Inside the Muslim Mind

Carla Gober: Could It Be Different?

Angel Manuel Rodriguez: A Queen in Name Only
Inspirng
We all know that God “sees the sparrow fall”—but that He can use a chip of wood as a sign of identification of His true church is phenomenal.

“How Guided by a Dream” (July 10), the conversion experience of the Bakof family in Melbourne, Australia, is most inspiring. Thanks to Gary Patterson for sharing it.

—Elinor Dittes
Portland, Tennessee

Want a Job?
Kind of a pity that Calvin Rock’s challenging talk (“The Best Is Yet to Come,” July 10) contained four mistakes in a six-word German sentence. It should read: “dein Wein, der Wasser gewesen war.” One would hope that the Review would contact someone knowledgeable before printing anything in a foreign language.

The Review does so well otherwise. Bless your hearts!

—Edward Niemann
Rockville, Maryland

Weighed and Found Wanting
“Weighed and Found Wanting” (July NAD Edition) really connected with me!

I’m a female who weighs 80 pounds more than I should and am employed at the highest levels in the Adventist educational system. Because I am overweight, I have been turned down for life insurance through Adventist Risk Management, even though my cholesterol is only 147. I walk three miles five nights a week and keep careful count of my fat grams.

Unfortunately this regime has not produced a svelte bod. I can attest that we “fatties” aren’t necessarily lazy and pigging out on ice cream and doughnuts every chance we get. Give us a break! By genetics or metabolism we bear a bigger burden than meets the eye!

—Name Withheld

This article is yet another example of the widely held belief that people are not responsible for their misdeeds because some genetic force impels or compels them to behave the way they do.

Inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil can never be a justification for intemperate or immoral behavior. We are accountable before God for what we do, and while I concede that homosexuals, alcoholics, and obese people have “tendencies” that may make obedience difficult, we cannot excuse irresponsible behavior just because they claim bad chromosomes. In the day of judgment the Lord does not ask about our DNA; He holds us accountable for what we have done with our inheritance.

—David Ritter
Angwin, California

Moral Dilemmas (cont.)
Jan Charles Haluska’s “In Christ There Are No Moral Dilemmas” (July NAD Edition) is a straightforward presentation of total surrender to the will of God. The “fiery furnace” and “lions’ den” experiences stand as excellent examples of an uncompromising trust and commitment—even unto death.

But when a third party is involved, many feel justified in compromise. Abraham is an example of one who chose to remain firm to his commitment to God, even though doing so would apparently cost the life of his son. That’s total surrender!

Although the author’s suggested response in the gestapo scenario leaves much to be desired, we can be sure that God will give us the right words and actions at the right time.

—Ivan Buchholz
Eau Claire, Wisconsin
Haluska gives a very thoughtful response to the moral dilemma question. There is no doubt that God has a thousand ways to accomplish His will, but Haluska does not convince me that the use of our brains and wits is ruled out in any enterprise of this sort. In the Bible we have at least two examples.

The first (Joshua 2) is the story of two spies being pursued by the authorities in Jericho. Assuming these were godly men, why did they choose to hide in a brothel? It seems they chose to hide with someone they could count on to do the “right thing.” And of course Rahab did. When the authorities arrived she said, “They went thataway.”

The second example concerns the prophet Samuel, whom God tells to go to Bethlehem and anoint a successor to King Saul (1 Sam. 16:2, 3). But Samuel protests that if the word gets around, he is dead meat. So God gives him a very practical solution: “Say you are going there to offer a sacrifice.” I am not convinced that God always requires us to put our lives needlessly on the line over every moral dilemma.

My purpose is not to deny the power of grace that Haluska rightly reminds us is always available. I do think that his reasoning is a little too pat and that the Bible does not rule out the sanctified use of our heads.

—Tarmu Magi
HEDGESVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA

Facing the Music (cont.)
Thank you for covering church news in a balanced way (see “Serious, but Not Weird,” July NAD Edition). Your coverage of potentially embarrassing news, together with constructive lessons, is a welcome change from “the old way of doing things.”

—Mark Reeves
GRAND TERRACE, CALIFORNIA

Living in Crazy Times (cont.)
Roy Adams is correct that we are “living in crazy times” (June 26). It was encouraging to read such a confronting article presenting a balance between forward-thinking clarity and loyal dependence on God’s Word. I too have been troubled by evidence of “infantile gullibility” in society and, at times, the church. The Review plays an important role in dealing with this issue.

—Murray Chapman, pastor
COORANBONG, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Though I have not had the displeasure of being bombarded with the millennial craze here in rural Russia, I appreciated Adams’ perspective on this subject. As I read I couldn’t help thinking of this statement in The Great Controversy: “Those who persist in this error will at last fix upon a date too far in the future for the coming of Christ” (p. 457).

Let us remember that our Lord is not waiting for some mystical number on a purely human contrivance called a calendar, but for His character to be rightly represented before the watching world by His people.

—Harold Curtis
SOURCE OF LIFE PUBLISHING HOUSE
ZAOKSKY, RUSSIA

Congratulations on this article. I appreciate the balance that the Adventist Review team maintains.

I have noted with some concern that certain books coming from our presses seem to hint at A.D. 2000 without actually stating it. The attraction of 2000 is likely to override the qualifications and demurrers the author uses.

How can we keep alive the sense of the soon coming without creating a fever that will backfire as did earlier scares by the likes of A. T. Jones?

—Hugh Dunton
BINFIELD, BRACKNELL, ENGLAND

COVER STORY

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NEXT WEEK
The Bible People
How we’re like them. How they’re like us.
My mom and dad seem to think that just because people my age say things differently and ask tough questions that we don’t have much of a relationship with God. That’s not it at all. My parents are the ones who taught me about Jesus in the first place. I haven’t forgotten. I’m just trying to make it my own.
The music in my world usually assaults me. Distressingly memorable jingles sell soap or cars. Top 40 tunes rage with passion and pain. Even Christian anthems are belted out as by a final trumpet. I had forgotten the peace that grows from sitting quietly with hundreds of others and listening to intricate music.

Friends had invited my wife and me to join them in Spokane for a concert by a classical guitarist. Only at the door of the large evangelical church did we discover the identity of the artist: Christopher Parkening—world-class musician, protégé of Segovia, talent extraordinaire.

All alone on the barren stage, he moved brilliantly through complex musical settings of Bach, Ravel, and Isaac Albéniz with the serenity of a man who knew his fingers wouldn’t fail him. When he spoke, the words were few and clear. Great music and great artistry need little commentary.

But less than 40 minutes into the concert, Parkening seemed to be bringing it to a close. I winced with disappointment as he began, “Before my last number, I want to tell you a little of my story...” I had expected more—music, that is, not words.

What followed was a spiritual tour de force such as I had never heard from a professional musician. In 30 compact, well-paced minutes, Parkening told a story of God’s relentless grace. Acclaimed by critics everywhere, wealthy beyond expectation from lucrative recording contracts, he had retired at age 30, certain that he had found the river of life in a Montana trout stream. Friends led him to a Bible-believing church and a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

What fascinated me was the compelling clarity of his gospel presentation. From memory he wove lengthy passages from Isaiah, Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians with an artistry as impressive as his musicianship. If there was an unmoved heart in the church that night, it was surely made of stone. Great music had been matched by great testimony.

Parkening recalled the Latin motto of Johann Sebastian Bach as he described the aim of his new life in Christ: Soli Deo Gloria. Lest we admire the man or his gifts, “To God alone be glory.”

I left the concert only dimly aware that Parkening had planted in my heart a phrase that would go round for weeks. Soli Deo Gloria. As thousands of Christians do each day, I asked myself if I was bringing praise to God by using gifts He has given me. Was I consumed with getting recognition? Had I neglected any gift?

This is the normal kind of moralizing we believers often do. But I had barely calmed my soul when a second question raised its head. Soli Deo Gloria: would God, in fact, be praised by how I used my gifts? Would men and women want to give God glory when I preached or wrote or counseled? Or was I offering up tinfoil when who He is requires gold?

Taking a motto like Soli Deo Gloria for one’s life and work requires—yes, even demands—a commitment to excellence, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the glorified One. Because we are sinners, not everything we do brings praise to God. The sermon prayerlessly patched together, the article hastily written, the counsel flippantly given—will anyone say that these bring glory to God either in the doing of them or in the hearts of those who receive them? Fifteen minutes idling through the Sabbath school quarterly may arguably qualify someone to participate in a discussion, but does it qualify anyone to teach the timeless truths of Scripture?

Jesus urged His disciples, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16, NRSV). The quality of that shining, the goodness of the work, is what brings the watching world to the point of praise. The musician who practices, the preacher who prepares, the teacher who seeks the same Spirit who inspired the Word—these are they who give a world dimmed down by mediocrity cause to rejoice in the Light.

Parkening omitted just one thing from his excellent evening: the other phrase Bach usually inscribed on his manuscripts. Jesu juva. “Help me, Jesus.” I’ve concluded that it’s unwise to take one Latin motto without the other. Since “all His biddings are enablings” (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 333), the same Lord who calls us to give Him glory equips us with the patience—for the practice—to get it right.

Shine the light.
We’re Being Transformed

Not very many human beings have actually seen God’s glory. Fact is, not too many have asked to do so, and fewer still are yearning for a view. Sounds strange, doesn’t it, when “glory” is such a happy-sounding, heavenly word?

Moses had complained a bit about some promises made to him that remained unfulfilled. The Lord then covenanted with Moses that His presence would stay with him, and Moses requested, “Now show me your glory” (Ex 33:18).

