

Elder's Digest

A Quarterly Resource for Local Church Elders

Number Four



“Yes,
I am coming
soon.”

Elders—Appointed by Men and Qualified by God

JOEL SARLI

Who chooses an elder—God or the congregation? Could it be that an appointed elder is not gifted by the Holy Spirit for that function? Is the function of elders less spiritual than that of pastors? I believe that elders are called by God as spiritual leaders. Pastors and elders must work together harmoniously in full co-operation to fulfil the spiritual needs of the congregation.

Today some people tend to take a secularist view of every office in the church. They believe many decision and appointment within the church are the result of political maneuvering. These people have lost their spiritual sensitivity and are unable to see the supernatural dimension of the church of Christ. As a result the church for them is merely a social club. The spiritual dimension of church leadership is denied.

In Ephesians 5:23-27 Paul presents the church as the body of Christ and as such partaking of His very nature. Paul makes it clear in Acts 20:28 that being an elder is a spiritual office and not a mere administrative function. He reminds the Ephesian elders to carry out their responsibility of caring for God's blood-bought flock. This responsibility for God's flock is not achieved by winning a vote, but through an assignment coming from the Holy Spirit and recognized by the local church.

Lawrence Eyres asserts: "In Ephesians 4:11, Paul is speaking of gifted men: 'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.' The evangelists and teachers-pastors are perpetually given by Christ to the church on earth as his full supplying of the church's needs, flowing forth from his complete victory over Satan, sin and death. At the outworking of the given Spirit, the Lord gives men gifts to the church for the perfecting of the saints. These men of gifts and only these are to be the elders of the church."¹

Paul speaking to the Ephesians mentions pastor as a gift and not just a specific office. Therefore is it not the responsibility of an elder to "pastor" the flock? Can we not say that in the church, "ministers" and elders share the same responsibility to the congregation?

The *Church Manual* observes: "The local elder must be one recognized by the church as a strong religious and spiritual leader, and must have a good reputation 'with them that are without.' In the absence of a pastor, the elder is the religious leader of the church and by precept and example must continually seek to lead the church into a deeper and fuller Christian experience. . . . the elder should not be chosen primarily because of social position, or because of speaking ability, but rather because of a consecrated life and leadership ability."²

An elder is gifted by the Holy Spirit and charged with caring for God's flock "The elder should, in counsel with the minister, carry much of the pastoral responsibility, visiting the church members, ministering to the sick, and encouraging those who are disheartened"³

An elder may have many gifts or just a few. Without any question, the giftedness is part of an effective ministry (1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 12:4-6), and the Holy Spirit is the only source of the spiritual qualification and power for a fruitful and strong leadership in caring for God's people. **E**

¹ Eyres, Lawrence R. *The Elders of the Church*. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House, 1975), p. 6.

² *The Church Manual*, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, (Silver Spring, Md.: 1990), p. 57.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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FOUR

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General Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists

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Elder's Digest is published quarterly by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which retains full editorial control. It is printed by the Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740, U.S.A. Articles about the work of the local church elder are welcome, and may be submitted to *Elder's Digest*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904 (301) 680-6510. A stamped, self-addressed envelope should accompany unsolicited manuscripts. Subscription requests or changes may be sent to the same address. Subscriptions: US\$9.95 a year. Single copy US\$3.00. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Elder's Digest*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 U.S.A.

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Is Your Church Senior-Sensitive?

WIN ARN and CHARLES ARN

Most churches in North America are following a course that will miss one of the greatest social changes—and greatest opportunities—in the continent’s history: the coming age wave. Like beach residents unaware of the approaching tsunami, most congregations still seem to assume that “the future of the church is its youth.” Today, tomorrow, and well into the twenty-first century the more accurate

description is “The future belongs to the old” (at least in Western countries).

Of course, most churches have a token senior adult class, and perhaps a monthly potluck or field trip for their older adults. But such approaches are woefully inadequate, if not entirely irrelevant, to the task of reaching and ministering to the rapidly growing community of persons who are older than 50.

Why are most churches so senior-insensi-

Common Church Problems

1. A survey we recently conducted among pastors indicated that their most common frustration is a lack of dedicated laypeople to do the work of the church.
2. Financial shortfalls are the most common reason for not adding a building, programs, and/or staff.
3. Members transferring jobs and/or moving to another community account for 3-5 percent membership loss in a congregation each year.
4. Low institutional loyalty is a common characteristic of baby boomers. Most churches find it difficult to solicit membership or even long-term commitment from this age group.
5. Biblical illiteracy is common among laity in many churches. As a result pastoral teaching often remains at the elementary level.

The Hidden Treasure

1. A separate study found that senior adults average two to three times as many available hours for church-related activities as any other age group.
2. In a given year, one senior adult church member will give seven times the amount of money that a baby boomer member will give in the same church.
3. Senior adults change their address an average of once every 12 years, compared with the national average of once every seven years.
4. High institutional loyalty is a common characteristic of senior adults. When they join, they stay and they are committed.
5. Most senior adult members have been Christians for years. Having experienced life’s mountains as well as its valleys, they have a wealth of maturity and wisdom they can share with others.

tive? It is generally because of one or more of the following reasons.

1. *Ageism*. This disease discriminates against, diminishes, and demeans age. Unfortunately, it is alive and well, not only in our society, but also in our churches.

2. *Ignorance*. A minuscule number of today's church leaders have been trained in the unique needs of, opportunities for, and outreach strategies required for persons older than age 50.

3. *Irrelevance*. Most existing senior adult church groups are operating on assumptions about senior adults that grew out of a different time and place. Today's senior adults are far different from their parents or grandparents.

Isn't it ironic that in the midst of decreasing resources, most churches don't realize the hidden treasure inherent in the senior adults of the church? (see box on previous page).

There indeed are effective ways for churches to respond to the challenge of an aging population. The graying of North America provides an enormous opportunity for the church, perhaps unique in this century. But without a major retooling of strategy and tactics, the church will be left behind. To restate: The approach most churches presently have for ministry to the aging adult population is woefully inadequate, if not entirely irrelevant.

So, what can be done?

Realize that all seniors aren't seniors

A new generational grouping has emerged in our society during the past generation. Their members are called "middle adults" and include those people between 50 and 70 years of age. They are, as *U.S. News and World Report* says, "a new generation, different not only in size, but in vitality and outlook." Older adults are living healthier, more active, productive, and longer lives. In reality, a person of 50 or 60 can expect to live 15, 20, or 30 more years. It is, indeed, their middle years. They are not, certainly in their own minds, "senior adults."

Realize that age does make a difference

People 30 years old are different than people 60 years old, not only in the hair on their head but in the mind inside. Older adults think differently than younger adults.

David Wolfe, a knowledgeable researcher and marketer, draws some fascinating contrasts:¹

Mature Adults	Young Adults
Declining influence by peers	Heavily influenced by peers
Declining materialistic values	Highly materialistic values
More subjective	More objective
More introspective	More extrospective
High sensitivity to context	Low sensitivity to context
Perceptions in shades of gray	Perceptions in black and white
More flexible	More rigid
More individualistic	More subordinated to others
More discretionary behavior	More predictable behavior
Less price sensitive	More price sensitive
Complex ways of determining values	Simple ways of determining values
Whole picture-oriented	Detail-oriented

Christian Implications

What does this changing demographic landscape mean for the church? Most important, it means that the old ways of doing senior adult ministry must be reevaluated. It is our belief that even the term *senior adult* will become politically *incorrect*. As more and more baby boomers inch toward that age category (the first boomers will turn 50 next year), the stigma attached to the term *senior* will make it a liability to effective ministry.

Even now we are finding that when churches offer a "senior adult" program, at most only 15 percent of the church members who qualify to be there actually are. As we have researched this phenomenon we have found that most do not want to be lumped into the category of senior citizen, either in the minds of others or their own.

The new and still emerging strategies that will be necessary for effective ministry to middle adults have many implications for programming and evangelism, and for scheduling of church activities. The church that is age-sensitive will be providing a *variety* of groups to appeal to the diversity of interests and needs of and activities appropriate for each age group.

Getting Started Right

We are often asked the question "If you were to develop an age-sensitive adult ministry, how would you begin?" Here are five components:

1. *Find, select, train leaders.* The success of your adult ministry will be directly related to the quality of your leaders. Someone needs to own the goal of ministry/outreach to young, middle, and senior adults. The leaders who will be most successful in each group have a genuine love for people in that group. It's not a job—it's a ministry.

In research we conducted with 500 churches that had a full- or part-time senior adult staff member, we found that the leaders who had received specific training in this area were far more effective—and their adult ministries were more likely to be growing—than were leaders who had received no training. (Eighty percent of all older adult staff members had received *no training* whatsoever in their field.) We also found that retired pastors are generally ineffective as middle and senior adult leaders unless they have been retrained in the unique issues and challenges of senior adult ministry in the 1990s.

2. *Get the facts.* Here is a proven principle: "Abundant, accurate information, properly interpreted and applied, enables churches to be good stewards of the grace of God and effective communicators of the gospel of Christ."

What are the actual statistics in your church? How many members are older than age 50? 55? 60? 65? What are the age groupings in your community? How many are homebound? What percentage are male, female? What are the various needs and interests represented in your prospective constituency? Effective programs and activities will be based on the findings of your research.

