

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 132:**  
**“Benedict XVI: The Man and His Mission”**  
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A little over two months have passed since the election of the new Pope, Benedict XVI. No definite appraisal of his pontificate can be done at this early stage. Yet, it is amazing how many significant events have already transpired during this short time that reveal the ecumenical, ecclesiastical, and political goals of Benedict XVI.

To understand the mission that Benedict is trying to accomplish, it is important to know a little bit about his early life, theological training, and church service. It is interesting to look at some of the events that shaped his thinking, causing him to change from a liberal reformer into an ultra-conservative traditionalist. More important still, it is important to consider how his past ruthless intolerance is playing out in his dealing with Catholics and non-Catholics.

This newsletter attempts to shed some light on Benedict XVI, by looking at him first as a man and then at his mission. The study shows that with the notable exception of the late John Paul II, Benedict XVI is the most influential Catholic leader of our time. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of two millennia of Catholic theology and history. As the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for the past 25 years, he has written over 50 books and composed major documents which articulate and crystallize important Catholic doctrines and issues facing the church. The richness of his personal talent, knowledge, experience, coupled with his deep commitment to uphold and enforce the fundamental Catholic doctrines, explains why the cardinals considered him as the best papal candidate at this time of Catholic history.

At the end of this newsletter, you will find my expanded study of **THE BIBLE AND RACE**. The many messages I received from concerned fellow believers in South Africa, caused me to take a second look to what the Bible teaches about the relationship among races.

My study is far from complete. Some days I hope to write a book on this subject, as I did about **WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**. The two subjects are closely related, because they deal with the distinctions that God has created—distinctions that some attempt to abolish.

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The initial investigation indicates that functional, sexual, and racial distinctions are part of God's good creation for the orderly functioning of the human family, the church, and society at large. The notion of abolishing such distinctions, is foreign to the Bible. The Bible teaches us to accept and respect the distinctions that God has created, not to abolish them through forced integration. If you are interested in this question, you may wish to read the expanded study at the end.

### **AN INVITATION TO VISIT ME AT BOOTH 33 DURING GC SESSION**

If you plan to attend the GC, feel free to come to visit me at my BOOTH 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. I look forward to meet many of my cyberspace Bible students. If you have difficulty to locate me, call me on my cellular at (269) 208-1942.

### **SPECIAL ONE TIME GC OFFER ON HITACHI PROJECTORS**

In the last newsletter I informed you that 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.

You will be pleased to know that I was able to buy about 100 projectors at a very special discounted price for the GC. 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. Over 500 churches and schools have bought this projector for \$2000.00, that is \$500.00 more than the GC SPECIAL OFFER.

A similar discount is offered on all the HITACHI models, ranging from 1200 to 4500 lumens. Feel free to contact me by email or phone (269) 471-2915, and I will give you the special GC price on the model you wish to purchase.

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I will be glad to deliver you the projector at my GC BOOTH No. 33 and you can pay at that time. You are welcomed to come to my booth for a demonstration. I will set up 4 different models for people to compare.

THIS IS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO PURCHASE AN OUTSTANDING PROJECTOR AT A BARGAIN PRICE AND TAKE IT BACK HOME WITHOUT PAYING HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS OF FEDEX AND CUSTOMS

### **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@biblicalperspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com) We guarantee to process your order immediately.

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**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 buttons: 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](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com)

**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.

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**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 isle, 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 banhof).

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.

**“Benedict XVI: The Man and His Mission”**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.**

**Professor of Theology, Andrews University**

The election of Pope Benedict XVI took many Vatican experts by surprise. For example, Vatican journalist John L. Allen, author of the book *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith*, and correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter*, CNN, and National Public Radio, gave four reasons why the controversial Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger would not be chosen as the new pope: He lacked sufficient pastoral experience, he was another non-Italian European, and it would be unlikely to have two of them in a row; he was too conservative and too controversial in the mind of progressive Catholic church leaders and academics; and he was too old. In fact, he turned 78 on the weekend prior to his election.

Allen as many other Vatican observers felt that the new pope would be from the Third World for at least three reasons. First, the Catholic Church is growing the most in the developing countries of the Southern hemisphere, namely Africa and Latin America.

