Church Leaders Gather in Brazil
Firsthand Report of Annual Council
The Final Exodus

Roy Adams’ “The Final Exodus” (Sept. 10 World Edition) stirred my blood! What a marvelous piece of writing to turn our thoughts away from the things of this earth and focus them where it counts most. Let us heed the warnings, let us vow to permit the Holy Spirit to change us into those who will be a part of the triumphant final exodus that is soon to happen.

And while God is working in us, let us also allow Him to work through us for the salvation of others—family, neighbors, friends, even those we do not know as we give of our means to herald the gospel in lands afar. It is time to put the Advent back into being Adventist.

—Frank Stanyer
Flordia Blanca, Pampanga, Philippines

The State of the Church

Thanks to Stephen Chavez for his editorial “The State of the Church” (Sept. 10). My church has recently moved the second worship service to our fellowship center to accommodate our growing membership. This has caused bitter feelings between members with differing viewpoints about whether or not Sabbath worship services should be held in a fellowship center. If only they would stop to appreciate the fact that we have a place to worship when fellow believers around the world have no place to meet at all!

—Name Withheld

Good Illustration

How I chuckled when I saw Ralph Butler’s illustration for Edward Gibbons’ “Lapping Up Laodicea” (Sept. 10). Though it was a serious subject, I liked the sense of humor shown in the illustration.

—Natalie Dodd
Centerville, Ohio

Constructive Criticism

First, I would like to thank you for the great work you have done for our church paper. However, I feel I must comment on the September 10 World Edition:

In my opinion, the first three paragraphs (a baseball story) of Bert Williams’ “Getting Older’s No Big Deal” are not suitable for the World Edition. If I wrote about “hitting him for six” or “winning by an innings and two wickets,” how many Americans would have a clue as to what I am getting at? The rest of the article was very good.

My other complaint is about the artwork in this issue. I feel the illustration accompanying the above article was in very poor taste. To me, it looked like two disabled convicts looking at a shooting star! The illustration in “Lapping Up Laodicea” was “cute,” but why the cartoon duck walking away? Finally, the cover picture (which was modified on page 9) looks as if Moses is berating the little boy.

These comments are given in the hope that you can maintain the high standard to which we have become accustomed. God bless you.

—Robert Buckley
Suffolk, England

August 27 AnchorPoints Edition

How can I thank you for your ministry and encouragement over the past several years? The Review has helped me more and more in my efforts for Him. Thank you for Bill Johnson’s excellent summary of Dies Domini (see “Suddenly Sunday,” Aug. 27 AnchorPoints Edition), for Clifford Goldstein’s excellent article on quantum
physics and God (see “Spooky Action at a Distance,” A ug. 27), and for Ellen White’s “The Working of Infinite Power” (A ug. 27). And Myrna Tetz’s “Clever Ways” (A ug. 27) made my morning as I prepared for a Sabbath youth rally.

May He continue to use you in this manner.

—Bill Blundell, Pastor Queens land, Australia

Bible Versions

In “The Bible Versions Debate” (July 23), Steven Thompson wrote incisively on the question of Bible translations. This is not just an Anglo-Saxon KJV problem. In Francophone areas some cling to the Louis Segond as the only true version. Only the 1917 translation will satisfy a vocal minority in Sweden.


—Hugh Dunton Binfield, England

The Remnant

Ella Rydzewski’s “remnant” phraseology clicked with me (see “Adventists and Lutherans in Prayer,” A ug. 20 Cutting Edge Edition). She writes, “The Seventh-day Adventist Church has the remnant message for this time. But why not respond to the remnant movement in other churches?”

This recognizes the distinctive prophetic truth of the end-time remnant and at the same time avoids the exclusive sound of “We are the remnant.” Won’t we bear the “remnant message” most effectively if our hearts and eyes are wide open to the “remnant movement” among all people, whom our God calls “My people”?

—Victor Hall Weymouth, England

Time to Seek the Lord (cont.)

I was deeply moved by your special issue “Time to Seek the Lord” (undated, but corresponds to July 30). Yes, I also do believe it is time to pray as we have never prayed before and to seek for renewal and revival.

I would like to share this whole issue with my church, would there not be the language barrier. I hope that William G. Johnson’s plans will come true to translate the Review in other languages, because I think the magazine belongs to the whole church.

—Horst Naether Germany

Corrections

What a surprise to see my picture on the September 10 Give & Take page. Just a correction on the caption’s last sentence, which read: “By early July, 36 of the 50 Czecho-Slovakian Union churches had registered for NET ’98.” The truth is, 153 out of 182 churches will be taking part in NET ’98.

—Daniel Duda Ministerial Secretary Czecho-Slovakian Union

I’m from Brazil, so I noticed the Newsbreak article titled “Musical Celebration Commemorates Brazil Campus” (Sept. 10). There were three spelling errors there. Two of them you probably shouldn’t be faulted for, since they are Brazilian names: the city of Artur Nogueira (not Artur Noqueira) and the pastor’s name, Walter Boger (not Walter Bogar).

However, there was another error, which you might consider correcting. The last paragraph says, “The highlight of the program was the unveiling of a plague recognizing . . .”

—Anderson K. Barbosa Via E-mail

Thanks for the corrections, particularly the last one. We must have been subconsciously influenced by Roy Adams’ cover story, “The Final Exodus.”—Editors.
“Behold, I come quickly . . .”

Our mission is to uplift Jesus Christ through stories of His matchless love, news of His present workings, help for knowing Him better, and hope in His soon return.

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At the bottom of it all, membership matters. The church centennial was fast approaching, and I was quickly sorting through the boxes of church office “stuff” to which the janitor had directed me in the back room. I growled at myself as I worked: my eager promise to write a history of the church for the coming celebration now seemed a foolish enthusiasm. Through what sieve of importance should one put a century’s worth of living and believing?

Among a clutch of yellowing photographs in the depths of one ragged box were six sheets of paper, each folded with the same creases, each written by the same precise hand. Upper right corner dates revealed that these were a succession of letters addressed to the church clerk over an 18-month period in 1898-1899. “Be assured that my husband and I wish to remain members of the church,” each one began. “Though unable to worship with you regularly, we very much prize our membership in the congregation.”

The author, I discovered, was the wife of the conference evangelist. She and her husband were itinerating all across the state, and thus could not attend the quarterly church business sessions at which the congregation adjusted its membership rolls. From her six letters and others like it a startlingly clear picture emerged: there was a time when membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church was deemed a privilege rather than a right. There was a time when exiting the church was nearly as easy as entering it, when persons regularly absent from worship and church life understood that they were forfeiting participation in the body.

A century later one of Adventism’s most painful realities, at least in industrialized nations, is the large percentage of nonattending “members.” In many congregations fully one quarter of the members never participate in the church’s life. Many churches count it good when half of those listed on the rolls find their way to worship on a Sabbath morning. In churches large and small, in ethnic congregations as well as Anglo sanctuaries, a deep discomfort stirs us when we’re called to give the number of our fellowship. We juggle dual sets of figures in our heads: one to use when interviewing a prospective pastor or reporting to the conference; another, always lower, used when talking frankly to ourselves.

Some argue that it costs the congregation little to keep nonattending members on the rolls: postage, envelopes, a copy of the budget. And who knows when some long-absent one may be revived? God grant it may be so.

But who can call the body healthy that will not face its own disease? Who will bless the inattention that neither works to revive the nonattending nor helps them graciously to find the exit? How can the congregation grasp its mission or measure its obedience to the Great Commission when it inflates its numbers and its influence in the community?

One thoughtful church administrator has even quietly proposed a “Covenant Sabbath” on which all Adventists in a given conference would be invited to reaffirm their intention to be part of the church. Persons not wishing or unwilling to make such a covenant would find the easy exit for which they have been longing. Reconstituted and reinvigorated by the courage that comes with choosing, congregations might better understand the gifts and the resources that the Holy Spirit has given to ripen fruit in their corner of the vineyard.

This is no call for hasty judgments and painful church attendance sheets. The grace on which the church is founded must be evident in the way that it treats even those who no longer wish to be part of its fellowship. But grace also honors the choices that free persons make. It is no less righteous to let persons leave the church than to welcome them in the first place, even while we sorrow for the choice.

Reforming our notions of church membership will demand deep prayerfulness, attentive pastoral care, and a higher estimate of the church’s significance than we have recently been used to. Paradoxically, many will come to value their membership in God’s remnant church only when they realize that it is a privilege possible to lose. For the sake of those who will be revived in no other way, it is a task we should pick up—and soon.
I must confess, I really don’t have a green thumb. Growing up amid the asphalt terrain of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, didn’t endow me with a love for gardening or landscaping. The simple task of cultivating a healthy lawn was a groundbreaking experience for me. Perhaps that’s why it’s taken me several years just to learn a few basic techniques for watering my yard.

Early on I realized the need to water a lawn several times a week, so for years I religiously imitated my neighbors. I would place my water sprinkler in several strategic locations and let it run. I’m sure you can guess the results. Some parts of the lawn were rich with thick, healthy, green growth, while other parts were brown with thatch or simply bare.

After a few years it occurred to me that I needed to take more care in choosing the right sprinkler for the job. I needed one that gave the best reach and saturation for my particular lawn size.

It also became apparent that timing played a key role. Landscaping experts say it’s much better to water your lawn early in the morning or right around sundown. The reason is simple. During the day water drops resting on blades of grass magnify the rays of the sun. This intensifies the heat and helps kill the grass. Late at night the water, which is not absorbed into the soil as rapidly as in the day, aids the growth of grass-killing fungi.