3. *Begin with an adult ministry, not a senior adult group.* This distinction is important. If you have a "senior adult group," you

limit the potential involvement to those individuals who see themselves as senior adults. Many other adults in your congregation and community will not identify with "those old people." In contrast, if your paradigm is an adult *ministry*, all kinds of groups can develop, many of which would not even be identified as senior adult. A church of 300 members could have 10 to 15 various adult groups responding to the variety of needs, and touching the lives of many more people.

4. *Develop a Purpose Statement.* A clearly written purpose statement will be the guiding light for a successful older adult ministry. This purpose statement should be owned by the members and be a yardstick to regularly measure progress. If a clear purpose statement is not established and used early in the ministry, the activities will become increasingly self-serving and self-centered.

In the box is one purpose statement

developed by an age-sensitive adult ministry. Use or adapt it if it describes the purpose you desire for your adult ministry. If not, create your own.

5. *Build your adult ministry on adult motivators.* Marketing researchers have

spent considerable time and money seeking to identify the reasons today's older adults buy or don't buy certain products. Their discoveries are of value to church leaders seeking to reach this same generation, and encourage them to buy a new lifestyle in the Christian faith and community. According to these studies, older adults are motivated by one or more of five values that form the foundation of most of their meaningful activity.² Those values are:

- *Autonomy.* They desire to be or remain self-sufficient.
- *Social and spiritual connectedness.* They respond to people more than programs.
- *Altruism.* They desire to give something back to the world.
- *Personal growth.* They desire to continue developing as human beings.

Adult Ministries Statement of Purpose

The adult ministry of _____ Church has as its purpose to communicate and share God's love to those in the church family, and to those outside the church. The assumption behind the adult ministry, the groups, and the activities sponsored by this ministry is that they exist for the purpose of serving, not being served; of giving, not receiving.

- *Revitalization.* They respond to activities that bring fresh and new experiences.

Effective older adult ministries of the 1990s and twenty-first century will be those that integrate these values and motivators into a creative variety of activities and experiences.

The age wave is swelling! The 60-plus age group is growing three times more rapidly than the population at large, and for the first time in American history there are now more citizens older than age 65 than younger than age 18.

The age wave is rapidly approaching! Those churches that are not prepared will be

swamped by the sheer numbers, diversity, and impact of these older adults. Or if they are prepared, they will get out their surfboards and catch the ride of a lifetime! **E**

¹ David Wolfe, "Targeting the Mature Mind," *American Demographics*, March 1994, pp. 32-36.

² For a more comprehensive discussion of these values, see the above-mentioned article by David Wolfe in *American Demographics*.

Win Arn is honorary chair of the North American Congress on the Church and the Age Wave. He is founder and president of LIFE International (1857 Highland Oaks Drive, Arcadia, CA 91006). Charles Arn is editor of Lifeline, a newsletter for leaders of older adult ministries.

A Friendly Church

GLORIA BENTZINGER

Welcome Katrina! Follow these signs!
Two miles ahead!"

Katrina couldn't believe her eyes!

There was a sign on the freeway that read, "Welcome Katrina! Follow these signs—two miles ahead!" With excitement she continued to drive, finding another sign, "Turn right here!" As she drove the last two miles to a church she had never been to and a church family she had never met, she was overcome with the love she already felt. During that two miles there was a series of hand-made signs, giving her directions and welcoming her by name!

Katrina had called the church the previous evening, letting them know she was a newly baptized member who was being transferred across the country. She simply asked for directions to church for Sabbath.

God worked through the lay person who answered the phone! Wanting to make sure their "new member" in town found the church, he made and put along the highway a series of personalized signs directing Katrina and welcoming her. He didn't know the reason she was moving. He didn't know she was feeling alone and needed emotional support from a church family right then.

Katrina was an airline employee. She was introduced to the Sabbath by evangelist Henry Feyerabend. Even before her baptism, she followed her new convictions and began keeping the Sabbath, changing shifts with coworkers to get Saturdays free. Then the situation changed and she was no longer able to get Sabbaths off. Katrina went ahead with her baptism anyway, full of faith that God would do something with her job situation so that she could honor Him. She was soon transferred to another state where she received full Sabbath privileges!

She smiled as she drove into the church driveway her first Sabbath in that strange town. The last sign in the series read, "Welcome Katrina!"

"It was an affirmation from God," Katrina reflects, "that this move to keep the Sabbath was the right thing to do."

When she walked through the doors of the church that morning, she found a new family waiting who showered her with love. **E**

Gloria Bentzinger is assistant editor of the Adventist Evangelistic Association's Update. Gloria and her husband work as an evangelistic team for the North American Division. This story is reprinted from Update, winter, 1994.

Anointing

MARK OWEN

Should anointing be performed only when one has an illness and wants to take it to the Lord for His healing?

Many feel that they should ask for anointing only after they have exhausted every other possibility and are on their deathbed. There is nothing in the Bible that says this. "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord." James 5:14

It is a great blessing for the church elders to minister to those in need. We realize that every little illness is not cause for anointing, but we read in *Counsels on Health*: "Why is it that men are so unwilling to trust Him who created man and who can, by a touch, a word, a look, heal all manner of disease? . . . Our Lord has given us definite instruction, through the apostle James, as to our duty in case of sickness."¹ Even though your need may be treated by doctors, bring it to the Lord first.

Who should be called? The pastor or the local elder.

"I feel like I am bothering the pastor and the elders by asking them to take time for an anointing service." This is a common feeling, but an anointing service is not a bother at all. They are here to serve you. They care about you and want you to live life to its fullest. And they gain a blessing from this service too!

Who will be at the anointing?

The pastor, elders, and sometimes their

spouses. Others may be there who are being anointed as well. You may request special friends to accompany you and pray for you.

Where will the anointing be held?

Generally at the church or the person's home. There are cases when the anointing is held at the hospital.

What if I caused my illness?

Most illnesses are caused by lifestyle and habits. God is willing to forgive any sin. We must confess and allow God to put away any sin that might have caused the affliction. Psalm 107 describes God's grace at work. It says that because of transgression sinners are afflicted and draw near unto the gates of death. But verses 19 and 20 add: "They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent forth his Word and healed them."

If I am healed, can the illness return?

If you have knowledge of a certain habit that brought about the illness and you return to that habit, then many times the illness will return. Stay in tune with the Lord and His leading for your life, and your healing will be secure.

What if I am not healed?

First, remember that you have done what the Bible says to do by calling for anointing. Second, realize that God sometimes chooses to heal in stages. Many have been healed gradually. Some have lost their pain. Others have found relief through doctors and their care. Some have gone through surgeries.

Some have not been healed on this earth; they will have to wait until heaven. The elders don't question the sincerity of the person if there is not a physical healing. They know that on every occasion some blessings are received. You will experience these blessings!

Do I have to disclose what my illness is?

You do not have to mention specifically why you wish to be anointed. The pastor and elders will respect your privacy. The elders will need to know what your general needs are to help them know how to pray for you.

What will happen at the service?

First, there will be time for talking and sharing. The pastor will talk about anointing and what it means.

Then you will have a chance to share your reason for requesting the anointing. When it is time for prayer, those conducting the anointing will kneel in a circle around you. All in the circle will say a prayer for healing, with the pastor closing by praying and touching your forehead with oil. After the pastor's

prayer, you will be given an opportunity to ask the Lord for healing. Sometimes a song or two will be sung to close the service.

Why does the pastor anoint with olive oil?

Oil represented the Holy Spirit in biblical times.

Do I have to be sick with an illness to be anointed?

No! People have been anointed for depression, bad habits, mental problems, handicaps, anything they feel Satan is bothering them with.

How should I prepare for the anointing service?

Psalm 66:18 says, "If I had cherished sin

in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." All known sin must be confessed and allowed to be put away by the Lord. God cannot bless you in your sins.

In your recommended reading you will read: "If any who are seeking health have been guilty of evil speaking, if they have sowed discord in the home, the neighborhood, or the church, and have stirred up alienation and dissension, if by any wrong practice they have led others into sin, these things should be confessed before God and before those who have been offended. . . . "When wrongs have been righted, we may present the needs of the sick to the Lord in calm faith, as His Spirit may indicate."²

If you feel like you cannot gain victory over a sin problem, this can be made a

subject of prayer in the anointing service. Jesus can heal every need. Put your trust in the Lord and His grace. If your faith seems weak, it will be strengthened during the service. God wishes you well more than you wish healing!

Besides searching your life for sins and confessing

them, please study and read the following: James 5:3-16; Psalm 107:17-20; "Prayer for the Sick" in *The Ministry of Healing*; Psalm 66:18; Psalm 41:10.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call your elder or the pastor. In the meantime, continue to search your heart and spend time in prayer and study.

"Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." (3 John 2). **E**

¹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1951), p. 457.

² Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), p. 229.

Mark Owen is a pseudonym. The author did not wish to be viewed as an expert on anointing, but wanted readers to focus on anointing itself.

Prejudice in Church

STUART and JILL BRISCOE

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor, by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?—James 2:2-4

Have you ever done that? James saw it happening in the church of God. He gives a perfect example of prejudice and of preferential treatment. A good seat for the rich man! Have you ever heard someone say in regard to someone else, "Wouldn't he make a wonderful Christian?" or "Wouldn't she make a wonderful Christian?" We're thinking, *That's a person who's got what it takes, or She's got prestige, or He has position.* We're thinking that if such a person came to Christ, he'd bring all his wealth and prestige to the church—to us. We'd be as prestigious as he is. He could make things happen for us. So Christians go ahead and target such a person, giving him the best seat and special treatment. That's preferential treatment, operating only on the basis of external, material considerations. It overlooks the fact that we claim to be holding to the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, His gospel of love that looks on the inside of a person—not the outside.