Second, in these developing countries the Catholic Church is facing serious competition; in Latin America the competition comes primarily from Evangelical churches, while in Africa and Asia from Islam.

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Finally, just as the election of a pope from behind the Iron Curtain played a major role in healing the East/West split that existed in 1978, a pope from the Third World could help address today the socioeconomic divide between North/South. Such pope could dramatically challenge the social injustices of globalization.

Surprisingly, the above prediction proved to be wrong. In less than two days and after only four ballots, the 115 members of the College of Cardinals elected the unlikely candidate, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on April 19, 2005 as the new pope. The speedy election demonstrate that in the few days before the election Ratzinger caused many cardinals to reconsider their thinking about himself. He was able to develop a remarkable consensus among the Cardinal electors on the importance to have a pope with his track record who will defend and enforce the Catholic faith, in order to save the church from “the dictatorship of relativism.”

### **Cardinal Ratzinger as Enforcer of the Catholic Faith**

Ratzinger represent continuity with the late Pope John Paul II’s conservative agenda. For the past 25 years he was the mentor and religious ally of the late pope. He has served unwaveringly as enforcer of Catholic doctrines and moral values. He laid down strict interpretations of Catholic religious teachings, speaking out against divorce, gay marriage, women ordination, abandonment of celibacy, and other liberal concepts.

Through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, of which he was the prefect, Ratzinger crackdown on ideologies and movements he perceived to be inimical to the Catholic church. He pressed charges against such theologians as Edward Schillebeeckx of Holland, Jack Pohier of France, Bernard Hasler of Switzerland. He stripped Hans Kung of his post as teacher of Catholic theology at the University of Tübingen for questioning papal infallibility. He suspended Prof. Charles Curran from his teaching post at the Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C., for advocating that sterilization and contraception were not always wrong. He forced Jesuit priest Terrance Sweeney to resign from his order, because he refused to destroy the results of a survey of American Bishops about celibacy and the ordination of women. A quarter of those surveyed reportedly approved optional celibacy.

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**What Influenced the College of Cardinals to Elect Ratzinger?**

Ratzinger's track record as the ruthless enforcer of the Catholic faith, initially caused many cardinals to have misgiving about Ratzinger. They disapproved his narrow view of the Catholic faith, his overly centralized view of the church, and his unyielding defence of Catholic traditional teachings. Yet, eventually they voted for him. What changed their mind? Apparently, they were impressed by what they witnessed in Rome about Ratzinger's leadership qualities during John Paul II's funeral and in the days preceding the Conclave. He seemed to be everywhere during those days, orchestrating all the events with competence and efficiency.

As the Dean of the College of Cardinals, Ratzinger preached a moving homily at the funeral, evoking emotional memories of the accomplishments of the late pope before million of spectators in Rome and around the world. Later, at his last public speech before entering the conclave, he delivered what sounded almost a campaign speech, warning the Cardinals that the Catholic Church must not become prey to modern moral relativism or ideological trends.

He said, "A dictatorship of relativism is being formed, one that recognizes nothing as definitive and that has as its measure only the self and its desires." He warned that the Catholic Church cannot be conditioned by the changing winds of ideological fashion. He said, "Having a clear faith, according to the Creed of the Church, is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, which is letting oneself be tossed and swept along by every wind of teaching, looks like the only attitude acceptable to today's standards."

Ratzinger's homily reveals the serious problems of heresy and apostasy facing the Catholic church within its own ranks. Since the end of the Second Vatican Council, some Cardinals, bishops, and many priests have ignored, re-defined, or even rejected some of their church doctrines. Some liberal Catholic church leaders have, at least implicitly repudiated such key Catholic doctrines as the inerrancy of the scriptures, the authority of tradition, the reservation of the priesthood to men, the necessity of the Church for salvation, papal infallibility, or even the bodily resurrection of Christ.

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Ratzinger's frank exposition of the threats facing the Catholic Church, served as a reminder to the Cardinal electors that only a Cardinal like himself, fully committed to uphold and enforce the Catholic faith can be elected, can safely serve as the new pope. The majority of Cardinals agreed with Ratzinger's analysis of the challenges facing the Catholic church and became convinced that he was indeed the best man for the job.

