

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 130:

“Church Growth Experiments in Secular Australia”

By Pastor E. Bruce Price

Retired Church Pastor, Evangelist, and Departmental Director of the South Pacific Division

Author, *God’s Channel of Truth: Is It the Watchtower?* and *Our Friends: The Jehovah’s Witnesses*

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,

**Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,
Andrews University**

The responses to my last ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 129 on “The Papacy: Retrospect and Prospect,” surpassed my fondest expectations. I received, not only hundreds of new subscriptions, but also numerous invitations to speak on THE FUTURE OF THE PAPACY. One invitation came from far away Hong Kong, where I will share this research with our believers on Saturday/Sunday, August 27-28 and with the seminary professors and local clergy on Tuesday, August 30, 2005.

It will come as a disappointment to many subscribers to see that this newsletter does not continue the study on the papacy began in the last newsletter. Hundreds of subscribers have told me that they are eagerly waiting to read my assessment of the new Pope Benedict XVI. Rest assured that during the next two weeks I will work full time on this project, with the intent of posting the next instalment before I leave for the General Conference.

The major problem has been the lack of time and of resources. During the past six weeks I have been away from home, speaking in Singapore, Malaysia, and South Africa. The intense speaking schedule and the limited internet access, have made it impossible for me to keep abreast of the programmatic speeches and directives of the new pope. Finally, I am back home with unlimited use of the high-speed internet and of the library resources of Andrews University.

While I keep you waiting for my study on Pope Benedict XVI, I am treating you to two essays that you should find informative and

stimulating. The first study, posted in this newsletter, is an evaluation of “Church Growth Experiments in Australia,” by Bruce Price, a retired Australian church pastor and author. Pastor Price is regarded as an authority on Jehovah’s Witnesses, having written two popular books on the subject: *God’s Channel of Truth: Is It the Watchtower?* and *Our Friends: The Jehovah’s Witnesses*. I will comment on this essay shortly.

The second study, to be posted in the next newsletter, will deal with the seven heads beast of Revelation 17. The author is Jon Paulien, Ph. D., Chairman of the NT Department of Andrews University Theological Seminary. Personally, I regard Prof. Paulien as the foremost Adventist eschatologist. He promised to deliver me his essay by the end of this week so that I can post it next week by June 13-14, 2005. You will be delighted and enlightened by Paulien’s responsible interpretation of Revelation 17.

During the past few weeks I received scores of fanciful interpretations of the seven-heads beast of Revelation 17, some applying them to the last seven popes. I am pleased that a foremost Adventist authority on apocalyptic prophecies, will lead us into a responsible interpretation of this much-discussed chapter. I promise to post Prof. Paulien’s essay next week as soon as I receive it.

A REPORT OF SOUTH AFRICAN LECTURE TOUR

In all my overseas travelling, I do not recall having ever experienced such a marvellous reception and response as I did in South Africa from May 13 to 28, 2005. The organizers filled each single day of my itinerary with at least one speaking engagements. On several days I spoke three times: at 1:00 p. m. at Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, and then at 4:00 and 7:00 p. m. at two different Adventist churches.

Honestly, I have never been under so much pressure in my itinerant ministry overseas. Usually the schedule allows for a couple of free days every week. But in South Africa there was “no rest for the wicked.” The only free day in my schedule, was supposed to be Thursday, May 26, but eventually even that day was filled with a request from the Kruegersdorp SDA Church, where we had a great evening rally.

At first I was worried that I may not be able to hold up for 17 days under such an intense pressure, because I am 67 years old, with limited energy. But it seemed that every day the Lord provided me with fresh strength to meet the challenge. It was reassuring to know that my wife and family were praying for me.

Warm Response of Capacity Crowds

What made the South African Lecture tour a most memorable experience for me is the warm response of the capacity crowds that attended all the major rallies. For example, on the first weekend (May 13-14), the Helderberg College Church that seats about 900 persons, was already packed on Friday evening. The average attendance on the Sabbath is between 200 to 300 members. On Friday evening the plan was for me to use a small side screen sufficient for the expected attendance of about 200 persons. But as the church began filling up, we quickly decided to move the projector to the center in order to project my PowerPoint testimony on the large 10' screen in the center of the sanctuary.

On the Sabbath both the sanctuary and the outside overflow tent, were filled with over 1300 people. Some had driven 300 to 400 miles to attend the meetings. They learned about the meetings from the ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER. The fact that over 2000 South Africans subscribe to my newsletter, partly explains the reason for the large attendance to all the meetings.

On Sabbath morning I spoke from 9:30 a. m. until 1:00 p. m., with only a short half-an-hour break in-between the two Bible studies. The Sabbath afternoon session began at 2:30 and continued nonstop until 6:00 p. m. Hardly a soul left during these long sessions.

The same experience was repeated the following Sabbath in Pretoria. About 1500 members and friends of other faiths attended the rally held in a beautiful Dutch Reformed Church, rented for the occasion. Ria Versters, the dynamic coordinator of my itinerary and of the Sabbath services in Pretoria, was apprehensive about my long Sabbath afternoon presentation on the latest Sabbath/Sunday developments. She mentioned to me that Afrikaans (white South Africans) are not accustomed to seat

for two or three hours long sessions on Sabbath afternoon. To her surprise every person seemed to be glued to their seat from 2:30 to 5:30 p. m.

A legitimate complaints by some of our black South Africans fellow believers, was the use of the Afrikaan language in some parts of the service. The vast majority of the black South Africans do not speak Afrikaan. In school they learn a native African language beside English, while the white South African learn Afrikaan, which is the language of their Dutch ancestors who settled in the country. In a Sabbath rally bringing together black and white South Africans, it would have been wiser to use only English, the language known and used by all South Africans.

Week Nights Meetings at the Bassonia SDA Church

The attendance was great, non only on the Sabbath, but even during the week nights. In Johannesburg I spoke every night from Sunday to Wednesday at the Bassonia SDA Church—a modern Afrikaan church that seats about 300 persons. Next to the church there is a spacious gymnasium used for fellowship meals and sport activities. The meetings were attended by both white and black South Africans. English was the language spoken at all times. There was no complaint about the use of Afrikaan.

On Sunday night about 200 chairs were brought in from the gymnasium to accommodate the overflow in the sanctuary. Even the platform was so filled with people that little space was left for me to stand and move. For the next three nights a closed-circuit was set up in the gymnasium. By Wednesday night about 700 people filled the church, the gymnasium, and even the connecting corridor. Many of the people who attended the meetings were non-SDA invited by our members, who were eager to introduce them to me.

By Wednesday night I felt emotional about the whole experience in a way I have never felt before. Somehow I felt deeply moved by the display of affection many were showing toward me for the blessings the messages brought to their lives. I came to view the congregation as my family of faith to whom God was granting me the privilege to proclaim timely biblical truths.

At the last meeting on Wednesday evening, several expressed their disappointment at my departure, saying: “It has been such a blessing to come every night. Now, what are we going to do the rest of the week?” It was evident that many had come to love the messages and would have loved to learn more about the Bible truths embedded in our Adventist message.

An indication of the interest for a deeper understanding of our message, is the unprecedented number of orders received during the lecture tour for my publications and recordings. Since I returned home a week ago, we have been working nonstop every day to process the hundreds of orders received. Truly I can say that never before I received so many orders. I should add that I did offer my 17 books and DVD/CD-ROM recordings at about 65% discount, in order to make it possible for believers with limited means to take advantage of the offer.