Imagine the situation that may have prompted James's words above. You've got a small group of believers, and James is the leader of this little church. It's made up mostly of poor people—some of them slaves—and very few wealthy or influential people at all. One day, to their delight, someone very wealthy, very influential, and very powerful comes in. Of course, the people say, "Wow! That's great! Double the offering overnight." They become

very deferential to him, fawning over him and looking after him, ushering him to the best seat. But they discover a shabby, little man in the seat, so they try to get him out of there because they don't want the influential man to see the shabby, little man lest he won't come back.

What's going on is a perfect example of prejudice. The believers are pre-judging both men on purely external and material criteria. They are not showing any interest in the internal realities of the people or in the spiritual realities of the people, and they don't seem to have any idea that the Lord is the Lord of both, that Jesus is the Savior of both, and that Christ came for both. They have committed prejudice in the church of Jesus Christ.

When we run into problems, it's easy to get sidetracked from the problems by a person. Then instead of addressing the problems, we attack the person. This had probably happened among the believers to whom James was writing. They had perhaps failed to address the problems. They had found the person they identified with the problem. They had attacked that person, and then they had decided that a whole lot of people who belonged to his group were all the same. That's how prejudice often works. Love and prejudice never go together.

Questions to consider

What type of person might feel uncomfortable in your church, and why? What can you do toward eliminating such prejudice in love? **E**

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From the book Living Love by Stuart and Jill Briscoe, Harold Shaw, Wheaton, Illinois, 1993.

The Art of Listening

JOEL SARLI

Often people need someone who is willing to just listen. Counseling experts say that listening is one of the most important parts of a counseling procedure. We have to learn to listen with the heart.

Because elders usually remain many years serving in the same congregation, people tend to see them as reliable counselors. In many cases, our pastors move frequently from one church to another and do not have time to establish a solid relationship with all the members of the congregation. Therefore, elders can be very helpful and effective in the area of counseling, cooperating with their pastor in making up a team ministry.

Counseling can be one of the most important activities in the ministry of the local elder. It is indispensable, therefore, to learn professional counseling skills and procedures.

Psychologist Lawrence Crabb, one of the pioneers in this field, has proposed that counseling should take place on three levels in the local congregation:

- Level 1 is *counseling by encouragement*. This involves all believers of a local church, and its objective is to teach them how to be more sensitive and caring.
- Level 2 is *counseling by exhortation*. It is more selective, and is implemented by a group of mature believers who learn helping skills and prove themselves available and reliable for such a ministry.

- Level 3 is *counseling by enlightenment*. A few selected Christians in each local church are willing to handle the deeper, and more stubborn problems which do not yield to encouragement or exhortation.

It is in the second and third levels that local elders encounter most of their counseling activities.

In Romans 12:8 we read that *paraklesis* is a spiritual gift. The gifts are distributed throughout the body of Christ, as God wills, and are used for the purpose of edifying the church. Not all members of the body have this gift of "coming alongside to help." But many do, and these people must form the basis of a counseling program.

The elders that feel the burden to help the congregation in this area should obtain the necessary basic skills and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit bless the congregation. There are many skills to be learned. There will always be room for improvement in this area, but do not wait until you are an expert to start helping people. Many of the needed skills will come as a result of practice and observation.

Listening—The first and indispensable skill in counseling

Someone has said that God gave us two ears and just one mouth meaning that we are to listen twice as much as we talk.

In 1980 at the James White Library at Andrews University someone gave me an issue of the *Personnel Journal*. This issue contained nine questions related to effective

listening. Read them and evaluate what kind of listener you are. If you are not as good a listener as you might be, practice the techniques in your daily relationships until you become a perfect listener.

1. Since you think about four times faster than a person usually talks, do you use this time to think about other things while you're keeping track of the conversation?

2. Do you listen primarily for facts rather than ideas when someone is speaking?

3. Do you avoid listening to things you feel will be too difficult to understand?

4. Can you tell from a person's appearance and delivery that there won't be anything worthwhile said?

5. When someone is talking to you, do you try to appear to be giving attention when you're not?

6. Do certain words and phrases prejudice you so you cannot listen objectively?

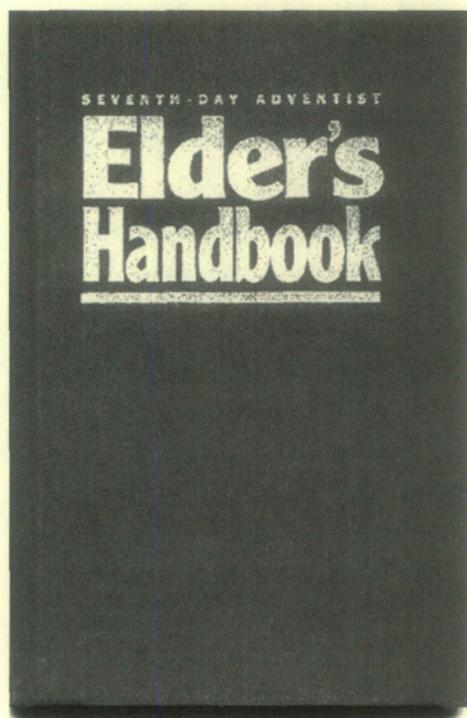
7. Do you turn your thoughts to other subjects when you think a speaker will have nothing particularly interesting to say?

8. When you're listening to someone, are you distracted by outside sights and sounds?

9. When you are puzzled or annoyed by what someone says, do you try to get the question straightened out immediately, either in your mind or by interrupting the speaker?

If you answered "No" to each question, classify yourself as a perfect listener. **E**

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being an elder*

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We Still Believe . . . That Jesus Is Coming Soon

ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

In many ways, Americans living in 1844 would have been more at home in the world as it was when Jesus lived here than they would be in our world of the late twentieth century—only 150 years later. That is not an exaggeration.

Historian Paul Johnson has called the years between 1815 and 1830 the “birth of the modern,” a dividing line between the industrial age leading to today’s high-tech wizardry and an earlier world that had continued unchanged in many important aspects for several thousand years. For example, the first passenger service using the newly developed steam locomotive began in 1830 between Manchester and Liverpool, England. Until then, the fastest means of travel remained the horse, just as it had since earliest times. The telegraph became a practical device in the United States in 1844 with transmission of a message between the nation’s capital and the nearby city of Baltimore, Maryland. Before that, long-distance communication relied on the physical delivery of a written letter—basically the same system used in ancient Persia and Rome. In medical knowledge, military weaponry, industrial technology, scientific research—indeed, in almost every area—the world of 1844 was more akin to the first century than to the late twentieth century.

Arguably, technology and human knowledge have advanced to a greater degree during the last 150 years than they did during all the centuries prior to that time.

Think of what we accept as commonplace today that was undreamed of 150 years ago:

space shuttles, moon walks, and probes of distant planets; telephones (conventional, cordless, cellular, mobile, even an image-capable variety that permits the people at both ends of the communication to see each other) with call waiting, one-button memory dialing, caller identification, and built-in answering machines; fiber optics, computers, fax machines, televisions, compact discs, and VCRs; automobiles, wide-body jets, antibiotics, nuclear submarines, and heat-seeking and video-guided missiles; credit cards, supermarkets, automatic teller machines, digital stereos, microwave ovens (now in 70 percent of American homes), video cameras, open-heart surgery, air conditioning, and Nintendo games—to name a few. The pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church never would have believed the world in which you and I live.

Obviously time has continued longer than they ever thought possible. The world has developed far beyond anything they could imagine. Have we also developed beyond the simple belief of those early pioneers in a soon-coming Jesus? Can we still expect Him to come in the high-tech 1990s? Or have we outgrown such a childlike faith?

Christians in every generation have tended to feel that theirs was the last and that Jesus must surely return in their days. In our day we have that same expectation. Many biblical signs of His coming are general enough that each generation has been able to point to contemporary fulfillments. For example, wars, famines, lawlessness,

lack of faith, and earthquakes have existed, to some degree, in all generations.

“But,” say some, “these things are occurring with greater intensity today than ever before.” But what level of intensity is necessary? Could not these situations conceivably continue centuries from now, in even more acute forms, if Jesus still hasn’t come?

Do we have any valid reasons to believe that Jesus is actually coming in our day?

I believe our world presently faces several life-threatening circumstances never encountered by previous generations. Here are just a few reasons why it seems to me that life as we know it on our world seems doomed and Jesus must return soon.

1. World population. Note these figures showing the escalating rate of how often world population has doubled, approximately, since Jesus’ day.

A.D. 1	250 million
A.D. 1700	625 million
A.D. 1850	1.1 billion
A.D. 1950	2.5 billion
A.D. 1985	4.8 billion
A.D. 2000	8.3 billion (estimated)

(*Signs of the Times*, October 1985, page 7).

Obviously world population cannot long continue to double at this rate. Already social scientists are looking with concern at the world’s bloated metropolitan areas. They are tossing about such terms as “out of control,” “widespread hunger and joblessness,” “environmental devastation,” “global instability,” “violence,” and “authoritarianism.” *The world has never before had so many people alive at one time that their sheer numbers threaten the entire globe.*

2. Dwindling resources. As world population explodes, the ability of the planet to support such numbers diminishes—rapidly. Today, we face shortages and environmental concerns unknown even a century ago. Not everyone, even in developed countries, can continue to expect, as a matter of course, the necessary quantities of life’s basic physical necessities—food, pure air, and clean water. In some cases, human-controlled factors—economics, politics, and society itself—are responsible. But even with the utmost human cooperation, it seems *we cannot continue to live as we do in the num-*

bers that we do. Earth’s physical resources cannot cope with the increasing demand and misuse.