There is no question that Ratzinger is an intellectual scholar and theologian of unparalleled stature in the Catholic church. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of two millennia of theology and of the cultural history of the West. As the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for the past 25 years, he has written over 50 books and composed major documents which articulate and crystallize important Catholic doctrines and issues facing the church. He was a key theologian at the Second Vatican Council, helping to draft major documents.

He is most knowledgeable of the needs of the Catholic church in different part of the world, since he has met regularly with bishops coming to Rome to discuss issues with him. He can easily converse in about 10 languages. The richness of his personal talent, knowledge, experience, coupled with his deep commitment to uphold and enforce the fundamental Catholic doctrines, explains why the cardinals considered him as the best papal candidate at this time of Catholic history.

Before discussing some of the specific goals of Benedict XVI has set for his pontificate, let us take a brief look at his background. We seek to understand how his early life, education, and church career contributed to make Ratzinger into the consummate defender and enforcer of the Catholic faith.

## **A LOOK AT RATZINGER'S LIFE AND CAREER**

### **Ratzinger's Early Life (1927-1951)**

Joseph Ratzinger was born in 1927 in the devout heartland of Bavarian Catholicism. Everywhere Catholic chapels dot the hilltops and small shrines to saints or Mary line the country roads. His parents were devout Catholic who influenced both of their two sons to become priests. His father served in both the Bavarian State Police and the German na-



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tional Regular Police, before retiring in 1937 to the Town of Traunstein. His resistance to Nazism resulted in frequent demotions and transfers.

At the age of 14 Ratzinger joined the Hitler Youth, whose membership was legally required. When he was 16, he was drafted with many of his classmates into the Flak (anti-aircraft artillery corps). A year later he was sent to the Hungarian border area of Austria to set up anti-tank defences. While there he saw Jews being herded to death. Those scenes became etched in his mind and are influencing his ecumenical outreach to the Jews. In early May 1945, he deserted the army, few days before the German surrender. When the Americans arrived in his village, he was briefly interned as a prisoner of war until June 19, 1945.

After the war, Joseph and his brother Georg, entered a Catholic seminary in Freising. On June 29, 1951, both he and his brother were ordained priests by Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber of Munich. Two years later he received a doctorate in theology from the University of Munich.

### **Early Church Career (1951-1981)**

In 1959 Ratzinger became a Professor of Theology at the University of Bonn, where he became known as a subtle thinker and engaging teacher. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), he served as *peritus*, that is, theological consultant to Cardinal Joseph Frings of Cologne, Germany. At the time of the Council he was a reformer, promoting a decentralization of the papacy and innovations in Catholic liturgy and practices. After the moral and physical collapse of Nazism, Ratzinger had expected a religious revival in the Catholic Church. Instead, he saw a church that was paralyzed with too many laws and too tight control. Thus, he felt changes were needed to revitalize the church.

When he started presenting his reformatory ideas as a lecturer first at Bonn and then Tübingen Universities, Ratzinger emerged as a star among the students. But soon he was forced to abandon his liberal views when he witness the devastating impact of the student protests on the Catholic faith. The radicalism he found among students, frightened and embittered him. Student hecklers disrupted his classes, defaming the Gospel as a “mass deception” to preserve the capitalistic status quo. They called the Cross “an expression of the sadomasochistic glorification of pain.”

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The protest movements of the 1960's convinced Ratzinger of the need for the Catholic church to adopt stern measures to crackdown on the dissidents who were attacking the Catholic faith. This conviction was central to his thinking as he rose to be Cardinal and Archbishop of Munich in 1977. The gradual change from a liberal reformer to a strong conservative, helps us to understand how Ratzinger became such a ruthless defender of the Catholic faith.

### **The Enforcer of the Catholic Faith**

On November 25, 1981, Pope John Paul II named Ratzinger prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, formerly know as the Holy Office of the Inquisition. His position formerly went by the title Grand Inquisitor.