Explaining to Moses that he could not see His face and live, the Lord suggested a compromise: “When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by” (verse 22).

Later, after Moses had spent 40 days and 40 nights with God, his face maintained a radiance the children of Israel found frightful (see Ex. 34:28-30).

Stephen too saw God’s glory, but he hadn’t asked to see it. He was preaching in the synagogue and doing fine until he mentioned that their ancestors had rejected God and murdered Jesus. Then he called them “stiff-necked people” who “always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). These church leaders gnashed their teeth at him, whereupon Stephen looked up and announced that he was seeing the glory of God (verse 56). At this the leaders broke into a wild frenzy, covering their ears and yelling at the top of their lungs; they then dragged him out of the city and stoned him.

For Moses, seeing some of God’s glory meant a promise that God would not destroy His people. For Stephen, it was a beautiful salvation assurance as the stones fell.

The problem with the rest of us is that we do not see God’s glory, we would promptly die. God designed, though, that we should possess some of His glory as much as we could handle. Here are five of the ways He chose to accomplish this:

1. Nature. Who can plant a garden, or tempt a squirrel on your patio railing with bread and peanut butter, or stand before the moon on a starlit night, without acknowledging the glory of God? “In earth and sea and sky, with their marvelous tint and color, varying in gorgeous contrast or blended in harmony, we behold His glory” (The Ministry of Healing, p. 411).

2. Work. We might not think of work as a way in which God demonstrates His glory when we’re cleaning the fridge or washing the car. There is a claim, though, that this particular activity was appointed as a blessing and that only the diligent worker “finds the true glory and joy of life” (The Desire of Ages, p. 72).

3. The Sabbath. Each Friday evening we get to unwrap a beautiful gift—a day of rest, a change of pace. Gifts are for sharing, and we do this as we worship together, fellowship, rest (some), and minister to others.

4. The law of God. We do not always see rules as anything very glorious, but a thoughtful review reveals in them a prescription for happiness.

5. The gift of giving. “It is the glory of our God to give,” claims Ellen White (ibid., p. 21). Following the birth of our daughter, there were three pints of blood we needed to replace or pay the price the hospital asked. My husband would give the blood, of course, though he dreaded the bloodletting. But he’s a brave man, and headed to the hospital to donate that which had saved my life. He returned so quickly I wondered for a moment if he wasn’t as daring as I had thought. He explained that he had gone to the laboratory and was given a message: “Three friends from the Buchanan, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist Church donated three pints of blood for Myrna.” In this gift of giving they gave to us a portion of the glory of God, and we better understood the importance of the gift of Jesus’ blood.

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:17).

* Bible texts in this article are from the New International Version.
JOTS & TITLES

In this feature, Adventists share their favorite church-related advice.

FRIENDSHIP SABBATH: Occasionally at our church we have a Friendship Sabbath. The week before, members sign up to host a certain number of guests in their homes for Sabbath dinner and afternoon activities. Then on Friendship Sabbath we invite visitors to write their names on slips of paper. These are gathered and assigned at random. All seem to enjoy having their circle of friends widened.

—Charles S. Cooper, Salmon Arm SDA Church, British Columbia, Canada

CHRISTMAS PLAYS: I am a children’s choir director for grades 1-4 at our church school. My favorite Christmas production has been “Angels Aware,” by Kathie Hill and Janet McMahan. The songs are exceptional and the music inspirational. I am always looking for good Christmas programs and would appreciate any suggestions.

—Mary Bishop, Arroyo Grande, California, SDA Church; phone: 805-481-0214; E-mail: Rbishop53@aol.com

ADVENTIST LIFE

I work with Sanctuary 7 women’s refuge, a supporting ministry staffed by Adventist volunteers. One day I was ringing a government department to order some information brochures on domestic violence for the women who come to our refuge. When placing the order I asked that the parcel be sent to Sanctuary 7, then gave our postal address.

When the brochures arrived, there was a mistake in the number sent, so I made a second phone call.

“Sanctuary 7?” said the government worker. “We had written down ‘Sanctuary Heaven’ on the original order, and everyone in the office was lining up to be residents!”

Our refuge is a haven from domestic violence, but certainly not heavenly.

—Mary Fedorow, Ocean Shores, New South Wales, Australia

A woman and her 5-year-old daughter live alone in our city. One Sabbath morning while preparing for the worship service, the woman told the daughter to return home as soon as the service was over, because they would be taking a trip to their village.

During that day’s children’s story, the leader asked those wishing to go to heaven to raise their hands. Everyone did—except the little girl, who reported that she would be going to her village instead.

—Jacobs Bright Milgar, Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa

My young niece Marie asked if I wanted to play a game. Unfamiliar with the game she suggested, I thought I’d first find out what I was agreeing to. “Is it a board game?” I asked.

In disappointment she said, “For you it might be.”

—Linden St. Clair, Boukoumbe, Benin, West Africa

ON THEIR MARKS . . .

JUST DOING IT: Sporting shoes and socks donated from Adventists in Stockton, California, members of the Ishaka Adventist Hospital Jogging Club in Bushenyi, Uganda, get ready for a morning run. Here runners pose with missionary to Uganda, Leila Rocero, who has finished two full marathons.

WE NEED YOU

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It was an unremarkable trip from Singapore to Bangladesh. Except for one thing.
Throughout the flight the gentleman sitting beside me studied my every action. Shortly before the landing he leaned toward me and asked, “What kind of Westerner are you?”
Before I could respond, he continued: “You’re different. You didn’t drink the wine that came with your meal; you didn’t watch the movie; you didn’t eat the pork entrée. What kind of Westerner are you?”
After I explained about my Adventist lifestyle and beliefs, he concluded, “You’re a better Muslim than I am.”

To these followers of Allah (God), Adventists’ message and lifestyle reinforce a reputation as “people of the Book.”

JAMES H. ZACHARY

COVER STORY

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After I explained about my Adventist lifestyle and beliefs, he concluded, “You’re a better Muslim than I am.”
This gentleman is not alone. Around the world many Muslims show deep respect for Adventists who follow a careful biblical lifestyle.

It’s a shame that the word “Muslim”—even in the minds of many Western Christians—is often associated with political chaos or terrorism. The gospel of Jesus calls believers to reject stereotypes of all kinds. And in view of the fact that there are nearly 1 billion Muslims worldwide, it seems imperative that we secure a true picture of this large group of people who consecrate themselves to serving the God of Abraham.

Tracing their history to A.D. 622, Muslims (“those who submit [to God]”) have emerged as one of the major religious groups in the world. Their devotion to the teachings of the Qur’an (their holy book)—modesty, dietary purity, strict morality—has earned them many admirers, even in Christian countries.

And if you live in a large metropolitan city anywhere in North America, Europe, Asia, or Africa, it’s likely that there is a Muslim community worshiping at a mosque not far from you. An estimated 10 million Muslims live in the United States alone.

Because of the perception (and the reality) of Muslim-Christian friction in some parts of the world, many people believe that reaching out to Muslims is nearly impossible. But just the opposite is true—if one knows how to go about it.

“I Am Not a ‘Christian’”

Because of his long Muslim name, students and teachers at Mountain View College in the Philippines affectionately called him “Muzz.” During Muzz’s studies at the college, the Holy Spirit convicted him that Jesus is the great Creator-God. Muzz was baptized and in due time became a pastor. The Lord blessed his ministry, and dozens of new converts made decisions for baptism. Through his efforts, many new churches were planted in unentered areas.

Several years later Muzz was asked to serve in the Ministerial Association at the Southern Asia-Pacific Division office. During a visit to one of the Muslim provinces of the Philippines, Muzz conducted an evangelistic seminar. One day a determined group of armed Muslim rebels sur-

Calmly Muzz replied, “Brothers, I am not a ‘Christian.’”

He used their definition of “Christian” in forming his answer. To the Muslim mind, Christians were the ones responsible for much of the death and bloodshed caused during the Crusades. Since many Christians eat pork, have “images” in their churches, pray to the saints, smoke, drink alcohol, and seem to care little about morality (as evidenced by rampant adultery and pornography), many Muslims view “Christians” as “infidels,” just as many Christians brand Muslims as “extremists.”

“What are you then?” one of the armed men asked.

“I am an Adventist,” Muzz replied. “What’s an Adventist?”

Muzz slowly went through a description of Adventist lifestyle and beliefs.

When he finished, the guns were lowered. An imam (spiritual teacher) stepped forward and offered, “You are our brother.”

Then they made this special request: “This is Ramadan [a month-long period of fasting and religious devotion]. We complete our prayers while you’re speaking here. If you can move the beginning of your meeting to 8:00 this evening, we’ll all come and listen to your message.”

People of the Book

Around the world, Muslims show respect for a person who carefully follows the lifestyle portrayed in the Word of God and the Qur’an. Their great desire is to be ready for the great judgment day. During their five daily prayers they submit themselves to Allah, the God of Abraham.

The word “Islam” itself indicates a total surrender to Allah, while “Muslim” refers to the one who makes that surrender to Allah. As Adventists, we are in this same spiritual heritage by faith. In a wider sense than most realize, these Muslim friends are family with us, children of the patriarch Abraham.

The Qur’an speaks of two kinds of followers of Jesus, or “people of the Book.” One kind includes those who have forsaken much of the scriptural path to truth. They do not follow in the steps of Abraham and the ancient prophets. Their lifestyle is not in har-
America to help develop a new understanding and appreciation for Muslim culture and religious beliefs. Each participant was taught how to reach out in friendship to Muslim people. Many were surprised to learn that Adventists have much in common with Muslims.

