In the struggle for religious freedom, religious people are sometimes the worst offenders.
Throw It Overboard
We enjoy reading the Review, and when we are finished we pass it along to someone else, who gets a blessing from the articles. However, we would like to express our objections to the front covers of the Review. This last one, of Jonah (June 12, 1997), was very distasteful to us and to several friends visiting at the time. We think that the majority of your covers have been gaudy and disrespectful of our faith. I can’t help wondering what the mail carrier thinks of this periodical when it’s placed in our mailbox.

—Sam and Ruthele Carson
Longwood, Florida

Deserving
Like so many of your readers, I thoroughly read and enjoy the Review from cover to cover. It certainly deserves the recent Associated Church Press Award of Excellence (for best redesign). I only wish more church members here would subscribe to it.

—Russell Blair
Palmerston North, New Zealand

Condemning Marijuana
I can understand why two Adventists would try to “top” one another in condemning marijuana use (see “Marijuana: Medicine or Mirage?” Take a Stand, June NAD Edition), but where is the “come, let us reason together” attitude of Jesus?

If all the various diseases of the body left the mind unaffected, there would never be a need for any brain-numbing, mind-altering medicines. Once you accept the need for some psychoactive medicines and drugs, accepting medical marijuana or its derivatives is only a matter of degree. Some sufferers claim that marijuana gives better symptom relief, with fewer side effects. Perhaps Gina and Loretta believe that these people are lying.

We presume too much when we categorically prohibit what may be their best hope for some relief.

—Wayne Salhany
Marietta, Georgia

Perfect Timing
Dick Duerksen’s “A Student Missionary’s Prayer” (June NAD Edition) reminded me of Pentecost in Acts 2. I believe there was a miracle on both the speaking and the receiving end of the good news message. I am amazed at the way God can deliver comfort and hope at the time we need it.

—Joe Cobb, Jr.
Sidon, Mississippi

Adventist Radio Programs
We acknowledge and appreciate the mention of the Adventist Radio Network and VOAR-AM in the May NAD Edition’s Top Five. However, Kermit Netteburg states that “only the Voice of Prophecy is Adventist.” Netteburg must mean that only the Voice of Prophecy is produced at an Adventist Media Center, because Kid’s Praise is also produced with an Adventist host at an Adventist station and teaches the children our

—Joyce Stolitz
Battle Creek, Michigan
Adventist perspective.

Since VOAR operates with an audience more than 95 percent non-Adventist, how significant it is that these listeners would count Adventist programs among their top five. A listing of the next five would have revealed other Adventist programs, including It Is Written at number 6. As a member station in the Adventist Radio Network, VOAR is constant in its effort to promote the programs and ministries produced within our own denomination, complemented by carefully chosen Christian programs from other sources.

—Cameron Beierle
VOAR MANAGER
MOUNT PEARL, NEWFOUNDLAND

Declining Morals?
Regarding “Will a Dozen Eggs Do?”
Give & Take, June NAD Edition.

Apparently not. Apparently the price of the Review has gone up—or the morals of the Review staff have gone down. At one time leadership was doing what it could to get information to God’s people; now they seem to be daydreaming about personal worldly goods. Perhaps it’s time for repentance (“Thou shalt not covet . . .”).

—Jeanie Rosenthal
APPLETON, WISCONSIN

The fictional “wish list,” based on James White’s announcement, was just for fun—and intentionally lofty. We didn’t want to choose items that readers might actually give us. Rather our playful purpose was to show our nonsubscribing audience just how affordable the Review really is. If subscriptions continue to climb (as they currently are), the Review will become even more affordable. Our apologies if we offended you.—Editors.

Helping the Hearing-impaired
Regarding Calvin Rock’s “Music and Ministry” (June 12), in which he responds to a query about improving service to the disabled in church.

While contributing to Christian Record Services is certainly worthy, individuals can do many other practical things in their home churches. My husband is hearing-impaired, and over the years we have come up with the following ideas:

1. Make your church user-friendly for people with a hearing loss. Use the bulletin for key announcements: class locations, service directives (stand, sit, kneel).

2. Always use the existing sound system. Don’t assume that “everyone can hear me all right—we don’t need this thing today.”

3. Conduct one Sabbath school class in a quiet room. Multiple classes in a large sanctuary provide an underlying buzz that is amplified by hearing aids.

4. Though it may seem old-fashioned, conducting hymns provides the starting and ending points for hymn verses as well as tempo. Don’t assume that everyone knows the hymns and local style of singing.

5. Background music during prayers, while lovely and mood-setting to the hearing worshiper, becomes only a garble of sound to the hearing-impaired. One thing at a time!

6. Speakers, please keep your face toward the congregation. Many listeners rely on your lip movements and facial expressions to catch the meaning of words they miss.

These suggestions cost only awareness and effort. If finances permit, a wide variety of assisted learning devices (ALDs) are available and are a far cry from the bulky black headphones in the front pews that most of us remember. “Real-time” interpretation is an option for large churches. As the pastor speaks, the words are typed onto a computer, then screened behind the pastor for all to read. This assists not only the hearing-impaired, but children and those learning the local language.

Help everyone hear the good news!

—Carolyn Wesner
MIDVALE, IDAHO
I can’t remember when I haven’t taught a weekly Sabbath School lesson. Even back when there were only about four of us in the class. But now my church is larger and its membership more diverse. The group has changed, and I guess I’ve changed, too. But one thing hasn’t changed: We still come together each week. We still open our Bibles. We still seek the guidance of the Spirit. And we are always blessed.
here it was. The title of the Sabbath school lesson I had promised to teach in a general lesson study setting: "No Pruning, No Grapes." Interpreted, this meant I was to stand in front of a couple hundred mothers, fathers, grandparents, prospective parents, and assorted others and tell them how to raise their offspring—or how they should have raised them.

Now, you need to know that our young adult children are successful, loving, rewarding, thoughtful. If you knew them, you’d wish they were yours. Even though experience teaches plenty, advising others is pretty dangerous. But I was to teach, and so the lesson began.

We skimmed Solomon’s parenting advice. He is great on discipline; he worked in some promises as he wrote his child-raising chapters and talked in generalities about training branches. But his son Rehoboam wasn’t exactly a model child. And with 700 wives and a few hundred concubines, a Temple to build, and the queen of Sheba to entertain, what time did he have for fathering his many children? (I wondered aloud how many of us women wish we were married to the wisest man who ever lived. Our husbands may think we are, but what if we really were?)

We could and should, of course, consider the advice of those recognized experts such as James Dobson, although I’ve even hoped he’d have trouble with his children.

You can tell this topic is a touchy one. Sometimes I become cynical and declare fate as responsible for how children “turn out.” You’ve seen good parents agonize over wayward offspring and parents you judged as permissive and irresponsible somehow grow model people, haven’t you?

We looked at the Sermon on the Mount, which helped us discover that if we followed Christ’s instruction, we’d go the extra mile, we’d shed love’s light on everyone, we would be strong on relationships and adopt other enviable attributes. In short, we would be irresistible, and our little ones would emulate our every action.

Then, in what I thought was a stroke of inspiration, or at the very least genius, I asked several parents to share their really important child-raising practices. “Be sure they are loved unconditionally,” suggested one. Others stressed family worship, reading together, camping trips, lemonade upon returning from school, and making a big deal when a parent arrives home from work.

Grandparents saw their roles not as reformers, but as friends who now have the time to show interest, give support, and play games with their grandchildren. “Families are the best examples on earth of a heavenly Father’s love and the closest evidence of the importance of togetherness,” one suggested.

As the lesson progressed, I mentioned some of what I had learned by working in a day-care center. Daily the young woman in charge lovingly related to an assortment of little ones brought to her by job-holding parents. For instance, when she wanted a child’s attention, she went to that child, moved so that her eyes were level with the child’s eyes (she often knelt in front of them), and then conversed.

The right to work alone was carefully guarded—all toys were called “work”—and no one else could barge in on a child’s “work” unless that child had granted permission. The children were not allowed to bring dessert with their lunch. There was no envy of someone’s luscious chocolate morsel by others who had oatmeal cookies or, worse, pieces of fruit.

During the last few moments of the study time we talked about how the typical family had declined during the past decade while the atypical family had increased. One-parent and foster-parent families have now become typical. We discussed how we would rather believe that our church is exempt, but now realistically have to admit that our children and young people are products of our modeling.

No pruning, no grapes? I’m still reticent to give advice, and yet unwilling to let go of the promise that the child who is instructed in the way he should go (“and in keeping with [their] individual gift or bent” [Prov. 22:6, Amplified]), will not depart from it when he is old. Interpretation? Let me venture the meaning as “modeling.” And let that modeling be as Paul suggests in my version of 1 Corinthians 11:1: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of the great Role Model of all time.”
No Truck Parking” said the signs at the edge of a large dirt parking lot. I saw the signs every morning as I jogged down a portion of U.S. 95, one of the main north/south routes through the state of Nevada. Mammoth 18-wheel tractor-trailer outfits were another common sight as they passed through the little town of Fallon. But if any of the truckers were tempted to park their rigs in this lot while they took a few hours of rest, the signs said in unmistakable language: “Park somewhere else. You’re not welcome here.”