Of course, in Ratzinger's time, torture could no longer be applied to dissenters. But in the realm of ideas, Ratzinger showed his ruthless determination to suppress any ideology that he viewed detrimental to the Catholic faith. For example, a popular thinking, known as "liberation theology," gained acceptance among Latin American's priests and bishops. They believed that the Catholic church should not only identify with the poor, but also organize them into a political force to bring about revolutionary social changes. Ratzinger played a leading role in silencing outspoken liberation theologians in Latin America as well as many Catholic professors teaching in Catholic Universities.

Charged with safeguarding Catholic doctrines during the pontificate of John Paul II, Ratzinger became ruthless toward those he perceived to be a threat to the Catholic faith. His stern approach earned him the whimsical nickname of "Panker kardinal," a reference to the battle tank used during World War II.

Ratzinger's intolerance caused a stir during the U. S. election of 2004, when he wrote a memo to Cardinal Theodore of Washington, indicating that priests were to deny communion to supporters of abortion rights. The memo was a veiled attack on Catholic candidate John Kerry. It is widely believed that such an attack coming, not only from conservative Catholic church leaders, but also from right-wing Evangelicals, contributed significantly to the election of George Bush.

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*Dominus Iesus: An Astounding Document*

To understand the intransigent mind-set of Pope Benedict XVI, we need to consider an astounding Vatican document, known as *Dominus Iesus*, that he composed, presented to the media, and defended while he was serving as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This document is important because, as we shall see, it sheds light into the goals that Benedict XVI has set for his pontificate. I vividly recall the release of this document on Tuesday, September 5, 2000, because I happen to be in Rome on that day.

On the evening news of the main Italian TV network, I saw Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger himself announcing the release of the Vatican Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, which means “Lord Jesus.” He took time to explain the significance of this document for Catholics and non-Catholics. I was stunned when I heard him saying that according to *Dominus Iesus*, salvation is to be found only in and through the unique and universal Catholic Church.

The origin of this traditional Catholic view is traced back to Pope Boniface VIII. In his Bull, *Unam Sanctam* (A. D. 1302) Boniface declared: “There is one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and that outside this Church there is neither salvation nor remission of sins.” This traditional Catholic view was substantially modified at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which formulated the concept, especially in the *Constitution of the Church*, that salvation is found not only inside the Catholic Church but also outside its fold, by all who live according to their conscience.

This broader view of various avenues to salvation fostered a policy of benign tolerance toward non-Catholics. Protestants, for example, were rehabilitated from heretics, to “separate brethren,” and to brothers and sisters in Christ. Similarly, members of world religions are now treated with openness and respect.

In the thinking of Vatican conservatives like Ratzinger, the policy of benign tolerance toward non-Catholics inaugurated by Vatican II, may have gone too far. It may have weakened the alleged unicity and primacy of the Catholic Church. This concern is expressed in an official four page “note” written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger himself. The Note says that “when the expression ‘sister churches’ is used in the proper sense, the

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one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Universal Church is not [meant to be] sister but ‘mother’ of all particular churches. This is not merely a question of terminology, but above all of respecting a basic truth of the Catholic faith: that of the unicity of the Church of Jesus Christ. In fact, there is a single Church.”

### **Salvation Derives Only From the Catholic Church**

In other words, for Ratzinger it is a fundamental Roman Catholic belief that there is only one true church that possesses the means of salvation and such church is the Roman Catholic church. Any salvation obtainable through other churches, ultimately derives from “the fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.”

This fundamental claim is reiterated more fully in the 16 pages Declaration *Dominus Jesus*, which Ratzinger wrote largely to reprimand liberal Catholic theologians who “have argued that all religions may be equally valid ways of salvation.” Ratzinger is concerned about “the rapid spread of the relativistic and pluralistic mentality” among liberal Catholic theologians, who believe that “one religion is as good as another.” He expressed his concern in his fiery speech to the cardinals before they withdrew to the Sistene Chapel to elect the new pope. He warned them that the Catholic Church must not become prey to a modern “dictatorship of relativism.”

To remedy this problem, the Declaration reiterates that “Catholic faithful are required to profess that there is an historic continuity—rooted in the apostolic succession—between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church. . . . There exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.”