Three guiding principles were prominent in the lectures, presented by Jerald Whitehouse, director of the Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations; Kenneth Oster, retired missionary to Muslim countries; and John McGhee, coordinator of Adventist-Muslim relations, North American Division. These are:

1. never argue over points of difference;
2. never attack any aspect of another person’s religious belief;
3. be willing to listen and ask questions to develop a clear understanding of the other person’s faith.

Significantly, this is also the approach usually followed by Muslims who want to learn more about Christianity.

Adventists and Muslims have large areas of agreement, which can generate much productive and illuminating discussion. Topics of mutual interest include the importance of prayer; the urgent need to be ready for the judgment and the return of Jesus to earth; the importance of following the diet prescribed by the ancient prophets; the concern of both the Bible and the Qur’an for high morals; the resurrection of God’s people at the end of the ages; and a description of what heaven is like.

How to Talk With a Muslim Friend

1. If a Muslim makes statements with which you cannot agree, thank that individual for helping you to come to an understanding of his or her beliefs and leave the matter there. There are so many areas of agreement that will encourage friendship to develop that it’s wise not to dwell on points of difference.

2. Become familiar with the Qur’an. Muslims treat this holy book with even greater respect than most Christians show their own Bibles. Adventist Christians can learn a precious lesson from Muslim friends about treating God’s Word with greater reverence and respect.

It’s best never to handle the Qur’an in the presence of a Muslim. He will be offended by any disrespect shown his holy book. Instead, copy references on a sheet of paper.

The Muslim considers the Qur’an written in Arabic to be the only true Qur’an. All translations and other language versions are “interpretations” of the real meaning of the Qur’an.

3. Call Muslims to a deeper, more complete faith, not to reject or dismiss their understanding of faith. This approach will be appreciated by a majority of Muslims. As you illustrate that both you and your friend are seeking a higher spiritual plane through study and prayer, you will avoid giving the impression of looking down upon another’s faith.

Most North Americans and Europeans will likely have contact with Arabic-speaking Muslims. In Arabic there are several key words that are helpful for understanding Muslim beliefs and conversing with Muslims:

- Allah, the name of the God who created the world in six days. He is the God of Abraham. Linguistically, “Allah” comes from the same word as the Hebrew name for God—Elohim;
- Isa (El Masih) is the name for Jesus Christ, revered as a great prophet in Islam;
- taqwa describes righteousness or inner piety, which is a great concern for Muslims as they attempt to prepare for the judgment;
- mutaqeen indicates the persons who have righteousness from Allah;
- hanif is the person who is faithful in serving the one true God of Abraham, one who belongs to God’s special people.

Faith-building Stories

More than 30 years ago a young Adventist missionary scheduled an appointment to visit with the king of a Muslim country in North Africa. His mission was to request permission to establish an Adventist hospital. The missionary was promised 10 minutes of the monarch’s time, but as the king listened to the description of the lifestyle and beliefs of Adventists, the visit stretched for two hours.

Just as the missionary was about to leave, the elderly monarch placed his hand on the missionary’s head and said, “You are one of the mutaqeen.” As noted above, the king was indicating that he accepted the missionary as one of the righteous followers of Allah.

The same will be said of any Adventist who makes the right approach to a Muslim. Adventists have long understood that our task is to help prepare a holy people ready to meet the God of Creation at the coming of the Lord. This is the special work of the last remnant of God’s people.

As earth’s history draws to a close, our mission is to call people from all faith groups to come into a personal relationship with God. Adventists aren’t just another Protestant church. We seek to lift God and His righteousness before all people, inviting them to “come up higher” in a relationship of obedience and faith with the God of Abraham. As we step forward, the God of heaven will do special things to assist in this urgent task.

During a recent Global Mission training program, one volunteer missionary related that in his house-to-house visits he became acquainted with a Muslim family. He volunteered to...
prayer for the family, and they welcomed the prayer. He also gave them the first study lesson based on the Bible with parallel references to the Qur’an.

The volunteer returned the next week to pick up the lesson and to leave a second one, but discovered that the first lesson had not yet been studied. He simply prayed with the family again and then left.

Twelve weeks went by, with the volunteer returning each week. Twelve prayers had been offered in that home, but not one lesson had been opened.

One week the volunteer was unable to visit the family. Returning the fourteenth week, he was greeted by a family member.

“We missed you,” they said. “We missed your prayer. We have completed all 12 lessons and would like to visit your Sabbath service.”

Numerous stories from around the Muslim world illustrate that God is doing something special for the people of Islam.

Recently I heard of a Muslim woman who made a trip to Mecca, the holy city of Islam, in the hope that a visit to that sacred site would bring healing. But the suffering continued after she returned home. Her parents made arrangements for a trip to England where she received medical treatment, but still her condition did not improve.

In reading her copy of the Qur’an, she noticed frequent references to Jesus, the Son of Mary. She decided that she would begin praying to this great “prophet,” and for several weeks continued this practice.

One night as she lay awake her room became bright with a soft light. She first thought that morning had come, but saw that it was still the middle of the night.

As she became accustomed to the light, she noticed 13 persons standing in her room, clothed in long robes. One of them was taller than the rest. He spoke, calling her by name. “I am Jesus, the Son of Mary. I am the one to whom you’ve been praying. I’ve come to answer your prayer. Please, come to Me.” She relates that her crippled condition was removed as she walked toward the figure in the room.

Bill Musk, author of Touching the Soul of Islam, relates another moving story of God touching the heart of a Muslim believer.

An imam made a pilgrimage to Mecca, fulfilling his lifelong dream to walk in the places in which the prophet Muhammad had lived.

Riding a bus from one holy site to another, he was engaged in conversation by the bus driver, who spoke to him kindly.

We never walk alone in bringing a person closer to God.

“You’re wasting your money,” said the driver. “It’s not necessary to make a long journey to holy places in order to have a closer relationship with Allah. Allah would like to have a personal relationship with you.”

The imam stepped off the bus to visit another holy site, but his mind was filled with questions. He determined to talk with the driver again when he reboarded the bus. He must learn more. His great desire was to find the right path and serve Allah with all his energies.

When he stepped onto the bus, however, he found a new driver at the wheel. The first driver had left.

Returning home, the imam visited a Christian friend. On the wall of his friend’s home the imam noticed a painting of a familiar face. He was certain that he had seen that person before, perhaps recently.

“Do you know the man in the painting?” he asked his friend.

“Yes, that is a picture of Jesus,” came the answer.

The imam sat there in long silence.

A great sense of his unworthiness swept over him. His heart was crushed by the burden of sin.

Suddenly a solemn thought came into his consciousness: the Lord Jesus had stepped off His throne at the control center of the universe to drive a bus in Mecca in order to reach a sincere seeker after truth.

“Tell me how can I express faith in Jesus?” he asked his friend. And there in that home, the imam accepted Jesus as his friend and Saviour. His family also followed his decision.

Just as the Lord has guided these individuals into a more complete knowledge of Him, the Lord will guide each person who reaches out to another human being, whatever their religion, culture, or status in life. We never walk alone on our mission to bring a person into a closer relationship with God.

By definition, a Muslim is one who is totally submissive to obeying the will of Allah. Throughout the world, Seventh-day Adventists are similarly motivated to seeing God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven. And we look forward to the time we can gather around the throne of the great I AM, the God of Abraham. ■

James H. Zachary is director of international evangelism for the Quiet Hour, Redlands, California.
found in Jeremiah 7:18 a reference to a goddess named the “queen of heaven.” Who was she?

This goddess is also mentioned in Jeremiah 44:17-19, and 25. In our attempt to identify this pagan deity we should begin with the biblical references. In this particular case, the texts provide good, although limited, information.

First, the worship of this goddess was very popular in Judah and in the city of Jerusalem before its destruction in 586 B.C. It was practiced by the kings, the princes, and the people in general (Jer. 44:17).

Second, it appears that she was worshiped in private family shrines. The texts indicate that fathers, mothers, and children were involved in her cult (Jer. 7:18). Her worship was well accepted by the people.

Third, the worship act seems to have consisted of at least the burning of incense, pouring out of drink offerings, and bringing of cake offerings (Jer. 44:19). The significance of these acts is not stated, and it would appear that bloody sacrifices were not involved in her cult. These religious acts were probably performed on the roofs of the houses, suggesting the worship of an astral deity (that is to say, a deity associated with or representing the stars of heaven [Jer. 19:13]). This would suggest that the queen of heaven was an astral goddess.

The cakes bore the image of the goddess (Jer. 44:19), which perhaps means that the cakes were made in molds. Archaeologists have found what seem to be baking molds shaped like female fertility figures.

Fourth, the purpose for the worship of this goddess is stated implicitly by the people who went to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem when they said to Jeremiah: “We will do everything that we have vowed, burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, as we did . . . in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no evil. But since we left off burning incense to the queen of heaven . . . , we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine” (verses 17, 18, RSV).

This goddess was not only an astral power but was also believed to provide food and protection from war to those who worshiped her. She was essentially a fertility deity and a goddess of war. Rebellious Israelites worshiped her because they thought she provided what they needed. She was considered to be superior to the Lord.

With that biblical information in mind, one can look for a pagan deity in the ancient Near East who fits this description—an astral goddess of fertility and war. Unfortunately, scholars do not agree on the identification of this goddess.