Perhaps the most essential lesson I learned was that even with a good sprinkler and strategic timing, a few brown and bare spots would still occur. It wasn’t until I spent time taking the sprinkler and applying water directly to those troubled areas that the consistency of the color improved, making the lawn more attractive.

Life Lessons

My hands-on experiences in lawn care have also taught me some valuable lessons about cultivating a Spirit-filled prayer life. The very discipline of caring for a lawn and garden provides divine principles for us all. Here are just a few that I gleaned from the process.

**Daily Devotion.** Effective prayer must be a daily experience to nurture a vibrant relationship with Christ. David said, “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Ps. 55:17, NKJV). Daniel, another prayer warrior, made it a specific practice to pray three times a day. And let’s not forget the example of Christ, who regularly sought communion with His Father before ministering to the needs of others each day.

**Time and Place.** Just as in lawn care, our prayer life may be enhanced by setting aside a specific time and place to talk with God. I’ve discovered that if I don’t set aside a specific time, the pressures of life will automatically consume my attention and energy, thereby robbing me of needed time with the Saviour.

Though such a time and place may differ according to individual lifestyle and circumstances, the need for consistency is paramount. While the Bible teaches that we should maintain a continuous attitude of prayer, we still must set aside a definite time to commune with God on a deeper personal level.

**Dynamic Dialogue.** Perhaps one of the most important influences in cultivating a vibrant prayer life is found in understanding the various dimensions of prayer. Our conversation with God needs to be a dynamic growing dialogue that ripens over the years. As our needs, aspirations, and desires change, so will our prayer life. As our character develops, so will our prayer life. As our relationship with God deepens, so will our prayer life.

Through prayer we express our love for God (sometimes called adoration), we rejoice with our Creator and celebrate His goodness, we thank God for the blessings He grants us each day, we confess our sins and bring our requests and concerns to God, and we intercede for others.

Nurturing a successful prayer life also demands that we take a deep, soul-searching look at the brown spots in our character, acknowledging our deficiencies and faults to the Creator. Approaching Him is throne with a contrite, remorseful heart, we must lay out our souls before Christ and invite Him to drench our souls with the water of life.
**ADVENTIST QUOTES**

“No stopping!”

— 5-year-old Carelle at the Kabula Hill church in Blantyre, Malawi, when asked how much she loved Jesus

“Good is not what we do, but who is in control of our lives when we do it.”

— Sharon Leukert, Corrales, New Mexico

“Confrontation causes us to examine the contents of our foundation.”

— April Daniell, Grandview, Texas

“Jesus was more willing to go to the grave for you than to go to heaven without you.”

— Pastor David Melendez, to the Mount Vernon Hill church, Mount Vernon, Ohio

— Sharon Leukert, Corrales, New Mexico

**ADVENTIST LIFE**

While driving through the countryside one day, our small son, Lonnie, noticed a large flock of sheep in the pasture. All but one were resting, and that one was standing on a knoll a short distance from the others.

“Look, Mama,” Lonnie said. “They’re having church!”

— Esther Oldham, Montrose, Colorado

One Sabbath while I was teaching the preschoolers in Sabbath school about heaven and the new earth, the children were putting the felt pictures on the board. Suddenly 4-year-old Bosha shouted, “I don’t want to go to heaven! I don’t want to go there!” I was surprised and asked him for the reason.

“I am not a girl!” Bosha yelled. “I don’t want to wear a white dress in heaven!”

— Aranka Bajic, director, South-East European Union Conference Department of Children’s Ministries

I chose to tell the story of David and Goliath for children’s story at church. I had verbally painted a picture of David as a youth going to visit his older brothers on the front line of battle.

“When David got there,” I asked, “who do you think was bothering the Israelites?” A hand shot up from a little boy in front who I knew was well versed in the Bible. I pointed to him, and he proudly responded: “The Filipinos attacked them.”

I took five minutes to regain the church’s attention.

— Jack Vance, Jacksonville, Florida

**HANGING US OUT TO DRY**

ALL WET: Pastor Roland Geiser, writing from Trois-Rivières, Quebec, Canada, received a dripping Review after a heavy May shower. So . . . the Geisers simply pinned it to a rack to dry.

**WE NEED YOU**

Send Give & Take submissions to . . .

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Poles Apart... N o L o

Two men, two churches, one community, one passion

BY SLAWOMIR MALAREK

I CAME TO BRANDON, MANITOBA IN THE summer of 1995. My assignment: to revive our churches in this second-largest city in the province. The attendance in my church was down to seven individuals. But God smiled, angels held their breath, and the question on everyone’s mind was: What new people would we meet? And in what exciting ways would they respond to the gospel?

A Connection With the Past

“That’s amazing!” I exclaimed as I stood for the first time in front of an unusual church building in the oldest part of Brandon. The wooden structure with narrow pointed windows and a little steeple, situated only a few hundred yards away from two onion-domed Ukrainian and Greek Orthodox churches, was unmistakably Eastern European. The sign out front said: “The Polish National Catholic Church.” I remembered such churches from my homeland in Poland. Though Catholic in its theology, it did not recognize the authority of the pope, and it allowed its clergy to marry.

To discover this church in the middle of the Canadian prairie, right in the heart of the vast North American continent, was almost unbelievable.

As I looked at it, I couldn’t help smiling at the name of the priest displayed on the little sign: “Father Anthony Budzik.” Knowing that the name meant “alarm clock” in Polish, I wondered whether he ever had problems with parishioners falling asleep during his sermons.

I noticed a house on the same property as the church and assumed that it must be the priest’s manse. Opening the gate, I approached the front door and knocked several times without any response. I’ll be back, I promised myself determinedly.

Where to Begin?

My first year in Brandon found me working hard with our Adventist congregation. Brandon is a vibrant city of 40,000 people, but with its industry and commerce it serves a population in excess of 150,000. It has its own university and more than 30 churches. Unfortunately, attendance in the Adventist Church had dropped to six or seven mainly elderly members.

We began with a work bee to spruce up our facilities. Then we prepared lots of advertising to let our community know that we were not a boarded-up church (a perception that some in our community held).

For our first evangelistic project we used videotapes of the NET ’95 series. People began to come to our meetings. Still thinking about Father Budzik, I attended meetings of the local ministerial council, hoping to meet him there. But I looked for him in vain. Meanwhile, we had already completed the follow-up Revelation Seminar and launched our first Bible correspondence school.

Then in the fall of 1996, equipped with a newly acquired satellite dish, we brought to Brandon NET ’96, projected on a nine-foot screen. After a year of efforts, five precious souls were baptized. However, in the process I almost forgot about the Polish priest.

A Providential Encounter

One day during the spring of 1997 my Swiss wife, Brigitta, met Father Budzik quite unexpectedly in front of the bank as she was parking her car. A little sticker of a
Polish flag displayed on our car’s rear window caught his attention. Standing there with a little boy, he extinguished his cigarette and started a conversation. “Are you Polish?” he asked with a slight accent.

“No, but my husband is,” she responded and then explained that our whole family had triple citizenship: Polish, Swiss, and Canadian.

“Are you Polish?” she asked, guessing his answer. “What do you do here in Brandon?”

“Yes, I’m Polish and I’m a priest.” Brigitta burst into laughter, amazed at this “coincidence.” Still excited about the turn of events, she gave Tony (for that’s how he introduced himself) our telephone number and urged him to call.

He didn’t call immediately, but when he did, the timing couldn’t have been better. We were immersed in a new series of evangelistic meetings. When Tony called, I was on the way to the church for one of the NET ’96 meetings, which we were repeating from tapes. I invited him to the meeting. He obliged by showing up and sitting through the whole program. The topic was health, which left me wondering whether it was the best one to serve as an introduction to Adventism.

As we conversed after the meeting, and then again a few days later in my home, I found that Tony was very much interested in health. He also shared with me that his congregation was small and his paycheck barely enough to meet his family’s monthly expenses. Tony had a wife, Yolanda, and two boys, Angelo, age 7, and Adriano, 3 years old. He said he watched evangelical preachers on television and often read the Bible.

Excited about what I was hearing, I spoke to Tony in Polish, hoping that our native tongue would better convey my earnestness: “You know, Tony, your life story reminds me of my father, who...
was also a Catholic priest in Poland. In 1960 he became an Adventist minister. Maybe the Lord is leading you in the same direction. Don’t worry about the future and don’t worry about finances. Just study His Word, discover His truth, follow His will, and He will direct your life and provide for your needs.” Then I prayed for him and his family.

We parted cordially, but I had a distinct feeling that Tony was too preoccupied with the urgency of his immediate needs to recognize the importance of my appeal. I didn’t hear from him for a long time, so I decided to give him time and space; I prayed that God would do the rest.

Impressed by the Spirit

Our most aggressive evangelism came in 1997. The series of programs commenced with a Financial Freedom seminar, followed by a Daniel seminar and the repetition of the NET ’96 meetings. We again launched our Bible course correspondence, blanketing the whole city for the fourth time with flyers.

In September of 1997 we capped the year with the video evangelistic presentation Preparing for the Next Millennium with Pastor Doug Batchelor. The seminar was designed to bring those who were interested in our church to a decision for baptism. This time we decided to deliver flyers by hand. In the process we visited 3,000 homes. I deliberately chose to walk the old area of town, where many Europeans lived, among them Tony.

On three occasions, after having visited many homes in his neighborhood, I knocked on Tony’s door, only to be disappointed when he wasn’t home. But I kept coming back.