The Declaration makes a distinction between the Orthodox churches, which retain “apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist,” and the Protestant “ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery.” The formers are viewed as part of “the Church of Christ” because of their close bonds with the Catholic Church, while the latter “are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with Christ.”

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The Declaration pointedly avoids using the word “church” when referring to Protestants, adopting instead the elusive term “ecclesial communities.” These Protestant communities may have elements of truth, but, according to Ratzinger, “they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.”

What all of this means is that the churches born of the Protestant Reformation are reduced, according to Ratzinger, to a lower level, being excluded from the list of “sister churches.” Protestants do not possess the means of salvation within their communities, but are dependant for salvation upon “the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.”

### **EVALUATION OF *DOMINUS JESUS***

The absolutistic Vatican Declaration that salvation for any persons is ultimately possible only through the channels of grace entrusted to the Catholic Church, stands in stark contrast with the interfaith dialogue fostered by Vatican II and the ceaseless efforts of Pope John Paul II to become the undisputed spiritual leader of mankind by reaching out to people of all faiths.

One wonders, What has caused this retrenchment in the mind of Ratzinger? The reason is his conviction, mentioned earlier, that the policy of benign tolerance inaugurated by Vatican II, may have gone too far. It has fostered a “dictatorship of relativism” that fails to recognize the certainties contained in Catholic doctrines. Ratzinger experienced first hand “the dictatorship of relativism” first during Hitler’s regime, and then during the students’ protest movements. In a memoir, Ratzinger remembers young Nazis scoffing at the Catholic teachings on sin and redemption, calling them foreign beliefs imposed by Jews. They preferred to stage rituals in the forests reflecting more pagan, Aryan roots.

Later, Ratzinger experienced again “the dictatorship of relativism” in the protest movements of the 60’s. After witnessing the students protests that scorned Catholic beliefs at the University of Tubingen, Ratzinger moved sharply to the right. He is concerned about the moral relativism evident today in the secularism of Western countries which is causing the almost total collapse of the Christian faith. Ratzinger notes

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that when the measure of truth is found in us, then there is no longer an ultimate truth and certainty. The “anything goes” approach to life, can only satisfy individual egos and desires, but it ultimately leaves people without the certainty offered by the Catholic Church.

### **Rome Never Changes**

Ratzinger is rightly concerned about the spread of theological relativism and pluralism which is weakening the alleged unicity and primacy of the Catholic Church. To counteract this threat *Dominus Jesus* reiterates in a succinct but comprehensive way the theological foundation of the Catholic claim to possess the sole means of salvation.

This important document helps us to understand the ruthless mind-set of Benedict XVI—a man who sincerely believes to have been called by God to save the Catholic Church, especially in Western countries, from “the dictatorship of relativism—” the belief that there are no absolute moral truths and everyone is free to develop his/her own set of beliefs by which to live and seek salvation.

Benedict XVI has sounded a timely and legitimate warning against the danger of moral relativism that has become so pervasive in our Western society. This problem affects even our own Seventh-day Adventist church. An increasing number of our members are questioning the moral standards of the churches, choosing instead to live by their own subjective values.

The pope is correct in exposing the danger of moral relativism of our society, but he is wrong in his proposed solution. He intend to resolve the problem of moral relativism by enforcing traditional Catholic teachings as if the were biblical truths. He makes no attempt to examine the biblical legitimacy of historical Catholic teachings, because for him the traditional interpretation supersedes any objective study of Scripture. Like the late John Paul II, he is a devout and sincere man who is blinded by tradition. Such a blindness causes him to accept and enforce Catholic heresies as if they were biblical truths.

Ratzinger’s Declaration *Dominus Jesus*, highlights the Catholic attempt to make salvation *a dispensation of the church*, rather than *a disposition of the believer*. By claiming to be the only church that has

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the apostolic succession and consequently the right to dispense salvation, the Catholic church is deceiving million of sincere people into believing that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church (*no salus extra ecclesia*).