One of the best proposed candidates is Ishtar, the Babylonian and Assyrian goddess of fertility. She was an astral deity identified with the planet Venus, the evening and morning star. She was considered the goddess of love, fertility, and war. She controlled the fertility of the land and gave victory in war to those who worshiped her. Ancient texts call her the “queen of heaven.” Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “cakes” in Jeremiah is a Babylonian term used to designate a sweet cake that was also offered to the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. It was baked with honey or figs.

Some scholars question that suggestion because there is no clear evidence for a strong religious influence of neo-Assyrian religious practices on Israel. Therefore, some suggest that the reference in Jeremiah is to the Canaanite goddess Ashtoreth/Astarte, the Canaanite equivalent of the Babylonian Ishtar. Ashtoreth/Astarte was also an astral deity in charge of the fertility of the land, a goddess of love and war. It would have certainly been easier for the Israelites to have been influenced by Canaanite religious practices than by those from Mesopotamia.

During the time of Jeremiah a religious syncretism had been incorporated into the religion of Israel that allowed for the worship of a foreign deity such as Ishtar or Ashtoreth in Judah and Jerusalem. Whether they called this goddess Ishtar or Ashtoreth is not important, because in both cases the purpose and probably the style of worship would have been the same or very similar.

This syncretism led to the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the exile of the Israelites. Religious syncretism is always a threat to the purity of the worship of the true God.

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OUR YOUNGEST son and five other young people were killed in a light plane that crashed during a camp meeting excursion.

My wife’s first words on hearing the news that night were, “Why us?” My own heart echoed similar sentiments. And we thought of the other grieving parents. Were they too asking “Why us?”

We are tempted to wonder about God’s sovereignty during times of tragedy.

Just before I wrote this article, our oldest grandson, Glenn, was out walking his baby when—“crash!”—right before his eyes, suddenly appeared a crumpled mass of steel and rubber that seconds before had been an automobile traveling at very high speed down a steep road. Inside the wreck were two young men—one dead, the other seriously injured. Relatives of the deceased and the injured arrived on the scene during the more than two hours it took to get the car’s occupants out of the tangled mess. Glenn, a minister, was able to help those distraught people who, through their tears, were asking, “Why? Why? Why?”

One’s mind goes back to Job. His friends, who knew him well and respected him for his integrity, doubtless were asking “Why Job?” when they heard the shocking news of the deaths of his 10 children and most of his servants—all occurring in one day. That same day Job lost more than 10,000 head of stock. We don’t find it hard to understand why those folk were asking “Why Job?” For was he not “blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8)? Of all people, it should not have happened to him!

And what did those same people say when later they heard that the bereaved and grieving Job had been smitten with a disease that covered his body with suppurating sores (Job 2:7)? Did they again shake their heads and ask “Why Job?”—perhaps adding, “He was such a good man”?

As humans we are inclined to question God in bad times. “Is God really sovereign?” Perhaps, like Gideon of old, we wonder: “If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened?” (Judges 6:13).

My wife’s youngest sister was driving to her brand-new beachside retirement home to spend the first night with her husband in their own little dreamland castle. She never arrived. A mile or so from her destination, a road accident claimed her life. Could not her husband, her relatives, and her friends legitimately ask “Why?”

In his best-seller When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Rabbi Harold Kushner claims that there are times when “it is difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming innocent victims.” Kushner’s statement, though undoubtedly written to bring comfort to the distressed and the distraught, really challenges God’s sovereign power. And the question remains: Is there genuine and sustainable comfort in the idea that God is sometimes less than sovereign over His creation, that God is arbitrarily limited by human circumstances?

Margaret Clarkson, an individual who suffered all her life, does not go along with the idea of a God of limited sovereignty: “The sovereignty of God is the one impregnable
rock to which the suffering human heart must cling. The circumstances surrounding our lives are no accident: they may be the work of evil, but that evil is held firmly within the mighty hand of our sovereign God. . . . God is the Lord of human history and of the personal history of every member of His redeemed family.”

And Jerry Bridges, a noted writer for the Navigators, asks some practical questions in his book Trusting God When Life Hurts: “Did another driver go through a red light, strike your car, and send you to the hospital with multiple fractures? Did a physician fail to detect your cancer in the early stages, when it would have been treatable? Did you end up with an incompetent instructor in a very important course in college, or an inept supervisor that blocked your career in business?” Then Bridges states: “Neither the willful, malicious acts nor the unintended mistakes of people can thwart God’s purpose for us.”

I concur.

If our supreme enemy, the devil, does not question the sovereignty of God, why should we?

With his own words the devil admits to the sovereignty of God. He knows only too well that both the good things and the bad things in the life of Job come within the realm of God’s sovereignty. Satan says that he knows God can put “a hedge around” Job and “his household and everything he has” (Job 1:10). That’s a reference to sovereign power. Satan also says that God can withdraw that hedge, with disastrous results for Job (Job 2:7). And that too refers to sovereign power. Satan is thus admitting that he can operate only within the boundaries of God’s sovereign power. Little wonder the demons believe about God and tremble (James 2:19). We, for our part, question God and tremble.

Doubt concerning the sovereignty of God is a soul-destroying virus. Happily, there is an antidote—God’s Word, the Bible. When the virus strikes, go to the Bible. It’s full of affirmations of God’s sovereignty. Said the wise man, “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord” (Prov. 21:30). And as we plan for the future, James admonishes us always to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that” (James 4:15). “The human mind plans the way,” says the wise man again, “but the Lord directs the steps” (Prov. 16:9, NRSV). “Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?” asked Jeremiah (Lam. 3:37). And the apostle sums it all up when he exclaims: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Rom. 11:33).

My own reading of the Bible suggests that there is not one of its 66 books that does not in its own individual way underscore the sovereignty of God. The night my father died, unexpectedly and suddenly, was a night our family will never forget. The next morning I called my mother and suggested, “Let’s read today’s morning watch text together.” This was it: “Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?” (Eccl. 7:13). The sovereignty of God!

After reading that text, Mother and I prayed a weakly spoken prayer in which, with flickering faith, we both accepted the truth of God’s sovereignty. I believe that God’s Spirit ministered the truth to our aching hearts that morning. God has not changed.

All around our present reeling world are hosts of people who are experiencing the healing balm that comes from a personal experience with our sovereign God. Like Job, these people can say with calm assurance, born of experience: “I know that you [God] can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). Such people are inside God’s fortress, the fortress of His sovereignty. Come join us. Or if you are already there, praise God for your security.

When I was a small boy learning to read, I saw the letters “DV” on the notice board outside our church that listed the various meetings held weekly. I asked my mother the meaning of the abbreviation, and she told me DV stood for the Latin expression “Deo volente” (“if God is willing”). Then Mother said, “Everything you plan in life must be planned on the DV plan: “God willing.”

Life has taught me the truth of Mother’s simple statement. Or more accurately, I am constantly learning that we have a sovereign God.

And there in that truth is our assurance for today and our hope for the future.

My wife’s youngest sister was driving to her brand-new beachside retirement home to spend the first night with her husband. She never arrived.

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SLAM! THE INMATE'S FIST CONNECTED solidly with its intended target. The victim reeled, then lifted a hand toward his wounded eye. "Wh—why did you do that?" he asked.

"I just don't like you, that's why!" the first prisoner sneered. A guard watched the tense scenario from nearby. When the first man readied himself for a second punch, the guard stepped up. "That's enough," he said bluntly, and led the cursing attacker away toward solitary confinement.

Not long afterward the guard returned and spoke to the inmate, a Seventh-day Adventist. The man's eye was now swollen and turning a sickening shade of yellow. "Why didn't you hit him back?" the guard asked flatly.

The prisoner paused, then spoke. "Because . . . Jesus said we're to love our enemies."

Shaking his head in wonderment, the guard said simply, "You're the bravest man I've ever seen."

Within the confines of a prison, a gentle inmate is rare. But the life of the prisoner who chose not to retaliate had been touched by someone with a rare gift—prison chaplain Bill Spangler.

Prayer Amid the Pain

Bill's call to prison chaplaincy came about the same time that a personal tragedy struck. On February 10, 1973, the Spanglers' oldest son, Bill, Jr., was killed in an automobile accident while driving to pick up his tractor-trailer rig in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Upon learning the horrible news, Bill, a welder, left his workplace and sped down Interstate 70 toward home. "Oh, Lord," he sobbed, "how can I go on living?" Looking back, Spangler realizes how God answered his heartfelt cry. Referring to the inmates he serves, this now-80-year-old Seventh-day Adventist prison chaplain beams, "They have become like sons to me."

A prison chaplain's initial desire to minister behind bars is felt in different ways. Bill's volunteer involvement in prison ministry began in 1972. When the group's leader, Ray Doyle, a music instructor at Highland View Academy in Hagerstown, Maryland, moved away, Bill was asked to assume leadership.

"I didn't know where to start—I was scared to death!" The pressure mounted when a chaplain from another denomination asked if Bill would provide Bible studies for the inmates at the Washington County, Maryland, Detention Center.

"I'll have to teach what the Bible says about the Sabbath," Bill pointed out.

The other chaplain's reply came as a surprise: "No problem—I believe every word of it myself." The man went on to explain that he'd grown up in a Seventh-day Adventist home.

Bill's passion for prison ministry soon exceeded the confines of the county jail. Today he and nine other individuals from local Maryland and West Virginia Adventist churches are actively involved in ministry at three institutions: the Maryland Correctional Training Center and the Maryland Correctional Institution, both minimum-security facilities, and the adjacent medium-security Roxbury Correctional Institute. The combined prison population totals approximately 7,000.

Employed in these institutions are some 1,500 staff members, some of whom seek counsel themselves from Bill and his colleagues.
“They’ll corner me and ask me questions,” Bill reports. “They’ll say, ‘Give us texts!’ And I do.”