On my fourth visit Tony was home, and he happily invited me in. I explained the purpose of my visit and that I felt I had to invite him personally to these important meetings. He thanked me and without hesitation promised to be there on opening night.

As I sat in his living room, a most unusual conversation ensued.

“Tony, I really appreciate the fact that you are such an open-minded individual,” I began. “Not often will a Catholic priest attend a meeting held in a Protestant church.”

His reply stunned me. “For some time, Slawek, I have been looking at other churches, studying their theology and listening to their preaching on television. I also study my Bible,” he said, pointing to a Bible within his reach. “My wife has her own Bible in the kitchen,” he stated proudly.

“I’ve noticed how often you quote the Scriptures, quite uncommon for a Catholic. I’ve also noticed that you don’t have any of the usual crucifixes on the walls,” I said.

He smiled and explained, “This house, which belongs to the church, was full of them. But we took them down. For some time now I haven’t believed in images and crucifixes. I...”
think it’s idolatry, and I tell it straight to my congregation. I tell them that the rosary has no place in the true religion of the heart, and kissing statues and bowing before them will not endear us to God. Some are really upset about my views, for this has been their tradition for generations.”

“So you don’t believe in the apparitions of Mary?” I was really beginning to enjoy this.

“No,” he responded. “A s a matter of fact, once in Ontario we had a woman who had visions. A few lay members and I went to investigate. Suddenly her voice changed to the voice of a young boy. She claimed it was 7-year-old Jesus who was speaking through her. Everybody around me began to kneel, making the sign of the cross and saying, ‘Miracle! Miracle!’ ”

“What did you do?” I interrupted, unable to contain my curiosity.

Tony went on: “I asked them, ‘Do you know what Jesus used to do with women like her? He cast demons out of them.’ They tried to disagree with me, claiming it was a miracle.”

“Are you on a collision course with your church?” I asked, trying to see how strong his attachment was to his church.

He reached out for a thick book lying on his coffee table. “This book contains some 1,200 rules of our church. One day I held this book in front of my congregation and said, ‘And we criticize the Jews for having some 600 rules of their own. Who is worse?’ ”

He added, “I’m still doing a great job for them. Our congregation has grown to 30 members. They know they won’t get a better priest.”

We moved into the kitchen, and Tony offered me some refreshments. But not wanting to overstay my welcome, I looked at my watch and said that it was time for me to leave. With his last words still ringing in my head I looked him in the eye, and as earnestly as I could I asked, “Tony, do you believe that the Catholic Church is God’s true church on earth?”

Quickly came his answer: “No; that’s why I’m searching.”

Just as swiftly came my next inquiry: “Tony, if this is how you feel, what are you doing in this church? Why don’t you leave?”

“I’m sure I will. It’s just a matter of timing,” he said with a smile.

We prayed together, and I was on my way rejoicing.

A s he had promised, Tony was there for the opening night of Doug Batchelor’s seminar. He brought his two sons with him, and my wife, Brigitta, was happy to include them in her already large children’s class. The boys enjoyed the children’s programs so much they couldn’t wait for the next meeting. They were constantly asking their parents, “When will we go again to hear the other priest?”

Tony enjoyed the first meeting enormously. The chemistry between him and Pastor Batchelor was just right. Tony soaked in every word. We talked after the first meeting.

“Do you still remember when I came for the first time in the spring to one of Mark Finley’s presentations?” Tony asked.

“Sure, I even remember that he spoke on the subject of health.”

Tony continued: “A s he was speaking about smoking, he paraphrased the text in Philippians, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,’ except I can’t stop smoking. It really hit me, because I was still smoking a pack a day.

“I came home that evening, read that verse again, and asked myself some very hard questions, namely, how can I preach the power of God to change lives and smoke at the same time? I went to bed and have never touched a cigarette since. I’m a free man.”

Deeply moved, I whispered, “You mean God used that one sermon to help you give up a harmful habit?”

Tony nodded. “And it wasn’t even that hard,” he stated matter-of-factly. He was there again the following evening and came out with a radiant look on his face. “I can’t argue with this presentation,” he said. “It’s all biblical and very clear.” This became his standard response.

Silent Witnesses

During the first few nights of our meetings Tony’s wife, Yolanda, was on duty at a local nursing home. But once she started attending meetings, there was no stopping her, either.

The Budziks always had many questions and asked for extra literature. Not knowing if it was the right thing to do, I gave them the book Seventh-day Adventists Believe, on our 27 fundamental beliefs. A few days later Tony not only had read it, but had passed it on to an Anglican minister.

A steady stream of books followed. Tony would read them and give them away to anyone who dared to challenge him on his new practice of Sabbathkeeping. The Almost Forgotten Day, by Mark Finley, was, and still is, his favorite.

Prior to one meeting before the end of the series Tony approached me and, with a note of triumph in his voice, declared, “We would like to be baptized and join your church.”

During the lectures Tony and Yolanda would sit next to another Catholic couple, the Mercures, who were bringing their three children to the meetings. Every time Pastor Doug would mention something about Catholic theology, history, or the Papacy, I could see Tony nodding his head in agreement, and then, turning to the other couple, he would make a comment or two of confirmation.

A fter each meeting, as Real Mercure asked questions about his church, Tony was able to explain and argue the Adventist position.

He’s doing my job, I thought to myself.
He was certainly a more convincing and credible witness than I.

On a subsequent visit Tony confided to me, “You didn’t know about this, Slawek, but when you came to invite us to the meetings, we were negotiating with the Anglican Church for possible employment. We were told that there was an opening in a nearby parish that we could take over at any time, without any retraining on my part.”

Tony continued: “The meetings started on Saturday, October 4, and the deadline for signing the contract with the Anglicans was the following Monday. We had all the forms at home. All we had to do was sign and return those papers. The remuneration they offered was quite lucrative.”

“You obviously didn’t do it, Tony,” I whispered with sudden emotion. “A ny regrets?”

“Oh, no!” he exclaimed. “The truth is the most important thing.” Tony’s joy in his newfound faith was evident and infectious.

The Next Step

I admired Tony’s commitment, even though he was faced with losing his job and his livelihood. If the Budzik family continued their present course, they would soon have to live on his wife’s part-time job and his driving of a school bus a few hours a day.

Tony was right. Timing was crucial. A nd the One who controls it came through for him, proving once again that God not only desires our salvation, but is true to His promise: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13, NIV). To Him be the glory!

As we began the largest-ever baptismal class for our church, I had many opportunities to learn more about Tony and Yolanda. I discovered that Tony was a graduate of the prestigious Papal Theological Institute in Kraków, Poland (he studied on the campus at Tarnów), and held a master’s degree in social rehabilitation.

His wife, Yolanda, was a graduate of the University of Warsaw and has a master’s degree in social rehabilitation. Finally the all-important day arrived.

He and his family were ordered to vacate the church-owned house.

On November 15, 1997, the church witnessed a glorious baptism as 12 new members were added to the church. As I baptized Tony, I pronounced the baptismal words in two languages.

The Cost of Discipleship

During the next few days Tony wrote a letter of resignation from the priesthood and the Catholic Church and sent it to his superiors. He clearly explained the reasons for his faith and included many Bible references as evidence.

One of the bishops answered immediately, calling Tony on the phone and telling him bluntly that he considered him a heretic, that he had become an outcast to the whole Catholic community, and ordering him and his family to vacate the church-owned house they lived in immediately (in the middle of the harsh prairie winter). He was forbidden to have any contacts with his parishioners. And as far as the bishop was concerned, Tony had never even worked for the Catholic Church. Tony’s request for his employment record was denied. Not a single response was made to Tony’s biblical arguments.

Later another bishop tried a different tack. He explained to Tony that if he would withdraw his resignation, they would move him to Toronto to a big parish, where he would have a chance to be promoted to a bishopric.

This talk frustrated Tony, because the church leaders he talked to seemed totally oblivious to the true reasons for his decision to join God’s remnant church. His conscience and the clear, conclusive scriptural evidence never entered their discussions.

Still, Tony remained unwavering in his convictions. He found some allies among his former parishioners who would not permit the family with two small children to suffer any unnecessary hardships. Quoting a local ordinance, they insisted that Tony and Yolanda be given 30 days to vacate the premises.

God’s Amazing Providence

Both Tony and I were born and raised in Poland. We studied theology and became pastors. We both lived and worked in other countries before coming to Canada in the same year—1989. At one point we both lived in southern Ontario, an hour’s drive from each other. Then God brought us to Brandon, Manitoba. Our assignment: to revive our respective churches.

Now we are brothers, not just because of the Polish blood that runs in our veins, but also because of the faith we have in Jesus Christ and our desire to share His word with others.

We’re also committed to God’s truth, and always want to be “men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall” (Ellen White, Education, p. 57).

Epilogue: In May 1998 Tony Budzik became an associate pastor of the Henderson Highway Seventh-day Adventist Church in Winnipeg. Next year he’ll attend the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Slawomir Malarek is a district pastor in Brandon, Manitoba. He and his wife, Brigitta, have three children: Michael, Daniel, and Kristina.
Passive Observer? Or Active Participant?

When I first read about Viagra, I thought, Anyone who uses the potency pill certainly deserves its possible dangerous side effects. Then I couldn’t help wondering why an “old-timer” like me (age 72) might not want to risk an early death in order to bring back some of the physical capabilities of younger years. Is it wrong to try to revive nature after the processes of time have taken their toll?