I often wondered if the truck drivers noticed the other sign on the property: the one that advertised the name of a church, its pastor, and an invitation to worship in the building that sat back off the road.

I know that a truck takes up a certain amount of space, and when it’s gone, its driver may have left a certain amount of refuse. But I also know that a church parking lot is never full more than once or twice a week. And a trucker is most likely to stop and rest between the hours of midnight and 6:00 a.m. when absolutely no one is going to park in a church parking lot. So I wonder: Why would a congregation (or at least its leaders) deliberately deny such an obvious service to the travelers who pass its way?

The thing that comes to mind is that like many Christians, this congregation was willing to follow Christ as long as that didn’t make any demands or require any commitment, and as long as they didn’t have to pick up any trash.

Part of the problem is that we’re so deeply involved in different “ministries” to our local congregations that we have little time to really serve the people who are yet to be touched by the life-changing power of the gospel. But when most of our efforts (our time, our money) go to sustaining internal activities, it’s time to remember that our commission is to “go and make,” not “stay and keep busy.”

Another part of the problem is that we have come to expect a return on our investment—whether it’s time, money, or effort. We look for service activities that give us the most “bang for our buck” in baptisms, media exposure, or community goodwill. Instead of just seeing a need and meeting it, we invariably ask: “What’s in it for us?”

Why is it that we love compelling stories about people who make great sacrifices and dedicate themselves to impossible tasks, but we then overlook service opportunities that lie literally at our doorstep?

Once I pastored a church that had a covered front porch. The kids from the neighborhood used its shelter as they waited for the school bus every morning. But then someone brought to the church board’s attention the fact that small amounts of graffiti were beginning to appear on the walls of this little shelter. Something had to be done to nip this small problem in the bud before it became a larger one.

Thinking back, I realize that we could have done something creative. We could have decided that someone from the church would be there every morning to visit with the kids, maybe even bring them something to eat or drink. It would have taken all of 30 minutes every weekday morning. But someone would’ve had to pay for the food and drink, and there was no guarantee that anyone would be baptized as a result.

Our solution? Ask the school district to make the children wait for the bus somewhere else.

I think we missed a great opportunity to demonstrate Christian service. It might not have yielded any tangible results; it may have been inconvenient. But wouldn’t it have been fun to have Jesus say in the judgment, “I was waiting for the school bus, and you visited Me; you brought Me something to eat and drink” (see Matt. 25:31-46)?
ADVENTIST QUOTES

“When the pastor comes over.”
—4-year-old Rebekah McGrath, Nambucca Heads, New South Wales, Australia, when her mother, Denise, asked what the Passover was

“My mother, Koreen!”
—3-year-old Toby Wharton, when a London pastor asked the children to name a mother in the Bible

“Sin is like laundry—best kept up and dealt with every day.”
—Elder Roger Coon, to the Willow Brook, Maryland, Sabbath school class

“The world began with the Sabbath and will end with the Second Advent. The remnant church began with the issue of the Second Advent and will end with the issue of the Sabbath.”
—Cecil S. Ma, Arcadia, California

ADVENTIST LIFE

Once when I was attending the Keene, Texas, church, the pastor was speaking about the terrible conditions that we were living in and what a joy it would be when Christ returns to take His children home.

My 3-year-old son had been pestering me to take him home when the pastor asked, “Are you ready to go home?”

Turning toward the pastor, my son shouted, “Yes!”
—Millie Meeker, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

The international composition of our students makes life interesting on our campus. One departing student put up a “For Sale” announcement on the bulletin board. Among the things listed was: “Notebook computer for sale, almost brand-new.” The bottom of the ad read: “First come, first win.”
—G. T. Ng, Ph.D., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines

READERS’ EXCHANGE

Please send correspondence directly to the writer, not to the Adventist Review.

AUTISTIC CHILD: We have a 15-year-old son with autism. He’s nonverbal, about 6 to 7 years of age in development, and has multiple food and chemical sensitivities. I would like to talk or correspond with other Adventist parents who have autistic children and face similar circumstances.
—Reggie Dockham, 1113 E. Adams, Riverton, WY 82501; 307-856-8250

IN PRISON, WANTS TO HELP: I became an Adventist after the most tragic event of my life—the murder of my wife seven years ago. In searching for reasons I committed this most heinous crime, I found the Seventh-day Adventist Church and gave my life to Christ. (I am in a military prison, but am a member of the Shiloh SDA Church in Leavenworth, Kansas.) Now, through correspondence, I’d like to help those who feel on the brink of destruction—because I’ve been there.
—Timothy A. Booth, Box 74851-B6, 310 McPherson Ave., Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-1363

BANANA CROSSING

UNPLANNED STOP: On the way to February’s church school building project in Changuinola, Panama, members of Maranatha Volunteers International could only watch and wait as just-harvested bananas were transferred from the plantation to the processing plant. And you thought trains were frustrating.
SOME EVANGELICALS HAVE STATED that in the twentieth century more Christians have died for their faith than in any previous century. Is that true?

We don’t have precise records for the previous centuries. Who knows how many Christians died during the religious wars in Europe four centuries ago? But the statement may be true.

Why is that?
First, because there are today more Christians on earth than ever before. Second, because powerful anti-Christian or antireligion ideologies have organized systematic persecution, and millions of people have died. Again, in some areas Christianity has been identified with Western culture and politics, and persecution is revenge. Plus we have more information about persecution of Christians. Finally, Western countries do not defend and protect Christians as they did in the past.

Have Christians been singled out for persecution, or have people of other faiths also suffered loss of religious freedom?
Intolerance has no frontier. When a radical and extremist
ideology comes into power, real or potential opponents are persecuted. The targets are people who are different.

In his 1994 report for the United Nations, special rapporteur Abdelfattah Amor mentioned 2,761 specific incidents. He told of 50 countries in which Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews are among those who are persecuted. A year later he listed 30 countries in which Christians had problems, 14 for Muslims, four for Buddhists, and three for Jews.

Hindus are persecuted in Pakistan, Shiite Muslims in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. In Iran the Bahá’í community lives under terrible repression. Orthodox Christians have problems in Albania, but they put a lot of pressure on others in Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania. Jehovah’s Witnesses are listed as one of the most persecuted groups, because they refuse to honor national flags or take blood transfusions, and are involved in door-to-door evangelism.

On October 10, 1996, between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., 21 churches and schools were burned and 9 demolished in eastern Java, Indonesia. Not a single church building was left standing in the city of Situbondo. Why? Because 3,000 extremist Muslims disagreed with a five-year prison sentence for an offense against Islam. The offender was a Muslim.

In Algeria several Catholic priests, monks, and nuns are assassinated every week. Extremists are killing dozens of women, intellectuals, and moderate Muslims.

When freedom is threatened, all of us—Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, nonbelievers—are in danger.

How about Seventh-day Adventists—have our people come under threat?

From the beginning of our history we have never had a special target. Our name has been mentioned only twice in the United Nations report. In spite of this, we know that we have had some pastors arrested. Two of our members were assassinated in Dagestan in March 1997, and others were threatened. We share the problems of all Christians in many countries. We also suffer discrimination as a religious minority in several “Christian” countries.

Persecution can come at any time.

Several years ago our pastors and members were persecuted in Burundi. They were forced to work for the state on Saturday. Keeping Sabbath under a very authoritarian government increases the risk of being persecuted. However, no law has ever been passed specifically against us.

Why have Adventists largely escaped persecution?

We are not a big church. We are not involved in politics, and refuse to use violence to defend ourselves. And we are not seen as an immediate and direct threat for most governments or powerful organizations.

That can change. Think only on the economic level. One day people making a lot of money from alcohol and tobacco might cause us trouble. The biggest persecution comes when a group threatens the interest of many. Our beliefs could expose us to difficulties in a social or political crisis.

Where are Adventists suffering today because of their beliefs?

The population of Chiapas in southern Mexico has been suffering for at least 25 years because of a civil conflict. More than 30,000 Protestants have had to leave their farms and houses, and 2,000 have lost their lives. Several thousand Catholics were killed also, and six Seventh-day Adventists. In this part of Mexico, Protestants, including Adventists, refuse to participate in the traditional religious festivals. Adventists don’t drink alcohol and don’t want to be involved in violence. They are caught between the belligerents. Because we are growing fast, we are becoming a target for both sides.

In Eastern Europe freedom can be threatened by the strong opposition of the Orthodox Church to any form of proselytism. They are alarmed by the flow of foreign evangelists entering their countries. Some of the Orthodox leaders view this proselytism as a new crusade against their church and their
We have to be very prudent. It is also all Christians. Proselytism is forbidden. The church shares the difficulties faced by laws on religious freedom.