Death Threat
The prison chaplain experience is laden with moments of both tension and spiritual triumph.

“I’m going to kill you!” The words carried a demonic edge as a sun-worshipping “priest” and inmate came toward Bill one day.

As calmly as possible Bill countered with “No, you can’t—Jesus won’t allow it.” The prisoner backed off, but spat out, “I hate you!”

Looking at the inmate, Bill knew that transforming hate into a heart full of love is an overwhelming challenge to all chaplains. Yet he spent the next 30 minutes in deep prayer alongside the prisoner.

Bill also tells of two former Seventh-day Adventist inmates who had recently returned to their spiritual roots. (In a recent year, 10 of 18 baptisms Bill performed were rebaptisms of former Adventists.) When informed that their work schedules included Saturday assignments, they refused and were promptly penalized. Sometime later one of the men received parole, but the other inmate was sent to a state evaluation facility. “He was preaching to his guards the whole way,” Bill laughs.

Upon his return to the penitentiary, the inmate heard an all-too-familiar summons: “I’ve been given orders that you are to report for work on Friday night!”

“I’m sorry, sir; I cannot, and I will not,” came the prisoner’s reply. “If you need to lock me up, that’s OK.”

The wide-eyed guard snorted, “I’m gonna have to talk to my lieutenant about this!” The mysterious outworking of God’s providence was clearly evident when the lieutenant informed his worker, “You leave that man alone—we’ve had enough problems with that before!”

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: Governor Parris Glendening (right) honors Bill Spangler for his contributions to the state of Maryland.

More Victories
Another prisoner was incarcerated for having committed murder at the age of 18. After 32 years behind bars, the man was baptized.

Recently another inmate strolled up to the man and growled, “I’m going to ‘plant’ you!”

Placing his hands in his pants pockets, the now-Christian prisoner stuck his chin out, providing a clear target for his antagonist. He then said, “Go ahead—give it your best shot.”

Stunned, the first prisoner mumbled, “Oh, you’re crazy!” He then walked away, but returned, ready to strike again.

The Christian inmate literally turned the other cheek to him, but this time his fellow prisoner stormed off for good.

Commenting about the change that had taken place in this murderer’s life, one guard said, “I’ve never seen anything like it. . . . His disposition is so much different. It’s tremendous what we’re seeing.”

A paraplegic inmate has been touched by Bill’s reading to him from the works of Ellen White.

“I’d go in and read him a chapter from The Desire of Ages. When we finished that, we started Patriarchs and Prophets. Well, the fourth chapter is about the plan of salvation, and that man grew exuberant. The other night I had five people gathered around as I read that book.” Bill adds with a twinkle in his eye, “I never thought I was that good of a reader, but they think it’s beautiful.”

Memorable Embrace
Not long ago Bill and his wife, Elsie, who live in Smithsburg, Maryland, were browsing at the Potomac Adventist Book Center when an “enormous” man came running toward Bill and threw his arms around him. “My wife was scared to death!” Bill recalls with a chuckle.

Suddenly Bill recognized the man as a former inmate to whom he had ministered.

“Well, how’re you doing?” Bill asked with a grin.

“I’m doin’ so well I’m helpin’ to build a church in Baltimore, and I’m a deacon, and I’m just doin’ splendid!”

A look of satisfaction crosses Bill’s face as he recounts the incident. “Those things are the greatest thrills a man could ever have.”

Yet another former inmate, now an elder in a local Adventist congregation, spent his own money to ensure that evangelistic flyers would be distributed to an entire community. “You can’t miss that man,” the conference president commented. “He’s holding his church together.”

Such life change is what caused one officer to state his position on the ministry of Bill Spangler: “We’ve got to let this man have freedom to do what he wants.”

Spiritual Fill-up
Chaplain Spangler humbly shares the heart preparation that goes into

A D V E N T I S T R E V I E W, S E P T E M B E R 1 1, 1 9 9 7  (127) 17
his ministry, and that of so many other prison chaplains. “I spend about an hour and a half each day in Bible study. When I leave the house, all the way to the prison I ask the Lord that the Holy Spirit will take over every part of my being and do the speaking for me. And He does—things come out of my mouth that I don’t know where they came from. God is doing this. God is merciful and good . . . and so real.”

Added to his spiritual formula for success is a simple personal philosophy for reaching hardened criminals with Christ’s love: “When you work among people, especially inmates, you have to accept them where they are and point them in the right direction.”

Bill’s message to Seventh-day Adventist church members is that communication starts early, a belief emanating from the fact that he has ministered to inmates as young as age 14, though charged as adults. “My passion,” he implores, “is that . . . parents take time to listen to what their children are saying. I want to encourage teachers, mothers and fathers, all individuals in the church, to be a little bit more concerned with, and loving toward, our young people.”

Bill expresses his grandest dream when he says, “I’d like to see every prison in the United States be touched by Seventh-day Adventists.”

Since his work as a prison chaplain began 25 years ago, Bill and his partners in ministry have seen 156 inmate baptisms take place as a result of their efforts. Most would say that he and those around the world who are living out their part in that dream deserve a medal.” Bill disagrees passionately. “I am not building Bill Spangler up, because Bill Spangler doesn’t know where to go. I want to show what the Lord can do, not what Bill Spangler did.”

Yet when the Lord returns to claim His own, there will be many whose lives were turned around because of prison chaplains such as Bill Spangler. Of course, some rewards have already been reaped. As Bill puts it, “I’ve done about everything a man could do, I guess, but I’ve never found any enjoyment like I have in working for these men.”

* In early 1997 Bill Spangler was awarded a pin of recognition by the Maryland state prison commissioner honoring the chaplain for his years of dedicated service. Then on April 23 Chaplain Spangler was recognized by the state of Maryland as a 1997 State Volunteer of the Year. The presentation was made by Maryland governor Parris Glendening.

Randy Fishell is associate editor of Guide magazine.

He lives in Hagerstown, Maryland.
Ellen White wrote: “Common talking, whispering, and laughing should not be permitted in the house of worship either before or after the service” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 492).

We have in our worship service a time to get up and move about the sanctuary to greet and welcome each other—especially visitors. As you can imagine, the noise increases significantly. How can we welcome each other this way and still maintain reverence in God’s house?

Congregations that use this greeting period for a brief time of spiritual exchanges do not, in my opinion, dishonor God.

A handshake or a hug, accompanied by a warm “God bless you” or “Happy Sabbath,” to the strains of “What a fellowship, what a joy divine,” is perhaps the most spiritual experience of the week for many. The key is engaging in this activity with spiritual intent, not with the attitude that issues in “common talking, whispering, and laughing.” Paul’s repeated injunction, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (1 Cor. 16:20, NIV), suggests that this is possible.

Can it be overdone? Yes. I have worshiped in services where I felt this greeting period was too loose, too loud, and too long. But then, I’ve been just as concerned about sanctuary order when bombarded by competing sounds from demonstrative teachers and students during the study of the Sabbath school lesson.

All of which is to state my conviction that the problem is not the nature of the activity, but the way it is conducted.

Further, suggestion that reverence and expressive interaction need not be mutually exclusive is gathered from the prophet’s description of our reunion in glory (Rev. 7:9-17). There, fresh from the darkness of death and the terrors of life, we shall meet and greet with unbounding joy. That thought makes the imagery of the Negro spiritual that states “When I get to heaven, goin’ to put on my robe, and goin’ to shout all over God’s heaven” eminently believable and wonderfully compelling.

Recently it was pointed out that for some time the children’s division Sabbath school offerings have been put to the church building fund instead of to the world field missionary budget. Some of us doubt that the pastor should have permitted this practice to go on without bringing it to the elders or to the church board. If the matter is raised to a congregational level, should there be a transfer of funds to reimburse the world field mission work?

Deviations from the procedure is both deceitful and dangerous. Paragraph one, page 58, of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual reads: “All Sabbath School offerings for missions are to be passed over to the church treasurer by the Sabbath School secretary-treasurer weekly, the church treasurer keeping a careful record of all such offerings.” These mission funds are transmitted to the conference office.

Deviation from this procedure is both deceitful and dangerous. It is deceitful because those who have made the arbitrary decision are not applying the funds as intended by the givers. It is dangerous because all departures from the usage of funds as outlined in the Church Manual make other diversions of moneys easy and, in fact, likely.

The genius of our denomination’s organizational strength is its unity of function—processes that allow us to maintain systems that are uniform and predictable worldwide. This allows leaders to project, plan, and implement in a stable, consistent manner.

Home needs must be cared for; in fact, it is illogical, if not immoral, to build schools and churches abroad while local facilities impugn the name of Christ (1 Tim. 5:8). But these needs should be addressed in an honest, forthright manner, not by siphoning off funds intended for missions.

The baptismal vow, the covenant to church office, and most especially, the acceptance of pastoral responsibility are pledges of loyalty that make funds diversion unacceptable.

Should something be done about past diversions? Yes, the biblical principle of restitution applies to the gifts we bring to God as well (Lev. 27:9-33).

Calvin B. Rock is a general vice president of the General Conference. He holds doctoral degrees in ministry and Christian ethics.

Calvin B. Rock is a general vice president of the General Conference. He holds doctoral degrees in ministry and Christian ethics.
What constitutes the church? Who is head of the church, and what is the basis of authority? And what determines the self-understanding of the church?

These questions were probed during the third round of discussions between representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and of the Lutheran World Federation in June of this year. The purposes of the official dialogue continue to be those stated at the outset in 1994: to explore areas of agreement and also of disagreement, and to remove false stereotypes of each denomination toward the other.