The fact that the Declaration *Dominus Jesus* goes into great length to reiterate this traditional Catholic teaching, goes to show that after all Ellen White was right when she wrote: “Rome never changes. Her principles have not altered in the least. She has not lessened the breach between herself and Protestants; they have done all the advancing. But what does this argue for the Protestantism of this day? It is the rejection of Bible truth which makes men approach to infidelity. It is a backsliding church that lessens the distance between itself and the Papacy” (*Signs of the Times*, Feb. 19, 1894, par. 4). Benedict XVI is a living and compelling example of the truth that “Rome never changes.”

## **A LOOK AT BENEDICT XVI’S MISSION**

In his first Mass as pontiff, Benedict XVI outlined the goals of his papacy, which include the unification of all Christians, reaching out to people of other faiths, restoring unity and identity to the Catholic Church, and fostering peace among the nations. During the first two months of his pontificate, Benedict XVI has already given some indications on how he intends to achieve this objectives. We shall take a brief look at his ecumenical, ecclesiastical, and political endeavors.

### **Benedict XVI’s Ecumenical Initiatives**

*Ecumenically*, Benedict XVI intends to follow the footsteps of John Paul II who fostered his role as the moral and spiritual leader of mankind, by reaching out to people of all faiths. In his first Mass as pope, delivered to the cardinals gathered in the Sistine Chapel, Benedict XVI said that his “primary task” as the successor of Peter “is to work to reconstitute the full and visible unity of all the followers of Christ.” He added that “sentiments alone are not enough. Concrete acts that enter the souls and move the consciences are needed.”

An indication of the concrete steps Benedict XVI intends to take to achieve Christian unity, can be seen in some of the meetings that

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have already occurred with church leaders of other faiths. For example, church leaders of different denomination were invited to attend the 24th Eucharistic Congress that was held in Bari, Southern Italy, from May 21 to 29, 2005. The theme of the congress was “Without Sunday, we cannot live.” This was an important congress that promoted in an unprecedented way Sunday observance. Benedict XVI himself closed the congress by delivering an important homily on the importance of rediscovering Sunday observance as a way to revitalize “the harsh wilderness” of Western Christianity.

The response from some Protestant church leaders attending the congress, is very revealing. For example, Bishop Eero Huovinen of the Finnish Lutheran Church, told the Eucharistic Congress: “We Finnish Lutheran wish to be part of the Catholic Church.” He expressed agreement with the theme of the congress by affirming that “Lutheran cannot live without the sacrament of the Eucharist.” He closed saying: “From the bottom of my heart, I would like to anticipate the day in which Lutherans and Catholics, together, unite in a visible way.”

Bishop Huovinen’s statement is significant for two reasons. First, it shows that the Catholic promotion of Sunday as the day of the eucharistic celebration, serves as a rallying point for Christian unity under the leadership of the Catholic Church. Second, it reveals that the historical doctrinal differences that have divided Protestantism and Catholicism are largely ignored. Part of this development is due to the historic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, which is an important agreement between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Incidentally, Ratzinger played a key role in the formulation of this document which minimizes the differences between the Catholic and Lutheran understanding of justification by faith.

It is worth noting that the Vatican is currently engaged in dialogues or consultations with the major Protestant churches, including our own Seventh-day Adventist Church. The primary objective is not to convert these churches to Catholicism, but to create a climate of respect and mutual acceptance. The success of the Vatican in softening the anti-Catholic teachings and prophetic interpretations of Protestant churches, can be seen in the evangelical acceptance of Roman Catholicism as a legitimate Christian religion. Writing for *Christianity Today*, Timothy George affirms:



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“Roman Catholicism is not a cult, and the pope is not the Antichrist” (May 26, 2005). It is evident that Protestants are not protesting anymore against the fundamental heresies embedded in Roman Catholicism.

Another significant meeting took place from June 1-3, 2005 at the Jesuit Conference Center in Los Altos, CA. Sixty-seven national Christian leaders, representing Evangelical/Pentecostal, historic Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic churches came together to explore how to work together in the spirit of love and mutual respect.