Hundreds of members ordered the DVD album with 10 PowerPoint messages on the SABBATH and SECOND ADVENT. To ensure that the DVD album will be delivered by the Post Office without delay, we AIRMAILED all the recordings at the cost of over \$5000.00. It is encouraging to know that thousand of people in South Africa who were unable to attend the meetings, will now be able to enjoy the same messages in their home and churches by watching the DVD recordings.

A Lesson Learned from Bassonia

In reflecting on the recent experiences in Bassonia (Johannesburg), Singapore, Penang (Malaysia), London, and across the USA, I have come to realize that the time has come for me to move from a short weekend seminar on one vital aspect of our faith, to a longer series of meetings covering all the vital biblical truths we cherish. A longer series offers an opportunity to interact and bond with a congregation, leading new believers to a baptismal commitment.

Several church leaders have encouraged me to developed a series of PowerPoint presentations covering our fundamental beliefs. In fact, I have received invitations from different countries to go back and present a series of evangelistic messages designed to lead people to baptism. By

God's grace I plan to develop such a series of PowerPoint presentations which can lead people to appreciate and accept the validity and relevance of the Adventist message for today.

Today, evangelistic meetings are largely conducted by pastors and/or professional evangelists who use their creativity to repackage and present the Adventist message in appealing ways. Their contribution to our church is inestimable. But, Bible scholars have seldom conducted a series of evangelistic meetings. Perhaps a reason is that their research-oriented lifestyle, tends to make them boring when standing before a large congregation.

But people seem to be willing to listen to a Bible scholar who is less eloquent than a pastor or evangelist, if they feel that he opens their mind to a deeper understanding and experience of biblical truths. My experience in America and overseas has shown that our members are eager to invite their friends to public meetings, if they feel that the speaker is a competent Bible scholar with a message that meets their mental and spiritual needs.

At a time when the focus of the church growth movement is on METHODS that bring people into the church, as the article you are about to read shows, it is reassuring to know that the MESSAGE of the Word of God, proclaimed with clarity, conviction, and relevance, is still the most powerful method of church growth. This is what I have learned and witnessed in South Africa and everywhere I have shared my ministry.

The challenge that our Adventist Church faces today, is not merely to learn new METHODS used by evangelical churches to bring people into the church, but to think new ways to make our Adventist MESSAGE relevant to our materialistic and secular-minded society. The latter requires THINKERS, not just TINKERS. Unfortunately, the Adventists church growth movement is largely based on the contribution of TINKERS, rather than of THINKERS. Respected Bible scholars are seldom invited to Adventist church growth conferences to propose new refreshing ways to present the message of the Sabbath, Sanctuary, and Second Advent to our secular-minded society. Yet, it is a proper understanding and acceptance of the Adventist message that gives to new converts a reason for living, loving, and serving the Lord.

The Meetings at Stellenbosch Theological Seminary

The report about the South Africa lecture tour, would be incomplete without mentioning the three lectures delivered at Stellenbosch Theological Seminary. The meetings were arranged by Dr. Bernard Ficker, from Helderberg College—a man with a real passion for reaching people with the Adventist message.

Stellenbosch University is a venerable institution that caters especially to the Afrikaans, that is, the white South Africans descendants of the original Dutch settlers. Its Theological Seminary trains the pastors of the Dutch Reformed Church, the dominant church of the white South Africans. Dr. Ficker explained to me that to be able to speak in the auditorium of the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, was in itself a significant breakthrough.

The three lectures I delivered were scheduled for the worse possible time, 1:00 p. m., lunch time. The rationale was that by 1:00 p. m., the morning classes are over and some theology students may choose to come to listen to my lecture, rather than going to the cafeteria. Frankly, I doubted that anyone would show up. But I was wrong. Some did come. We started with about 60 people and finished with over 100.

Among those who attended the meetings there was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary. He was eager to purchase all my 17 books and recordings to donate them to the library. An educated lady learned about the meetings from an announcement in the newspaper, and she drove every day more than 100 miles to attend the lectures.

My first PowerPoint lecture was on *THE CHRISTIAN AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES*. In this lecture I share the findings of my research on the biblical imperative of total abstinence, published in my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE*. The book has been favorably reviewed by scholars of different persuasions.

The reason I was asked to lecture on this topic, is because the town of Stellenbosch is in the heart of the wine-making country. It is the

equivalent of the Nappa valley of the United States. In fact, Stellenbosch University offers a degree in Enology, that is, the science of wine making.

Among those who attended the lecture, there was a young man in the late twenties, who had earned a degree in Enology from Stellenbosch University. He told me that after reading *WINE IN THE BIBLE*, he decided to sell his successful wine-making business, because in good conscience he could no longer produce alcoholic wine, which is detrimental to the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of people.

The second PowerPoint lecture was on FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY: HOW IT CAME ABOUT? In this lecture I share the highlights of my dissertation on the change of the Sabbath, published by the Pontifical Gregorian University, in Rome, Italy. The interest for the Sabbath generated by the lecture was evident by the orders that Dr. Ficker and his helper received not only for my Sabbath books, but also for the newly recorded DVD ALBUM with 10 PowerPoint Sabbath lectures.

The last PowerPoint lecture was on THE CERTAINTY OF THE ADVENT HOPE. In this lecture I discuss first five major factors which are causing people to neglect or even reject the Advent Hope, and then five major reasons for believing in the certainty of Christ's imminent Return.

Dr. Ficker was so enthusiastic about the response of those who attended, that he is already working on plans to bring me back to Stellenbosch Theological Seminary for a longer series of lectures, hopefully at a more reasonable time. He feels that it is a providential opportunity to be able to present our Adventist message in the stronghold of the Dutch Reformed Church.

The Socio-Political Situation in South Africa

South Africa has undergone radical changes after the dismantling of the apartheid form of government. Black South African are rightly proud of the fact that the abuses and restrictions of the apartheid government are finally over. They are free to travel, to study, and to get government jobs.

The new government is trying to make past wrongs right, by implementing affirmative action programs that gives priority to blacks over whites, especially when it comes to jobs. The result is that white South African graduates, are forced to leave the country to seek employment in Australia, USA, Britain, and else where. This explains why South Africans are widely scattered throughout Western countries.

The flight of brain power from South Africa, poses a threat to the future of the country. The wealth of a nation is determined not only by its natural resources, but also by its human brain-power resources. The constant exodus of brain-power, necessitated by the lack of job opportunities, is gradually leading the country into an economic crisis. Manual labor is cheap in South Africa (about \$200.00 a month), but foreign companies are unwilling to built manufacturing plants, because of restrictive policies. For example, the government requires that 51% of the ownership of new businesses must be in the hands of black South Africans, who do not need to purchase their share.

The economic crisis is evident in the alarming rate of unemployment, poverty, and crime. Several sources have told me that about 70% of the people are unemployed. The situation has been aggravated by the influx of people from all the neighboring African countries who were invited to come to South Africa after the independence. Now, the government is trying to stop illegal immigration and want to send people back to their homeland, but such efforts are too little and too late. The result is that the major cities are surrounded by “shanty towns,” with crude shelters made up of scrap metal sheet and cartons.