This year Adventists hosted the weeklong session and selected Jongy, overlooking Lake Geneva in Switzerland, as the site. The European setting fit well the international character of the discussions; it also enabled Dr. Ishmael Noko, the new general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, headquartered in Geneva, to pay a visit and express his deep interest in the dialogue.

Representing the Lutheran side were: Dr. Faith E. Rohrbough (U.S.A. and Canada), cochair; Dr. Erwin Buck (Canada); Dr. Nelson Kilpp (Brazil); Prof. Naohiro Kiyoshige (Japan); Rev. Ole Chr. Kvarme (Norway); Dr. Mariette Razivelo (Madagascar); Dr. Jorg Rothermundt (Germany); and Dr. Risto Saarinen (Finland).

The Adventist representatives, appointed by the General Conference, were: Dr. Bert B. Beach (U.S.A.), cochair; Dr. Niels-Erik Andreasen (Denmark, U.S.A.); Dr. Teofilo Ferreira (Portugal, U.S.A.), Dr. Johann Heinz (Austria, Germany); Dr. William Johnsson (Australia, U.S.A.); Dr. Pardon Mwanza (Zambia, U.S.A.), Ms. Aulikki Nahkola (Finland); Dr. Jan Paulsen (Norway, U.S.A.); Dr. George Reid (U.S.A.); and Dr. Angel Rodriguez (Puerto Rico, U.S.A).

Most of these individuals had been present for one or both of the previous sessions, held in 1994 and 1996. The dialogue followed the format established in the earlier rounds: worship each morning, presentation of scholarly papers, and discussion leading to draft statements approved by all present. These statements are preliminary in nature and subject to revision after the dialogue is completed next year.

The Lutherans will host the fourth and final round next May. They have selected a retreat center on Lake Geneva; the topic area for discussion will be eschatology. It is expected that a joint statement summarizing conclusions of the four rounds of dialogue will be printed and circulated after the concluding session. The papers prepared for the dialogue have been notable for extensive research and careful scholarship, and the plan anticipates their editing and subsequent publication also.

For the session recently concluded, papers and discussion focused on the topic of the church and authority. Adventist presentations came from Angel Rodriguez, "The Adventist Church and the Christian World," and George Reid, "The Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of Church Authority." For the Lutherans, Ole Christian Kvarme presented "The Understanding of Church Authority in Lutheran Churches," and Nelson Kilpp, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper in Lutheran Tradition and Present Dialogue."

Discussions were lively, candid, intense, and marked by Christian cordiality and respect for differing views. Members of the group have now spent up to 15 days (and nights!) listening to one another and have developed bonds of appreciation. We have learned that the most fruitful way to achieve dialogue is to be candid in presenting our respective faith heritages, to hold nothing back, and to be open in disagreeing with one another.

An area of particular interest to both sides was the role and authority of Ellen G. White’s writings. This potentially divisive topic proved, on careful consideration, not problematic for the Lutherans, because Adventists, while holding her writings to be authoritative, look to the Scriptures as the prime authority and her work as a derived authority. Lutherans, in fact, have a parallel authority structure: Scripture is the prime authority, and five other documents—the three ancient creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and Luther’s Small Catechism—derive their authority from Scripture.
Adventist Leaders Killed in Rwanda

The General Conference recently received reports that Pastor Theophas Ruterahagusha, president of the North Rwanda Association, was killed by an unknown gunman at a roadblock between Ruhengeri and Gisenyi, where the church headquarters is located.

Luka Daniel, president of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division, with headquarters in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, called the incident “murder in cold blood.”

According to limited reports, Pastor Ruterahagusha was driving between Ruhengeri and Gisenyi and came across a group of people who had just finished fighting. He was stopped and asked to take one of them, who was badly wounded, to the hospital.

On his way back he came upon a barrier on the road. He was stopped. Suddenly gunmen emerged and shot one of the young people in the car with Pastor Ruterahagusha. It is reported that the young man fell, but feigned death. Following this, there was an order to “shoot the pastor!” after which Ruterahagusha was shot dead.

The killing is the most recent in a number of incidents that have shocked the church in Rwanda. According to Pastor Amon Rugelinyange, president of the Rwanda Union Mission, this was the latest in a series of assassinations in the Ruhengeri area.

Rugelinyange says that Pascale Ruzibiza, Ruterahagusha’s daughter and wife of the principal of the Adventist secondary school at Rwankeri, was killed along with her three children.

Ruzibiza’s death forced the church to move its headquarters temporarily from Rwankeri to Gisenyi, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) away. Rugelinyange also reported another attack, where former president Karekezi and his wife were also killed.

Luka Daniel said that “No one can say for sure if these unfortunate incidents are related.”

Commenting on the recent tragedies, which are viewed as a continuation of revenge killings connected with Rwanda’s recent civil war, Daniel said, “One thing is sure: until Rwandese can come together to kill the real enemy—the spirit of revenge—lives of both the innocent and the guilty will continue to be lost.”

These tragic events make the church even more aware of the need to stand on the side of peace, compassion, and reconciliation. Adventist leaders throughout Africa are asking the world church to continue to pray for Rwanda.—Adventist News Network.

Sudan School Off the Starting Block

BY RALPH STALEY, EYIRA ADVENTIST VOCATIONAL ACADEMY PRINCIPAL

The students and faculty at the new Eyira Adventist Vocational Academy in Sudan just completed their first quarter with nine baptisms. The baptisms came as a result of a Week of Prayer.

The Adventist Church’s newest academy has an enrollment of 100 students. It owes its existence to a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering and a grant from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency/ Sweden. Located on a 2,000-acre campus, the school will be adding 50 students per year for four years.

Operating a school in a remote area, with access only by United Nations flights or occasional truck convoys, is challenging. Other than radio contact, the faculty and staff members are cut off from the rest of the world.

With no reliable food source or materials, the students grow their own fruits and vegetables, including beans, cabbage, peanuts, and sweet potatoes.
The Legacy of Dr. Spence Alexander

BY ROGER HUNTER, TEACHER, STANBOROUGH SECONDARY SCHOOL, STANBOROUGH, ENGLAND

With many books written on pain and suffering, perhaps the title of Christian counselor James Dobson's book When God Doesn't Make Sense most aptly describes the story of Dr. Spence Alexander.

A Scotsman, Dr. Alexander passed up a lucrative medical career at home and, in 1990, took his wife and children to a much less glamorous life in South Africa, specifically the town of Empangeni in Zululand. While working there, Alexander went far beyond the call of duty—often treating poor patients for free, holding long fellowship meetings after working all day at his private practice, then resuming his work at the local hospital.

Dr. Alexander's life of service, however, was to be brutally cut short. One evening at a gas station, he stumbled onto a robbery. As he tried to escape from his minivan, which was about to be hijacked, Alexander was hacked and shot to death—leaving behind a wife and three children aged 14, 12, and 9.

One cannot help questioning why these things happen, and indeed, the answer will not be given this side of heaven. Yet along with the negative points of this event—namely, a fatherless family—we find some positives: In Empangeni, Alexander's death has united people of all races in celebrating his service and life. His relatives, who aren't Christians, see him as brave and dedicated, and Scottish people in general are impressed by such single-minded devotion to values so different from the world's.

In life and death Dr. Spence Alexander exemplified well Matthew 5:16: “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (NIV).

NEWS BREAK

ADRA Halts Albanian Operations

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency is among the majority of humanitarian agencies that have suspended operations in Albania. The suspension is a result of civil unrest in the former Communist country. Very few expatriate workers remain in Albania, says Beth Schaefer, ADRA news and information officer.

ADRA operated seven clinics, funded by the Danish International Development Agency. Many humanitarian agencies will review the situation this month.

New Churches Built in El Salvador

Don Noble, president of Maranatha Volunteers International (MVI) in Sacramento, California, reports that 30 of the 50 church buildings scheduled for construction in El Salvador by MVI volunteers are now complete. Only eight churches have yet to be started.

The new church and school buildings have already spurred many baptisms. Half of the 10 schools are completed, and construction has started on three more schools. The entire El Salvador project is scheduled for completion by December 31, 1997, Noble says.

Mongolia Recognizes Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has become an officially recognized denomination in Mongolia. The registration is first for Adventists in this Asian country and is considered a rare recognition extended to churches.

In July the Ulan Bator City Council voted to approve the application from the church for one year. Annual extensions will be granted, providing the church doesn't break the country's laws.

Munkjargal, a Mongolian and a student at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, presented the church's application. “We praise God for working on our behalf,” says Pastor Gerald Christo, who is currently responsible for the church's activities in Mongolia. “Munkjargal deserves our appreciation for the tenacity with which he has pursued the application.”

The Adventist Church is now one of the few Protestant churches to be registered in Mongolia. “Mongolia's recent history of Communism and their distant history of Buddhism have made it very difficult for other religions to gain official recognition,” says Mike Ryan, director of the General Conference Office of Global Mission.