There is no “one size fits all” answer to your question. Impotency is inevitable for any man who lives long enough. On the other hand, it is not always the result of age. In some instances other factors (i.e., disease, accidents, emotional stress, etc.) play a part as well. The situation is further complicated by the fact that combinations of these causes (plus others) may be responsible. Furthermore, even when age or the normal erosion of physical powers is the only factor, impotency occurs for some much earlier than for others.

Given the wide spectrum of possibilities for its presence, it is impossible to generalize or, to put it the other way, narrowly decide regarding the reversal of impotency via Viagra or any other product. But as shown in the case of Abraham and Sarah’s parentage of Isaac (Gen. 21:1-7), not all arbitrary manipulations of nature are evil.

Is it a sin to restore lost powers that can be legitimately employed in bringing pleasure to older individuals? I think not. Doing so by the method you are contemplating, however, must be considered in the light of the medical concerns to which you alluded. A’s important as sex is to the marital union, structuring for this capability at the high risk of injury (at any age) is probably not a good decision. If your physician advises against this course, and if there are no better options, you will be wise to adjust to “what is” rather than to risk sickness or early demise hoping to regain “what used to be.”

On a recent Friday afternoon a storm (possibly a tornado) hit our area with the result that hundreds of large trees were broken off or uprooted. Volunteer help came not only from nearby neighbors but from all over the county to cut up and clear away the fallen trees.

My property had no damage to speak of. But I have thought of the example of the ox in the ditch on Sabbath. We were very happy for the crews who worked day and night to restore our electric power. Would our witness as Seventh-day Adventists be of greater value by refusing to allow the volunteers to work on our property on the Sabbath? Or should we appreciate the kind actions and say nothing?

The wiser of these choices would be to allow the volunteers to perform the good deeds they came to accomplish.

Consider: 1. These individuals were not working for profit or seeking to foster business ends—they were giving time and energy in a selfless attempt to do good.

2. While fallen trees were not “suffering oxen,” their interruption of electrical services, etc., posed serious problems in many homes, not to mention hospitals, clinics, etc. To rebuff the kindness of such thoughtful and willing neighbors would be a serious insult. Such unnecessary rigidity leaves the impression that the word “peculiar,” as applied to Seventh-day Adventists, is quite different from what is meant in 1 Peter 2:9.

May I suggest, however, that the most appropriate course you and the other members could have followed would have been to go out and assist these good Samaritans in their attempts to remove these obstacles that endangered human or animal welfare. That move, from passive to active righteousness, would have provided the closest parallel to Christ’s response in Luke 14:1-6 and given a memorable testimony regarding our church and our God.

Calvin B. Rock is a general vice president of the General Conference. He holds doctoral degrees in ministry and Christian ethics.
How real will it be?

WILL THE NEW WORLD BE a material place like the present one or a “spiritual” realm, radically different from this world? Will the redeemed engage in the kind of activities we know today, or will they spend eternity in everlasting contemplation and meditation? This article focuses on the actual environment and lifestyle of the redeemed.1

The chief biblical passages that speak of life in the new earth (Isa. 65:17-25; 66:22-23; Rev. 21:1-22:5) offer us only glimpses of what life will really be like there. Thus any attempt to characterize the life, conditions, and pursuits of the world to come must be seen as very limited and imperfect efforts to describe a reality that “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (1 Cor. 2:9).*

Renewal of This Earth

To appreciate the biblical glimpses about life in the world to come, it’s important to remember first of all that in the Bible the eternal habitation of the redeemed is located right here on this earth, and not somewhere up “in heaven.” Both the Old Testament and the New speak of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1) as being not a different world somewhere off in space, but the present heaven and earth renewed and transformed to their original perfection.

The biblical vision of the world to come is inspired by the peace and harmony that existed between Adam and the animals at Creation will be restored in the new earth, when “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them” (Isa. 11:6).

Similarly, the prosperity and abundance that prevailed at Creation will be restored on the new earth, where “the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” (Amos 9:13; cf. Isa. 4:2; 30:23-25; Joel 3:18; Zeph. 3:13). These descriptions convey the picture of a real and abundant “earthly” life in the new world. “The wilderness becomes a fruitful field” (Isa. 32:15), and “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb” (Isa. 11:6).

The New Testament presents essentially the same vision of the world to come. Peter speaks of this “earth and the works that are upon it” that will be purified by fire (2 Peter 3:10). The outcome will be “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (verse 13). Paul declares that the whole human and subhuman creation is eagerly longing to “be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19-21). John saw in vision “a new heaven and a new earth” that God will establish after purifying this present earth (Rev. 21:1-4).

Active Urban Life

Perhaps the most powerful image used in the New Testament to convey the sense of continuity between the present and the future world is the image of the Holy City.
Hebrews, for example, says that Abraham “looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). The experience of Abraham is typological for all believers, because, as the same author explains, “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come” (Heb. 13:14).

The New Testament closes with a most impressive description of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, into which are welcomed “only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27). It is doubtful that all the details of the city—the high walls, the 12 gates, the 12 foundations—are to be taken literally. Whatever their meaning might be, however, the vision of the Holy City conveys the image, not of a mystical, monastic life in a heavenly retreat, but of urban life of intense activity on this renewed earth.

Life in the Holy City will not be one of isolation and loneliness, but of communion, excitement, and action. The New Jerusalem will be a complex, cosmopolitan place where people of different races, cultures, and languages will live and work together in peace. Life will not be static and boring, but dynamic and creative.

“[In the New Jerusalem],” Shirley C. Guthrie writes, “there will be community without uniformity, individuality without irresponsibility. The problem of individual rights versus community welfare will be solved in such a way that community serves individual, and individual serves the community, in a commonwealth of free responsible beings united in love.”

The image of the redeemed living together in the City of God in interrelatedness and interdependence represents the fulfillment of the divine intent for creation and redemption. At Creation God willed that human beings would find their fulfillment, not by living alone, but in working together to subdue and have dominion over the earth. Through redemption Christ reconciles us to God and to fellow beings so that we can live in peace with all people.

**Urban Life Sanctioned by God**

The biblical vision of the Holy City in the new earth suggests that the structure of urban life is sanctioned by God. For many it is difficult to accept this view, because our present cities are hardly a reflection of the City of God. On the contrary, they are the places where crime, hate, hostility, and indifference toward God and fellow beings prevail.

The present state of urban life should not cause us to reject, in principle, urbanization as a sinful social structure. The fact that urban life will continue on the new earth tells us that it will be possible for people to live together in a complex urban system of interrelatedness and interdependence without giving rise to the social, economic, ecological, political, and racial problems we experience today.

Moreover, this vision of living together in the future City of God should challenge us as Christians not to abandon the cities en masse by fleeing to the country, but to work in and for the cities by offering our Christian influence and helping to solve the many complex problems.

**Activity and Creativity**

Life in the new earth will not be spent in idleness or passive meditation, but in productive activity and creativity. Those who think that the redeemed will live in the new world as glorified guests—fed, housed, and entertained by God—are totally misled. Isaiah writes: “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat” (Isa. 65:21, 22).

The biblical picture of tomorrow’s
world is one in which real people engage in productive activity and creativity. There will be no lack of time or resources to complete our projects. In the field of knowledge today we can only scratch the surface of any discipline in which we choose to specialize. The more we learn, the more we realize there is yet much to be learned.

In the new earth, however, there will be no limit to our growth in knowledge and grace. “Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquisition of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.”

Continuity With Present Culture

Life in the new earth will involve some continuity with what we may loosely term our present culture. This is suggested by the fact that God will purify this earth and resurrect our bodies, rather than creating a new planet with brand-new inhabitants.

Another significant indication of continuity is found in Revelation 21:24-26: “The kings of the earth shall bring their glory into [the city]...; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” This passage suggests, first of all, that the inhabitants of the new earth will include persons who have attained great prominence and power in this world: kings, presidents, scientists, and the like.

Second, the unique contributions that individuals or nations have made to the betterment of the present life will not be lost. They will continue to enrich the life of the new earth. This gives us reason to believe that the technological breakthroughs of our time will not be lost, but greatly enhanced, refined, and perfected. The God who affirms the goodness of the world He has made and who values our creative accomplishments will not simply write off all the creative work that men and women have produced, often at great personal sacrifice. It is comforting to think that the value of our creative work will extend beyond this present life to the new earth.

Absence of Evil and Fear

A most notable difference between our present life and that of the new earth will be the absence of all the things that now limit or harm our lives. There will be no more manifestation of evil, either within us or around us. It is hard to imagine what it will be like to live in the new world without the presence of hate, jealousy, fear, hostility, discrimination, deception, oppression, killing, cutthroat competition, political rivalries, arms races, economic recessions, racial tensions, starvation, disparity between the rich and the poor, or sickness and death.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). These bold strokes suggest far more than they actually indicate. They suggest that there will be no more incurable diseases, no more tragic accidents, no more crippled children, no more funeral services, no more permanent separations. They also suggest that we will be able to accomplish our God-inspired goals. In our present life, sickness or death often terminates the ambitious projects we are pursuing. In the new earth everyone will have unlimited time and resources to achieve the highest goals.

The absence of evil will be evident especially in the absence of fear, insecurity, and anxiety. Our present life is constantly exposed to dangers, uncertainties, and fears. We fear the loss of our job, the robbery of our home, the breakdown of our car, the unfaithfulness of our marital partner, the failure of our children at school or at work, the deterioration of our health, the rejection by our peers. In a word, we fear all the uncertainties of life. Such fears fill our lives with anxiety, thus contradicting God’s purpose for us and diminishing our human potential.

