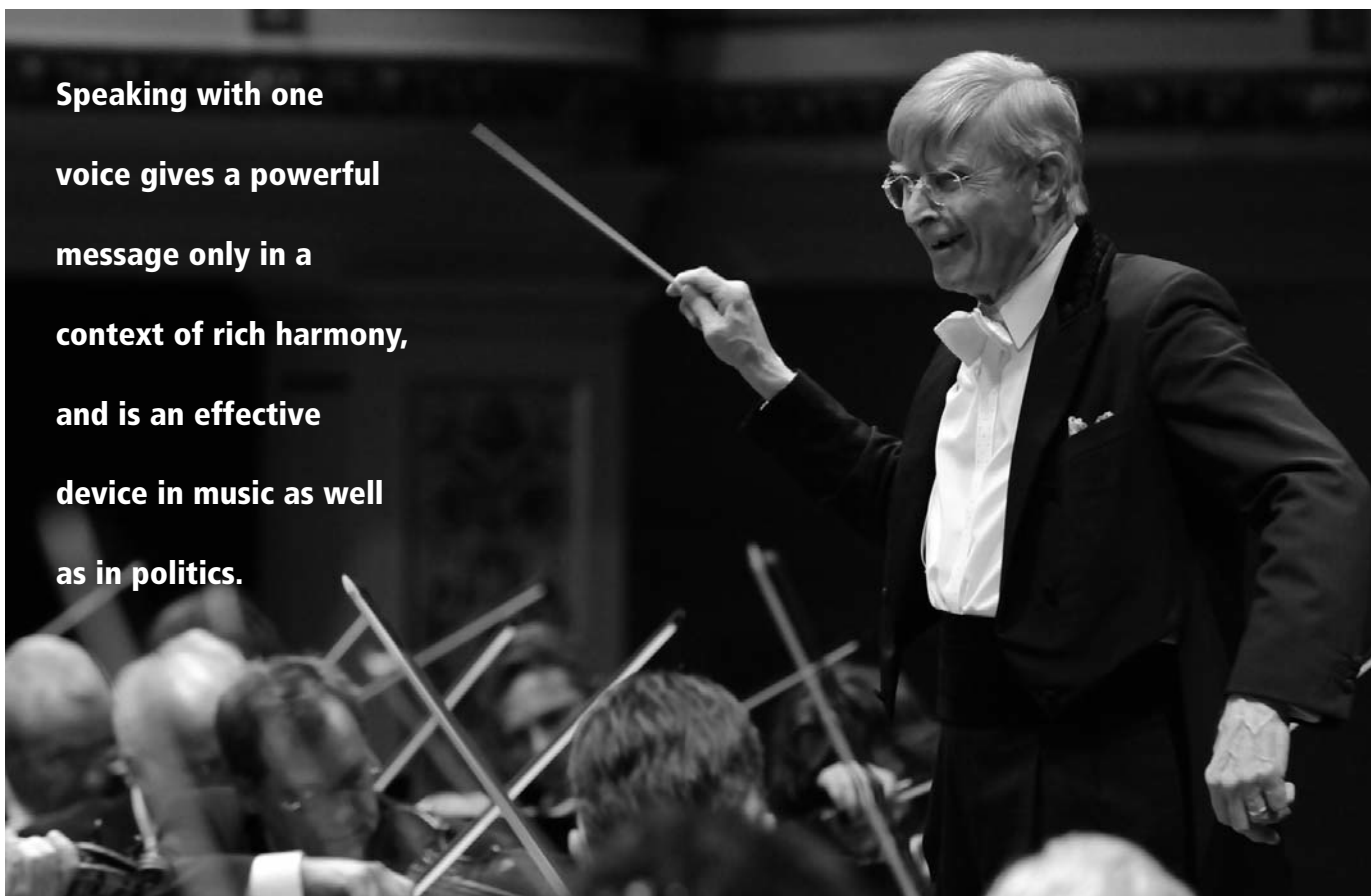
Heikki Silvet is a friend of mine from Estonia. When he was a pastor in Tallin, the capital of Estonia, and the iron curtain started to come down, two Adventist evangelists from Finland, only fifty miles to the north across the bay, came for an evangelistic campaign. Heikki was dumbfounded over what he heard and completely lost orientation for a while, left the ministry, and went off to Siberia to study the origins of Estonian and Fenno-Ugorian culture. The stress on righteousness by

faith—so central for us today—was too much for him. Old-style Adventism taught “faith and works” on equal terms, and he felt he had been cheated. Thank God he came back into balance and became a teacher and librarian at the new seminary in Zaokski, Russia.

I don’t particularly like the labels “liberals” and “conservatives,” but these two groups of people need each other. The conservatives halt the liberals when they seem to go too far, and the liberals push the conservatives when they resist change. But they should not be allowed to halt our mission, which is to spread understanding and compassion and to be “the salt of the earth.”