Ironically, as Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President, Albert Mohler explains, Evangelicals appreciate to a significant degree the conservatism that leads Benedict XVI to defend historical Catholic positions. The reason is that they also are trying to preserve and uphold their deposit of faith. Furthermore, more and more Protestants have come to accept the Pope as the spokesman for Christianity and the symbol of Christian unity, because, as Billy Graham said of the late pope John Paul II, he has become “the moral conscience of mankind.”

### **Significant Ecumenical Outreaches**

Benedict’s initiatives to achieve Christian unity, assumes different forms in different countries. For example, few days ago he sent Cardinal Walter Kasper, head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to Moscow in order to continue the dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. This church split from Rome in the Great Schism of 1054 and has maintained chilly relations with the late Pope John Paul, who campaigned against the Soviet Union and sought in vain to visit post-communist Russia. Kasper’s mission is to explore what obstacles still need to be overcome to facilitate dialogue and possible reconciliation with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Another surprising initiative is the Vatican announcement to resume talks with the Anglican church. The talks were suspended in 2003 after the Episcopal church in the US, which is part of the worldwide Anglican communion, agreed to the consecration of an openly gay bishop, Gene Robinson of New Hampshire. The late pope, John Paul II, warned that the decision would cause “serious difficulties” in the dialogue between the two churches. Benedict XVI’s willingness to resume the talks, despite his reputation as an hardliner, shows that he is prepared to put such differences aside in order to facilitate a reunification of the two churches.

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Another ecumenical initiative is Benedict XVI's meeting on June 9 with a 25-strong Jewish delegation headed by US Rabbi Israel Singer, President of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations and Edgar Bronfman, President of the World Jewish Congress. The Pope, who witnessed first-hand the Nazis' extermination of the Jews, told the delegation that "remembering the past remains for both communities a moral imperative." The Pope referred to the key role he played at Vatican II in formulating the document *Nostra Aetate*, which denounces and renounces the historical Catholic teaching of contempt for the Jews as killers of Christ.

### **Opening New Diplomatic Ties**

Benedict XVI is working hard to expand the Vatican influence by endeavoring to establish diplomatic ties with China, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam. On May 12, 2005 at an audience of diplomats accredited with the Holy See, the pope called for an opening of diplomatic ties with countries who had expressed sorrow at the death of his predecessor. He was referring specifically to the three countries China, Vietnam, and Saudi Arabia, that at present time have no diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

The Chinese government appears to be willing at this time to establish diplomatic ties with the Vatican. At the funeral of John Paul II, Chinese foreign ministers Liu Jianchao said: "China is willing to ameliorate relations with the Vatican and it is hoped that the Holy See, under the leadership of the new Pope, will do something that is conducive for the improvement of Sino-Vatican relations."

### **Benedict XVI's Cold War With Evangelicals**

The paradox of Benedict XVI is that, while on the one hand, he is taking concrete initiatives to achieve Christian unity with Orthodox, Anglican and certain Protestant churches, on the other hand, he is preparing to fight a cold war with those Evangelical churches who are aggressively winning Catholics to their faith.

In his first Mass a pope, Benedict XVI unequivocally affirmed his commitment to achieve "the full and visible unity of Christ's follow-

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ers.” To achieve this unity, the pope is prepared to fight on two fronts. In first world countries, he must fight *secularism*, which is causing the near collapse of institutional Catholicism. In third world countries, he must counteract the expansion of *evangelical* churches that are winning Catholics to their faith at an alarming rate.

According to some researchers, Evangelical Christianity is expanding in certain parts of the world much faster than the Catholic Church. For example, the fall of the Berlin Wall, not only reinvigorated the Orthodox Church, but also saw massive conversions into evangelical churches in countries of the former Soviet bloc. Catholic growth in these countries has been slow.

In Latin America, a predominant Catholic region for the past 500 years, the number of evangelicals has grown from under 250,000 in 1900, to over 60 million in 2000. Most of the converts were former Catholic. The Catholic Church is experiencing an unprecedented exodus of her members who are joining evangelical churches.