Scripture uses various images to reassure us that on the new earth there will be no fear or insecurity. It speaks of a city with permanent foundations built by God Himself (Heb. 11:10), and of “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).

The citizens of the new earth will
be responsible stewards of God's new creation. They will not spoil it again. A perfect ecological equilibrium will be preserved, which will guarantee the well-being of the human and subhuman creation.

The Presence of God

The most rewarding aspect of life on the new earth will be an unprecedented experience of the presence of God among His people. “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them” (Rev. 21:3). These familiar words are the central promise of God's covenant of grace (cf. Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10), which will be realized fully in the new earth.

God's presence in the new earth will be so real that “the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev. 21:23). Believers will enjoy on the new earth the blessed fellowship that Adam and Eve experienced each Sabbath when God came to visit them. The Fall interrupted this blessed fellowship, but the Sabbath remained to remind believers of its future restoration (Heb. 4:9). Our weekly celebration of the Sabbath nourishes our hope of the future fellowship with God in the new earth. That will be, as Augustine puts it, “the greatest of Sabbaths,” when “we shall rest and we shall see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise; this is what will be at the end without end.”

This glorious biblical vision of the world to come can fire our imagination, nourish our hope, and strengthen our faith while we live among the uncertainties and troubles of this present life. It can inspire us “to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world” (Titus 2:12) while we await the consummation of our blessed hope, the appearing of our Saviour to restore this world to its original perfection.

* Bible texts in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.

1 A companion article last week looked at what people will be like in the world to come, concluding that the redeemed will have a physical body like the present one, but without the liabilities of sin, sickness, and death. (See the cover story in the Nov. 5 Adventist Review.)


Samuele Bacchiocchi is a professor of theology at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Adventist Leaders Celebrate Church’s World Growth in Brazil

BY CARLOS MEDLEY, ADVENTIST REVIEW NEWS EDITOR

When more than 300 Adventist administrators, educators, pastors, and lay members from around the globe gathered for Annual Council in Foz do Iguacu, Brazil, September 29-October 6, they celebrated the church’s rapid growth and voted significant actions that will affect the church worldwide.

This year’s meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee was marked by important milestones for the church in South America. In Argentina church leaders celebrated the 100th anniversary of the start of the Adventist work in that country. It was in Brazil that the concept for the Adventist Church’s Global Mission thrust was born in 1986. This initiative seeks to establish a Seventh-day Adventist presence in every population group of 1 million or more around the world.

In the past 12 years, 2,204 congregations have been organized in previously unentered territories and the church’s membership has doubled, from 5 million to 10 million. Today more than 19,000 volunteers are working to plant new congregations.

In his keynote address GC president Robert S. Folkenberg appealed to church leaders to reaffirm their commitment in the family of God. He declared, “We are God’s children now. You and I are sons and daughters in God’s family. We are part of a spiritual family that includes the Godhead, angels, and the unfallen beings of worlds throughout the universe, as well as God’s people on earth in every age.”

“THe Family of God” was the theme of the week-long business session. Folkenberg characterized God’s family, the church, as having love for one another. “Love is the quintessential defining characteristic of God’s church,” he said. “Where we find a lack of love for one another in God’s church, to that degree we have failed. Where there is favoritism, jockeying for position, taking an unfair advantage, or a critical, fault-finding spirit, the church has failed to live up to its defining characteristic of love.”

Folkenberg also characterized the church by unity. “Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, so the members of God’s church are to be one,” he said. “Jesus spent the final precious moments of His life on earth praying that you and I and all His people would be united in Him.”

The GC president echoed the sentiments of evangelist Billy Graham, who once identified racism as the one sin he would eliminate if it were possible. “If I could pray one sin away within our worldwide church family, it would be the sin of racism,” Folkenberg said. “Where the racism in a society is mirrored in the church, the church has abandoned its spiritual unity and conformed to the prevailing culture.”

Folkenberg made it clear that the members of God’s family must be accountable to one another. “[T]he apostle] Paul makes it clear that we are indeed our brother’s keeper, our sister’s keeper, in the sense that we are to be willing to take responsibility for each other [Phil 2:4].”

“A authority in God’s family doesn’t operate on the same basis as does authority in worldly institutions or settings,” he said. “A authority in
**God’s church rests on a mutual willingness to be accountable to each other, to be willing to be self-sacrificing for the good of the whole body.**

Folkenberg also asserted that God’s family is defined by its mission to share the good news of Christ. “God has called each one of us individually to engage in mission,” he said. “The truth is that witnessing is absolutely vital to a growing relationship with Jesus, both individually and corporately.

“From its beginning, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had a zeal to share Jesus and His special truths for these last days with the world. We believe that God has given us a unique message to give before He comes, a message that no other church or group has been given to share.”

**Diverse Family**

Echoing the theme of “The Family of God,” GC secretary G. Ralph Thompson praised the church for its diversity. “We must never forget that the Seventh-day Adventist family is a multinational, multiracial, multilingual, multicultural family made up of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

“We are [also] made up of all age groups,” he added. “What appeals to one generation does not necessarily appeal to the other. We must not let our age differences cause a split in our churches and divide us.”

Despite these concerns, Thompson said that God has blessed the church with amazing growth. As of June 30, 1998, world membership reached 9,905,971, an increase of 426,504, or 4.5 percent, over the same period last year. He noted that statistical projections indicated that membership reached 10 million by October.

“For this we praise the Lord,” Thompson declared. “We continue to make the plea, however, to all of us administrators, pastors, and church members to close the back door of our churches so that when new converts come in among us, they will find the kind of atmosphere that will help them to stay, to put their roots down, and to become solid, lasting members of our churches.”

Thompson also reported that as of December 31, 1997, the church had 1,183 current regular missionaries.

**Good News**

The Annual Council is where church leaders vote policy items and statements on social issues (see p. 20), hear reports, elect personnel, and approve the church’s world budget.

GC treasurer Robert Rawson brought good news to the committee, saying that the GC finances are strong. In 1998 the treasury officials recovered $17 million blocked in Brazil. The money was used to strengthen GC finances and distributed to a variety of long-term projects that the GC had previously committed itself to.

The treasurer also reported a $6.2 million increase in tithe received for the first eight months of 1998 ($59,367,612, as compared to the same period last year ($53,123,187). However, unrestricted nontithe funds decreased by $3 million, from $13,683,322 in the first eight months of 1997 to $10,669,956 for the same period this year. Undertreasurer Martin Ytreberg pointed out that the decrease resulted from a fluctuation of currencies and an increase in giving of restricted funds.

As of August 31 the GC showed an adjusted operating gain of more than $3.8 million, representing a $2.1 million increase over the same period last year. The increase is attributed partly to the GC’s in-house operating expenses running $1.2 million under budget. Treasurers expect in-house operations to be approximately $1.5 million under budget by December 31.

The operating gain is significant because investment income totaled a mere $322,722 (as of August 31), down from nearly $2.7 million last year.

After receiving the treasurer’s report, the committee approved a $108.7 million world budget for 1999. The budget is down considerably (from 1998’s $125.7 million budget) because of accounting changes. The largest factor in the decrease is that...
Ingathering funds will not flow through the GC (see “New Ingathering System” on page 22).

Theological Education. In a move that could bring major changes to the future of graduate-level theological education worldwide, the GC Committee voted to establish a new international board to oversee the development and implementation of unified standards, procedures, and policies for the education of ministers, Bible teachers, chaplains, and seminary professors.

The formation of the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) seeks to answer the critical question of who should determine the direction of ministerial and theological education for future pastors and teachers. The IBMTE will work in conjunction with boards of ministerial theological education within the church’s 12 world divisions to develop theological curricula at designated seminaries and universities within their territories. The plan calls for professors who desire to teach in these programs to undergo a denominational endorsement process. Such endorsement may be valid up to five years.

The plan also calls for hiring organizations, such as conferences and schools, to employ ministers and Bible teachers who have received the endorsed training. GC education director Humberto Rasi describes the plan as a process for the church to endorse new ministers and teachers professionally. “Other professions have their standard requirements,” he says. “This will be similar to certification procedures in other professional fields.”

AC Votes Statements on Cloning and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

BY RAY DABROWSKI, GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNICATION DIRECTOR

In separate statements the General Conference Executive Committee voiced an Adventist response to two important issues—the challenge of sexually transmitted diseases and human cloning.

The first document, “Statement on Meeting the Challenges of Sexually Transmitted Diseases,” identifies the “grave ethical, medical, and social problems resulting from increasing sexual permissiveness and associated promiscuity.” While noting advances in treatment, education, and research, the statement notes the need for continuing effort in all areas, especially the moral and spiritual aspects.

The paper also notes that “abstinence from extramarital sex promotes sexual and emotional health” and concludes with an appeal that challenges the church to develop, “without delay, a comprehensive strategy of education and prevention.”

According to Dr. A. R. Handysides, General Conference health and temperance director, “the statement deals with our remedial attitude to those who are either in the church or mainly outside the church and who do not live according to biblical instruction. It provides advice to health practitioners, hospitals, and other entities, and puts up front what Seventh-day Adventists have to say on this subject. It will be also beneficial to pastors and those who are dealing with nonchurch organizations that may be asking us what is our position regarding this matter.”

The document “Statement on Ethical Considerations Regarding Human Cloning” generated a reaction from some physicians at the council. The paper sets out concerns over the possible cloning of human beings. With future research prospects “comes the Christian responsibility to address profound ethical issues associated with human cloning,” the paper states.

While admitting that “there may be future situations in which human cloning could be considered beneficial and morally acceptable,” the document also raises concerns over risks and misuses of human cloning. “But warnings don’t do justice to the issue,” said Dr. Patrick Guenin, a physician from France.