The greatest threat to the future of South Africa is the massive unemployment and poverty that is ticking like a time bomb, ready to explode at any time. Desperate people do desperate things. This is evident in the frightening crimes that occur every day. At night, cars are highjacked at intersections and sometimes drivers are killed. A pastor told me that at night he does not stop at a red traffic light in certain dangerous intersections of Johannesburg, because he is afraid to be attacked by bandits. The last night I spoke at the Bassonia SDA Church, two cars were stolen in church the parking lot, and another car was broken into.

To protect themselves from criminals, middle class people live in kind of high security prison environment. Their houses are protected by high walls with electronic wire, iron gates, and iron bars cover all their windows and doors. Their cars are equipped with all sorts of security devices. In Cape Town, the security guard at the hotel, warned me not to venture out for a walk at night, because I may not come back alive. The black South African driver who drove me to the airport summed it up well, when he said: “We have gained political freedom, but we have become victims of crime.”

The Situation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The socio-political problems of South Africa are reflected inside the Adventist church. While in the USA the black and white conferences function independently within the same Union, in South Africa a forced integration of our white and black conferences is currently being promoted. This plan is creating considerable apprehension, because white churches fear the loss of their identity.

Helderberg College used to be a predominantly white college. Now, it has become a black college. Of the 400 students only half a dozen are white. These are Filipinos whose parents serve a missionaries in Botswana. This means that while the blacks have two colleges, Bethel and Helderberg, the white young people have no longer a white college to attend.

In America the problem is less felt, because there are more colleges to choose from. For example, if Atlantic Union College is becoming predominantly black, parents have the option of sending their sons and daughter to Southern University—the fastest growing Adventist white university in the USA. Such an option is not available to South Africans, who end up attending secular universities.

The future of the white Afrikaan SDA church in South Africa looks bleak. As the older members gradually pass away, there will be fewer new members to take their place. Ultimately our Adventist Church in South Africa will become a predominantly black church, like in England. Let us pray for our leaders and members in South Africa. They need to be

empowered with wisdom and grace to fulfil the Gospel commission in the midst of social, political turmoil.

SPECIAL ONE TIME GC OFFER ON HITACHI PROJECTORS

In occasion of the forthcoming General Conference Session in St. Louis, (June 29 to July 9, 2005), the HITACHI Corporation of North America has agreed to offer their lines of projectors at a special ONE TIME OFFER, to help especially our churches and schools in developing countries.

For example, the SPECIAL GC OFFER on the HITACHI 2000 LUMENS CP-X328 HIGH RESOLUTION, is only \$1,495.00, instead of the factory suggested retail price of \$7,495.00. This projector has WON THE AWARD of the best projector in its class. Many churches and schools have bought this projector for \$2000.00, that is \$500.00 more than the GC SPECIAL OFFER. This special offer is good only while the supply lasts.

The same special ONE TIME GC SESSION OFFER applies to all the HITACHI models that you can view at my website: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/bppprojectors/> NOTE: The SPECIAL GC OFFER is NOT given at my website. To obtain a quote, just call me at (269) 471-2915 or email me your request at sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com

The special ONE TIME GC OFFER was worked out with HITACHI during my recent lecture tour in South Africa (May 10-31, 2005). When I became painfully aware of the desperate need of good projectors in developing countries, I appealed to HITACHI to grant an additional discount in occasion of the forthcoming General Conference Session. HITACHI agreed to grant such a discount on all the projectors that I would purchase in advance for the GC session.

I ventured out on faith and I bought about 50 HITACHI projectors of the most popular models purchased by our churches and schools during this past year. This means that Adventists attending the GC session, can pick up a projector at my BOOTH No. 33 at a bargain price and take it back to their homeland without paying FEDEX airfreight or custom duties.

My BOOTH No. 33 is located on the “AISLE 00” that runs from the Adventist Bookstore at the one end of the isle, to the Exhibit Hall “1” at the other end. If you are unable to attend the GC, you can take advantage of the SPECIAL OFFER while the supply lasts, simply by calling us at (269) 471-2915 or email us your request at sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com

SPECIAL ONE TIME GC OFFER ON DVD/VIDEO SEMINARS

In occasion of the General Conference Session, I am offering for only \$60.00, postage paid, my DVD or VIDEO ALBUM containing 10 live, dynamic PowerPoint presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent which I present worldwide. The regular price of the album is \$150.00. The VIDEO ALBUM has the same 10 PowerPoint messages, but its price is only \$35.00, postage paid, because we need to reduce our inventory.

The recording was done few months ago by a TV crew at the brand new Michiana-FilAm SDA Church at Andrews University. The quality of the taping is exceptionally good, especially since the editor, Lawrence Brown, a former student of mine who works for Channel 16 of Notre Dame University, spent a month to insert manually each of the 1000 PowerPoint slides used for the 10 lectures.

These 10 PowerPoint lectures include the discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on the change of the Sabbath. You will see important documents and leading popes who influenced the change of the Sabbath. People who cannot attend my weekend seminars, can now enjoy my Sabbath/Advent messages in their homes and share them with their congregation.

If you plan to attend the General conference, you can purchase the DVD ALBUM for \$60.00 or VIDEO ALBUM for \$35.00, at my BOOTH No. 33 which is located on the “AISLE 00” that runs from the Adventist Bookstore at the one end of the isle, to the Exhibit Hall “1” at the other end. If you are unable to attend the GC, feel free to call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915 or email us your order at sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com We guarantee to process your order immediately.

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR AN EXCELLENT REMOTE FOR YOUR POWER POINT PRESENTATIONS?

If you are looking for an outstanding Remote for your Power-Point presentations, you will be pleased to know HONEYWELL has just come out with the smallest and most powerful remote in the market. You can view it at <http://www.powerremote.com/>

The size of the transmitter is smaller than a credit card. You can stick it inside the palm of your hand and nobody can see it. The operating distance between the remote and the receiver is officially 150 feet. But I tested the remote in an open environment, and the radio signal can go up to 400 feet of distance. IT IS INCREDIBLE! The transmitter has three button: forward, backward, and laser.

The brand new model is hard to find in the market, but I signed a contract with HONEYWELL to distribute it to our churches and schools. By buying 50 units at a time, I can offer this incredible remote for only \$120.00, postage paid. To order a remote, call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915 or email us your order at sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com

THE BEST SDA COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

Much of the prophetic message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church derives from the Book of Revelation. Yet until now our church did not have an authoritative commentary. Finally, Andrews University Press has published a thorough *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, authored by Ranko Stefanovich, an outstanding Adventist scholar who has worked on Revelation for many years, in preparation of his doctoral dissertation. This new commentary provides a wealth of information needed to unlock the meaning of the prophetic message of Revelation for our times.

Read the full story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/RevelationofJesusChrist.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the book through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of June and July 2005. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars.

JUNE 17-18: LOMA LINDA FILIPINO & ROMANIAN CHURCHES

Location: Loma Linda Filipino SDA Church, 11180 New Jersey Street, Redlands, CA 92373. For information call Pastor Armando Fabella at (909) 790-8171 or (909) 798-3822.

Loma Linda Romanian SDA Church, 26271 Mayberry Street, Loma Linda, CA (2354). For information call Pastor Nicolae Butoiu at (909) 799-8523.

JUNE 28 to JULY 11: GENERAL CONFERENCE IN ST. LOUIS

Location of **BOOTH:** My **BOOTH** number is 33. It is located on the "AISLE 00" that runs from the Adventist Bookstore at the one end of the aisle, to the Exhibit Hall "1" at the other end. If you want to reach me on my cellular phone, my number is (269) 208-1942. I look forward to meet many of you. Feel free to stop by to renew our acquaintance.