3. Nuclear weapons. The nuclear age dawned only about fifty years ago, yet already, two nations—the United States and what was once the Soviet Union—possess between themselves some 48,000 nuclear weapons with an explosive power thirteen million times greater than the bomb that leveled Hiroshima. A single Poseidon submarine—less than two percent of the United States’s total nuclear force—is able to destroy every large- and medium-size city in the former Soviet Union. In addition to the United States and Russia, a growing number of nations also belong to the “nuclear club,” and still others have the potential to quickly develop nuclear arsenals.

I know that we live now in the age of *glasnost*, or openness. We are reducing our military capabilities and forging alliances with our former cold war antagonists. The world is looking to a time of “*peace and safety*.” But I also know that human history has been an unending story of aggression and war. Peace is a fragile condition with a tenuous life. Past experience indicates that humankind will eventually use—intentionally or other wise—the technology for killing that we have developed. It has ever been so. *Never before in history has humanity held in its hands the ability to actually destroy life as we know it on the entire planet in a matter of minutes.*

4. Fulfilled prophecy. A fourth consideration deals not so much with world conditions as with God’s perspective.

The Bible presents two basic types of predictive prophecy—event-oriented predictions, such as those in Matthew 24 and in many Old Testament writings, and linear time prophecies, such as those of Daniel and Revelation. The longest of these linear time prophecies is the 2,300 days (prophetic years) of Daniel 8 and 9, which extend to the year 1844, the last fixed prophetic date in Scripture. Today, even more so than 150 years ago, the Bible tells us that we are living in the end time and that the next great prophetic happening will be the return of Jesus. The Millerites were wrong about

the time for the second coming, but they were as right as they could be in determining that the time prophecies of the Bible end with 1844. Since that time, we have walked to the end of the biblical time line. The Bible is clear that Jesus' second coming is the next major event to take place! Ellen White calls this teaching the "keynote" of the Bible.

One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming, to complete the great work of redemption. To God's pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in "the region and shadow of death," a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is "the resurrection and the life," to "bring home again His banished." The doctrine of the second advent is the very key-note of the Sacred Scriptures. From the day when the first pair turned their sorrowing-steps from Eden, the children of faith have awaited the coming of the Promised One to break the destroyer's power and bring them again to the lost Paradise (*Maranatha*, page 13).

The Millerites, who were so terribly disappointed in 1844, looked for Jesus to come for two reasons. First, they based their belief on the teaching of the Word. Second, they wanted Him to come; they longed to see Him. Both these reasons are still valid today.

Scripture clearly declares that Jesus is coming. We can agree with the pioneers on that. The question for us, then, is this: Do we want Him to come as badly as they did? Is our uncertainty about His coming caused, in part, at least, by our loss of a sense of urgency? Have we allowed the delay to blind us to the reality of His coming?

I would like to suggest three points to consider when dealing with the delay of Jesus' return. They do not necessarily explain why time has continued so much longer than we anticipated. But they help us put the delay into a biblical perspective that can help us preserve our certainty that He is coming.

1. God is sovereign and can choose the time He thinks best for His Son to return.

We may feel confused by the delay, just as the disciples were confused and disappointed following the crucifixion. They had a preconceived notion of what the Messiah's role would be, and when Jesus didn't follow

their ideas, they didn't know what to make of it. "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel," they reflected (Luke 24:21). In the same way, the passing of the years may leave us wondering if we can have any sense of urgency about the return of Jesus—or whether He will come at all. But God is under no obligation to follow our expectations. He is always in control and has determined a time for Jesus' coming that will accomplish His eternal purpose: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36).

The apostle Peter points to God's sovereignty as an important factor in dealing with the apparent delay in Jesus' return. Peter predicts that in the end time men and women will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4). We have usually applied this verse to non-Christian "scorners," and rightly so. But could it not also apply to those within the church who have begun to question the soon return of Jesus because of the time that has passed since we first began to look for Him?

And what does Peter say about those who doubt that Jesus is returning soon? They deliberately forget, he says, that in His own good time God once acted decisively to destroy the world by a flood in response to sin. And in His own good time, He will also one day judge the world by fire when His Son returns: "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment. . . . But do not forget this one thing dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise" (verses 7-9).

Peter points us to God's sovereign will and His power to act when He decides it is best. And He assures us that day will come.

We may be puzzled by the delay, but the fact is that Jesus *will come*, and He will come when God chooses for Him to come. Each year, each month, each week, each day actually brings us closer to that glorious time.

Have you ever found yourself driving home, only to discover that your gas tank is almost empty? You keep going, nervously

looking for a gas station, but none appears. Each mile, you tell yourself, "I've made it this far, so I probably won't run out of gas before I get home." Of course, you know that isn't logical. Actually, you are all the more likely to run out of gas soon precisely because you have traveled so far. And the farther you go, the more certain it is that you will run out of gas.

In the same way, it's easy to delude ourselves by thinking, *Jesus hasn't come for the last 150 years, so the chances are good He won't do so soon.* Actually, each passing day brings His coming that much closer.

In a very real sense, we don't have to worry about the timing of the second coming. It is out of our hands. Jesus will come in God's own time, because God is in control. He is Lord of time.

2. The delay is evidence of His incredible patience and love for you and me.

The second consideration we need to be aware of is that God is waiting in love. Peter says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Ellen White echoes the same thought: "The reason why the Bridegroom delays is because He is longsuffering . . . not willing that any should perish. . . O the precious longsuffering of our merciful Saviour!" (*Sons and Daughters of God*, page 118).

God has always held back His judgments as long as possible in order to give us every opportunity to repent and be saved. He *will* act to destroy sin and those who insist on being identified with it, but He does so reluctantly and only after every possible appeal has been made. Even when He determined that the world must be destroyed with a flood, He waited 120 years while Noah preached repentance and salvation. When He determined that Sodom and Gomorrah had passed the limits of forbearance, He granted Abraham's repeated requests to spare the cities if only a minimal number of godly people could be found there (see Genesis 18:20-33). He deferred judgment on Israel time and again in the Old Testament—and forgave the people repeatedly when they repented and turned again to Him. And,

according to Peter, the main reason Jesus has not yet returned is God's great desire to give everyone as much time as possible to be ready. He doesn't want anyone to lose out on eternal life.

Christ's parables also incorporate the concept of unanticipated delay. Recall the ten virgins, who found that the bridegroom "was a long time in coming," much longer than they had expected (Matthew 25:1-13). The calculating, unjust steward concluded that his Master's return was "taking a long time in coming" (Luke 12:42-48).

From this perspective, the delay is evidence, not that God is unconcerned about us, but, instead, it is evidence of His incredible patience and love. We tend to focus on the fact that Jesus has not yet appeared, but we need to focus more on the fact that God is still holding open the door of mercy, inviting all to enter.

This perspective can even help us grapple with the length of the delay. In one sense, it's true that a long time has elapsed since 1844. But in the scheme of earth's history—and certainly in the scheme of God's eternity—150 years are not all that significant. Perhaps we need to shift our focus from how long it has been since 1844 to the fact that these 150 years represent only a small fraction of the time that has gone by since Creation.

Think of it like this. If the approximately six thousand years of earth's history could be compressed into a single 24-hour day, the Flood would occur before eight o'clock in the morning. The Exodus would happen about 10:00 a.m. Jesus would die on the cross at approximately 4:00 in the afternoon. And *the time from 1844 to 1994 would be only thirty-six minutes—from 11:23 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.*

Seen from that standpoint, the delay doesn't seem so significant, especially when we realize that God is waiting a little longer in order to save as many as possible.

3. To be Christians means that we are called to an ongoing sense of immi-nence, expectation, and trust.

Here is the third factor to consider when we deal with the delay. Jesus says:

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

It is like a man going away: He leaves his house in charge of his servants, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (Mark 13:32-37).

This means we should live our lives every day as if Jesus might come at any time—as indeed He might. It also means that we should live every day as good stewards of all that God has entrusted to our care to make a better world. In this parable, and others, Jesus made it clear that while we are to live in expectation of His soon return, we are also to "occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13, KJV). When asked what he would do if he knew Jesus would come tomorrow, Martin Luther is supposed to have replied, "I would plant a tree today."

Both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy consistently present the second coming as near. Apparently, the disciples fully expected Jesus to come again in their lifetime (see Acts 1:6). The apostle Paul exhorted the Roman Christians, "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here" (Romans 13:11, 12). He told the Corinthian Christians, "The time is short" (1 Corinthians 7:29). At Thessalonica, some even quit their jobs in their fervent expectation of Jesus' coming, so that Paul had to warn them against fanaticism (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 3:6-13).

Ellen G. White writes "The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been represented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional." (*Evangelism*, page 695)

How are we to live, then, in light of the fact that there has been such a long delay?

Apparently, we are not to be anxious

about the time of His coming. We are to anticipate it, expect it, look for it. But at the same time we are to trust Jesus so that we continue to occupy the place and the work He has left us to do: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

While we wait for Him to come, we are to live and work and witness in a way that testifies to our confidence in His love for us. We are to rest in His salvation here and now even as we anticipate the fullness of the salvation to come when He appears. The apostle John puts it this way: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! . . . Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:1-3).