Uncomfortable with the statement’s endorsement of “making cloning possible in the future,” Guenin told the Review, “Such a statement could be confusing. In Europe, Canada, and other parts of the world, the medical, scientific, political, and religious groups have all said a definitive no to such a possibility.”

Handysides noted, “This statement is in line with many international and political views on the subject,” and for the church it is “more of a red flag, and it may help us to digest what we read and what we see evolving in the world around us.”

In recent years the church has become known for addressing issues that drive the public agenda. The current decisions are a good example of the church’s interest in providing guidance to its members.

Calvin Rock, a General Conference vice president and Review columnist, noted, “While not addressing the recognized fundamentals of faith, such statements are very useful in our decision-making. They do not answer all the questions regarding the lifestyle matters they treat, but they provide valuable assistance in clarifying disturbing elements of ethical issues and encouraging us to balance individually responsible activity.”
action is needed to guard against theological fracture. However, some committee members, such as Mack Tennyson, of South Carolina, questioned why the new board was needed. “We have union presidents who serve as board chairs of our colleges. Are we saying [through the document] that they are unable to deal with the problems being addressed here?”

Folkenberg said the new plan would foment dialogue between educators and those who employ ministers.

**Total Commitment.** A another significant action was the “Total Commitment to God” document, which was placed in policy. Voted as guidelines in 1996, the document seeks to articulate principles that illustrate how a congregation, pastor, educational or health institution, or conference entity can maintain a life and ministry that is totally committed to Christ. One of the more controversial features of the plan calls for the development of spiritual assessment programs for churches, educational institutions, and other church entities.

Some committee members voiced concern over the statement, believing that the document sets up a mechanism whereby the church judges the spirituality of its employees and members. “Are we to evaluate spirituality?” asked Selma Chaij, from Maryland. “I would dread to think that I’m being judged by another human being.”

However, Mario Veloso, an associate GC secretary, commented, “At this point we’re just putting into writing what we’ve been thinking all the time. This is calling for institutions to act in harmony with the church. This document is telling institutions to follow the principles of the church.”

Lowell Cooper, a GC vice president, said, “This document I see as a statement of philosophy. It has a role other than policy. This describes character, not process. There should be an [additional] statement describing the document and how it is used. I’m concerned that it may be confused with simply policy.”

GC president Robert S. Folkenberg reassured the delegates, saying, “This document in no way seeks to evaluate personal spirituality. What it does do is to get people asking, ‘What is our plan?’”

**Church Manual Changes?** A new streamlined Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual may be on the horizon in the next few years. The GC Committee authorized the Church Manual Committee to present a proposal for changes to the book’s format to the 1999 Annual Council. If passed, the changes would be recommended to the 2000 General Conference session in Toronto.

The goal of the revision is to distinguish those essential characteristics of an Adventist church from those elements that may be subject to adaptations. One possible change could be putting the adaptable elements (such as procedures for departments and auxiliaries) in a separate handbook. This would allow for such procedures to be updated more frequently than the five-year period that it takes to change the manual.

“We’re really talking about saving the relevancy of the Church Manual for those who find it irrelevant,” says Folkenberg. “There are simply things [in the manual] that do not apply today. They tend to contribute to lowering the respect for the essential items.”

**NGEN Ingathering System.** When your local congregation launches next year’s Ingathering campaign, a totally different system will track the gathering and distribution of funds, according to GC officials.

Though you may not notice any difference at the local church level, there will be significant changes in the management and disbursal of funds as a result of the newly voted procedures. Under the new system the General Conference will no longer be involved in the disbursal of funds.

Currently the North American, Trans-European, and Euro-Africa divisions (donor divisions) are running...
Kidnapped!

At the Annual Council Review editor William Johnsson talked with Pastor Paul Ratsara, president of the West Congo Union Mission. Ratsara, a Madagascan, is in his fourth year of administration of this war-torn region, formerly known as Zaire.

What were conditions like when you came to Kinshasa [capital of Zaire] four years ago?
Very dangerous. If the soldiers [of former president Mobutu] saw you carrying a bag or a case, they would stop you and say, “Maybe you have a dangerous weapon there. Let me see.” They would take everything and say, “Don’t turn back; just go.” And you didn’t turn back, or they might kill you.

Have any of our people been harmed?
In June 1996 Pastor Napita, secretary of the union, was waylaid by bandits when he went to the market. He resisted them, and they shot him three times. He is now confined to a wheelchair.

How about you?
Three days after Pastor Napita was shot, I walked across the main road in Kinshasa to visit a travel agency. As I reached the other side, a man came up to me and asked, “Who are you?” I didn’t stop walking, but the man kept alongside me. There was a car parked by the side of the road, and he insisted that I get in. I was going to resist; then I saw he had a gun. I remembered what happened to Pastor Napita and got in the car.

What happened next?
There were three other men in the car. They took everything I had and put me in the back, between the man with the gun and another man. The driver and chief of the bandits sat in the front seat.

What did the bandits plan to do?
They said they would drive to a quiet place on the banks of the Congo River, kill me, and dump my body in the river. I realized my wife and three children would never know what happened to me.

And what did you do?
I felt scared when they made me get in the car. Then I began to pray, and suddenly I felt the peace of God come into my heart. It seemed as if Jesus was right next to me, and I said to Him, “If You want me to die, I am in Your hands. But if You want me to live, please rescue me.”

God gave me a cool head, and I began to talk to the bandits. “I am a missionary from Madagascar,” I said. “I have come here to serve God and humanity, including you.”

How did the bandits react?
They didn’t want to listen. I kept talking normally, explaining my activities, talking about God.

Then I noticed that the car was slowing down. The bandits were arguing in their own dialect, but I could tell that even though three of them were wanting to go on, the chief wanted them to stop. Then he spoke in French: “No, we aren’t going to take this man. He is a man of God. Let him go. We aren’t going to keep him.”

He turned to me and said, “Pastor, we are releasing you. You may go.”

How did you get home?
We were far from any transport. I was concerned that I might meet up with another gang of bandits, so I said to the bandit chief, “Can you give me a ride back?”

They drove me back close to the city and gave me back my money and documents—everything. As I got out of the car, the chief said, “OK, now we are friends.”

“Yes, we are friends. Thank you and God bless you.”

How did this wonderful escape affect you?
The church members were amazed that I wasn’t killed. I reflected a lot on what had happened, and developed a philosophy of life drawn from the Scriptures. I especially like what Paul says in Acts 20:24, that his life is no longer dear to him and that he is ready to die.

So I have learned that in order to live, you have to be ready to die. In order to be free, you have to be free from the fear of death. When you no longer hold your life dear, you are free.

My prayer every day is to be in tune with God every moment, to know that the angels are with me. It’s still dangerous here, so I pray all the while—as I drive, while the children are away at school, at night, because the bandits may come then.

Postscript: When the civil war erupted in 1997, the Ratsara family was evacuated to Brazzaville. After harrowing experiences they returned to their home in Kinshasa to find it totally looted. During the recent strife they had to flee their home again. Currently they are in Abidjan and plan to return to the Congo.
Other Annual Council Actions

In other business the General Conference Executive Committee:

- Established a goal of $4,992,000 for the 2000 General Conference session offering. The money raised will be used to fund 1,040 outreach projects in the 10/40 window. The Adventist Church’s 12 world divisions are expected to raise $3.5 million, and special donations will cover the balance.

  The 10/40 window is a large region in the Eastern Hemisphere that extends from northern Africa in the west to China in the east. The largely Muslim area is the most difficult in the world for Christian outreach.

- Voted to authorize an exemption in the 25 percent laity quota in the selection of delegates to the 2000 General Conference session by General Conference and division institutions.

- Restructured the Croatian-Slovenian Conference into the Croatian Conference and the Slovenian Conference, effective January 1, 1999. Under the reorganization the new Adriatic Union Conference will also be established. The union comprises the Albanian Mission and Croatian and Slovenian conferences.

- Voted a recommendation that would change the name of the General Conference Health and Temperance Department to the GC Health Ministries Department. The name change will not be final until it is voted at the 2000 General Conference session in Toronto, Ontario.

- Voted to continue the practice of holding two Annual Councils outside of North America during the 2000-2005 quinquennium. This vote rescinds the 1998 Spring Meeting action to discontinue the process.

- Elected Lowell Cooper, an associate General Conference secretary, as a GC general vice president. Cooper fills a newly created position in which he will work with several GC institutions.

- Elected Donald Sahly, an associate director of the General Conference Education Department, as an associate secretary, replacing Cooper.

- Elected Garland Dulan, chair of the Anthropology and Sociology Department at La Sierra University, in Riverside, California, as an associate director of the General Conference Education Department, replacing Donald Sahly.

- Elected Robert Lemon, an associate GC treasurer, to be GC undertreasurer. Lemon replaces Martin Ytreberg, who recently became vice president of Adventist Risk Management.

- Elected Steven Rose, Southern Asia-Pacific Division treasurer, as an associate GC treasurer, replacing Robert Lemon.

- Elected Duane Rollins, Guam-Micronesia Mission treasurer, as Southern Asia-Pacific Division treasurer, replacing Steven Rose.

- Elected Bert Haloviak, an assistant director of the General Conference Archives and Statistics Department, as department director. Haloviak replaces Bill Cash, who resigned in July.

- Elected Sharon Cress, an assistant director of the General Conference M inisterial A ssociation and coordinator of Shepherdess International, as an associate director of the M inisterial A ssociation.