Many governments are preparing new democratic countries of Western Europe. Protecting religious conduct against any governmentally imposed burden not necessitated by a compelling public interest. After the 1990 decision in Smith v. Employment Division, that the United States. The Court declared unconstitutional a statute that was the single most useful tool in protecting individual religious practices from unintentional governmental burdens.

The city of Boerne, Texas, had alleged that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) was unconstitutional. RFRA was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton in 1993 as a reaction to another Supreme Court decision in 1990 that severely undercut the protection of the free exercise of religion provided by the Constitution of the United States.

Before 1990 the free exercise clause was interpreted to protect religious conduct against any governmental imposition burden not necessitated by a compelling public interest. After the 1990 decision in Smith v. Employment Division, that protection was reduced, in effect, to a ban on intentional burdens placed on religiously motivated conduct. RFRA was designed to reinstate the previous higher level of protection.

But the Court held in Boerne that in passing RFRA, Congress violated the constitutionally mandated separation of powers by invading the Court’s right to interpret the Constitution. That decision is a severe blow to the protection of religiously motivated conduct from government burdens.

In the second case, Agostini v. Felton, the Court revisited—and relaxed—its previous high wall against governmental involvement in parochial elementary school funding. The case, from New York City, challenged a lower court ruling that sending public school teachers into parochial elementary schools to provide special classes for children with disabilities violated the establishment clause of the Constitution. Of far greater significance, the plaintiffs asked the Court to revise its key interpretation of the establishment clause in a way that would allow significantly greater public funding of a variety of undertakings of religious groups. And that is exactly what the Court did. While opinions may vary as to the desirability of providing equal services to both public and parochial school students, it is significant that the Court’s newly stated understanding of the establishment clause forbids only those government actions intended to benefit religion, not those that do so unintentionally. A more detailed analysis of these two decisions will appear in a forthcoming issue of Liberty.

Significant change in constitutional interpretation resulting from these decisions plays into the hands of forces in the United States Congress now pressing for a religious amendment to the Constitution. Damage has been done by the changes in constitutional doctrine resulting from the aforementioned Supreme Court decisions. The broad coalition of religious groups that brought RFRA into being will try to undo that damage by legislation, if at all possible. But a legislative fix may prove impossible. Then any move to provide further protection for religious liberty would require a constitutional amendment.

Several examples of such an amendment are now floating around Washington, D.C., and one, sponsored by Representative

Some are subtle, others not so subtle

BY MITCHELL A. TYNER

Are there threats to religious liberty in America today? Yes, always. Do these threats come from government or from churches? from the courts or the legislatures? from liberals or conservatives? The answer is yes to all the above. The usually turbulent waters of church-state relations are being roiled by the convergence of pressures from several sources. Here’s what’s happening.

Of most immediate interest are two decisions handed down by the United States Supreme Court in June. In one, Boerne v. Flores, the Court declared unconstitutional a statute that was the single most useful tool in protecting individual religious practices from unintentional governmental burdens.

The city of Boerne, Texas, had alleged that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) was unconstitutional. RFRA was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton in 1993 as a reaction to another Supreme Court decision in 1990 that severely undercut the protection of the free exercise of religion provided by the Constitution of the United States.

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Can you imagine a government publishing a list of good or bad religious groups? I am very concerned about this, because persecution begins with lists. The media use them; people are scared of you if you are on the wrong list. It becomes more difficult to get a permit to build new churches, to open schools, and to have an evangelistic program. On the other hand, I am encouraged to see many intellectuals in Europe fighting these types of lists. We are not alone.

As the century draws to a close, are threats to religious freedom increasing or decreasing?

We have never enjoyed such a
Earnest Istook, of Oklahoma, has been introduced in Congress. All of these suggested amendments cause concern for those for whom religious freedom means more than the validation of majoritarian concerns. Many are directed at a particular problem of concern to its author. Most are concerned more with rewriting the establishment clause than with the protection of free exercise of religion, especially the practices of those whose views do not reflect those of the majority. None of these proposals presently come even close to the level of support needed for passage by Congress, much less the support necessary for ratification by a majority of the states.

Although cross currents constantly muddy the waters, patterns are discernible here.

1. **Majoritarianism.** For more than a decade the United States has been moving toward more empowerment of majorities and correspondingly less protection of minorities. This is seen in the characterization of affirmative action as “special treatment” rather than a remedy for a problem, and by the rancor generated by that discussion. It spills over into the religious realm when believers ask for accommodation for a religious practice that runs counter to general practices, such as workplace requirements. Requests for accommodation are often met with the retort “You’re just wanting special treatment.” Yet historically, many if not most critically important religious liberty battles have been fought over this very issue of exemption from generally applicable rules and practices.

2. **Cynicism toward conservative religion.** Over the past two decades, as conservative Christians have become more politically active, they have often fallen prey to the temptations inherent in politics. Their political maneuvering, disclaimed as something other than what it clearly is, has produced considerable cynicism in those who do not share their view on significant issues. It has been argued, with considerable evidence, that the elite who shape American culture refuse to take seriously anyone who takes his/her religion seriously. Such a mind-set often sees religion, especially conservative religion, more as a threat to be contained than as a key component of freedom to be stoutly defended.

3. **Cynicism within the religious community.** Unfortunately, religious groups sometimes are more energetic in pursuing their own agendas than in the general protection of religious freedom for all. For example, the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, now before Congress, would give significant protection to a wide variety of religious practices in the workplace. But because it is perceived as primarily a protection for Sabbatarians, it is receiving very limited support from those religious groups who are often most vocal in protesting what they consider to be governmental inroads into religion. As some of their leaders have commented privately, the bill addresses a real need to protect legitimate religious practices, but their ox is not the one being gored.

Threats to religious liberty in America today are real, and come from many sources. In these swirling currents we are challenged to point out clearly that religious liberty means more than either empowering the practices of the majority or giving special treatment to practices of religious minorities. It means defending the very keystone in the arch of human liberty, the core of self-determination. It means reminding others that their rights are not safe unless ours are too, and reminding ourselves that the best way to protect our own rights and freedoms is to protect zealously those same rights and freedoms for others, including those with whom we fundamentally disagree.

**Mitchell A. Tyner is associate general counsel, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.**
World Events Demonstrate Importance of Religious Liberty Congress

BY JONATHAN GALLAGHER

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Dramatic world events highlighted the vital importance of religious freedom and human rights as 400 delegates from more than 30 countries attended the fourth world congress on religious liberty. Meeting in Rio de Janeiro June 22-26 under the theme “Facing the New Millennium: Religious Liberty in a Pluralistic Society,” delegates were shocked to learn of the new legislation voted by the Russian Duma (parliament) June 23, which will severely restrict the rights of some religious groups.

“This bill can be seen as a major setback for democracy in my country,” said Valery Borschev, a member of the Duma attending the congress. Pointing out just how relevant the Congress on Religious Liberty was, Viktor Krushenitsky, secretary general of the Russian chapter of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), expressed his disappointment at the vote.

“This new law does not correspond with the country’s constitution, nor with the international declarations on human rights,” Krushenitsky observed, “and can be seen as a reversal of reforms which uphold freedom of religion to each and every faith.”

In response, the congress voted a four-page resolution protesting the new legislation and requesting Russian president Boris Yeltsin not to sign it into law.

The next day, June 24, news arrived of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to strike down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act as unconstitutional.

“These two world events alone show the vital importance of safeguarding religious freedom,” said John Graz, secretary general of IRLA and one of the congress organizers. “That the two most powerful countries on earth can act this way, how can anyone say that religious liberty matters are unimportant and irrelevant?”
European like me, it was very exciting South America,” said Graz. “For a to ‘pitch our tent’ on another continent: God and to seek after Him, free from of Argentina, Carlos Saul Menem, to work with my South American colleagues. We have also received a warm welcome from the Brazilian authorities, including the president’s office.”

Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso sent a special message to the delegates, expressing his delight that Brazil was chosen to host this congress. He spoke of his pride in Brazil’s record of defending the principles of “freedom, pluralism, and tolerance in religious matters.”

“Religious freedom is inseparable from the very freedom of thought and speech, an inherent aspect of each individual’s human dignity,” said Cardoso, “an indispensable element to the strengthening of world peace.”

Similarly, a message from the president of Argentina, Carlos Saul Menem, identified the “first right” to be “to worship God and to seek after Him, free from coercion and discrimination.”

“The fourth world congress is a valuable contribution leading people and governments to assume with renewed force the defense and promotion of religious liberty as essential for the dignity of the human person and for the peace of the world on the verge of a new millennium,” Menem said.

Reflecting the seriousness of the mood, keynote speaker Abdelfattah Amor warned of the dangers of abusing religious liberty.