JULY 22: HAMBURG GHANAIAN SDA CHURCH - GERMANY

Location: Charlottenstrasse 24A. (About 200 meters from U2 Emillienstrasse bahnhof).

For information call Pastor Nyamaah Elijah at 4040197131

JULY 23: KRELLIGEN GHANAIAN SDA CHURCH - NEAR HANNOVER

For location and information, call Pastor Charles Dediako at 7115059807.

COMMENTS ON PASTOR BRUCE PRICE'S ESSAY

Pastor Bruce Price's essay on "Church Growth Experiments in Secular Australia," is a chapter taken from the newly released book *HERE WE STAND: EVALUATING NEW TRENDS IN THE CHURCH*. The book (over 800 pages) is printed by Review & Herald, but published by *Adventist Affirm*. The book addresses the major issues facing the Adventist Church today. The issues are divided into 7 sections, for a total of over 50 chapters. Different authors examine the following issues:

1. New Methods of Church Growth
2. New Questions on Doctrines
3. New Views on Creation (the evolution-creation debate in the Adventist church)
4. New Styles of Worship and Music
5. New Issues on Marriage (polygamy, homosexuality, divorce & remarriage, etc.)
6. New Changes in Local Church Leadership
7. New Structure for the Church (congregationalism, etc.)

A thoughtful reading of *HERE WE STAND*, will help you to understand the major issues facing the Adventist church today. You will understand how these issues are debated by Adventist thought-leaders.

The price of this large, informative volume is \$19,95, postage paid. You can order a copy in two ways: (1) through *Biblical Perspectives* or (2) through *Adventist Affirm*.

To order the book through *Biblical Perspectives*, simply call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915 or email us your order at sbacchio cchi@biblicalpherspectives.com

_____ To order *HERE WE STAND* through *Adventist Affirm* simply call (269)-471-2300 or visit the secure website: www.adventistsaffirm.org

Observations On Pastor Price's Essay

Pastor Price's essay looks at two Adventist approaches to church growth tried in Australia. He labels one *pragmatist* and the other *commissionist*. His case study of Australia is relevant to many other countries like the USA, where the same methods are being tested today.

Pastor Price shows quite convincingly that the *pragmatist* approach of those churches that adopted the celebration-type of contemporary worship, minimizing distinctive Adventist doctrines and capitalizing on entertaining forms of worship, has hardly produced real church growth. An example given is the five pilot contemporary churches that were "planted" in the South Pacific Division. Eventually four of them left the "the sisterhood of Adventist churches", causing the loss of members and pastors.

By contrast, churches that follow the *commissionist* approach, characterized by strict fidelity to the "distinctive Adventist message . . . and the counsels of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy" have a tract record of growth. A case in point is the Waitara SDA Church where Pastor Price served for 16 years. During his pastorate "235 souls were baptized, and a further 18 were reclaimed and rebaptized." During Pastor Price's tenure, I have preached twice at the Waitara SDA Church, and I can testify that it is a dynamic, growing church.

Overall, Pastor Price offers a sound assessment of the church growth movement in the Adventist church. Church growth based on questionable METHODS, such as beat music, entertainment, relaxing of church standards (going to church with tea-shirts, string dresses, blue jeans), and presentation of new doctrines with a less demanding Gospel, can produce a sick Adventist church that can ultimately die.

By contrast, church growth based on the proclamation of a sound biblical MESSAGE, that uphold distinctive Adventist doctrines and standards, produces healthy churches that survive and grow. It has always been my conviction that what leads people to a genuine conversion experience

is the MESSAGE of God's Word, proclaimed with clarity, conviction, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Disagreement with Pastor Price

My disagreement with Pastor Price could possibly be in his understanding of what it means to be faithful to traditional Adventist beliefs, especially to the teachings of Ellen White. For me to be faithful to traditional Adventist beliefs does not mean to accept without questioning all the doctrines formulated by our pioneers over hundred years ago. Rather, it means to build upon their foundation, by expanding, correcting if necessary, and making our traditional doctrines relevant to the needs of our society.

To illustrate my position, I will refer to my newsletter No. 86 "Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy" that generated a lot of hate mail. As some of you may recall, I proposed to expand the prophetic role of the Antichrist beyond the papacy, by including Islam as well. After all, both the Papacy and Islam arose to power at about the same time. The Papacy influenced the Western part of the Roman empire, while Islam during the 100 years of conquest from 632 to 732, conquered the Eastern part of the Roman empire, extending its dominion from North Africa until the Far East (Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc.).

Both the Papacy and Islam persecuted God's people. The Muslim were even more brutal than the papacy by radically uprooting Christianity from many countries. The North African countries of Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, were all flourishing Christian countries. Today you can count the number of Christians with the fingers.

Both promoted the false worship of God through the intercession of human beings (Mary, venerated also by the Moslem, Mohammed, the Saints). Both changed God's Holy Sabbath Day: the Papacy changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and Mohammed changed the Sabbath to Friday.

When we look at the total picture, it would seem to me that expanding the prophetic role of the Little Horn Antichrist, by including Islam in addition to the papacy, is a reasonable proposal. Personally I feel that it is not wise to put all our eggs in the basket of the papacy. Yet, such a

reasonable proposal was met with fierce denunciations from those who accused me of departing from the hallowed traditional teachings of our pioneers.

Graeme Bradford's book *Prophets are Human*

Another example is Graeme Bradford's book *Prophets are Human*, published in 2004 by our Australian *Signs Publishing Company*. Bradford is a Professor at Avondale College and has examined the life and writings of Ellen White for the past 20 years. Pastor Price cites this book as a recent attempt to cast doubt on the work of Ellen White. He mentions the earnest attempt of "faithful Australian ministers and laymen" to counteract the negative impact of this book.

Fortunately, I heard Prof. Bradford speak at the South Queensland Campmeeting when I was invited to speak at that campmeeting. I also had the privilege of reading his unedited manuscript before its publication.

In his presentations at the South Queensland Campmeetings, Prof. Bradford reaffirmed his commitment to the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, while alerting the audience about some of her limitations. The same is true of his book *Prophets are Human*. The manuscript version that I read shows in a compelling way, on the one hand the validity of the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, but on the other hand her limitations.

The problem is not with Bradford's book—which deserves commendation for his painstaking research—but with those who have developed in their mind a glorified view of Ellen White, making her the equivalent of the Catholic Madonna.

Since my last newsletter where I mentioned the Waldenses, I have received numerous messages from concerned brethren who try to persuade me that the Waldenses existed long before their founder Peter Valdes (ca. 1200) and that some of them were Sabbathkeepers. The reason given is that what the Lord told Ellen White is more trustworthy than the witness of historical documents. I plan to post an indepth study on the Waldenses in a future newsletter.

What these concerned brethren ignore is that the Lord did not reveal to Ellen White the details of the history of the Waldenses, but the broad unfolding of the Great Controversy. Ellen White was a diligent student of history. She had about 3000 volumes in her library, far more than any Adventist minister has in his library. She tried to gather the details of history from the best sources available to her. Unfortunately some of her sources were inaccurate. This is why Ellen White asked Adventist scholars to help her make corrections to the 1911 edition of *THE GREAT CONTROVERSY*.