“Seventh-day Adventists established their presence in Mongolia through the efforts of Adventist Frontier Mission (AFM), a private supporting ministry operated..."
Test Your Global Mission IQ

1. Through Global Mission, church members from Cotonou (the capital city) held a Revelation Seminar (1994) in Ouidah, a major center of voodoo worship. They baptized 12 persons. Today 15 members meet. Six other new groups have received support from Global Mission. The name of this former French colony in West Africa is—

A. Benin  C. Dahomey
B. Upper Volta  D. Nyasaland

2. Nineteen youth volunteered for 16 months’ service on one of the world's most interesting tropical islands. Global Mission provided funds for food and rent and training in teaching literacy and market gardening production. The youth worked in the fields, taught the alphabet and health and hygiene, and gave Bible studies. They established Sabbath schools in 11 areas. Now the people need funds to build small chapels. This 800-mile-long island lies in the Indian Ocean:

A. Andaman Islands  C. Madagascar
B. Reunion  D. Sri Lanka

3. Twelve Global Mission pioneers work for Christ in eight locations in a former republic of the U.S.S.R., now a separate nation and once referred to as “White Russia.” Global Mission pays for some of these locations. What is its present name and where is it located?

Answers

1. A. Benin. This nation of 5.4 million is part of the Sahel Union and has a church membership of 176 for each 1 million population. (The world average is 1,546 members for each 1 million.) Two churches serve 953 members.

2. C. Madagascar. Despite an Adventist density of 2,832 per 1 million—nearly double the world average—there are many unentered areas among the 15 million people living on this island.

3. Belarus. It lies north of Ukraine and east of Poland. Its capital is Minsk. Adventist density is 428 per 1 million.

—Compiled by F. Donald Yost, Office of Global Mission, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

News Break

by Adventists. AFM was authorized for humanitarian and not religious work. When new believers began to worship, difficulties were created with the government because this was a function for which the group wasn’t registered. Now Adventist believers are free to function as a church and share their faith.” The new status allows the church to hold property, invite foreign missionaries, and conduct outreach.—Adventist News Network.

News Notes

✔ Correction. Alert readers were no doubt surprised to discover that famous British preachers G. Campbell Morgan (d. 1945) and David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (d. 1981) were featured speakers at the International Congress on Preaching, held in London last April (see World News & Perspectives, Aug. 14, 1997).

Yes, we still believe that the “dead know not anything”—not even how to preach! The errors were not the author's, but crept in during the editorial process.

Additionally (for the record), the archbishop of Canterbury is George Carey, not William Carey (founder of the modern missionary movement). And the head of the Anglican Church is still Queen Elizabeth II.

✔ The Potomac Adventist Book Center in Takoma Park, Maryland, was named Health Food Store of the Year at the National Natural Food Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, July 14.

ACN Workshop Focuses on Volunteers

The Adventist Communication Network (ACN) will present a satellite workshop for pastors and local ministry leaders called “Taking Care of Your Church Volunteers,” on September 13, 4:00-6:00 p.m. Eastern time, on Galaxy 9, channel 2.

Four experienced volunteer coordinators will share what they have learned on how to keep volunteers motivated year after year, project after project. They’ll also shed light on the new paradigms for taking care of volunteers in the 1990s. To participate (handouts needed), please register by calling 1-800-ACN-1119, ext. 6.

What’s Upcoming

Sept. 13-20  Adventist Review emphasis
Sept. 20  Family Togetherness Day
Sept. 27  Pathfinders’ Day
Sept. 27  Thirteenth Sabbath Offering for the Trans-European Division
Could It Be Different?

We’re looking forward to the past, unless we change it.

BY CARLA GOBER

IT WAS A DIFFERENT FAMILY, YET NOT SO unlike the other families that I had seen on the one night a week that I do counseling. They sat in a semicircle around me, looking on as I drew their family tree on a large board in front of them. They seemed interested as we talked about grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles—who begat whom begat whom. Then we moved on to a more difficult part of the drawing. I proceeded to ask them questions about family patterns of behaving, such as conflicts, addictions, cutoffs, and triangling. As they talked, I drew family patterns with red, yellow, blue, and black markers. We were making a genogram.*

As I drew, the family became more interested and more quiet. Finally it was complete. I leaned back and asked, “As you look at all of this, what do you think?”

Dad spoke first. “It’s a mess.”

Mom spoke next: “We’ve got problems.”

Pointing to the middle generation, I asked, “What happened there?”

Both seemed confused. “What do you mean?”

“What happened at this level,” I asked, “that is different from the generation before it or after it?”

Dad studied the genogram. “Nothing. They look so identical that it’s scary.”

After drawing a projected fourth generation, I asked, “What do you expect in the generation yet to come?”

They surveyed the entire board, and then Mom spoke. “From looking at the rest of the board, I guess we should expect the same thing in the next generation.”

They were both quiet.

Finally Dad spoke and, with the seriousness of a man who has just awakened from a bad dream, asked, “Is there any way it could be different?”

I couldn’t answer him. Only he could answer that question. Could it be different? It could be different, but will it?

Let’s consider another family. For two generations the individuals within the family have struggled with alcoholism and addictions. Then, without any explanation, a third and fourth generation arose sober and clean. As a therapist I would be compelled to ask, “What happened there?”

It is not surprising to hear stories such as:

“Oh, my father became a Christian, and things were very different.”

“My mom sobered up and started taking care of us kids.”
We had a tragedy in the family, and the crisis brought the whole family closer.

Courage to Change

Change at one level brings change at another, whether positive or negative. And so we learn two things from looking at the family system:

1. Individuals within families seek to re-create that which is familiar; not that which they like or that which is good, but that which is familiar.

2. Any change that is made within a family system has the power to change not only the current generation, but generations to follow.

Patterns of behaving are passed on from generation to generation, making the current generation one of the greatest predictors for the one to come. Thus the family system is one of the most powerful mechanisms for either carrying on that which is familiar or for implementing change. Patterns of behaving are passed on from generation to generation, making the current generation one of the greatest predictors for the one to come. Thus the family system is one of the most powerful mechanisms for either carrying on that which is familiar or for implementing change. There seems to be continuous tension between the two. Should the familiar be respected and maintained because of its past success, or should it be torn down and replaced by newer, more efficient ideologies and methods?

There are times when the familiar should be protected and encouraged to continue in families as well as other systems. The health-care environment is becoming increasingly high-tech, but even in that environment accrediting bodies are continuing to ask where and how spiritual care is being documented. High touch is still important. In this case, the familiar should be maintained.

However, sometimes change is necessary for the future, and when it is, it is not easy to facilitate. I have consulted with educational entities, businesses, and health-care institutions. In every case, people who are going through change are generally very resistant to that change, even if they understand that it will bring positive results. The process of change is extremely difficult, since that which is familiar has far greater power than that which is unknown.

Even as I say that, I hear the voice of One who knew that best . . .

“Get these things hence. Make not my Father’s house a house of thieves.”

“The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Lazarus, come forth.”

Here entered God Himself as a lion, ripping away at the sinews of established ideas and tearing at the flesh of the greatest of all opponents, death. Yet in the maelstrom of His anger one could hear the gentleness and saving grace of the lamb. The lion and the lamb lying side by side in a God made flesh.

Lessons from the Past

On a genogram of human existence, looking before and after this event, one is compelled to ask, “What happened there?” What happened to so challenge a system of beliefs at its roots? What godlike voice roared through the ages, declaring that what was familiar was not good enough?

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a shaking and a trembling at the foundation of supreme religious authority. That which was familiar began to topple. There were changes in attitude toward the papacy, questions regarding authority, and criticisms of current theology. As icebergs calve off into the ocean, making unforgettable thunderous roars, groups of people began to break away, the effects of which have continued throughout history.

And the next generation asks, “What happened there?”

The answer comes in the echo of a man who had one conviction—or was it 95?

“The just shall live by faith.”

Again the familiar was toppled.

Sometimes that which is familiar is toppled for reasons that are unclear, or maybe even detrimental. In the eleventh century, and for the next several hundred years, hundreds of thousands of people marched, voyaged, left homes and families, killed, and were killed. It was one of the greatest popular movements in history. Their goal? They were on crusades in the name of the church to take control of the Holy Land. They would slaughter without hesitation. Later generations find them difficult to understand and ask, “What happened there?” What inspired thousands of people to join the Crusades to take control of a land the church lacked power to retain? The familiar was toppled, but for what reason?

And yet, in my mind, this first holocaust is easier to understand than the second. Six million Jews were killed while good people stood by in paralyzed silence. The next generation asks, “What happened there?” How is it that the world stood seemingly mute while 6 million people suffered and died? Was it the silence of not being
able to speak, having nothing to say, or not wanting to break the silence? According to Hitler, change needed to happen. Six million silenced voices attest to the effect of that change.

**Wise Enough to Know the Difference**

When looking from the past to the future, there is always tension between whether to re-create the familiar or to produce needed change. Black fog surrounds the fear that the familiar, which should be destroyed, will be protected, or that change that is implemented will prove to be destructive. How are we to know the difference? And knowing the difference, what impact can we make?

The past and the future lie so closely together they are like prongs of a fork, always side by side, but never quite touching. We are in that little space between the prongs, called the present. And exactly how long is that? I remember a discussion my sister and I had years ago. We decided that “now” was about a second long. Then we discussed how long a second was. My sister thought it was as long as it took to say “second.” I thought it was as the snap of a finger.

She disagreed, “No, it’s this long.” With that she blinked her eyes. This concluded our conversation. We decided that “now” was as long as the blink of an eye. Augustine discusses the present by saying, “We see that this ‘present time’ . . . has contracted to the space of scarcely one day. But let us look into this one day, too, because not even a single day is wholly present. It . . . is made up of twenty-four hours. . . . And that very hour itself is made of fleeting moments. Whatever part of these has fled away is in the past, whatever remains is in the future. If anything can be meant by a point of time so small that it cannot be divided into even the most minute particles of moments, that is the only time that can be called ‘present.’ And such a time must fly so rapidly from future to past that it has no duration and no extension” (*The Confessions of Augustine*, Book XI, chap. 15).