“No religion is free from violations and religious intolerance. In order to preserve the right to peace and international security we need to strangle religious extremism,” he declared. Tunisian-born Amor is the United Nations special rapporteur on religious intolerance and president of the International Academy of Constitutional Law.

During the congress Amor sat with the IRLA hearing committee to consider eight cases of religious liberty violations affecting a number of minority faiths. These included religious-motivated killings of Seventh-day Adventists in Dagestan, southern Russia; persecution of evangelical believers in Chiapas, Mexico; the legal status of Scientology in Germany; prejudice against the Unification Church; hostility against “The Family” in Argentina; and discrimination against Seventh-day Adventists in Trinidad and Tobago.

Intolerance on the Rise

In perhaps the most chilling example of deliberate religiously intolerant propaganda, one of the presenters showed a leaflet from one of Germany’s major political parties. It depicted insects being swatted on the cover, with the message “We don’t want such ‘sects’ here.” The body of the leaflet contained references to various religious groups, as well as depictions of the Star of David and the Buddha.

With more than 60 speakers, the congress reviewed religious freedom and associated human rights from a wide perspective. Among the memorable presentations were those from two women members of South American national congresses.

Martha Chavez Cossio, a member of Peru’s congress, spoke passionately of her role in bringing the fundamental human right of religious liberty into the political arena in a predominantly Catholic country. She is currently sponsoring a bill on religious freedom and toleration, and expressed her appreciation for the support she receives from three Adventist fellow members of congress.

“Even if Catholics believe they have the truth, this does not authorize an inflexible or fanatical position to others,” Chavez remarked.

“Additionally, the state has a duty of toleration of religions, not indifference. Religious liberty is not just a convenience; it springs from an internal conviction and a yearning to be free.”

Colombian member of congress Viviane Morales Hoyos revealed that it was only in 1991 that a new constitution was adopted in Colombia that permitted religious pluralism. Before that date any religious observance other than Roman Catholicism was outlawed, she noted. Observing that the domination of Catholicism in her country has been called “a cultural dictatorship,” Hoyos went on to share how she had been able to achieve the passage of a new law in 1994 that enshrines freedom of religion as a cardinal right in Colombian legislation. Recently Hoyos submitted a legal agreement to the minister of the interior to guarantee respect for an individual’s chosen day of worship.

“We still have problems,” said Hoyos, “but what we have sown in tears we will harvest with joy.”

The final morning’s plenary session concluded with an affirmation of religious liberty from Silvio Platero, Cuba’s deputy director for religious affairs. He referred to the country’s constitution, which guarantees religious freedom as well as the right to no religion at all. “Cuba is a model of mutual understanding,” said Platero. Mentioning Seventh-day Adventists specifically, he said, “I would say to you that you have a very thriving church in Cuba.”

Responding to these comments, Daniel Fontaine Marquez, president of the Cuban Union Conference, remarked cryptically, “He said some things that are quite right, and some that will be right in the future.”

The congress concluded with an extensive formal statement reemphasizing the importance of religious liberty to the whole world, and calling on all countries to respect the religious beliefs of all their citizens.

Jonathan Gallagher is an assistant director of the General Conference Communication Department.
Are We Dead in the Water?

A look at what the church is up against in evangelism

BY REG BROWN

The exciting report coming from the last General Conference session indicated that the world membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is approaching 9 million. We can rejoice in what has been accomplished under the blessing of God, especially when we consider that at the first General Conference session in 1863 the membership was a mere 60,000. It is a tribute to our pioneers that through their vision and personal sacrifices such a worldwide work has been successful.
However, a disturbing factor in the church's membership growth is the slow increase (in some cases a zero growth) among the Caucasian population of the Western world. The current dramatic growth appears to be taking place in the developing countries, and this is wonderful to see. But the big concern facing leaders and members is how to stem the declining baptism rate in the industrialized countries.

The lifeblood of Adventism has been evangelism, especially the public presentation of what we know as the three angels' messages. But evangelism in today's world has changed drastically, and traditional approaches have generally produced meager results. Methods that once worked are no longer productive—which inevitably leads to the question What of the future?

We must acknowledge the fact that there have been enormous changes in the lifestyle and conditions of our communities. Most people, in my country at least, do not attend church regularly—fewer than 10 percent, statistics show. They might visit a house of worship on special occasions, such as Easter and Christmas, but they have no real commitment to religion. Their children no longer go to Sunday school, and marriages are often performed by a celebrant in a registry office or in a garden.

In the heyday of public evangelism, when large numbers of people joined the Adventist Church, the majority of them were practicing Christians. They read their Bibles, went to church, and kept Sunday as a holy day. The Adventist message simply added to their knowledge of the Scriptures, and they accepted the truth, sometimes with great opposition. Evidence of the religiosity of a bygone era is the number of disused and decaying churches scattered all across the industrialized countries of the West, many of them converted into restaurants and art galleries.

**A New Ball Game**

It is not easy to say categorically what has brought about these changes in attitudes. But factors such as materialism, television, affluence, and war come to mind. Generally speaking, as people and countries become more affluent, there is a corresponding decline in religious interest and fervor. Dependence on material things sometimes leads to a reduced dependence on God.

And without a doubt, the advent of television has seen decline in attendance at public religious meetings. A survey of baptismal figures in Australia has shown a marked drop-off as television became more readily available. The screening of violence, perverted sex, corruption, and pornographic materials has undermined spiritual values and produced a morally decadent society.

What is the answer? Do we write off a society because of its indifference to religion? Are there other methods that can be used to reach unchurched people? People's needs are just as great today as when they were responding more readily to the public presentation of the gospel. How to reach unresponsive hearts with the claims of Christ is the question for which we need to find answers.

Some feel that personal evangelism may be the most productive way to go—not as a replacement of the public presentation, but as a complement of it. According to Adventist evangelist Mark Finley, personal evangelism is still the best way to win people. People still respond to kindness, and genuine friendship breaks down prejudice.

Australian researcher Alwyn Salom has discovered from surveys that friendship is the major factor in influencing people to join the Adventist Church. And he claims that 72 percent of new members had a previous contact with an Adventist friend, neighbor, relative, or work mate.

**The Personal Touch**

The best example of personal ministry is that of Christ Himself. If we study the methods He used, it may help us meet the challenge of today's society. The classic experience in Scripture is that of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). Christ's action angered the disciples, who believed in the separation of Jews and Samaritans.

But in commenting on this...
experience, Ellen G. White wrote as follows: “As soon as she had found the Saviour the Samaritan woman brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. . . . Through the woman whom they despised, a whole cityful were brought to hear the Saviour” (The Desire of Ages, p. 195).

Jesus was the Master Evangelist, and He demonstrated an approach that should be a model for us. Said Ellen G. White again: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (The Ministry of Healing, p. 143). Christ’s method is based on personal contact and friendship. The formula is a simple four-step plan:

1. He socialized. Jesus mingled with all kinds of people—educated and uneducated, sinners and saints. He personalized His ministry.

2. He sympathized. He showed genuine concern for people; He empathized with them.

3. He gave Himself in service, ministering to people’s needs, spending most of His time in deeds of practical ministry—healing, teaching, comforting, and feeding.

4. He invited people to take salvation. “Follow Me,” He bade them.

It is significant that Christ did not ask people to follow Him until He had won their confidence and trust. And this He did through personal interest and by coming close to them in love and fellowship. This type of relationship takes time to develop and must be genuine. People are wary of phonies. But even those who regard themselves as nonreligious are impressed by unselfish acts of kindness.

**Do we write off a society because of its indifference to religion?**

Not One Size Fits All

Notice, however, that Christ ministered to the needs of people as He found them in each particular place. The needs of people in some places today are for food and clothing, for health education, for employment. In other places people encounter loneliness, boredom, breakdown in marriage, child abuse, domestic violence, alcoholism, and drugs. Sometimes it’s simply a discouraged soul in need of a word of encouragement or a friend.

All too often we ask people to take the fourth step—to follow Jesus—before we have built bridges into their lives through the first three. Yet at first people are more impressed by our approach, so to speak, than by the message. But once our approach has arrested their attention and a friendship is formed, they will then listen to what we have to say. In an age of high tech, people still need that personal touch.

What Christ did in healing the sick, relieving the people of the guilt of sin, and speaking words of comfort to the distressed was all good as far as it went. But people need to take the final step in Christ’s strategy—“follow Me.” Should it not be our highest privilege to help people accept Jesus as their Saviour?

The most effective soul winners in the future may not be frontline evangelists and pastors, as important as these are in the totality of the evangelistic strategy. Rather, these will probably be ordinary members who put into practice Christ’s approach toward the person living next door, in the workplace, in the public educational institutions, in the boardroom—anywhere.

I believe ordinary Adventists will be those making a difference in the mission of the church of the future.