Healthy and Unhealthy Church Growth

The point of the two examples cited above is that church growth based on the PROCLAMATION OF THE TRADITIONAL ADVENTIST MESSAGE, that ignores the problems of our traditional teachings and the contribution of committed Adventist scholars, will foster unhealthy growth. The Catholic church has experienced enormous growth during the Pontificate of John Paul II who preached traditional Catholic beliefs around the world. But Catholic growth is based on the blind acceptance of traditional heresies.

As Adventist we want to be sure that our church growth is a healthy growth, based not on gimmicks or inaccurate historical beliefs, but on a sound interpretation of Scripture. Lately, our Sabbath School Lesson has indicated that our traditional interpretation of “666,” lacks contextual and historical support. Abandoning an unfounded interpretation, makes our church more credible—healthier. But for some, it represents the abandoning of an important landmark.

In many ways church growth is like the physical growth of our body. We can feed our body with junk, fast food, and we grow an unhealthy, obese body. We can feed our body with strict “vegan” diet and we grow pale looking bodies. But, we can feed our bodies with a balanced vegetarian diet and we grow healthy looking bodies.

The same is true of church growth. Churches that grow on the junk food of an entertainment diet, may become big (obese) numerically, but they are sick in terms of biblical morality and spirituality.

By contrast, churches that grow on the “vegan” diet of traditional teachings, may grow to become legalistic and judgemental in their attitude.

But churches that grow on the balanced diet of a correct understanding of Biblical teachings, will grow to become healthy and happy congregations. This is something to think about.

“Church Growth Experiments in Secular Australia”

By Pastor E. Bruce Price

Retired Church Pastor, Evangelist, and Departmental Director of the South Pacific Division

Australia, with its secular, postmodern culture, poses a real challenge to Seventh-day Adventists in their commission to preach the everlasting Gospel of Revelation 14:6.

The golden years of public evangelism after World War II, when hundreds were being baptized, are now only a memory. Church administrators, pastors, and evangelists find it a real challenge to win souls, grow churches, and increase memberships.

Over the past two decades in Australia, two philosophies of Church Growth have emerged as the answer to postmodernism. Some refer to these philosophies as “contemporary” and “traditional” approaches. But because these terms mean different things to different people¹, I prefer to call the two approaches the *Pragmatist* and the *Commissionist* methods of church growth.

A. *Pragmatists* are those who are willing to try any methodology or approach if they believe it will make the Adventist church grow. It means being willing to learn from other denominations that are still experiencing church growth. It can mean new forms of worship, music, standards, and even the presentation of new doctrines or the neglect of old doctrines, in favor of entertainment. Pragmatists tend to adopt the celebration-type contemporary approach to worship.

B. *Commissionists* are those who will only apply new methods and techniques that are in harmony with the counsels and soulwinning principles

found in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. They will not compromise in any way the unique Biblical doctrines or standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They accept the entire Gospel commission of Matthew 28:18-20, which includes “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

They follow the prophetic commission in Revelation 10:10, 11 to “prophesy again before many peoples” and in the time of the end powerfully preach the everlasting Gospel with the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12. Commissionists may be described as those who still uphold the distinctive Adventist messages, the mainstream style of worship, and the methods of evangelism that are consistent with counsels in the Spirit of Prophecy.

This article briefly looks at these two approaches to church growth, showing how they have fared during the past 15 or so years in some notable churches of the South Pacific Division. With hundreds of thousands of dollars being pumped into the celebration-type contemporary methods of church growth, it is only fair to ask if their experiments have been successful. I will begin, however, with a brief summary of my encounter with the new approach to church growth.

My Pilgrimage to U.S.A. Celebration Churches

By the late 1980s, Australian Adventist administrators, evangelists, and pastors were looking for an answer to the challenge of this post-Christian era. They wanted to know how to successfully grow their churches.

It was at this time that the “celebration movement” was introduced to the world church of Seventh-day Adventists. The church’s leading papers heralded the first celebration churches in Milwaukie, a suburb of Portland, Oregon; and Colton, California, U.S.A. This new type of church was believed to be the answer to our church growth problems, as hundreds were flocking to these celebration churches. I was one of the pastors who embarked upon this pilgrimage.

My first opportunity to observe the celebration church movement in detail was in June 1990. I was part of a group of 30 Australian pastors who were taken on a Church Growth Tour through the U.S.A. to learn how

to grow churches. Two of the “growing” Adventist churches we visited were Milwaukee and Colton. With glowing enthusiasm their pastors told of the crowds of worshippers who were attending. Their excitement was contagious. We took notes, filed materials, and then attended some of their services.

I was in my 38th year of ministry, having been a departmental director and pastor/evangelist. Observing these celebration churches caused me concern as I saw their sacred worship services accompanied with lights and loud disco-type music of secular, worldly entertainment. The distinctive truths of the three angels’ messages and the Spirit of Prophecy had given way to a message of “love and acceptance.” Church standards had suffered a similar fate, as members were encouraged to be “loving” and not “judgmental.” However, many of those attracted to these services could not see the dangers. They expressed their joy that this new presentation of the Gospel had brought to them love, understanding, and a liberation from Adventist legalism.

With almost evangelistic zeal the members were urging other Adventists from surrounding churches to join them in this newfound experience. These churches were certainly growing, and rapidly. But it was largely “transfer growth” from other Adventist churches. While they were supposed to attract and convert “unchurched Harrys and Marys,” few such “kingdom-growth” baptisms were taking place.

While some of us left those celebration churches with questions in our minds, none of us had any idea that both of these churches would later collapse, with the loss of hundreds of souls. The pastor of the Milwaukee church also would become so antagonistic to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its teachings that his soul-destroying influence would even extend to Australia. In fact, little did we realize then that one of our fellow ministers on this tour would on his return “plant” a celebration/contemporary church like those he was observing, and he too would suffer a similar fate, with the loss of the church and himself to the Adventist Church.

“Kingdom” Church Growth

On that Church Growth Tour, however, there was one smaller Adventist church that impressed me: Norwalk, California. The pastor had

taken this church from a membership of 250 to 750 in just a few years. He explained that he had done this as a result of following closely the methods of evangelism and outreach outlined by Ellen White. After the meeting some asked his opinion of the celebration movement and why he was not impressed by it. He confirmed that the church growth being experienced by the celebration churches was largely “transfer growth” from other Adventist churches. His church’s growth was mainly kingdom growth, of souls being won to Christ as a result of evangelistic outreaches and Bible study.

Thus, when I returned to Australia I had a choice between the celebration-type church growth methods, and the time-honored Adventist approach. The choice was between the pragmatic approach and the commissionist approach. Faced with this choice, I chose the latter.

I determined to continue to pattern and grow my church in Sydney, on the counsels of Ellen White, in books such as *Gospel Workers* and *Evangelism*, and not make it a celebration church. The Lord blessed our humble efforts and in the 16 years I was the pastor of the Waitara church in Sydney, we witnessed the baptism of 235 souls. Many of them were “unchurched Harrys” who have become pastors, evangelists, and soulwinners for the Lord. In the past four years since I retired, this church has continued to win souls and to grow. It is difficult to find an empty seat at any of its services.

When I did not make my church a celebration-type contemporary church, some church administrators questioned why I was not being “progressive.” I told them that when this celebration movement should be successful and prove that this was the way the Lord wanted His church to go, then I would follow. Until then I would wait. But as I waited and watched, I witnessed only disasters in both Australia and the U.S.A.