- Elected Peter Prime, Caribbean Union Conference president, as an associate secretary of the General Conference M inisterial A ssociation.

  Prime replaces Walter Pearson, who became director/speaker of the Breath of Life television ministry.

TRUE COLORS: During the South American Division report officers from the local fields donned traditional dress.

SISTER PREACHER: Ariana Ellen G. di Araujo, 14, presented a sermon during the Global Mission program.

TRADITIONAL SOUNDS: An ensemble from Peru performed traditional hymns.
On the Road to Zimbabwe

The World Council of Churches is about to hold its eighth assembly in Harare. What are the challenges facing it? What is its future?

By Denis Fortin

The World Council of Churches (WCC) will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its founding when it holds its eighth assembly December 3-14 on the campus of the University of Zimbabwe in Harare, under the theme “Turn to God—Rejoice in Hope.”

Commenting on the theme of the assembly and the celebrations leading up to it, WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser expressed the hope that member churches all over the world would “take the time to celebrate the rich ecumenical heritage of these 50 years, to assess where, in the present context, they are called to turn to God anew, and to commit themselves, in hope, to the ecumenical vision which God sets before us.”

Indeed the time has come to reassess the ecumenical movement. As approximately 330 member churches prepare for the Harare meeting, the world body finds itself grappling with issues needing serious consideration, among them the following:

1. An Acute Financial Crisis

In a report to the central committee in September 1996, Raiser underlined the serious financial crisis that has troubled the council since the last assembly. With only 50 percent of the member churches contributing to the financial support of the organization in 1995, and with the downward trend in currency exchange rates, the council has had to face several budgetary and staff reductions at its headquarters in Geneva.

Raiser believes the time has come for churches to assume greater financial responsibility. Measures taken to solidify finances through investments and more diversified income generation were not enough, Raiser said. The council, in addition, will need to come to grips with the fact “that almost 50 percent of the member churches do not contribute anything to the financial resources of the council, while many of them expect to receive financial assistance.” Membership contributions for the financial support of the organization “can no longer be treated as optional and voluntary,” Raiser said.

In view of these financial constraints, what hope can there be for the future of the WCC? Raiser’s answer essentially says that the council needs to reexamine its priorities.

Along the same line, Birgitta Rantakari, the moderator of the WCC’s finance committee, also told the central committee in September 1997 that the “WCC must adjust its life and work to new financial realities.” After the assembly in Harare, she said, “business as usual will not be an option.”

2. Eastern Orthodox Complaints

As difficult as the financial situation may be for the WCC, an even more serious crisis challenges its very raison d’être. Since the last assembly in Canberra in 1991, the Eastern Orthodox churches have expressed a growing resentment against ecumenism in general and the WCC in particular. This has already resulted in the withdrawal of the Georgian Orthodox Church from the WCC (1997). And earlier this year the Bulgarian Orthodox Church announced its intention to withdraw from the council. There is a fear that other Orthodox churches will do the same.
Orthodox churches feel the WCC is increasingly threatened by institutional paralysis—too much structure, too many programs, and overinstitutionalism.

But the Orthodox churches’ major contention with the WCC is that since they are a minority group within the council, their voice is not heard. There is a perception that the fellowship between Orthodox and Protestants in the council is weakening, and that the Orthodox churches are finding it more difficult to make a contribution to the council’s agenda, which deals too much, they believe, with Western Protestant concerns and ethos.

This “fact is not due so much to Protestant intention to dominate the council, but rather to Orthodox reluctance to become fully involved in the total life and work of the council and to identify with it.” That’s the view of Aram I, catholicos of the See of Cilicia in Lebanon (of the Armenian Orthodox Church) and moderator of the WCC’s central committee. His recommendation to his people is that Orthodox churches should stop standing back from the WCC and really get involved in all its aspects.

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However, many Orthodox leaders feel that the goal of consensus, long pursued by the ecumenical movement, has failed. According to them, it hasn’t brought about any change in the theological teachings and doctrinal positions of the member churches of the council.

3. Padare

One other source of concern for Orthodox churches is the plan for a special new feature at the Harare assembly known as the “padare.” Padare is an African word meaning “meeting place” and is a Zimbabwean tradition of people coming together to receive and share wisdom, especially concerning community problems.

Inspired by this tradition, the WCC has invited churches, ecumenical groups, and other organizations to share their experience and wisdom with participants in an international, ecumenical version of padare. Since representatives of ecumenical organizations and of churches that are not WCC members will be present at the assembly, the padare is intended to serve as a meeting place to break down the barriers between all these groups and to provide the atmosphere of an authentic gathering of churches to mark this fiftieth anniversary.

What disturbs the Orthodox churches is the accreditation by the WCC of certain groups to participate in this padare. One of these that has already drawn criticism is the local group Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe.

Given these concerns, some Orthodox leaders have called on Orthodox churches to indicate their discontent with various developments in the WCC by not participating in ecumenical worships and prayers, and by boycotting most voting during the plenary sessions at the assembly in Harare.

In the past few months Raiser has tried to defuse the mounting tensions among the Eastern Orthodox churches, but the problems are too deep to expect a quick solution. Many observers think that if the Orthodox churches withdraw from the council, this could mean the end of the organization. Without the Eastern Orthodox presence the council would essentially become a gathering of Protestant churches.

Common Understanding and Vision

Since 1989 a process of study and consultation toward a new statement on a common understanding and vision of the council has been in the making. Some believe that this process, with the document it has produced, offers hope and will give member churches a greater sense of ecumenical purpose. Given the financial crisis and the discontent of the Orthodox churches, this study process comes at a good time, and the central committee has considered plans for sweeping organizational changes designed to preserve the integrity and refocus the purpose of the organization.

Seen by some as a new “ecumenical charter,” the working document Towards a Common Understanding and Vision (CUV) of the World Council of Churches is the end result of an intensive process of consultation among the member churches of the council. This document was sent to all member churches after it was adopted by the central committee.
The Aventist Church will face a renewed call to get involved.

How Close Are We to Unity?

With this new vision in mind, one proposal is the organization of an “ecumenical forum” between the WCC and other ecumenical partners. This forum is intended to strengthen the WCC’s relationship with churches that are not members of the council, namely, the Roman Catholic Church and many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The forum is not intended to replace the WCC, but to encourage a larger participation in the ecumenical dialogue of all Christian churches. If this forum is created, and if other Evangelical and Pentecostal churches join it, the Seventh-day Aventist Church would face a renewed call to get involved in ecumenical dialogue at this international level.

The response of the Roman Catholic Church toward this new ecumenical charter suggests that the Catholic ecumenical understanding and commitment is “in general coherent with the present affirmations of the WCC member churches and of the WCC” as outlined in the CUV document. However, when asked if the Roman Catholic Church could in the future become a member of the WCC, Monsignor John Mutiso-Mbinda, a senior official of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said that it was “still very difficult for the Roman Catholic Church to consider becoming a member of the World Council of Churches.” The Roman Catholic Church remains noncommittal.

If this is so, what are the prospects for the success of this new ecumenical forum? Will it really make a difference in ecumenical dialogue without the participation of the Roman Catholic Church? Likely not.

The CUV document is also intended to serve as a clear statement of areas of agreement between the WCC member churches and to inspire them to recommit themselves to the ecumenical movement, with the hope that this recommitment could help delinquent member churches decide to give their active financial support to the troubled organization.

As this intensive study process, undertaken over the past eight years, comes to a close in Harare, the assembly will conclude in a service of thanksgiving, celebration, and recommitment, with radio and television broadcasts carrying the solemn and historic event to member churches worldwide. Congregations and parishes around the world are also being encouraged to observe Sunday, December 13, as a special day of recommitment to the ecumenical movement.


1 For those who want to follow the coming events at the Harare assembly, I recommend the official website of the World Council of Churches at http://www.wcc-coe.org. This site also makes available to anyone free of charge a daily International Ecumenical News Highlight through electronic mail. The Aventist Review will cover and report on the eighth assembly.

Denis Fortin is associate professor of theology at the Seventh-day Aventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He teaches a course in ecumenical trends.
I’ve always had difficulty understanding the extermination of the Canaanites by the Israelites under God’s orders. Can this type of war be justified?

This is a difficult question, and there is no quick answer. I can only outline a few elements that should be taken into consideration. We cannot concentrate on a few verses that provide a biblical response; we have to take into account the Scriptures’ teachings concerning God, evil, human society, and war and also reject simplistic solutions (e.g., the Old Testament view of God being different from the one in the New Testament; the biblical writer’s use of pagan notions, etc.). I will limit my comments to three important arguments.

1. Time Frame: The biblical text indicates that the extermination of the Canaanites was basically limited to a period of conquest. Often God reminded the Israelites of this responsibility, introducing His intentions by saying, “When you cross the Jordan into Canaan . . .” (Num. 33:51, NIV); “When the Lord . . . brings you into the land you are entering to possess . . .” (Deut. 7:1, NIV; cf. Deut. 12:1; 18:9). The Lord didn’t expect this to be a permanent characteristic of Israelite warfare. Once the conquest was over, the Israelites were only to be involved in self-defense. There is no biblical support for the practice of “holy war.”

2. Morally Justifiable Warfare: Those who go to war intend to win at any cost, and this by itself makes the extermination of the enemy an intrinsic part of warfare. This was clearly the case in the ancient Near East.

Interestingly, the Old Testament makes a special effort to demonstrate that God’s command to destroy the Canaanites was not arbitrary or controlled by expansionistic interests. God Himself provided the reason: they were sacrificing their children to their gods, involved in sorcery and witchcraft, and consulting the spirits of the dead (Deut. 18:10-12). Their moral and religious corruption had reached an intolerable level.