Sandwiched in between the past and the future is that little slant of time called the present. Although it may at times feel long or short, it is always the same length of time—only but a moment. It seems so transient, so insignificant, like one more fall leaf floating to the ground, but we must rightly respect its import. Of the three, the present is probably the most powerful for good or for evil. In this little slant of time, we either continue with that which is familiar and connect the future to the past as a seamless garment, or we rip and tear at what has gone before and form a new garment altogether.

I am not a historian, which is probably more apparent than even I am aware, but I do know this: unless God returns, there will be generations after this one. Our present is their past, and our future is their present. So when we talk about the future, we are making it even as we speak.

It may be as Martin Luther King, Jr., stated in a speech in opposition to the Vietnam War: “These are revolutionary times. . . . We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.” Maybe in this tiny space of time called the present, it is of utmost importance to look at the past and, where necessary, react against it, to seek for change. If the Lord so directs, to change the way we relate to our churches, our students, and our attempts at spreading the gospel. Maybe the past is not the best way for the future.

Yet standing next to that, we see the face of Moses, talking to God from his heart, from our hearts: “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here” (Ex. 33:15, NIV).

On the genogram of life, when generations after point to this one and ask, “What happened there?” what will be the answer?

Will they say that nothing happened and that we faithfully preserved the past? And if so, was it preserved because it needed to be preserved, or was it preserved because it was familiar and we knew no other way?

Or will they see a stirring and trembling of the status quo? And if so, will it be a power and change for good or for evil?

We stand between the past and the future; our very standing is the effect of one and the creation of the other. In some ways I feel like the dad in my earlier story, who looked over the genogram and said, “It’s a mess.” While there are many good things about the past, there are things that should not remain the same, especially at the personal level. And if it hasn’t touched us there, it hasn’t reached far enough.

I look at my own teaching. There are some aspects I want to continue. In 10 years I hope I enjoy teaching as much as I enjoy it now. I also hope I am as interested in the students. On the other hand, I hope I never again refer to my students as “kids,” as I did last week. I would rather respect them for the professionals they are. I also wish I could learn their names before the end of the quarter. So on a personal level, I, as that dad, ask, “Is there any way it could be different?” I believe that with each slant of time called the present, I am answering that question.

We all stand here in the present, looking forward to the future . . . No, looking forward to the past, unless we change it. ■

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* A genogram is a format for drawing a family tree that records information about family members and their relationships over at least three generations.

**Carla Gober** is an assistant professor of religion and director of the Center for Spiritual Life and Wholeness at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.
Why Not Adopt a Grandma?

BONNIE KOTTER

Do you have a grandma? If you do, you are very lucky. And grandmas are lucky to have grandchildren. Whether you have a grandma or not, what about adopting one? Yes, adopting! I know usually children are adopted, but not always. Listen to this story.

Mrs. Dodd was more than 75 years old and lived by herself in an apartment. Old friends sometimes called or visited, but they talked about their troubles, and that made her sad.

Oh, how Mrs. Dodd missed talking with the families at church. She couldn’t attend anymore because of leg problems. She really missed the children. She was a widow who had no grandchildren. She had one son, who lived far away and visited only once a year.

One day as she sat by her window, looking out at a gray cloudy sky, the telephone rang. The cheery voice at the other end was Mr. Rand, a member of her church. “Our family would like to worship with you this coming Sabbath,” he said. “We thought we would bring Sabbath school and church to you this week.”

Mrs. Dodd almost shouted, “Yes, come right ahead!” And so Mr. and Mrs. Rand arranged to visit her with their two daughters.

When they arrived, Laurie and Jennifer Rand sang a duet for Mrs. Dodd. Then they gave her pictures and cards they had made. Next came the Sabbath school lesson. The children acted out a Bible story. Mr. Rand played a video he had taken of the church service the week before. It thrilled Mrs. Dodd to see some of her old friends in the congregation. At the end of church they all sang songs from the hymnbooks they had brought.

Laurie hugged Mrs. Dodd. “Will you be our adopted grandma?” she asked. “Jennifer and I would like to send you pictures and visit sometimes—”

“—and have Sabbath school and church with you again,” interrupted Jennifer.

Mrs. Dodd was so surprised she could hardly speak. After taking a deep breath, she smiled and said, “I would love it.”
MARANATHA INVITATIONAL PROJECTS

Maranatha Volunteers International Association invites readers to join them on another exciting adventure of helping to change lives. The recipients of your work will be changed through a renewed environment. You will be changed in becoming a part of this renewal. And people on both sides of the projects will be blessed just by knowing each other.

Maranatha has planned 10 construction and renovation projects for the coming year.

Everyone is invited on these invitational projects. Do a little dreaming—where would you like to go in the next 12 months?

Upcoming Projects in the United States

Columbia, TENNESSEE
Dates: September 14-28, 1997
Leader: Melvin and Karen Hatch
Project: Church

East Wenatchee, WASHINGTON
Dates: September 17-October 3, 1997
Leader: Don Wesslen
Project: Church renovation

Hagerstown, MARYLAND
Dates: October 1-15, 1997
Leader: Robert and Doris Poblano
Project: Highland View Academy campus renovations

Upcoming International Projects

Campos, Rio de Janeiro, BRAZIL
Dates: November 4-23, 1997
Leader: Robert Hatch
Project: 7 churches, Sabbath school classrooms

Jayapura and Biak, IRIAN JAYA
Dates: January 9-27, 1998
Leader: Karen Larsen
Project: Churches

Barquisimeto, VENEZUELA
Dates: February 3-March 10, 1998
Leader: Karen Larsen
Project: 11 churches and 2 schools

Days Creek, OREGON
Dates: June 10-24, 1998
Leader: Ken Casper
Project: Campus renovations

This project will be followed by Maranatha Volunteers International Convention at Days Creek, Oregon, June 25-28, 1998.

Did a particular project catch your eye? To receive information and a project application, write to:

Lynnette Seymour
Maranatha Volunteers International
1600 Sacramento Inn Way, Suite 116
Sacramento, CA 95815

Phone: (916) 920-1900; fax (916) 920-3299;
E-mail: CompuServe 74617,2722

Information will be sent to you when it becomes available. Also, let us know if you are interested in coordinating a group mission trip through Maranatha.

“Sir, . . . leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it” (Luke 13:8, NIV).

My husband likes to buy me roses, but he is thwarted by my frugality. Roses equal money spent, something our meager budget can ill afford. But I like roses, and Donald likes making me happy, so he has had a hard time cutting back on the expense.

When we bought our first home, he discovered a solution that pleased us both: our own rosebushes.

We planted three the first summer. The middle one promptly died. The orange rosebush struggled to live. The red rosebush grew happily and became my favorite.

Then a series of disasters hit the red rosebush. An ice cooler fell off the steps and knocked off half the bush. The rosebush had barely recovered when a storm severed half of what was left. It bravely endured this and was actually blooming when fall came around.

Then the spring of 1996 arrived. In our part of Texas we had repeated temperature swings, going from 90 degrees to freezing within a week. My poor rosebush was tricked into budding just in time for a freeze. The dainty green leaves curled into brown, brittle masses, and the healthy stems turned into dry twigs.

I was distressed. Taking my husband out to see the catastrophe, I said, “It’s dead.”

“I’ll buy you another,” he promised. “Would you like me to get it this week?”

“Wait,” I said. “There might be another freeze. Besides, the bush might still be alive.”

So we waited. I checked the rosebush regularly, but my hopes fell as it remained deathly brown.

One day Donald pointed out a scarlet stalk. “It survived!”

I disagreed. The stalk was growing from the ground, not the main stalks. The undeveloped leaves clustered tightly around the sprout, blurring any clear patterns. I had to wait a few more days for the leaves to spread out. There before me was the distinctive serrated leaf of the rosebush! My abused but loved red rosebush was alive!

As I looked at those young rose leaves growing despite the death pallor the bush had worn for weeks, I couldn’t help remembering the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard. That tree had not been a healthy plant like my rosebush. It had been a disappointing tree, one that did not bear fruit. After three years the owner of the vineyard passed judgment on it: “Dig it up and replace it!”

But the gardener pleaded for more time. “Let me give it special care this year,” he said. “Perhaps it will produce fruit. If not, we can always cut it down later.”

The parable ends there. For some reason I’d always finished it in my mind. The fig tree was uprooted. It had had three years to produce fruit. Another year couldn’t make any difference, could it?

Now that I’ve seen my rosebush overcome insurmountable odds, I think I missed the point of the parable. It wasn’t about judgment; it was about mercy.

A lot of us are like that fig tree. We’ve had the advantage of growing in the vineyard, where we are tended by fellow Christians, but we still don’t produce the fruit of the Spirit. Sometimes our friends and family give up on us.

But God doesn’t. He gives us another chance. He looks beyond our lack of fruit or green leaves. He sees the heart. He can tell whether it is alive or not. If there is even the tiniest spark of life left, He doesn’t give up on us!

Isn’t that the most fantastic news you’ve ever heard?!

Melody Snow is a freelance writer who lives in Lillian, Texas.
The *Adventist Review* on-line is made available free through the sponsorship of the North American Division Adventist Health Ministry Department—coordinators for “The Year of Health and Healing.”

During this year, Adventist Health Ministry invites each Adventist congregation to reaffirm the church’s health principles and share them throughout their communities.

For more information and materials on the Year of Health and Healing, call the Adventist PlusLine at (800) SDA-PLUS or Adventist Health Ministry Department at 301-680-6733.