The Celebration Movement in the South Pacific Division

When the celebration movement was launched in the Seventh-day Adventist Church by the Milwaukie and Colton Adventist churches in America, some pragmatists in Australia and New Zealand were quick to follow them. Five church plants of this nature were attempted in the South Pacific Division, each of which adopted a celebration-type contemporary

style of worship. They were: (1) Cherrybrook, Sydney, Greater Sydney Conference; (2) Cornerstone, North New Zealand Conference; (3) Fox Valley, Sydney, Greater Sydney Conference; (4) Riverside, Perth, West Australian Conference; and (5) Southside, Brisbane, South Queensland Conference.²

These five contemporary churches that were “planted” in the South Pacific Division initially experienced transfer growth from other Adventist churches, but had very little success in their style of evangelism in terms of kingdom growth. Tragically, four of these five churches are no longer in the sisterhood of Adventist churches. Like most of their American counterparts, they experienced a tragic loss of members as well as pastors.³

Besides the church “plants,” some established Adventist churches also adopted aspects of the celebration church growth methods. The Church Growth leaders of the South Pacific Division specially promoted one such Sydney church (the Mt. Colah church), hoping to demonstrate the success of these pragmatic methods. However, official conference records reveal that this church only had 19 baptisms in its first nine years, and in the next five years only one baptism!⁴

This “model” pragmatic church now has such a small attendance that it is struggling to exist. In contrast to this celebration-type church, the neighboring “commissionist” (or traditional) church, Waitara, has so experienced real kingdom church growth that it has been asked to care for the “model” church.⁵ In fact, more of these celebration-type contemporary churches are in trouble, and conference leaders are becoming very embarrassed about them, having in the past enthusiastically promoted them.

The Ford Apostasy

A mistaken assumption of the contemporary church growth movement is that distinctive Seventh-day Adventist doctrines are a hindrance to church growth and must, therefore, be abandoned. And yet, the churches that have jumped on this bandwagon are not growing!

For example, one of the greatest hindrances to church growth in Australia has been the apostasy of one of its most talented “sons,” Dr.

Desmond Ford. The apostasy has been like a great tsunami that has wrought enormous devastation throughout the South Pacific Division. For decades Dr. Ford taught at Avondale College, influencing more than a generation of professors, students, and future ministers. At the same time he was a popular and brilliant speaker at camp meetings and ministerial gatherings.

Among the Adventist doctrines that Dr. Ford opposes are the sanctuary, 1844, the investigative Judgment, the remnant church, and the role of the Spirit of Prophecy. In 1979 he publicly announced that he had not believed some of these doctrines for the past 35 years because he could not reconcile the writings of Ellen White with the book of Hebrews.⁶ In 2002, Ford at last publicly admitted he did not believe in “the creation of the world in six literal days a few thousand years ago.”⁷

However, for decades Dr. Ford taught differently and wrote articles for Adventist publications purporting to uphold some of these doctrines. His book *Daniel* is a further example of this duplicity.

Voices were raised through these years in Australia concerning Dr. Ford’s teachings. In 1976 he was even taken before the Biblical Research Committee by those concerned about what he was teaching at Avondale College on “the Sanctuary, the Age of the Earth and Inspiration.”¹⁰ Ford defended himself. The two leaders of these concerned brethren were two of Australia’s most successful evangelists. To silence their voices of opposition to Ford’s teachings, they were banned from church pulpits.¹¹

After Dr. Ford was dismissed from denominational employment in 1980, a staggering 180 ministers left the ministry within the next decade.¹² However most of his followers and sympathizers remained in the church. He urged them to do this, so they could use their influence more effectively to change the church. Many have since enjoyed positions of trust and responsibility.

Thus, with this overwhelming influence of Dr. Ford in Australia, there has been a greater challenge to soulwinning and church growth than all the forces of secularism and postmodernism combined.

What minister or layman is going to labor to bring souls into a church that he believes has defective doctrines? What right does the Adventist Church have to exist, and what mission does it have if it is not God's remnant church commissioned to call people out of Babylon to do His will and keep all the commandments of God?

This also explains why the celebration type of church growth in Australia was accepted so readily. The pragmatic-type celebration churches do not teach the unique doctrines of the Adventist Church, and Ellen White is rarely mentioned among them.

The association of Dr. Ford and those who promote his teachings with this type of church growth is well known in Australia. Some have even defied their conference administrations and invited him into their pulpits to address their congregations,¹³ where people have flocked to hear him.

Influential men, who would later raise serious doubts about the trustworthiness of the Spirit of Prophecy, even led a delegation to have Dr. Ford reinstated to preach again in Adventist churches.¹⁴ With this army of ministers and laymen who have been influenced by Dr. Ford in Australia, church growth has been seriously impeded.

Ellen White Challenged

Besides jettisoning distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, another mistaken assumption behind some of the church growth attempts is the view that the messages contained in the Spirit of Prophecy are not always relevant to the contemporary situation. However, this diminution of Ellen White's counsels has not helped those churches to grow!

In the South Pacific Division, since the doctrines of Dr. Ford are incompatible with the teachings of Ellen White, the Australian church has witnessed a continual denigration of her role and authority in doctrinal matters.¹⁵ Dr. Ford's followers appear foremost in upholding her in a pastoral role, while subtly destroying confidence in her writings in most other areas such as theology, health, history, etc., by outlining her "errors."

The year 2004 will no doubt be remembered in Australia for some of the most serious attacks on Ellen White from within the church. It began with a Summit on Ellen White at Avondale College. Prominent Australian presenters were some of Dr. Ford's most outspoken supporters, including those who tried to have him reinstated in the church in recent years. By contrast, some who are known to faithfully support Ellen White were not even asked to present a paper.¹⁶

Then in 2004 a lecturer in theology at Avondale College, the premier Seventh-day Adventist institution in Australia, published his provocative book,¹⁷ *Prophets Are Human*—a work that has been widely promoted by some prominent thought leaders of the church. This controversial book was initially promoted by a most distasteful cartoon of an alarmed Ellen White at last caught out in her errors! This appeared in the Division paper, the *Record*, and in large posters sent to every church.

In February 2004 a series of four articles appeared in the *Record* of an interview between an influential church historian and theology lecturer and the journal's editor, casting further doubt on the work of Ellen White. Serious charges were made by this church scholar, such as stating her writings were in error, being "partly wrong and partly right."¹⁸

Many faithful Australian ministers and laymen have been working to rectify the situation. Some have challenged the allegations. Others have been searching to give our people answers. This explains why the 400-page book *Greatest of All the Prophets* is receiving a wide circulation even among those who do not normally read its authors' publications. This book not only documents the above situation but also answers each charge made against Ellen White. It would have been better if these answers could have been forthcoming for our confused people through the official church paper, the *Record*.

Fortunately, early in 2005, the Division evangelist was able to organize scholars from Andrews University, U.S.A., to give a series of presentations answering the most serious problems raised by *Prophets Are Human* and the *Record* articles.²¹ Copies of these presentations will be made available throughout the Division.

The Australian Adventist church was blessed by the living presence and counsels of Ellen White for nearly a decade. As a result, the South Pacific Division experienced great church growth, and its institutions likewise. However, as it has lost confidence in its doctrines and the Spirit of Prophecy, it has lost dedication and sacrifice, and as a result many of its institutions,²² as well as having its church growth crippled.