Reg Brown is a retired pastor/evangelist living in New South Wales, Australia.
Have you ever been playing in a swimming pool when your mom or dad tells you to get out now? Don’t you just wish you could stay in the pool forever?

Well, you may wish it, but you don’t really mean it. After a while you’d get hungry and want to get out and eat. Or you’d get sleepy and want to get out and go to bed (yes, you would!). Or you’d have to go to the bathroom, and you know you have to get out of the pool for that.

It is good to enjoy what you are doing. But you’ve got to also be willing to quit what you’re doing and move on to the next thing. You don’t want to get stuck doing one thing all the time. There’s so much more to do.

What would happen if an egg never wanted to hatch? The little bird inside might think it liked being inside the cozy warm shell. It might think, This is perfect. I have everything I need. I don’t want to leave.

But then it would never see the sky or trees or other birds. It would never get to eat worms, bugs, or other bird treats. It would never learn to sing. It would never learn to fly.

It is best for the bird just to go ahead and hatch. It is best if you can learn how to swim and play the trumpet and mow the lawn and play checkers and name all the books in the Bible and lots of other things.

Jesus said, “So you must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48, ICB). By “perfect” He meant mature. And He didn’t so much mean “perfect right now” as “on the way to perfect.” Right now you’re pretty good. But to be honest, you know you could be better. Each day you can ask Jesus to help you be more thoughtful and loving, to be kinder and better. Each day you can be growing, getting a little closer to what Jesus wants you to be.

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Some years ago a well-known Dutch professor got himself into trouble with his colleagues. He had written a novel that brought high praise from most literary critics. But the story was situated in the milieu he knew best—the university at which he taught. And although the book was purported to be a work of fiction, a few of his colleagues soon thought they recognized themselves in its pages and were not happy. How could the author depict them in such unfavorable light? They were ready to take the matter to court.

How would you feel if, upon reading a book, you suddenly discovered that one of its major characters is a very close description of yourself—manifesting some of your good points, but also portraying your weaknesses? I would be embarrassed.

In fact, I have had that experience. In a collection of essays and novelettes representing a whole array of literary genres, I came upon a section that I found extremely uncanny, containing, as it did, an accurate description of the way I’d often felt through the years.

It portrayed a man (of middle age, I suppose) who had done quite well in life. He had few, if any, material worries. Surrounded by people who respected and assisted him, he enjoyed all sorts of cultural manifestations and found more than enough interesting things to keep himself busy. He had a higher than average education and an interesting job. All of these things made this man very much like me.

But a more notable thing about this person (that which made me even more convinced that the
author must have studied me very closely at some stage of my life when he created his character under the guise of an autobiography) was that this man was fundamentally unhappy. His life, seemingly so full of all sorts of good and pleasant things, remained basically empty. He could never be fully content with what he had achieved and the things he possessed. In spite of it all, there always remained a nagging feeling that these enjoyments were fundamentally superficial and unsatisfactory. And the things that give real meaning and depth to life seemed to escape him, however passionately he chased them. In fact, his whole disposition had gradually changed from a simple enjoyment of the present to an obsessive preoccupation with the future, hoping ardently that one day he would know real happiness.

By now many readers, I'm sure, have guessed that the book I have in mind is the short philosophical biblical essay we know as Ecclesiastes.

Its author (Solomon) had indeed little to complain about as far as material comfort in life was concerned. He lived in a grand villa that took 13 years to build (1 Kings 7:1). Not only was he married to the daughter of Pharaoh, ruler
Egypt (1 Kings 3:1), but he also had more beautiful women around him than he could probably even remember by name (1 Kings 11:3). His annual income in gold alone was 666 talents, which by today’s standards would easily make him a multimillionaire (1 Kings 10:14). A multitude of guests assured that there was never a dull day.

And we are told what it took to keep the royal household going: "Solomon’s provision for one day was thirty cors of fine flour, and sixty cors [about 185 bushels] of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, besides harts, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl" (1 Kings 4:22, 23).

Solomon was not only extremely wealthy, excelling “all the kings of the earth for riches” (1 Kings 10:23); he was also a very cultured man, known for many of his proverbs, as a songwriter with more than a thousand texts to his name (1 Kings 4:32), and as a poet whose love poetry (Song of Solomon) is still read by millions today. He was a talented ruler, having been divinely blessed with “wisdom and understanding beyond measure” (verse 29).

What more could a man desire? Yet read Solomon’s startling self-evaluation in Ecclesiastes 2:9-11: “So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”

Again and again Solomon repeated this outcry of disillusionment: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Eccl. 1:1). Take some time, if you will, to read the 12 chapters of the book straight through—it will probably take you no more than one hour. There is a good chance that, like me, you will find what this man wrote some 3,000 years ago to be strangely modern. Indeed, it very aptly describes the feelings of many of us today who, particularly in the Western world, really have little to complain about. We have a family, a house, one or more cars. We have enough money to buy good food, to go on an annual vacation, and to save something for our old age. We should be happy, but we are not. To many of us, somehow, everything seems utterly meaningless. “Is there nothing more to life?” we ask ourselves. “Is this it? Is this all we may expect?”

Whether we like it or not, most people will have to go through their midlife crisis, as I suspect Solomon did. When we have passed 40 going on 50, we recognize that the pattern has been set for the rest of our life. If we have not advanced in our career by that time, the likelihood is that we never will. When we were young, just out of college, getting married, starting a family, working for an academic degree, getting our first pay raise, so many things seemed possible. We had dreams and ambitions. We knew we would go far in life. If we would play our cards right, we would enjoy success and find fulfillment.

But some 20 or 25 years later most people grudgingly have to admit that not all their dreams and ambitions have come true—and probably never will. They will then have to come to terms with the idea that life has cheated them—or, difficult as it is to admit, that they were not so brilliant after all and that their life, like that of the vast majority of people around them, is not and never will be as exciting as that of the jet set and the (supposedly) happy few who make interesting guests for talk shows.

Of course, many of us continue to hope that there may be a turn for the better. In Western society (such as where I live) we are champions in projecting things into the future. Happiness, satisfaction, fulfillment—these are largely conceived of in future terms. “OK,” we seem to say, “life may not be all that great now, but just wait . . .”

Until when?

Until the children have grown up so that we can have some of that freedom back that we used to enjoy so much (so much for selective memory). Until the children can go to school so that mother can continue her education or find a full-time job. Until we have earned that master’s degree or that Ph.D. Think of the free time we will have when that thesis is at long last finished, and of the respect it will earn us, and the career opportunities that will present themselves. Until we have finally received that long-awaited promotion and have that desired status of head of the department (and the salary that goes with it). Until we can return and move to that part of the country where we always wanted to live, and spend our time in the way we want, instead of being pushed around by a boss.

Even in the spiritual realm this kind of thinking is not uncommon. We may be aware that our inner life misses that vital spark that so many other Christians seem to have, that radiance that tells of a close walk with the Lord. We may have to do without that until the Lord one day decides to do something special for
us—work a miracle or give us some unique experience.

If Solomon has anything to tell us in Ecclesiastes, I believe it is his insistence that true happiness—that sense of completeness, wholeness, peace, fulfillment—is not based on the good things the future may bring. It is true that the Christian faith means hope for the future and that our orientation is for a new life in the world made new. But it is likewise true—and Solomon tries to get that across to us—that faith in the true God is something very earthly, something that has to do with the here and now. With today.

If you have taken the time to read Ecclesiastes through, you will probably have paused a few moments when you came to chapter 9 and read verses 7-11. Let me quote them in full, because they express so beautifully and concisely what Solomon wants us to understand:

“Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do. . . . Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life which he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.”

God may give you a very long life. You may have chosen a lifestyle that will help bring that about. But even if you live to be a 100, life continues to come to you only one day at a time. Make sure you enjoy every day. Do not focus on that future moment when the circumstances will at long last be such that life will become enjoyable. It may never come. Focus on today with its challenges and opportunities. There is always something good and worthwhile if you look for it. Whatever comes your way today, make the best of it. Look actively for the things that are worthwhile. Try to enjoy the company of the people you associate with. Appreciate the love of your spouse, of your children, of your friends.

A number of years ago I read an interview of an 85-year-old Kentucky woman. The journalist asked her, “What would you do differently if you could start all over again?”

“Oh,” she replied, “I would do mostly the same things. But I would dare to make more mistakes. I would also take more time for myself. I would try to enjoy myself a bit more than I have done. I think I would eat fewer beans and more ice cream.”

I am not suggesting we follow that last suggestion of the dear Kentucky lady and set aside all dietary rules. But in many ways our life could consist of fewer beans and more ice cream, if you know what I mean. We should make a real effort to get more enjoyment out of the simple things of everyday life.

The story is told of a rabbi who one day asked a member of his synagogue why he was always in such a hurry. The man answered, “I am chasing success and happiness.” The rabbi looked him in the eye and simply said, “It may not be before you; it may be behind you or just beside you.”