What a wonderful description of what it means to live in expectation of His appearing while trusting Him to sustain us day by day! The time is near. Jesus will come soon. Each passing day brings us closer. This is true in a very personal sense as well as in absolute terms.

How much time is left on God's clock for earth? The fact is, we simply don't know. All the indications are that Jesus *will* come soon. But no matter how many years earth may have in absolute terms, in a personal sense, the return of Jesus is no farther away than our last heartbeat—only decades away, at most, for any of us.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been concerned to uphold the biblical truth that those who die sleep in death until the resurrection at the end of time; so much so that I sometimes think we have tended to overlook another truth—the truth that in practical terms, death and eternity do mean virtually the same thing. Those who died in Christ last week will not realize that eternity has arrived for them sooner than for those who died in Christ 50 years ago or 150 or 1,500 years ago. For each, the next conscious

moment following death will be the sight of their precious Lord returning.

It was the evening of October 22, 1991. Mother and Dad had spent a pleasant evening together in their basement study in Spokane, Washington, doing what they loved most, being together and studying the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. Dad went upstairs to the kitchen to get one of his loose-leaf notebooks in which, over the years, he had compiled his favorite quotations. Sitting at the kitchen counter, he began to read the material he planned to share with some conference workers. When Mother came upstairs a few minutes later, she found him with his face down on the book.

Like his father before him, my father had preached the soon return of Jesus all his life. He rests now, sleeping and awaiting the call of the Life Giver. But, as far as he is concerned, the second coming will interrupt his reading. When the Lord returns and Dad is raised to eternal life, the train of Dad's thoughts will momentarily pick up where they left off. However long it may be in real time before Jesus comes, for Dad, at one moment, he will be reading a favorite quotation and the next instant, he will see his

Saviour! I can hardly wait for that day to come!

Why has Jesus waited so long? We want Him to come. We long for Him to return.

I believe the primary reason for the delay is the reason we have looked at from the apostle Peter: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God is waiting in love for you and me and everyone else who will turn to Him with all our hearts, repent of our sins, and allow Him to fill us with His righteousness. Praise the Lord for His patience and His overwhelming love! Though delayed, He will come, and come soon, for He has promised. "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). **E**

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Robert S. Folkenberg is the President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This article was taken from his most recent book, We Still Believe, published by the Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1994.

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Have You Noticed the Time?

MARJORIE LEWIS LLOYD

“Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones.”

—*Testimonies*, Vol. 9, page 11.

Those words are very familiar to Seventh-day Adventists. But how fast is rapid? Twice as fast? Or three times as fast? How fast can we expect the great controversy to wind up?

Here’s an answer: *“When divine power is combined with human effort, the work will spread like fire in the stubble.”*—*Selected Messages, Book 1*, page 118. (Italics supplied.)

And if that doesn’t boggle the imagination, here’s something that will. Ellen White, commenting on the first chapter of Ezekiel, verse 8, said, “The heavenly messengers seen by Ezekiel, like a bright light going among the living creatures *with the swiftness of lightning*, represent the speed with which this work will finally go forward to completion.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 4*, page 1161. (Italics supplied.)

Think of it! The work will be finished with the speed of lightning!

I think of that dark night when the disciples of Jesus were out on the treacherous Sea of Galilee. They were out there alone—without Jesus. And the sea was getting into the ship, and they were trying to bail it out—just as the world is getting into the church, and dedicated men and women are trying to bail it out. The world keeps saying, “Stop bailing. You’re centuries out of date. You need to become contemporary. Let the water in. It won’t hurt you.”

Like the disciples that night, we say, “Lord, it’s dark. And You haven’t come. And

there are those who wonder if You ever will.”

But Someone was watching on that dark night. The ship with its precious cargo was never out of His sight for a moment. He saw them toiling—rowing—bailing. And when the ship was about to sink and the desperate moment came when they would perish without Him, He hurried down from the mountain and came to them, walking on the water. And they were afraid. But He said, “It is I; be not afraid.”

And it says, “Then they willingly received him into the ship” (John 6:21).

And what happened when they took Jesus into the ship? *“Immediately* the ship was at the land whither they went.”

Immediately!

Is that why we haven’t reached our destination? Is that why Jesus hasn’t returned? Is it because we haven’t taken Jesus into the ship?

Undoubtedly.

Would taking Him into the ship hasten His return?

Undoubtedly.

And yet there is something else to consider. We talk a lot about how we are delaying His coming, and how He can’t come until we are ready—as if the day and the hour were in our control. And some of us make it a copout, and think we can hold off the return of our Lord as long as we choose by just not being ready.

But we’re in for a big surprise. God isn’t going to wait forever. The harvest of wheat is not the only consideration. There is a harvest of tares as well. When the tares are so ripe that for the good of the universe they dare not be left any longer; when the nations have filled their cup until the overflow of

violence must be checked or else; when the number is reached—Jesus dispenses judgment upon them. And it isn't just the world who will be surprised!

When the number is reached? Yes. "With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps an account with all nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account will remain open; but *when the figures reach a certain amount* which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath commences. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. There is no more pleading of mercy in their behalf."—*Testimonies, Vol. 5*, page 208.

If those final, rapid movements were happening one after another in quick succession, *if* the latter rain were falling all around us, *if* the loud cry were even now doing its mighty work in a crescendo difficult to ignore—would we be concerned with some of the trivialities that consume much of our time now?

The other day I read the question, "Would you want Jesus to return tomorrow, or are there a few things that you want to do before He returns?"

The question seemed to me rhetorical. It seemed to imply that if we knew Jesus would come tomorrow, we might have some things to make right today.

But I wonder whether we realize that if the return of our Lord were only one day away, it would be far too late to make anything right. The case of every man would already have been decided, and the decree would have gone forth, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22:11).

And Jesus says, "Behold, I come quickly" (verse 12).

God is in a hurry to wind things up. That means that Jesus is coming soon. It also means that, even sooner, Jesus will finish His work in the heavenly temple. And when that work is finished, it means that He has already come to your name and mine—and has already made a decision never to be revoked!

I wonder whether we realize the terrible solemnity of the moment when Jesus will either hold out His wounded hands and say,

"Father, My blood for that soul"—or He will turn sadly away, with indescribable hurt in His heart because we have refused the incredible sacrifice He made for us. There is nothing more He can say, nothing more He can do!

Our destiny is decided. The verdict is in. It is determined whether we are saved or lost. Jesus died for all. All could be saved. But He will not interfere with man's free choice. His death will not save anyone who is not willing to be saved. Nor does it save anyone who ~~was~~ once willing and does not remain willing.

Isn't it inappropriate, then, in view of our own weakness, in view of that solemn moment when our cases are decided, to go about proclaiming *now* a verdict that is not in, a decision that has not yet been made! What would an earthly judge think of you or me if we had been accused in court and the jury was still out—what would he think if we called a press conference and announced that we had been found not guilty? Wouldn't he quickly put us in our place?

Confidence in our Lord is one thing. Presuming to make His decisions for Him is quite another. An inner confidence, an inner assurance that we will be saved—that we all should have. Jesus has done everything to make our salvation possible. Only our enduring to the end can make it sure. Isn't it inappropriate, and a little premature, to be proclaiming a work of grace in us that is not yet finished, by saying, "I am saved"?

"No sanctified tongue will be found uttering these words ['I am saved'] till Christ shall come, and we enter in through the gates into the city of God. Then, with the utmost propriety, we may give glory to God and to the Lamb for eternal deliverance. As long as man is full of weakness—for of himself he cannot save his soul—he should never dare to say, 'I am saved.'—*Selected Messages, Book 1*, page 314.

God is in a hurry to be through the terrible experiment with sin. He will not wait for us forever. Our probation soon will end. There will then be not a moment longer to prepare, for the day of our Lord pierces the skies. Our preparation days are now or never!

God is in a hurry. And unless we too share His sense of urgency, we'll be left

behind as a part of the great debris when Jesus, with His people, sets out for the city of God!

When Jesus moves down through the blazing skies and the trumpet sounds and the earth reels and the dead move up out of their graves and the living cloud makes ready to depart, not one of us will be able to hold it back!

Hold-it-wait-I'm-coming-I'm-almost-ready will have died on our lips along with I-

knew-He-was-coming-but-I-didn't-think-it-would-be-so-soon!

Friend, have you noticed the time? God's time? **E**

Marjorie Lewis Lloyd for many years was involved with the communications program of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This article appeared in her book The Man With Two Umbrellas published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association.



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How I Visit Pastors of Other Faiths

CLYDE BROOKS

In 1978 Ministry, an international journal for Seventh-day Adventist pastors, began a program called PREACH. This program included sending Ministry to non—Seventh-day Adventist ministers as well as promoting local PREACH seminars. At first it was subsidized in North America by the General Conference and the North American Division, and the list of subscribers grew. Because of financial pressures, the program lost both subsidies in 1989. In other countries PREACH continues to be subsidized by divisions and unions.