Those who have lost confidence in this God-given instruction no longer follow its counsels on church growth. They pragmatically turn to the methods of other churches, charismatic and celebration alike. These methods entertain but they do not produce Seventh-day Adventist Christians, nor do they convert the secular-minded. Awareness in Australia is increasing that there has been a lot of time and millions of dollars wasted on such experiments that have failed.²³

The Charismatic Movement in Australia

Australians have been flocking to high-energy Charismatic churches, which between 1996 and 2001 have enjoyed attendance increases ranging from 20 to 42 per cent. This is despite the fact that at the same time Australian overall weekly church attendance declined by seven percent and Catholic mass attendance declined by 13 percent.²⁵

The charismatic Hillsong Church in Sydney attracts 18,000 worshippers a week²⁶ to its theatrical type of worship, complete with a big band, stage lighting, and dry ice.²⁷ It has averaged a yearly church growth of 1,000 worshippers for the past 17 years.²⁸

Churches such as Hillsong continually fascinate some Australian Adventists who wonder which aspects of the Hillsong phenomenon could be adopted to enjoy such church growth. Avondale College theology students are taken to Hillsong to learn how to grow a church. It is believed to have greatly influenced the first Australian Adventist celebration church at the nearby suburb of Cherrybrook.

Regrettably, Cherrybrook collapsed when 80% of the congregation moved into an independent tongues-speaking Sundaykeeping church.²⁹ However, the success of charismatic churches such as Hillsong is still having an influence on the worship style of many Australian Adventist churches.

When a pastor has been crippled by the influence of the Ford apostasy and can no longer preach the Adventist message with power, then he and like-minded church members often turn to the methods of the charismatic churches and entertainment to try and grow their congregations. The results have often been disastrous, with resources squandered.

Church Growth in “Traditional” Adventist Churches

Most Adventist churches in Australia that are experiencing real church growth are the “traditional” churches³⁰ —i.e., those mainstream churches which follow the counsels of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy in carrying out the Gospel commission.

Although claiming to be a “traditional” church does not necessarily guarantee church growth, what is incontrovertible is that upholding the traditional Adventist messages and time-honored methods of evangelism still work. I can testify to this because I, among many others, have put them to the test!

As indicated earlier, I had been a departmental director for 14 years. But in 1984, foreseeing the ongoing devastation of evangelism and church growth in Australia because of the Ford apostasy, I asked for the privilege of having a church to pastor. I wanted to test whether the counsels that God had specifically given to this people concerning church growth would still work successfully.

I was given a church in a difficult area for evangelism, on Sydney’s affluent upper North Shore, in the suburb of Waitara. The church was struggling against the effects of the Ford apostasy. It was half empty and the congregation divided.

Undeterred, the congregation was given strong Adventist sermons. They were left in no doubt of the teachings and mission of the remnant church to which they belonged. Then, using the counsels of the Bible and Ellen White, the members were trained in soulwinning.³¹ They were soon bringing their interests to church, studying with them and preparing them for baptism. Public evangelists³² were brought in to help reap the work being done.

Soon the church, which seated 300, was full each Sabbath. A second service had to be started to accommodate all the worshippers. In the 16 years I was the pastor of that church, 235 souls were baptized,³³ and a further 18 were reclaimed and rebaptized. In the past four years since I retired, this strong church growth has continued. Today it is hard to find an empty seat at any of its services.

Many examples could be given where these methods of evangelism worked successfully in secular Australia. The Woollahra church is a prime example: This church is situated in Sydney's eastern suburbs, which are both the most affluent and secular in all of Australia.³⁴ The large Woollahra church building had so few attending it seemed it would soon have to close. Then the local pastors used public evangelism, prophecy seminars, and proven Adventist evangelistic outreaches, based on the Spirit of Prophecy.³⁵ Baptisms resulted, and within a few years the church was full each Sabbath.

My point is this: Regardless of how a church refers to itself—pragmatist or commissionist—it will not grow *unless it upholds and preaches the distinctive Adventist messages, and follows the counsels of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy in carrying out the Gospel commission*. Celebration-type contemporary churches, by their very nature, tend to preach a different message and adopt a different method of church growth. This is why, despite the hype, they are failing.

The Challenge of Secular Australians

From the results shared in this article, it does not take a space scientist to realize the futility of the attempts to grow the Adventist Church by adopting celebration-type contemporary styles of worship, down-playing our distinctive doctrines, undermining the trustworthiness of the Spirit of Prophecy, and embracing the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. Not only have these types of churches not grown, but also 80% of them (four out of the five churches) have ceased to be Seventh-day Adventist congregations! In contrast, the records indicate that churches that take the Seventh-day Adventist message seriously and that still uphold the proven Adventist approaches to evangelism, are the ones that are growing even in secular Australia.

The above conclusion has some far-reaching implications for the Seventh-day Adventist church. It compels us to ask: What Biblical examples do we have of winning the secular-minded?

“There is no God, not even one with the message ‘God helps those who help themselves,’” wrote M. Langley in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Letters to the Editor, January 3, 2005, p. 12. What can be done to convert this typical secular-minded Australian? What new methods need to be introduced, and what pragmatic changes would need to be made to our present methods of evangelism to win this person?

The interesting discovery we make in the Bible is that we have very few attempts by Jesus or the apostles to specially work for the secular-minded—at least using pragmatic or contemporary methods of His day.³⁶

Jesus told His disciples to “go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6). He told the Syrophenician woman, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24). However, Jesus ministered to her as He did to others, such as the Roman centurion and the woman of Samaria, when they exhibited faith sometimes greater than those of Israel. We could hardly class these people of faith as secular.

Let us also remember that Jesus in His soulwinning methods did not appear to the Samaritan woman chanting Roman tunes or disguised as a would-be Samaritan. He did not need to. He had a message to bring to her, and He did not mince words. In this way He won her, and she in turn won others. These were Jesus’ methods of church growth.

As the apostles, including Paul, moved to take the Gospel into all the world, their evangelistic endeavors were still mainly with the “God-fearers”. He sought them out in the synagogues or worshipping by riversides, if there were no synagogues. In this way he won his greatest number of souls.

However, on Mars’ hill in Athens, Paul encountered the secular-minded. Ellen White tells³⁷ how he pragmatically “sought to adapt his style to the character of the audience; he met logic with logic, science

with science, philosophy with philosophy.” It produced “but little fruit.” Then he decided to move on to Corinth and preach a powerful message, ignoring the secular Greek culture of “excellency of speech and wisdom” and to preach nothing “save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Here Paul experienced real church growth, and a church was planted! It did not happen in Athens!

Does secular Australia have sufficient “God-fearers” to work with and experience church growth? The answer is surprising. A recent poll reveals that 46 percent of Australians believe they will go to Heaven when they die³⁸ and “28 percent of us believe the Earth was created in six days.”³⁹ While Australia is still much more secular than the United States, the approximately 10 million Australians who believe they will go to Heaven when they die, and the nearly six million who believe the earth was created in six days, offer an excellent field to continue our evangelistic endeavors.

These people are waiting to hear more about Heaven and the Creator, Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. The full message of Seventh-day Adventists has never been more relevant. It can still enjoy church growth even in secular Australia.