Real happiness can be yours now. Enjoy the small things of today. They bring you more satisfaction than the great things of the future that you’re hoping for, but which may never materialize. From my own experience I know how true that is.

* Texts in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.

Reinder Bruinsma is the secretary of the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists in St. Albans, England.

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While there is evidence that the church in the South Pacific Division (SPD) is doing much that is helping to fulfill its mission, the steady decline in the number joining the church is a concern. This was the main message SPD secretary Laurie Evans reported at the recent midyear meetings.

Added to this was the increase in numbers leaving the church. During 1996 it reached an equivalent of 49 percent of baptisms, up from 35 percent the year before. In Australia and New Zealand last year’s loss represented 61 percent of baptisms.

“The disturbing fact is that the situation in respect to losses through apostasies and missing would be far worse if every mission and conference carried out an audit of their membership records,” said Evans. “The sobering truth is that we are a ‘bleeding’ church. After deducting apostasies from baptisms, our kingdom growth was only 2.2 percent compared to a world figure of 5.7 percent. If deaths are also deducted, the real growth for last year is only 1.9 percent.”

In spite of the overall slowdown, the Pacific islands’ growth is outstripping Australia and New Zealand by 6 to 1. “The result of this is a shrinking home base supporting an ever-expanding island operation,” said Evans. “This situation is putting increasing financial pressure on division resources. It’s clear that the real solution to this problem is to encourage island missions to become more self-reliant.”

More than 232,000 church members (approximately 80 percent) live in the island territories, compared to 59,000 in Australia and New Zealand.

**Rejoicing**

“Unlike entities in the corporate world,” said Evans, “it is impossible to put a value on the real ‘net worth’ of the church.”

He illustrated this in various ways:

- those who had “embraced the Adventist message”
- the influence of Sydney Adventist Hospital on 31,093 patients and their families
- the 729 students in Australia and New Zealand who had completed correspondence courses through the Adventist Media Centre
- the A$1.5 million (US$1.1 million) of printed material distributed by literature evangelists
- the A$7.7 million (US$5.7 million) of overseas aid administered by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency
- the impact on 1,554 tertiary, 7,215 secondary, and 20,235 primary students in the church’s education system

**Passionate Call**

In what was at times a passionate speech, Evans called for the church to address several challenges, including:

1. Evangelizing the cities of the South Pacific Division. “We need to especially train and equip workers to go into these asphalt jungles,” he said, “and develop relevant methods and approaches to meet the varying needs.”

2. Investing in modern means of technology so that the gospel can be taken to remote, isolated areas where there is no presence or only a small Adventist presence.

3. Developing leadership for various responsibilities. He signaled beginning a master’s degree in administration at Avondale College. He also saw a need to recognize “the potential of people already in the [church] system, and displaying corporate unselfishness when it comes to career enhancement for such individuals.”

4. Further streamlining the decision-making process through delegation and empowerment, and ensuring it takes place as close to the grass roots as possible.

5. Encouraging “creativity, visioning, and ownership in such a way as to engender enthusiasm for involvement in the mission of the church by leadership, laity, and employees.”

6. Projecting a more positive image of the church to the public and improving communications to church members.

“Challenges such as these—which are not intended to be exhaustive—help us recognize the need for the church to be Spirit-directed and -administered,” said Evans.

**The church needs to reach out to the cities.**

Reprinted from the South Pacific Division Record.
French Government Restores Sabbath Privileges

French Seventh-day Adventist students can once again legally observe the Sabbath because of the efforts of a religious liberty defense agency. In a letter to the French chapter of the International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty (IADRL), education officials from the French government granted permission for Jewish and Seventh-day Adventist students to be absent from school on Saturdays.

“This decision marks a reversal of French government policy, which discriminated against religious minorities,” says Maurice Verfaillie, Euro-Africa Division communication director.

Until 1993 each new minister of education wrote letters granting permission for Adventists to be absent from compulsory attendance on Saturdays at France’s public schools. The 1993 Waco tragedy and the Solar Temple suicides led some French authorities to identify certain religious minorities as “dangerous sects.”

According to Verfaillie, media campaigns against such cults led some school directors mistakenly to identify Adventists as an unusual religion that should not be granted attendance waivers.

“The attitude of French authorities hardened,” said Verfaillie. “Many Adventists and Jews were not granted the right to freedom of conscience regarding Sabbath [Saturday] absences for religious motives.”

A 1992 decree passed after Islamic agitation was cited as a reason to restrict religious freedom. As a result, some school directors refused to grant permission for Saturday absence. Now that right has been reinstated.

“This is a great help to Adventist families, not only on the French mainland but also in the government’s overseas territories,” says Verfaillie. “The reinstatement will show the public that the French government does not consider the Adventist Church a sect, but a church. The letter from the minister of education is significant because of negative sentiments regarding new religious movements and religious minority groups.”—Adventist News Network.

Philippine Government Intervenes in Baptism

When a prison chaplain objected to the baptism of 72 prison inmates in the Philippine town of Palawan, justice ministers from the central government stepped in and overruled prison officials.

The inmates had been studying with a group of Adventist volunteers for some time and requested baptism. However, a chaplain persuaded the prison
chatted with Lech Walesa today. It isn’t every day that you talk with an individual who has changed the rhythm of world history. Then again, I talk to Jesus every day.

I had Lech cornered 30,000 feet above the earth, so I figured he had to talk to me. He was working on a crossword puzzle. I was of no help . . .

H’mmm, what’s a 12-letter word that means sardine in Polish?

I jokingly mentioned finding him doing a crossword puzzle. The humor didn’t translate, and taking my comment seriously, he replied, “I always do crossword puzzles. It keeps me finding answers.”

Changing my conversational strategy, I asked a direct question: “Mr. Walesa, I will be speaking to 1,000 Polish youth tomorrow. What would the former president of Poland have to tell the youth of his nation?”

He looked up and tapped his pencil twice on his pad as his bodyguard translated my question. He looked squarely at me as he spoke, his mustache bouncing at every consonant. “Our world is changing rapidly. There are many complex problems, new problems.”

He paused and then raised his tone. “Tell the youth that for every problem there is a solution, and that they are not the problem; they are the solution.”

Interesting. Lech Walesa has found the same answer that God clearly spelled out long ago: five-letter word for the Holy Spirit’s chosen weapon, third letter is U.

“I will pour out my Spirit upon all people,” reads Joel 2:28 (NIV). “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.”

Thank you, Lech Walesa, for an exciting conversation. And thank You, God, for an exciting prophecy. Youth aren’t the problem; they are the solution.
I’ve been having a neighborly debate with a friend who subtracts his income tax from his increase when calculating his tithe. His position is that we are to tithe on the net increase and that taxes are legitimate expenses. I know others think this way also. Would you please comment?

We are justified in regarding our increase as the net amount, or actual earnings, after expenses and investments required to produce those earnings have been subtracted. The grocer, for instance, may legitimately deduct the expenses for hired help, inventory purchases, etc., from gross earnings and regard what is left as the increase.

That is not true, however, with respect to money that the government at any level charges for services rendered to its citizens. Taxes, including income tax, are not expenses we pay in order to acquire income. They are expenses imposed by government for its operations in monitoring our general welfare.

Another way to look at it is to ask whether, if income tax is a legitimate deduction, taxes on gasoline, clothing, food, etc., are also acceptable subtractions.

In the final analysis, an understanding of the technical aspects of the tithing principle is not as important as is the “attitude of gratitude” that inspires one to give back to God “not grudgingly, or of necessity,” but with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7).

Your friend’s posture can be best addressed, not by debating tithing options, but by a heightened gratitude for God’s goodness. Remind him that we are, in matters of obedience, wiser and more blessed when we serve God, not “on the margin,” or from the most narrow interpretation of His Word, but from hearts of responsive praise and thanksgiving. Such an attitude makes stewardship a privilege and tithing not a payment, but a happy return to God of that which is already His.

How do you deal with people in the church, especially if they are older and in positions of authority, who have power and who control issues, without offending them or driving them away?

Individuals such as you describe are indeed problematic and when repeatedly placed in office can effectively stymie progress. There are, however, several ways to deal with the problem. One is attempting to relate to these persons in ways that will increase their comfort zone regarding the opinions of others. Inviting them to activities planned and attended by groups or individuals not normally of their circle and/or honoring them publicly with certificates and awards for their dedication through the years may soften their resistance to the proponents of change and, consequently, to change itself.

Another is to be creative about church mission. In fact, when controlling individuals or groups are making church participation for some difficult or impossible, a good way for those excluded to engage in service is via programs that are not mandated or controlled by the regular church votes (e.g., community witness, youth mentoring, etc.). Of course, you should consult your pastor for guidance and understanding in structuring such programs.