Since 1989 the PREACH program endures in North America (with a smaller circulation) because of donations by lay members and the generosity of some local conferences. The purpose of the program is to break down barriers of prejudice, and this has happened for those who receive the magazine. PREACH continues to be one of the church's most successful public relations projects. But for further outreach we need person-to-person contact. The Conyers Seventh-day Adventist Church in Conyers, Georgia, sponsors 161 subscriptions to Ministry for non—Seventh-day Adventist ministers. Church elder Clyde Brooks tells how he follows up these subscriptions with a visit. The Editor

Teachers of the gospel whose minds have not been called to the special truths for this time . . . should be among the first to hear the call. To them the invita-

tion must be given" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 230). What better way to share these special truths with the religious leaders of other faiths than by sending them *Ministry*! Because we believe this, the Conyers Seventh-day Adventist Church sends *Ministry* to 161 pastors in three counties near our church.

I am an elder, semi-retired and have more time than some of our other members. I thought it might be well to visit personally as many of these pastors as I could. I wanted to know if they were receiving the magazine, get their reactions to it, and become acquainted with them.

Introduction

I did not call for an appointment, but dropped by the church office. I introduced myself as a member of the Conyers Seventh-day Adventist Church and one of the elders. I did not dress in a suit, as I thought this would make the atmosphere of the visit more casual and comfortable. I did not want them to think I was there to argue doctrine, so at once I made it clear that this was a friendly gesture to get to know them.

Many pastors were not in, especially those in outlying areas. But those whom I did find in received me warmly. I stated that my purpose in visiting was to get acquainted with them and to be sure they were receiving *Ministry*, a gift from our church.

Most of the pastors said they had been receiving the magazine and enjoyed reading it. Only one pastor did not read the journal

because he disagreed with the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He requested that we cancel his subscription. But even this pastor was open to having prayer with me.

Prayer

My prayers were simple. I asked God to bless these pastors in their important responsibilities, to bless their members, and to bless them as the shepherds of their flocks. I asked God to give them a double portion of His Holy Spirit.

Some also prayed. (It would be respectful to ask the pastor to pray first.) One pastor said he especially liked the idea of my coming and our praying together. Another said he did not know much about Seventh-day Adventists, but after my visit he planned to find out more about them. He was so open and friendly that I gave him some books. With another pastor I had the opportunity to discuss the Sabbath message and was able to leave a book with him.

After our prayer a number of pastors arose and embraced me, telling me how much they appreciated my visit. One woman pastor was in the parking lot of her church when I arrived. Even though she was leaving her office, she stopped to talk and pray with me.

Leaving Literature

As I leave their office, I give each minister a tract entitled "Diet for a Longer Life," which offers a complimentary copy of *The Ministry of Healing*. This is not a time to present doctrinal material. Unless a pastor shows a special interest in a particular theological subject, leaving a tract or other material on health makes a nice reminder of your visit.

What to Do When Pastors Are Out

As I stated previously, many of the pastors were not in their church office. Anticipating this, I prepared a letter written on our church stationery. In the letter I stated that I was sorry I did not get to meet them, but had stopped to get acquainted and see if they had been receiving the *Ministry* subscription that our church was sending to them. I also left the tract on healthful living. If the church was open, I put the letter and tract inside. If it was not open, I left them on

the door handle. Many of the churches are so scattered I did not want to go back, perhaps repeatedly, to try to catch them in.

These visits took me several days, but they gave me some of the most enjoyable experiences I have ever had. I recommend visiting PREACH subscribers to other elders.

I am reminded of further counsel: "Our ministers [and lay ministers] should seek to come near to the ministers of the other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ's messengers, we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock" (*Evangelism*, p. 562). *Ministry* provides the opening wedge in getting to know these pastors. **E**

If your church would like more information on the PREACH program and how you can help, write for "Evangelism That Goes Beyond Monastery Walls" at *Ministry*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

Clyde Brooks is a retired pastor and elder of the Conyers Seventh-day Adventist Church, Conyers, Georgia.

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Even So, Come Lord Jesus

MARK A. HEISEY

It's time to look up—*redemption* draweth nigh! Didn't you feel this way listening to the news this week? Did you notice how the news people spoke of Gorbachev's visit to Rome as a pilgrimage and how Catholicism is portrayed as synonymous or representative of Christianity?

Did you notice, that when Dan Rather asked Billy Graham if Gorbachev was using the pope in all this, Graham said, "Perhaps they're using each other. And if that's the case, my money's on the pope."

And what do you make of the summit meetings between the superpowers, their proposal for disarmament, and the Biblical warning of when we hear the cries of "peace and safety".

Please turn in your Bibles to Revelation 19:1-9 "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord of our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent

reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God." "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!"

Revelation 22:7, 12-14, 20, 21 "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of thisbook. . . . And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. . . . He which testifieth these things, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

When? Soon! That's all we know—and all we need to know. There are those who believe they can come very close to pinning down a date. They figure their charts on world political and religious events, or economic indicators, or a prophetic theory of Old Testament feasts, holidays, and jubilees.

Some have had to set later dates when the five years or so they had allowed for the return of Jesus passed into history. Others are waiting for their forecast to be tested.

There is an amazing variety to the theories, from interesting to ridiculous—from scholarly to dependence on dream communication from a supposed heavenly angel.

Occasionally in the newspaper you'll see an ad regarding the coming of some "messiah," or a block ad claiming significance to what they believe to be the first year of the seventh millennium coming in 1992.

Some believe in a 6000 year theory; will give you a list of references, a chart of the sanctuary and religious feasts and supposed jubilees—concluding Jesus will come in 1994.

Hasn't it occurred to you that the devil, who certainly is not stupid, could undoubtedly be laying the groundwork of deception for his counterfeit of Christ's coming? (For every truth there is a counterfeit.)

The urgency, the specifics, the sensational always appeals to enough people and creates scoffers and doubters at the same time.

I believe the words of Jesus—for whatever reason, He said it this way—"Behold I come quickly."

When? Quickly! That's all we know—and that's all we need to know. It was Jesus who said, as recorded in Matthew 24, "When ye shall see these things (the signs of My coming), know that it is near, even at the doors (verse 33) . . . But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only (verse 36) . . . Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh (verse 44)".

If I were to ask you this morning, if you believe that Jesus would come back this month—or perhaps before the end of the year—you'd probably vote "NO."

If so, it's possible that in the back of your mind you have a vestige of the idea of "getting ready" rather than "being ready." I don't know when He will come, but I know He will come! He is coming soon!

DO YOU want Jesus to come soon? Are there things you want to do first (get an education, get married, have a child, live in financial security . . .)? Or perhaps you want the Lord to come before something particular happens—before you need to have surgery, before you need to face the world and fend for yourself, before you die? And are you

ready for Jesus to come? . . . Would your heart be right, if He came tonight? The Lord is coming, are you ready?" Would you "love His appearing?"

Do you really want Jesus to come? The Bible says, "And every man that has this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

The burden of our message is given in our text for today—it's the Everlasting Gospel—that God is just and the Justifier of everyone that believes on Jesus Christ. We preach it in the context of the advent so that His Kingdom may come when His will is "done on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus may be waiting for a people to come and claim as His own. He did say, "When this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, then shall the end come."

It's estimated that there are 18-20,000 unreached people groups in the world today—groups of people who have not been reached with the gospel by any Christian. This translates into about 80,000 people who die every 24 hours or 55 every minute who have never heard the sweetest name on earth—who have never heard the story of Jesus. What are we doing for them?

To His followers Jesus says, "You shall be witnesses". After healing a man, Jesus said, "Tell what great things the Lord has done for you". That's what witnesses do—they tell what they know. Now there are some professed Christians that more closely resemble, or try to act the part, of the judge; some the prosecuting attorney; some the defense attorney. Some like to pass sentence; others find fault; others defend the truth. Jesus wants you to be a witness. (Begin to speak, then sing, motioning congregation to join: "I Love to Tell the Story.")

A witness is not very effective if they simply tell what they heard other witnesses say—they are not asked to share what they think or have ideas about—they are not to speculate or guess—they are to tell what they know. Do you know Whom you have believed?

I know not why God's wondrous grace,
To me He hath made known,
Nor why unworthy—Christ in love,
Redeemed me for His own.

I know not when my Lord may come,
At night or noontday fair,
Nor if I walk the vale with Him,
Or meet Him in the air.

But I know whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able,
To keep that which I've committed,
Unto Him against that day.

This much you need to know—"Jesus loves me, this I know!" And, "when we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!" "We have this HOPE that burns in all our hearts—HOPE in the coming of the Lord."

"When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be." It will be quite a day if we all get to heaven, won't it? But will we all get there? Would that surprise some of you? It may surprise you who isn't there.

Oh, there will be some surprises there. But I doubt if it will be the kind where you are surprised that so-and-so made it, because if that is your thinking, chances are you won't be there. For Jesus said, "Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." (Matthew 7:1, 2)

If you, with the knowledge of Christ that you have, make it to heaven, it doubtful will be a surprise—because if you believe the words of Jesus, that He's coming again "to receive you unto Myself: that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3), where's the surprise? It will surprise those who didn't have the hope—those who didn't know the love of Jesus, or the promise of heaven as a home.

Sitting beside a bed-ridden shut-in this week, I listened as she spoke of her love for Jesus, and her faith in His promises. She then said, "I'm not going to die—I'm just going to go to sleep."

"Yes, even so, come, Lord Jesus." The disciple John knew some of the distance between promises and realization because of evil and its effects in our world. Perhaps that's why he ends his letter to the churches, wishing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to be with us.

When trouble would tear away faith,
when disaster tries to have us cast away our

confidence, when death tries to rip away from us all hope—I can hear Jesus say, "Behold, I come quickly." When you cry over the loss of a friend, when you think of human suffering, when you battle with temptation—Does Jesus hear you pray, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus"?