As the traumatic signs of Christ’s soon coming take place, such as September 11 and the Asian Tsunami, the secular are becoming more open to the working of the Holy Spirit. As they respond, they too can be won to this message. But it will not be done by entertainment, but with the solemn preaching of all the Bible truths and the methodology consistent with the truths that we have been given as a people.

To bring souls to a full and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ takes much dedication, prayer, and work. Nothing has changed in this regard since the days of Jesus, His disciples, or Paul. There are no shortcuts. We are to solidly build on the Rock, not superficially on the sand!

Those who choose other “easier” means of church growth may witness crowds proclaiming, “Lord, Lord,” and even see them doing many wonderful works in His name. But Jesus warns that if they do not do His will, to them He will say those fateful words, “I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23).

ENDNOTES

1 When the Adventist celebration churches in America and then in Australia began to collapse, efforts were made by those who were running churches along celebration lines to distance themselves from the word “celebration.” “Contemporary” or “alternative” was used instead. However, a “contemporary” church may mean different things to different people. Definitions of “contemporary” range from a full-blown celebration church (one which plays down Adventist doctrinal distinctives and lifestyle practices, embraces the Pentecostal/charismatic worship style, and employs secular music, Hollywood-style dramas, and other questionable Gospel gimmicks to reach the “unchurched”), to an otherwise mainstream SDA church, which differs from “conservative” or typical SDA churches only in the fact that during its church services it plays lively or upbeat music which are in the church’s hymnbooks. The term “traditional” is not very helpful either, because it can have the overtones “old fashioned,” “still living back in the Dark Ages,” or “stuck in the mud,”—i.e., a mood that refuses to explore new ways to do things. Notice, however, that a Bible-believing Adventist Church can remain true to its message and the methods of church growth approved by the Spirit of Prophecy, and be innovative at the same time, as for example, has been successfully demonstrated by H.M.S. Richards, Mark Finley, C.D. Brooks, Doug Batchelor, etc., in their evangelistic outreach using cutting-edge technology of their times. Therefore, to avoid being misunderstood, it may be best to not use the terms “contemporary” and “traditional”—*unless they are carefully explained*. This is why I have come up with two new expressions—pragmatist and commissionist.

² A detailed analysis of the baptisms and membership transfer results can be found in E.B. Price, “Church Growth in Contemporary Churches in the South Pacific Division,” 2002, p.1.

³ For an insightful perspective on the North American scene, see Richard O’Ffill’s article in this volume; see also Michigan Conference President Jay Gallimore’s “Can the Church Be Relevant and Survive?” *Adventists Affirm* 16/3 (Fall 2002): 16-27 and the March 14, 2002 report Gallimore presented to ministers of his conference.

⁴ E.B. Price, “Church Growth in Contemporary Churches in the SPD,” p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶ Elder J. Robert Spangler, Editor, *Ministry*, October 1980, p. 4.

⁷ Wesley Centre, Sydney, NSW, August 3, 2002.

⁸ Desmond Ford, “The Creator in Court—The Teaching of the Investigative Judgment Is Not a Face-saving Device but an Integral Part of the Everlasting Gospel,” *Review & Herald*, October 18, 1962, and “The Judgment,” *Ministry*, July 1979.

⁹ Pastor J.W. Kent led 16 concerned men protesting to the Biblical Research Committee, February 3, 4, 1976.

¹⁰ “Concerned Brethren” was abbreviated to “CB” as a term of derision for those opposing Dr. Ford’s new theology.

¹¹ Pastors J.W. Kent and G. Burnside were banned from preaching in the churches on December 18, 1978 because of their opposition to Dr. Ford. When Pastor Burnside died in 1994, some of the bans had still not been lifted.

¹² Dr. Harry Ballis, PhD Thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, discusses the 180 ministers who left the church.

¹³ The former Cherrybrook pastor, now at Charlestown, did this. It also occurred at Castlehill and Kellyville churches.

¹⁴ One was Dr. Arthur Patrick. He is a church historian who had served in a variety of capacities within the church, including pastor-evangelist, chaplain, college lecturer, and Director of the Ellen G. White/Seventh-day Adventist Research Centre at Avondale College. He recently raised doubts about the writings of Ellen G. White in his four “conversations” with the editor of the church’s *South Pacific Record* (February 7, 14, 21, 28, 2004).

¹⁵ “Ellen White’s Role in Doctrinal Matters,” *Ministry*, October 1980, pp.53-60, answered Ford’s rejection at Glacier View of the authority of Ellen White’s God-given counsels in the matter of theology.

¹⁶ Dr. Allan Lindsay, presenter of the excellent *Keepers of the Flame* video series and the very respected retired Director of the Ellen G. White Research Centre, was not invited to present a formal paper like the other presenters.

¹⁷ Dr. Lester Devine, Director, Ellen G. White SDA Research Centre, used this term to promote the book.

¹⁸ Arthur Patrick with Bruce Manners, “Ellen White for Today: 4,” *Record*, February 28, 2004, p.10, col. 1, para. 4.

¹⁹ Jan Knopper, former Division PD Director, challenged the *Record* writers who claimed that Ellen White made historical errors, to produce evidence for their assertion. They were unable to do this, but did not retract their statements.

²⁰ Russell R. Standish & Colin D. Standish, *The Greatest of All the Prophets* (Highwood Books: Narbethong, Victoria, Australia, 2004).

²¹ The Division evangelist is Geoff Youlden, and the scholars invited from the U.S.A. were Dr. Jiri Moskala, Dr. Larry Lichtenwalter, and Dr. Denis Fortin.

²² The SPD has lost seven of its nine hospitals, as well as its entire chain of health food shops and restaurants.

²³ Huge sums of money—from both the local conferences and local churches themselves—were invested in establishing celebration churches that failed. The \$1.25 million video series, *Chasing Utopia*, produced to win the secular-minded also had little success.

²⁴ “Hallelujahs in the Hills,” *Sydney Sun Herald*, November 7, 2004, p. 27.

²⁵ “Faithful Flock to New Churches,” *Sydney Sun Herald*, January 9, 2005. Source: National Church life Survey.

²⁶ “Hallelujahs in the Hills,” *Sydney Sun Herald*, November 7, 2004, p.27.

²⁷ “How Great Thou Aren’t,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 21, 2004.

²⁸ “Hillsong Prays for the Miracle,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 13, 2004.

²⁹ E.B. Price, “Church Growth in Contemporary Churches in the SPD,” p. 2.

³⁰ Notice that I define what I mean by “traditional.” See, however, note 1 above for reasons why I hesitate to use the term “traditional.”

³¹ Louis R Torres, Mission College of Evangelism, U.S.A., began conducting evangelism training programs in 1993.

³² Geoff Youlden, Division evangelist, conducted a number of public programs. In 2001, he also became the senior pastor of the church in order to use it as a training center of evangelism for Australian lay members.

³³ E.B. Price, “Church Growth in Contemporary Churches in the SPD,” p. 5. Source: Official Conference Records, 5.

³⁴ It has Sydney’s most expensive harborside mansions as well as the notorious “King’s Cross” red-light district.

³⁵ The pastors are Milton Krause and Gary Kent.

³⁶ Louis R. Torres, “Contemporizing the Gospel,” a four-page unpublished paper.

³⁷ Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 244.

³⁸ Mark Coultan, “Bible Belt Puts Squeeze on Evolution,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 28, 2004, p.4.

³⁹ John Savage, Letters to the Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 30, 2004, p.42.