And there’s a third option that is quite legitimate. Positions of authority in the church are filled by the vote of the congregation upon names recommended by the nominating committee (or the church board when the nominating committee is not functioning). If you and sufficient others think change is needed, then make it in the appropriate way at the appropriate time—when elections are held.

Please realize, however, that more often than not, the people who have power and who control issues are the ones who show up at business meetings and support the church faithfully with their tithes and offerings. Many who sense the need for change and who have greater talents for service are often deficient in these areas and hence ineligible or unavailable for leadership, a fact that perpetuates the very conditions they decry.

Calvin B. Rock is a general vice president of the General Conference. He holds doctoral degrees in ministry and religious ethics.
Did he treat all his guests this well?

O

UR TOUR GROUP’S GALA FAREWELL was scheduled for the last night of our African safari. Since we would be flying out of Entebbe, we had reservations at a luxury hotel. We would celebrate with crystal, silver, and candlelight, a great contrast to the tents, cots, and camp stools that had served us during the actual safari. Following the banquet, our group would be leaving on a 2:00 a.m. flight for Paris and on to New York.

An Unscheduled Interruption

That afternoon, as our zebra-striped buses pulled up to the main entrance of the elegant hotel, I was planning what I would wear to the banquet. Off would come the khaki pants and bush jacket. I’d just have time to press the long, blue gown I had purposely packed in my flight bag for this special event.

But as I alighted from the safari wagon and stepped into the marble-floored lobby, the room began to whirl around. Esther, my roommate on the trip, noticed my stagger and grabbed my arm. Leading me to a chair, she said, “I’m going to order a room for you.”

“But our plane leaves at 2:00 a.m.,” I protested. “And I want to attend the farewell banquet.”

Esther’s medical background kicked in as she ordered, “You sit right here. I’ll get someone to carry your flight bag to your room.” (Most of our luggage had already been taken to the airport.)

Leaning my dizzy head against the side of a big chair, I saw Esther talking to the clerk at the desk. Then I looked down a long corridor and saw through the parted curtains a banquet room already ablaze with lights, and waiters in white uniforms bustling around the flower-laden tables.

Presently Esther eased me out of the chair and led me by the arm as a young hotel bellhop reached for my flight bag. The young man led the way down a long hall. Then he made a sharp right and proceeded down another long, almost dark hallway. I wondered how far we’d have to go. By this time I could hardly push one foot ahead of the other, but Esther, holding me tightly, prevented me from toppling over.

On the long walk through the hallways I hadn’t seen or heard anyone. This entire wing of the hotel must be vacant, I thought.

At last the bellhop put a key in the door, opened it, and snapped on a dim overhead light. I saw a bed on the far side of the room. I stumbled toward it and collapsed on top of it.

“I’ll stay with you,” Esther volunteered.

The thin-faced young bellhop placed my flight bag on the bedside stand and turned and faced Esther in the manner of a captain taking command. “No, you go to banquet. I watch her!” He gestured toward me and said to Esther, “I bring her hot mint tea. You go!”

Angel Of Entebbe

Put the desired image here.
I nodded and Esther moved reluctantly toward the door. The bellhop rushed to open it. “I never leave her,” he asserted. “You no worry. I take good care.”

Helpless but Not Alone

I closed my eyes, but still the room seemed to be spinning. Or was it the bed?

Presently the bellhop was beside me, placing a pan on the floor just below my head. “You use,” he offered. “I empty for you. I bring tea.”

There was an ominous quiet in the room as well as in the hallway. I heard no voices, no footsteps. A twinge of fear came over me, and I tried to get my head off the pillow. But I was too dizzy even to try to stand. The pain in my head and my abdomen was severe.

At first I thought it was simply traveler’s sickness. But as my misery grew worse, I wondered, What if I should die alone in this room, in this empty wing of the hotel?

The door creaked slightly as the bellhop came in, a tray in his hands. He placed it on the stand. I heard him lift a teapot lid; then I heard the liquid tinkle into a cup. “Take some, Missy; make you feel good,” he assured me. He helped me hold the cup to my lips, for my hands were trembling. “Little more, Missy, little more,” he urged. “Hot tea good for you.” A little later I heard him tiptoe out of the room.

I drifted in and out of sleep. Sometimes pictures flashed past, the sights we had seen on our trip. Murichison Falls exploding through a narrow cleft of rock. Table Mountain being covered by a cloth of thick, white fog. Surf crashing at the foot of the Cape of Good Hope, as the waters of the Atlantic and the Indian oceans merged in awesome fury. Victoria Falls thundering its power in a magnificent curtain of falling water.

Then, in a type of delirium, I felt my airplane falling, falling, twisting, spiraling, and panic swept over me. I must’ve cried out in fright.

I awakened to the sound of a loud creak as someone suddenly pushed the door open. The bellhop stood there silhouetted against the faint light in the hallway. “You all right, Missy?” he said. “I here. I never leave you.”

He came to my bedside, picked up the pan on the floor, and emptied it in the bathroom. He handed me a cool, damp cloth to wipe my mouth and cool my face. “I bring you more tea,” he said.
Once Esther left the banquet room and came to look in on me. “I had to be sure you were all right,” she said. She pointed toward the door. “That fellow never leaves. He sits on the floor just outside the room.”

I settled back onto the pillows, comforted that someone was watching, caring, helping. I dreamed of my childhood, of Mother rocking me in her arms. The sleep was healing.

**Lasting Memories**

At 1:00 Esther came to awaken me and tell me the buses were leaving for the airport. Quickly the young man brought another pot of mint tea. “Missy, you drink,” he said as he poured a cup and handed it to me. “Make you feel good for the airplane.” He then gathered up my flight bag and waited by the door as I slipped on my travel coat and walked toward him, Esther holding my arm.

“Missy, you better now?” His eyes sparkled. I saw pride on his face, the kind of pride a doctor must feel when he has given aid to a patient. “Missy, glad you feel good now. I watch you all night.”

“Thank you, thank you” was all I could say, for a lump was heavy in my throat. I pressed a gift into his hand, but he didn’t even look at it. As he led the way down the long hallways, he turned often to see how I was doing. Concern for me was clearly evident on his face.

As the plane lifted skyward, I glanced out the window at the lights of Entebbe glowing farther and farther away. With my handkerchief I dabbed at my eyes. Esther, still concerned for me, leaned over and asked, “Are you feeling all right?”

“Yes,” I answered. “Yes, I’m just fine.” My voice was still unsteady. “I wish I could’ve brought that young man with me—he was so kind. Oh, Esther, he was the most beautiful memory of anything I saw in all of Africa,” I told her. “An angel, a beautiful angel.”

I bowed my head and offered an inaudible prayer. “God, help me to be half as kind to others as that young man was to me this night.”

Madge Haines Nelson celebrated her ninety-first birthday last June. She is a retired schoolteacher who lives in Angwin, California, with her husband, who is 104 years old.

**New from HSI**

1/2p Bw
NEG supplied
There is in Genesis 5:22 a phrase I like very much: “Enoch walked with God.” Would you tell me, in practical terms, the meaning of that phrase?

Sometimes when we are exploring the meaning of a particular expression, it helps if we examine the usage of similar ones. By comparing and contrasting expressions or phrases, the particular nuance of each one surfaces. In the Bible there are several employments of the verb “walk” when describing the relationship with God and humans.

One can walk before the Lord (e.g., Gen. 17:1; 48:15). The idea is one with which we are well acquainted in our family relationships. Parents with children who are still too young to walk by themselves but who want some independence are placed by the parents before them when they go for a walk. The purpose is to protect them, to be able to anticipate any danger ahead and keep them in the safety of the way. The expression “to walk before God” is a dynamic way of describing God’s providential care for us.

God, like a good parent, wants to keep His eyes on us, leading us safely in our lives (Gen. 48:15; Ps. 56:13). This happens as we walk blamelessly (Gen. 17:1) in full commitment to Him, in faithfulness (firmness of life), in righteousness (submission to God’s will), and in uprightness (rectitude) of heart (1 Kings 3:6).

One can also walk behind/follow after the Lord. This phrase may have originated in the context of pagan processions. On special occasions the idol was taken from its temple and carried by the priests as the people walked behind it, praising and worshiping it. The Old Testament uses this phrase most of the time in speeches or commands condemning idolatry (Deut. 6:14; Jer. 2:23). When applied to God, it recognizes Him as the exclusive object of worship. Love for Him is the motivating force (Jer. 2:2), and it expresses itself in obedience to His will (1 Kings 14:8; 2 Kings 23:3).

Walking with God expresses intimacy, friendship, companionship. The individual is no longer walking before or behind Him, but with Him; by His side.

Mystics have told us that this walk with God takes place in contemplative meditation as we separate ourselves from the world around us. This is certainly not what the biblical phrase means. It was in the realization of his daily tasks that Enoch walked with God. In fact, we are told that he walked with God after having children (Gen. 5:22). And Noah walked with God while building the ark (Gen. 6:9). Our walk with Him takes place in the home, the street, the workplace—everywhere we go. The phrase describes Him as our travel companion.