I am fortunate to be invited every year to conduct the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, considered by many to be the best symphony orchestra in the world. This wonderful concert hall with its perfect acoustics is like a temple for music. In the “green room,” where the artists can meet visitors after the concerts, there is a mysterious sign on the wall. Only when you look at it in the great mirror on the opposite wall will you discover that it is “mirror writing.” It is a quote from a play by Ben Jonson, Shakespeare’s contemporary, and says, “All concord’s born of contraries.” How true! And the truth is illustrated through the type of writing. It takes two sides to arrive at the truth. *Concord* is harmony, peace, mutual kindness. But it takes at least two voices to reach harmony. If they are always in unison, there is of course no disharmony, but no harmony either! How tedious in the long run. Speaking with one voice gives a powerful mes-

Speaking with one voice gives a powerful message only in a context of rich harmony, and is an effective device in music as well as in politics.



C/MATTHIAS CREUTZIGER

sage only in a context of rich harmony, and is an effective device in music as well as in politics. But repeated without variation it smells of propaganda and turns us off. How I long for that kind of concord! Shakespeare says in *Macbeth*, “Had I power, I should pour the sweet milk of concord into hell!”

That brings me to the second and more personal part of today’s message. In another play, *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare says something about music that reveals a wonderful insight: “The man who hath no musick in himself, / Nor is not mov’d with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treason.” This is a very strong statement, but true. It seems exaggerated—is it really impossible to trust someone who is insensitive to music? Perhaps it is easier to accept a more positive ver-

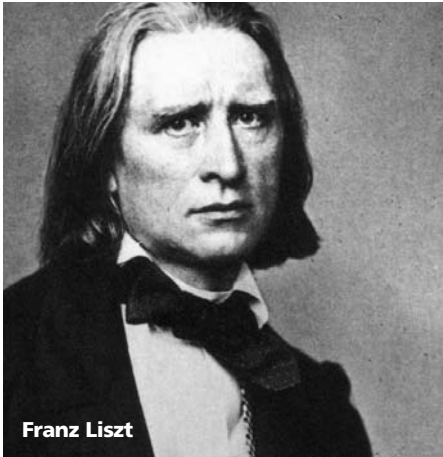
sion of the same thought, penned by Ellen G. White: “[Music] has power to subdue rude and uncultivated natures, power to quicken thought and to awaken sympathy, to promote harmony of action” (*Education*, p. 168).

I have been an Adventist all of my life. This summer it will be 70 years since I was baptized, and I have never regretted it. My parents’ influence has formed my character, and in addition, without my church I would not be what I am today. My father was a zealous and hardworking pastor, very conservative, with an ascetic bent. He had a burden for souls and stressed that we, his three children, must be models for his church members. Sometimes it was not easy to wear that cloak, but we admired our father, and our admiration grew with maturity. He could be

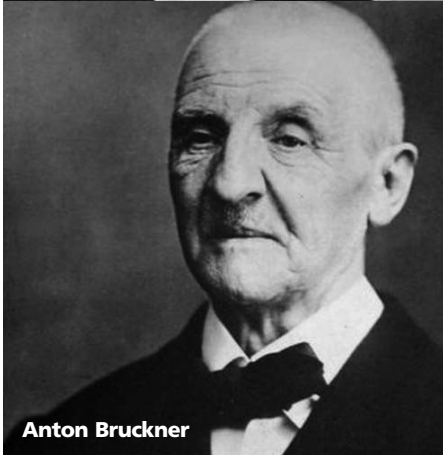
harshly demanding sometimes, but he had a real soft spot for music, so according to Shakespeare he was certainly not “fit for treason.” He had a good tenor voice and would have preferred to be a singing evangelist.

He married a young girl who was a gifted pianist, and he would arrange for her to perform a piano recital with works by Chopin and Liszt before he gave his public address. In the 1930s he could fill the concert hall of the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki with an announcement like this: “What happens when there is half an hour of silence in heaven? Come and listen to Pastor Adolf Blomstedt from the USA. Fifteen-minute piano recital before the presentation.”

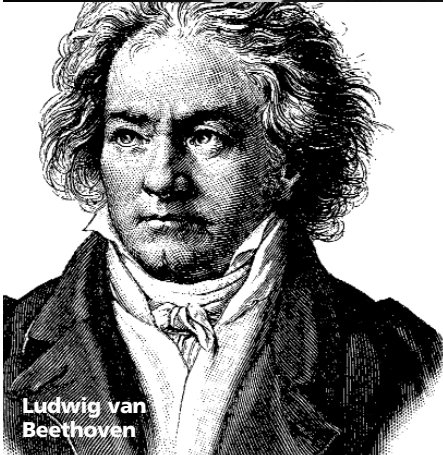
That was before the days of FM Radio, TV, LPs and CDs. Today nobody would respond to such