Hundreds of years before, the Lord had said to Abram: “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (Gen. 15:16, NIV). By the time of the conquest the sins of the A morites had reached “its full measure,” indicating that God does pass judgment on the nations and their commitment to moral values and proper religious practices (cf. Gen. 18:20-33). God was executing judgment against sin and impenitent sinners.

A second reason for the extermination of Israel’s enemies is that if they remained in the land, they would have become instruments of corruption for His people (Deut. 7:4). A holy people required a holy place to live. War was God’s attempt to organize a new order based on His principles of justice and love, a land in which peace and security would prevail. Any thing that could threaten the divine intention was to be removed.

3. The Israelites as God’s Assistants: That God enlisted the Israelites as His instruments in this type of war raises moral and ethical concerns. Had God used the forces of nature, very few would feel that uncomfortable. But He used war. War is an unavoidable characteristic of a fallen, sinful world. By transforming Israel into a nation with political identity and by declaring Himself to be its king, God and His people were going to be involved in warfare. Their enemies would be other nations that were unwilling to recognize God’s moral claim on them and would attempt to exterminate His people. Through the conquest of the land, God trained His people for war in order for them to cooperate with His theocracy in the fulfillment of His divine intentions for them and for the world (Judges 3:1, 2).

We may not completely understand this topic, but there is one thing we know, namely, that God is loving, kind, and just. This biblical picture of God is essential in the discussion of a subject like this one. He is the one who allowed His Son to die in our place, the one who, in an act of love and justice, will exterminate sin and impenitent sinners from our planet in order to create a peaceful and eternal kingdom.

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

Regular Missionary Service

The following persons have left their homes to work in other countries or to return to the missionary service. Please remember them in your prayers.

Richard John Affolter, Jr., to serve as director, Adventist Health Center, Moscow, Russia, and Bette Marie Affolter, of Gentry, Arkansas, left July 28, 1998.


Richard Huei-Ying Liu, to serve as secretary, Northern Asia-Pacific Division, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, and Hanna Mei-Shan Liu, of Grand Terrace, California, left June 16, 1998.

Adventist Volunteer Service

The following persons have left their homes to work in other countries or to return to the missionary service. Please remember them in your prayers.

John Lobitana Arrogante, to serve as relief optometrist, Swaziland Eye Services, Manzini, Swaziland, Southern Africa, and Minerva M indoro A rogante, of Taipei, Taiwan, left July 12, 1998.

Thomas Morton Ashlock, to serve as interim president, Bangladesh Union Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Betty C lydene A shlock, of Collegeville, Minnesota, left June 18, 1998.

Jerrell Newton Fink, to serve as development consultant, Central Philippine Adventist College, Bacolod City, Philippines, of Los Angeles, California, left March 31, 1998.

Donald Edward Casebolt, to serve as physician/family practice, Seventh-day Adventist Hospital Ile-Ife, Nigeria, West Africa, of Walker, Minnesota, left July 12, 1998.

Robert Lee Darby, to serve as relief dentist, West Indies, of Kansas City, Missouri, left June 15, 1998.

Jazlin V. Ebenezer, to serve as education instructor, Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College, Gazipur, Bangladesh, of Manitoba, Canada, left June 10, 1998.

Esther Louise Farley, to serve as financial director/accountant, ADRA/Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, of Aiea, Hawaii, left Los Angeles, California, left June 15, 1998.

Theodore Smithwick Fiala, to serve as relief dentist, St. Kitts Dental Clinic, Basseterre, St. Kitts, West Indies, of June 10, 1998.
Mrs. Fey attended church every Sunday, rejoice in the fellowship of 200 other Chinese believers. Then she started listening to the Voice of Hope on Adventist World Radio and began to learn about the seventh-day Sabbath.

One day she was reading her Bible while waiting at a bus stop for a bus to another city. “Mr. Wong,” an elder from an Adventist congregation in that other city, was also waiting for the bus. He observed Mrs. Fey’s concentration—it was unusual to see someone reading the Bible in public. So he politely struck up a conversation. They got on the bus and kept talking; she was excited when he talked about the Sabbath. He invited her to attend the Adventist church in his city.

Then Mrs. Fey went back home, kept listening to AW R, and told her fellow church members about the Sabbath. Within a year all 200 members had become Sabbathkeeping Seventh-day Adventists. And a year later? The membership had doubled!

Mrs. Fey is an example of thousands of listeners to Adventist World Radio who don’t just listen to the broadcast—they tell other people about the radio programs; they share newfound faith and belief.

A nother such person was David, a student at a government nursing school in Irian Jaya and a faithful listener to AW R. He had also completed the Bible study course in Indonesian. Then one day his life changed dramatically: he gave the wrong medication to a drug addict in the hospital. The addict died, and David was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Stunned by the verdict, David knelt by his prison bed and prayed, “Lord of AW R, please help me! I didn’t mean to kill this person, and I know You didn’t intend for him to die. Please make it possible to have the sentence reduced.” It happened: the court reduced his time to 16 months. David prayed again; the court met again and reduced the sentence to eight months!

David was convinced that what he had learned through the AW R broadcasts and the Bible studies was the truth, and he didn’t waste any time telling others. During his eight-month stay in prison he prepared 22 other prisoners for baptism.

Yet another person who didn’t just listen was Bernard. A young Seventh-day Adventist whose home is the Ivory Coast, West Africa, Bernard listened, amazed, one day as a Christian friend said that the Adventist Church was a sect—because it didn’t have a radio program. So Bernard set out to explore the shortwave bands for an Adventist program, and he found one.

Excited with his discovery, he grabbed his shortwave radio, jumped on his bicycle, and raced into the village square to find his friend. There, by the palaver tree,* other people were standing around talking. Curious, they gathered around as Bernard played the radio for his friend. In that instant Bernard realized the power of radio and began using it as an evangelistic tool. At last count 12 villages had groups of Sabbathkeepers because of the Voice of Hope—shared enthusiastically by Bernard and his radio.

Please pray for AW R listeners worldwide who, convicted by the Holy Spirit, share their newfound faith.

*A palaver tree, or “talking tree,” is generally a large tree in the village square whose shade attracts people for sharing news and conversation. For Bernard, it became an “outdoor church.”

Andrea Steele is director of public relations and development for Adventist World Radio.
The Deep, Deep Love of God

By Stephen G. Dunbar

I gave the OK signal and started down. As I watched my gauge, the numbers clicked up—21 . . . 22 . . . 23 . . . 24 meters below the surface. It was time to level off.

As I was now submerged in electric blue waters, the cool air from my tank moved dryly past my throat and filled my lungs as all around me the marvels of the deep dazzled my eyes and excited my thoughts.

I'm always amazed at how very different the creatures of the sea are from terrestrial organisms, and this dive, just east of Great Keppel Island off the Queensland coast of Australia, would reveal God's imagination and creativity in ever more incredible ways. As always, each animal has its place, its niche, its part to play, in the brilliantly colored and intimately organized drama of the deep.

The excitement came swiftly as a green sea turtle rose up from somewhere below the visible edge of a coral head, its shape silhouetted against the dancing light of the faraway sun, its fins slowly pressing against the fluid medium with strength and confidence. Then, as mysteriously as it had appeared, it was gone.

All around me were evidences of the genius of God, the built-in adaptability of every creature after its kind (Gen. 1:21). God's love of beauty, creativity, and humor was expressed in colors, shapes, and oddities too imaginative for nature alone to have developed.

Catching my attention from a distance, a rock wall appeared alive with moving, crawling, darting organisms. Some, like the stationary gorgonian fan (a type of soft coral) extended small feeding nets, called polyps, that filter even smaller plants and animals from the surrounding waters. Others, like the three-centimeter polyclad flatworm, crawled slowly, fearlessly, over the rock and onto my finger with its ostentatious decoration warning of its distastefulness to a potential predator.

Leaving the flatworm along with other oddly shaped, imaginatively colored, and curiously acting sea creatures such as the sea cucumber, nudibranch, and shrimp neighbors, I made my way toward a field of large sea anemones. Even from far away I could see small orange fish bouncing around in this carpet of stinging tentacles. These anemone fish (more commonly called clown fish) had built up resistance to the stinging cells of the anemones and made their homes among the anemones' protective arms (scientists still do not fully understand how they do this).

In return for protection the anemones received small scraps and bits of meals that the clown fish had eaten nearby. It was truly a sharing relationship. However, the relationship is even more intimate when it comes to the microscopic plants that live inside the tentacles of the anemone itself. Not only do these algae produce the red, blue, and brown hues of the tentacles that we can see, but in exchange for free lodging, these algae combine sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide to produce simple sugars that are paid to the anemone and used as food.

In Psalm 104:25-31 David marvels at how great and how vast the oceans are and how many living things exist below their surfaces. Yet all these creatures rely on God's mercy, on the Creator's love for His creation to give them their "meat in due season" and be "filled with good."

My dive into the deep was ending just as it had begun. I was still thinking!—thinking of how God, in the midst of running His universe, would take the time to reveal His love for us. Not only had He created, but He had built into His creation the variety and adaptability that few places on earth reveal as clearly as the ocean's deeps. I couldn't help thinking that no matter how far below the waves I might ever be able to venture, still farther below His creatures would be there to reveal the deep, deep love of God.

Stephen G. Dunbar is a professor in the Department of Biology, Central Queensland University, Queensland, Australia.