Walking with God presupposes the existence of a road, a way. The Bible has much to say about “the way of the Lord.” It designates a particular type of life ruled by the loving power of God. His instructions define and identify the road He wants us to travel (Deut. 8:6). That road is His, and to walk on it is to walk with Him. In the New Testament this road becomes a living one, Jesus Christ (John 14:6). He is the embodiment of God’s will for His followers, the way.

Before closing let me point out a concept in those expressions that is so obvious that it can be easily overlooked: God walks! He is a dynamic person constantly involved in the lives of His creatures. It is because He walks that we can walk with Him.

Let’s look briefly at the first time the Bible says that God walks: Genesis 3:8. This passage describes God as walking alone while humans are described as unable to walk, that is, hiding themselves among the trees of the garden. In fact, they even look like trees; they are covered by leaves (verse 7). Trees cannot walk. Humans had abandoned the way of the Lord and become spiritually paralyzed.

The God who walks went out seeking humans and granting them the possibility of walking again with Him. Walking with God presupposes that there was a redemptive encounter between God and us, and that we were enabled by Him to join Him in His walk. This God did for us through Christ.

Now we can listen to the prophet: “What does the Lord require of you? . . . To walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Angel Manuel Rodríguez is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.
They Still Go

The following persons left their homes to work in other parts of the world in early 1997. We thank God for their dedication. Our prayers go with them.

Adventist Volunteer Service

Charles Raymond Herbert Baker, to serve as builder, West Cameroon Mission, Douala, Cameroon, of Pembroke, Bermuda.

Deana Brown, to serve as English/Bible teacher, Korea SDA Language Institutes, Seoul, Korea, of Houston, Texas.

Theodore S. Flaitz, to serve as dentist, Djbouti Adventist Health Centre, Djbouti, and Phyllis Flaitz, of Hermiston, Oregon.

Clementine Alice Garth, to serve as English/Bible teacher, Korea SDA Language Institutes, Seoul, Korea, of Anchorage, Alaska.

Kenneth Edward LeVos, to serve as English/Bible teacher, Korea SDA Language Institutes, Seoul, Korea, of Pennsboro, West Virginia.

Clarence Lloyd, Jr., to serve as English/Bible teacher, Korea SDA Language Institutes, Seoul, Korea, of Dublin, Georgia.

Shannon R. Skelton, to serve as director, Hat Yai English Language Center, Hat Yai, Songkla, Thailand, of Omak, Washington.

Peggy Carolyn Swartz, to serve as English/Bible teacher, Korea SDA Language Institutes, Seoul, Korea, of Burkesville, Kentucky.

Walter Henry Toews, to serve as construction supervisor/accountant, Southern Asia-Pacific Division, Silange Cavite, Philippines, of Williams Lake, British Columbia.

Kevin and Dee (Marcia) Toppenberg, to serve as family medicine physicians, Guam SDA Clinic, Tamuning, Guam, of Orlando, Florida.

Stewart Donald Swena, to serve as family practice physician, SDA Hospital Ile-Ile, Osun State, Nigeria, of Longwood, Michigan.

Kenneth A. Varga II, to serve as English teacher, English Language Schools, Moscow, Russian Federation, of Berrien Springs, Michigan.

David Alan Wedel, to serve as English teacher, Polish Spiritual Seminary, Maja, Poland, of Colton, California.

Patrick Shawn Williams, to serve as director, Muak Lek English Language Center, Saraburi Province, Thailand, of Cedaredge, Colorado.

Aimee Noelle Wright, to serve as elementary school teacher, Saipan SDA Elementary School, Mariana Islands, of Chandler, North Carolina.

Dale Walter Ziesmer, to serve as pediatric dentist, Saipan Adventist Clinic, Mariana Islands, and Jane Ziesmer, of Belton, Texas.

Regular Missionary Service

Bienvenido Arrogante, to serve as optometrist, Adventist Health Centre, Lilongwe, Malawi, Cecilia Arrogante, and one child, of Baldwin Park, California.

Hector Luis Diaz, to serve as vice president of student affairs, Antillian Adventist University, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, Niljika Yadira Diaz, and three children, of Loma Linda, California.

David Leroy Gregory, returning as manager, AWR-Pan America, Costa Rica, Joyce Lynn Gregory, and two children.

David Gordon Hardt, returning as optometrist and director, Saipan SDA Clinic, Saipan, Mariana Islands, Carmen Jo Hardt, and three children.

Jon Michael Harris, returning as director, Griggs University-Bethel Center, East London, South Africa, Enid Christina Harris, and two children.

Wayne Edmond Hazen, returning as art teacher, Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Mexico, Maria Esther Hazen, and two children.

Edwin Ivan Hernandez, to serve as vice president for academic affairs, Antillian Adventist University, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, Magaly Rivera Hernandez, and two children, of Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Jon Michael Nash, to serve as chair of Telecommunications Department, Engineering School, Alicia Marie (Lizzie) Nash, to serve as science teacher/computer programmer, Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Mexico, and two children, of Longwood, Florida.

Tommy Richard Onjukka, to serve as dentist, SDA Health Services, Nairobi, Kenya, Jerri Ann Onjukka, and two children, of Ishpeming, Michigan.

Lyndon Everett Parsons, returning as district pastor, Shannon/Galway, Ireland, Leslie Ann Parsons, and two children.

William Lamar Phillips, returning as assistant director, ADRA/Central American Union, Honduras, and Felicia Jean Phillips, Luis Ricardo Ramirez, to serve as teacher, Visual Arts Department, Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Mexico, Brunhilda Alvarez Ramirez, and two children, of San Bernardino, California.

Andrew Christopher Smoot, to serve as director, ADRA/Bangladesh, Bangladesh Union Mission, of Westmont, Illinois.

Tasha Suzanne Wade, to serve as elementary teacher, Malamulo Missionary School, Makwasa, Malawi, of Takoma Park, Maryland.

Robert C. K. Wong, returning as radiobroadcasting director and church ministries departmental director, East Asia Association, Hong Kong, and Mary Luo Wong.

Kenneth A. Wright, Jr., to serve as treasurer, Pakistan Union Section, Lahore, Pakistan, and Ruth Esther Wright, of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.
On Their Blindness

Years ago in West Africa our neighbors on each side of us were African-American missionaries. As a busy teacher-wife, trying at the time to be perfect host and super mom, I had little time for back-fence neighborliness. I spent more of my free moments visiting with these missionary wives than with my Caucasian counterparts at the other end of the campus. They became special friends of mine, especially the one who was our children's teacher.

One day in her home, when the two of us were discussing the impending visit of a General Conference officer, my neighbor asked me a puzzling question.

“What’s his attitude toward us?”

“Us?” Was she speaking of us as women? as missionaries? as cooks? as what?

When I started to say “I don’t understand,” her hearty laugh interrupted me in midsentence.

“You’ll have to excuse me,” she said, still chuckling. “I thought you were one of ‘us.’ I forgot you weren’t Black.”

She forgot I wasn’t Black! Our friendship, I realized with enlightened surprise, was entirely dissociated from our ethnic origins. Where I was concerned, my neighbor was totally color-blind.

“You’ve paid me the ultimate racial compliment,” I told her. But through the years since then I have come to regard her remark as a tribute to her liberated acceptance of me as a person “of one blood” with her.

My own children were fortunate enough to have grown up color-blind. The pluralistic society of their childhood was as natural to them as the variety of tropical flowers that graced our campus. As our children associated with their multinational playmates, their language took three different forms: African English when they were with their Ghanaian friends; British English, in varying accents, with their English and Scottish playmates; and American English with their American friends. Sometimes because of the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian presence on our staff, a Scandinavian lilt even crept into their intonation.

Never did their speech become hybrid, however. They slipped from one accent to the other as unaffectedly as if this were the universal way of dealing with one’s native tongue.

What a shock for these open-minded youngsters to later return to their own country and find in many people they met attitudes of, at the very least, indifference and, worse, of discrimination and outright prejudice. They had to adjust again to things as they then were and certainly are, perhaps to a lesser degree, today.

Still, as they grew up, the lessons of acceptance and adaptability they absorbed so naturally in the mission field stayed with them in their own relationships with others. As adults they were able to live comfortably in French- and Spanish-speaking cultures, and for six years one of them even felt at home with the Japanese language and way of life.

How many times since those long-ago days have I thought of their easy relationship with their African peers as ideal for all of God’s children to be accepting and adapting, completely unconscious of any “walls of separation.” For we are all blood kindred in Christ, in whom, as the hymn puts it, “there is no east nor west.” Neither is there, as the Scriptures affirm, “Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, NIV).

Jeanne Jordan is a retired teacher and missionary living in Roswell, New Mexico.
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