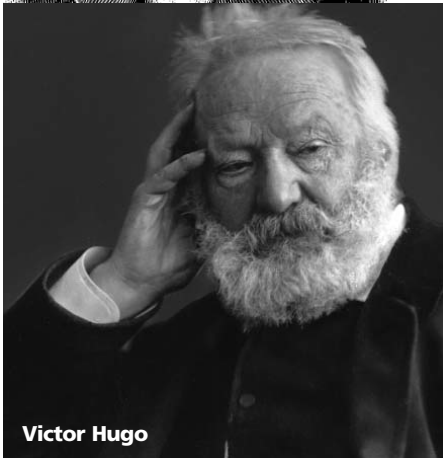
Franz Liszt



Anton Bruckner



Ludwig van Beethoven



Victor Hugo

inserts in the local papers. “Heaven” is just romantic nonsense to modern man, and Chopin and Liszt have given way to pop tunes and rock music over the headphones. But our burden for souls remains. How shall we reach them when they don’t understand our language? This is the real BABYLON—“confusion”—not understanding each other.

A couple of weeks ago I conducted three concerts with the Berlin Philharmonic, another of the world’s leading symphony orchestras. Symphony orchestras are for me what the harp was for King David. A symphony is the highest and richest form for musical expression in Western culture. They are spiritual confessions and can be profoundly moving. But there are also symphonies that include words from sacred texts, like the Catholic Mass. In Berlin I played such a work by Anton Bruckner, one of the greatest symphonists after Beethoven. It was his Mass No. 3 in F minor, for great orchestra, chorus, and four soloists. The text is all from the Bible plus the *Credo* movement, which is a setting of the Nicene Creed. And here I connect with the title of this sermon. There were very appreciative reviews in the Berlin papers, all stressing that the concert had been like a worship service. But one critic complained bitterly about the text. The very pious composer had interrupted the fugue at the words “and I believe in eternal life” with triumphant shouts of CREDO—CREDO / CREDO / CREDO! This was too much for the apparently nonbelieving critic. He found it obsessive and totally unacceptable. He loved the music but hated the

words. Perhaps he was afraid that he might lose his atheistic convictions and in his inner self heard the words of King Agrippa when listening to St. Paul: “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

I can understand him. His reaction was like that of Michael Steinberg a few years ago here in San Francisco. He was the program annotator for the San Francisco Symphony and a wonderful man, a great scholar. He could write about music better than anyone I have ever met. But as a Jew he was apprehensive about the message in Bach’s *St. John Passion* we were performing at the symphony. He knew that the Christian church had based much of its sometimes anti-Semitic attitude on the Gospel of St. John, where the Jews get all the blame for having killed the Messiah. But Steinberg could not help loving Bach’s great music. So what should he do? He wrote a long article in the program book solemnly warning the public not to *believe* what was being sung. “Enjoy the music, but disregard the text—it is not true.” He meant that Bach’s music could not be prohibited, but that every performance of this work should have a warning label attached—like the cigarette packages that announce that smoking can kill you. This is an excellent demonstration of the power of good music! Even the devil knows it—and trembles!

By way of explanation, what do we mean when we sing “CREDO”? Actually the word “believe” has not always meant just the acceptance of certain doctrines. The word originally meant “to love” or “to hold dear.” It comes from the old German word *belieben*, which means just that: “to hold dear,

to love." So when we sing CREDO, we really say, "I love, I commit myself." It is a summons to action and not so much a confession of believing in certain dogmas.

A summons to action is what I am pleading for today. Not only every sermon by a pastor or a layman, but every day in the life of a Christian should be a demonstration of a life in God's presence. God has no other way of acting in the world but through people. Christianity is a dead theory and nonsense if not lived in action. It is like a musical score. In a materialistic world it looks only like meaningless dots and lines on a paper. Only when awak-

ened by the understanding spirit and skillful hands of the musician does it become a reality, giving a powerful message of hope, comfort, joy and riches beyond description. Yes, for the person who, according to Shakespeare, "hath . . . musick in himself," it can bring him closer to God than any other human experience. Just as music "expresses that which cannot be put into words, but on which it is impossible to be silent," according to Victor Hugo, so it is with a life for God—it is the only way to bring him to life.

Let us not be silent. Arise and sing. Wake up and live. ■

Herbert Blomstedt is one of the leading symphony conductors of our time. He has been the music director of some of the finest orchestras in the world, including the San Francisco Symphony, the Dresdner Staatskapelle and the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig. Now in his mid-80s, he still guest conducts top orchestras on three continents in about 70 concerts a year.

Every Sabbath finds him in an Adventist Church wherever he may be, sometimes delivering the sermon, as on this occasion in Mountain View, California, on April 2, 2011. He also considers his concerts a kind of worship, reaching out even to people who have not yet found their way into a church. For those sensitive to classical music, his desire is for it to be a spiritual experience for the listener, "preparing the heart for an encounter with God."



Herbert Blomstedt with Joshua Bell

HILARY SCOTT