For you and I to live is Christ—and to die for Him is gain. Whatever happens is okay, as long as we are there to crown Him Lord of all.

(SONGS: "Hail Him The King of Glory" *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, number 202)

Special References

"We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ" (*Evangelism*, page 221) "our only safety is in being ready for the heavenly refreshing" (*Selected Messages, Book 1*, page 192).

"Why has God not given us this knowledge?—Because we would not make the right use of it if He did. A condition of things would result from this knowledge among our people that would greatly retard the work of God in preparing a people to stand in the great day that is to come. We are not to be engrossed with speculation in regard to the times and the seasons which God has not revealed" (*Evangelism*, page 221).

You can't possibly believe that Jesus is waiting for this world to get any worse, before He comes, can you?

He certainly is not waiting for a specific date in history. How else could Mrs. White record in 1898, "Had the church of Christ done her appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would before this have been warned, and the Lord Jesus would have come to our earth in power and great glory" (*Desire of Ages*, pages 633, 634).

"Instead of exhausting the powers of our mind in speculations in regard to the times and seasons which the Lord has placed in His own power, and withheld from men, we are to yield ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit, to do present duties, to give the bread of life, unadulterated with human opinions, to souls who are perishing for the truth" (*R&H*, March 22, 1892; *Evangelism*, page 702). **E**

Mark A. Heisey is a pastor in North Carolina.

Prudence and Forethought

ELLEN G. WHITE

While Nehemiah implored the help of God, he did not fold his own hands, feeling that he had no more care or responsibility in the bringing about of his purpose to restore Jerusalem. With admirable prudence and forethought he proceeded to make all the arrangements necessary to ensure the success of the enterprise. Every movement was marked with great caution. He did not reveal his purpose even to his own countrymen: for while they would rejoice in his success, he feared that, by some indiscretion, they might hinder his work. Some would be liable to manifest exultation that would arouse the jealousy of their enemies, and perhaps cause the defeat of the undertaking.

As his request to the king had been so favorably received, he was encouraged to ask for such assistance as was needed for the carrying out of his plans. To give dignity and authority to his mission, as well as to provide for protection on the journey, he secured a military escort. He obtained royal letters to the governors of the provinces beyond the Euphrates, the territory through which he must pass on his way to Judea; and he obtained, also, a letter to the keeper of the king's forest in the mountains of Lebanon, directing him to furnish such timber as would be needed for the wall of Jerusalem and the buildings that Nehemiah proposed to erect. In order that there might be no occasion for complaint that he had exceeded his commission, Nehemiah was careful to have the authority and privileges accorded him clearly defined.

The example of this holy man should be a lesson to all the people of God, that they are not only to pray in faith, but to work with diligence and fidelity. How many difficulties we encounter, how often we hinder the working of the Providence in our behalf, because prudence, forethought, and painstaking are regarded as having little to do with religion! This is a grave mistake. It is our duty to cultivate and to exercise every power that will render us more efficient workers for God. Careful consideration and well-matured plans are as essential to the success of sacred enterprises today as in the time of Nehemiah. If all who are engaged in the Lord's work would realize how much depends upon their fidelity and wise forethought, far greater prosperity would attend their efforts. Through diffidence and backwardness we often fail of securing that which is attainable as a right, from the powers that be. God will work for us when we are ready to do what we can and should do on our part. Men of prayer should be men of action. Those who are ready and willing will find ways and means of working. Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainties. The means which he lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow.

The Lord still moves upon the hearts of kings and rulers in behalf of his people. Those who are laboring for him are to avail themselves of the help that he prompts men to give for the advancement of his cause. The agents through whom these gifts come, may open ways by which the light of truth shall be given to many benighted lands. These

men may have no sympathy with God's work no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with his word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused. The Lord has placed his goods in the hands of unbelievers as well as believers: all may return to him his own for the doing of the work that must be done for a fallen world. As long as we are in this world, as long as the Spirit of God strives with the children of men, so long are we to receive favors as well as to impart them. We are to give to the world the light of truth, as revealed in the Scriptures; and we are to receive from the world that which God moves upon them to give in behalf of his cause. The Lord's work might receive far greater favors than it is now receiving, if we would approach men in wisdom, acquainting them with the work, and giving them an opportunity of doing that which it is our privilege to induce them to do for its advancement. If we, as God's servants, would take a wise and prudent course, his good hand would prosper us in our efforts.

Some may question the propriety of receiving gifts from unbelievers. Let such ask themselves: "Who is the real owner of our world? To whom belong its houses and lands, and its treasures of gold and silver?" God has an abundance in our world, and he has placed his goods in the hands of all, both the obedient and the disobedient. He is ready to move upon the hearts of worldly men, even idolaters, to give of their abundance for the support of his work, and he will do this as soon as his people learn to approach these men wisely and to call their attention to that which it is their privilege to do. If the needs of the Lord's work were set forth in a proper light before those who have means and influence, these men might do much to advance the cause of present truth. God's people have lost many privileges of which they could have taken advantage had they not chosen to stand independent of the world.

In the providence of God we are daily brought into connection with the unconverted. By his own right hand God is preparing the way before us in order that his work may progress rapidly. As co-laborers with him, we have a sacred, solemn work to do. We are to have travail of soul for those who are in high places; we are to extend to them

the gracious invitation to come to the marriage feast.

Although now almost wholly in the possession of wicked men, all the world, with its riches and treasures belongs to God. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. "Oh, that Christians might realize more and still more fully that it is their privilege and their duty, while cherishing right principles, to take advantage of every heaven-sent opportunity for advancing God's kingdom in this world! E

Ellen G. White was one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This article comes from Southern Watchman, March 15, 1904.

Do you have ideas for more effective ministry?

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Support the Multi-Church Pastor

JAMES H. ZACHARY

In the case of a pastor who serves more than one church the elder's role is similar to that of an assistant pastor.

1. Attend district meetings of church leaders to work with the pastor in developing a plan for the churches and companies in the district. This plan would include:
 - a. Becoming aware of the district pastor's itinerary.
 - b. Developing plans for visiting all members of the district.
 - c. Developing evangelism plans for each church in the district.
 - d. Laying plans for district mini camp meetings.
 - e. Attending leadership training seminars conducted by the pastor and the conference leadership.
 - f. Scheduling baptisms with the pastor.
 - g. Working with the pastor regarding the sermonic year for local congregations.
 - h. Scheduling time for church board meetings when the pastor can be present.
2. Lead out in church board meetings in the pastor's absence.
3. Lead out in planning for the weekly worship services.
4. Prepare sermons for the congregation on a regular basis.
5. Lead the elders, deacons, deaconesses and Sabbath school teachers in a regular visitation program for members, interests, and guests.
6. Support all departments of the local congregation.
7. Keep the pastor aware of the successes and needs of the local congregation.
8. Lead the church in a strong evangelism program by:
 - a. Modeling the principles of personal evangelism.
 - b. Conducting a baptismal class.
 - c. Conducting lay evangelism meetings from time to time.
 - d. Supporting and being involved in small group ministry.
 - e. Leading the church, where possible, in Global Mission activities to enter unentered areas.
 - f. Ensuring that the church nurtures new believers.
 - g. Helping to reclaim missing members.
 - h. Planning activities that will hold the youth in the church.
9. Work with deacons to make sure the church building and yard are kept in good condition.
10. Work with the church board and members to make sure your church's atmosphere is so filled with the love of God that new members and interests will feel welcome.
11. Attend all the meetings scheduled by the pastor and conference for the training of elders.
12. Give full support to the most important team in the church: the pastor-elder team.
13. Take steps each day to grow in close personal relationship with Jesus Christ; pray for the guidance and empowering of the Holy Spirit.
14. Be well acquainted with the *Church Manual*, *Elder's Handbook*, and *Elder's Digest* in order to be aware of your role as an elder.
15. Take steps to build up a basic library that will help in preparing meaningful sermons. **E**

James H. Zachary, is an associate secretary of the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

From Here and There

■ The Use of Wine and Heart Disease

You may have heard that regular use of red wine reduces the risk of heart disease. This is based on research in France, where people consume diets as fatty as North Americans. Another take in this research is reported by the Institute on Alcoholism & Drug Dependency at Andrews University. The heart disease prevention benefits "may be explained by non-alcoholic compounds. Phenolic substances which have strong antioxidant properties are found in red wine, as well as in many fruits and vegetables including grapes and raisins. The phenols have been shown . . . in inhibit the oxidation of 'bad' (LDL) cholesterol, thus reducing its atherogenic ability." Want more information? See the journal *Nutrition Review*, volume 51, pages 185-187 (1993).

■ Did You Know

In a recent sociological study of religious North America reported in *Newsweek* some interesting statistical findings were made. There are more than 1,500 different religious bodies and sects in the USA.

More than 90% of Americans profess a belief in God. More than half say they pray at least once a day and more than 40% claim to attend worship services.

Other interesting findings are:

- The wealthy attend worship service less often than the poor,
- Most Americans are not Muslims, and most American Muslims are not Arabs,
- More African-Americans are Roman Catholic (9%) than Muslim (0.9%),
- One fourth of American Jews have no religion and another 12 percent are Christian converts.

■ Utrecht Update

Two subjects discussed at recent General Conference meetings with division officers from around the world included stewardship education and the Commission on the World Church Organization (COWCO). Besides a discussion relating to the modification of the church's constitution, by-laws and policies, COWCO again looked at capping the size of General Conference Session delegations. COWCO has made recommendations to the 1994 Annual Council that offer alternatives to the present 2650 delegates, which world divisions want reduced to 2000. The decision must be made at the General Conference session in 1995. COWCO also plans to make prospective delegates to the Utrecht, Holland, session aware of the issues to be discussed there by distributing a videotape (with supporting documentation) prior to their arrival.

■ Southern Baptists Maintain Stand on Homosexuality

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Protestant body in the United States, recently gave itself the constitutional authority to expel member churches which affirm homosexual behavior.

According to a Baptist Press release by Art Toalston and Louis Moore, delegates swiftly and overwhelmingly voted to emend their constitution to that effect, ending successfully the two-year process for such action.

The implications of the action had the immediate effect of fueling the determination of the SBC to separate itself from positions taken by US president Bill Clinton, a member of a Southern Baptist church in Little Rock, Arkansas.

The Convention nevertheless approved a resolution to "separate ourselves" from a detailed list of stances which Bill Clinton espouses. Among the offending issues were his approval of abortion in certain circumstances and his stated determination to allow homosexuals to serve openly in the US military.

■ **Church to Emphasize the Year of the Adventist Woman**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has

designated 1995 as the Year of the Adventist Woman. Worldwide emphasis for this special year will highlight contributions women have made to the Adventist Church, and focus on six issues facing women in the world today. These issues, given priority by the Church, are illiteracy, poverty, threats to health and poor health care, length of workday, abuse, and lack of training experience and opportunities to participate in the Church's mission. **E**

Answering Your Questions

Send us your church administration and theology related questions. In this column the ED will answer as many of them as space permits.

Signs of the Second Coming

HENRY FEYERABEND

Question:

Weren't the Lisbon earthquake, the dark day and the falling of the stars local events that affected only one small region?—I.P., Newfoundland, Canada.

Answer:

They were not as local as some would think. The Lisbon earthquake was felt in the North African city of Fes, 400 miles away; in the city of Strasbourg, 1,100 miles away; and through a tidal wave in Barbados, 4,000 miles away. (See Mervin Maxwell, *God Cares*, Volume 2, pages 194, 195) In the Gosling Memorial Library in St. Johns, Newfoundland, we have evidence that even Canada was hit by a tidal wave as a result of this earthquake. (Ernest Monteith, *The Lord is My Shepherd*, page 3)

The falling of the stars was not limited to New England. The event was recorded as far away as Western Canada. (Ernest Monteith, *The Lord is My Shepherd*, page 5).

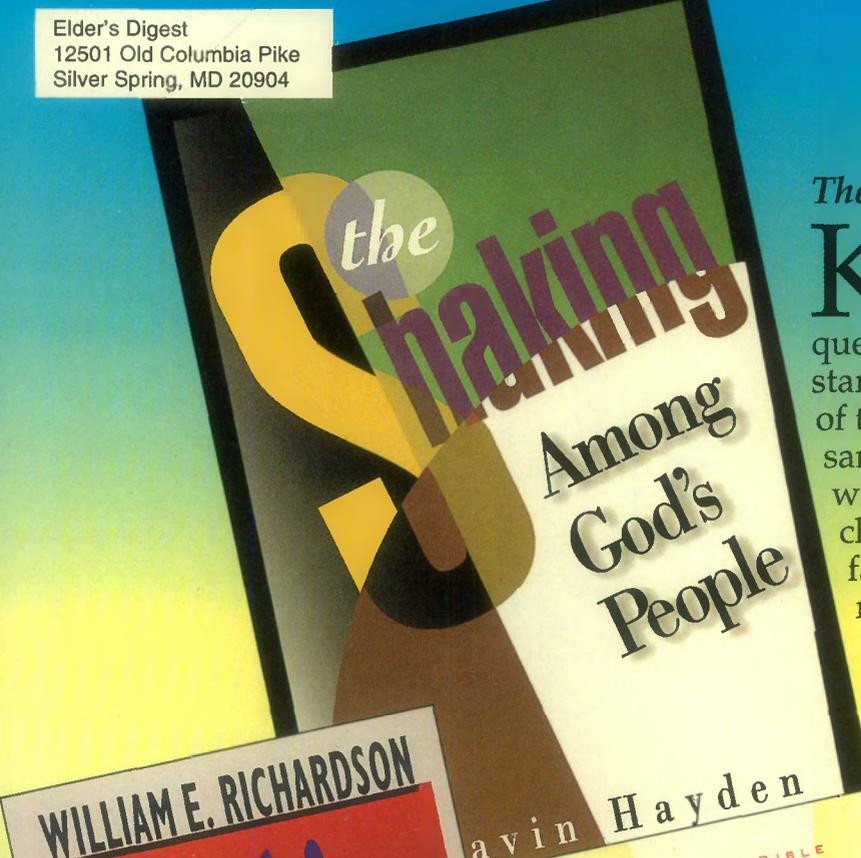
As Dr. Mervin Maxwell points out in his book *God Cares*, these signs are significant in three important aspects:

1. Their magnitude. All of them called world-wide attention and made an impact on the people of their time.

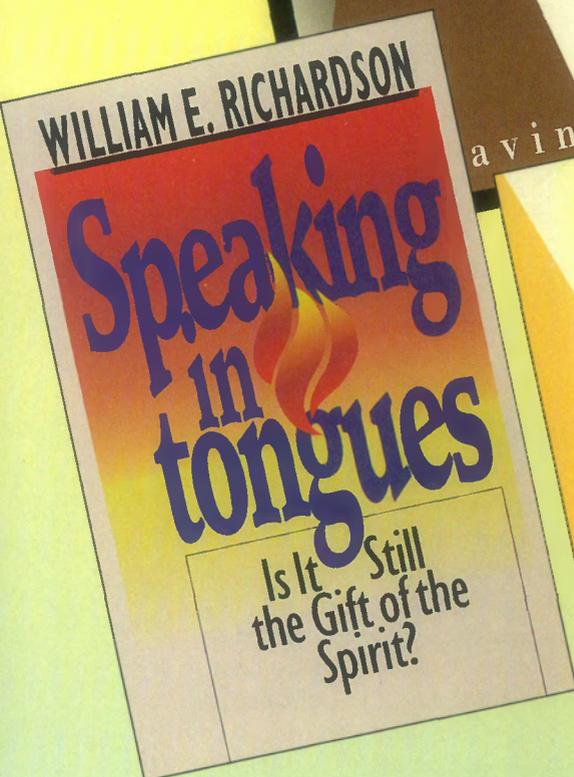
2. Their location. They occurred in Europe and North America where people were studying the Bible and pondering the prophecies, and where they would be ready to perceive their importance. A dark day over the Sahara or in New Guinea would have said little about the coming of Christ to cannibal head hunters or Muslim nomads.

3. Their timing. They took place at the exact time, in the right order, right on schedule. **E**

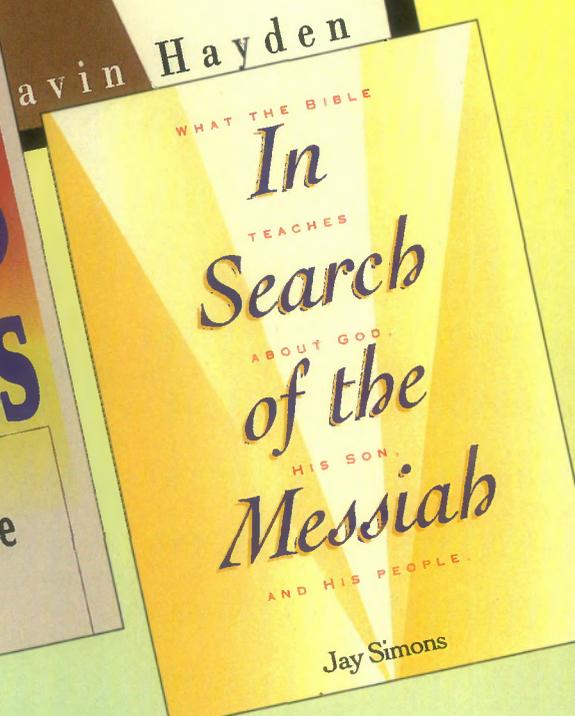
Henry Feyerabend is the speaker of "It Is Written" telecast for Canada and evangelist for North American Division working in connection with the Media Center evangelistic program.



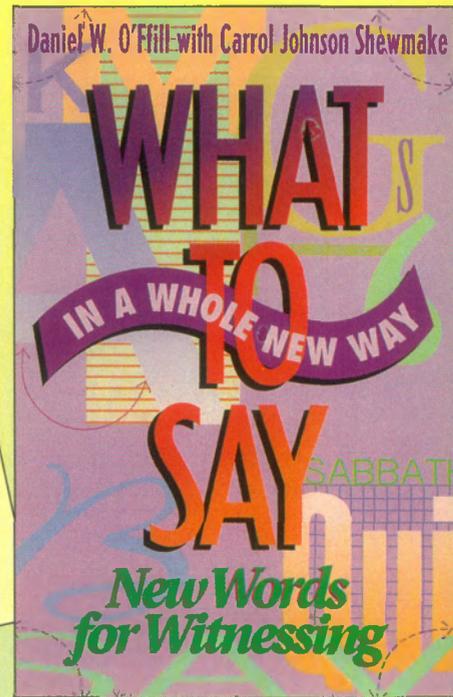
The Shaking Among God's People
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