According to a new poll released by the Latinobarometro, a Chile-based firm that conducts polls in 17 Latin American countries, the Roman Catholic church has lost nearly 10 percent of its members during the past 10 year. While Latin America remains the world’s most Catholic region, accounting for about 43 percent of the world’s 1.1 billion Catholics, the number of Catholics there is shrinking. The poll shows that about 71 percent of Latin Americans considered themselves Roman Catholic in 2004, down from 80 percent in 1995. If this trend continues, only 50 percent of Latin Americans will identify themselves as Catholics by 2025.

Benedict XVI is determined to reverse this trend, especially by challenging bishops and priests to meet more effectively the spiritual needs of the people. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Council of Latin American Bishops’ Conferences CELAM, the pope sent a message dated 14 May 2005, in which he calls upon Catholic leaders in Latin America to “give special attention to family catechesis and the promotion of a positive and correct vision of marriage and conjugal morals, contributing in this way to the formation of authentic Christian families which shine for the way in which they live the values of the Gospels.” Plans are under way for the pope to visit Argentina and Chile on the occasion of the Latin American Synod.

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**Benedict XVI's Ecclesiastical Strategy**

*Ecclesiastically*, Benedict XVI is determined to continue the tireless efforts of John Paul II to restore unity, and identity to the Catholic Church. Though he describes himself as “shy and unpractical,” his impact on Catholicism has been greater than that of any other contemporary leader, with the notable exception of late Pope John Paul II, his long-time mentor and religious ally.

Prior to his election as Pope Benedict XVI, Ratzinger served for 25 years as the unwavering enforcer of Catholic doctrines and defender of deeply conservative values. He laid down strict interpretations of religious teachings, silencing left wing theologians and speaking out against divorce, gay marriage, women ordination, abortion, and other liberal concepts.

**Progressive Catholics Call for Cultural Accommodation**

Ever since the Second Vatican Council, progressive Catholics have expected, and in some cases even demanded, that the Catholic Church follow the path of cultural accommodation adopted by virtually every mainline Protestant denomination. Benedict XVI will sorely disappoint those Catholics who are looking for doctrinal and moral accommodation, because he firmly believes that a church with porous doctrinal and moral boundaries soon withers and dies.

The question in the mind of liberal Catholics is: How little can I believe and practice and still remain a Catholic? The response of Benedict XVI—a man deeply rooted in Catholic traditional doctrines and practices—is: How much do Catholics today understand and experience traditional Catholic doctrines? The new pope firmly repudiates the attempt to find a comfortable cultural accommodation, which leads into cultural appeasement.

His own close involvement with the drafting of the major documents of the Second Vatican Council, has given to the new Pope an exceptional grasp of the drifting away from the blueprints of the council. He is reported to have compared the Council aftermath to a huge construction site where the blueprints have been lost and everyone continue to build according to his taste. The result is that an increasing number of Catholics

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are comfortable with a partial observance of Catholic doctrines, or are loyal to their church by birth, but not by practice.

### **Issues Defining Benedict XVI's Pontificate**

When John Paul II was elected pope, the issue that defined the mission of the Catholic church at that time came from the East, namely, the struggle against Soviet dictatorship. John Paul understood that there was a fault line in the Soviet empire that would eventually cause its collapse. The fault line was the clash of values between the concern for social justice and the suppression of personal freedom in order to attain that goal.

Twenty six years later, when Benedict XVI was elected pope, the issue that defines the mission of the Catholic church comes from the West, namely, the threat of the “dictatorship of relativism,” the tendency to question the existence of absolute moral truths and to think that everyone has the right to live according to his own values. Benedict XVI believes that there is a fault line in the moral relativism of our society, which is to be found in the tension between personal freedom and the abandonment of objective truth. Such a tension cannot be sustained for a long time. Ultimately, according to the pope, moral relativism and secularism can only be conquered by reaffirming the objective truths entrusted to the Catholic church.

### **The Appointment of Archbishop William Levada**

Benedict XVI's strategy to win the battle against the moral relativism of our time will unfold in different ways during the course of his pontificate. The initial steps can be seen in the appointment of San Francisco Archbishop William Levada to his previous position of Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and in his call for liturgical reforms, especially the revival of the Sunday observance.

Benedict XVI chose Levada because he has shown how to face the challenge of moral relativism in America's most secular and relativistic city. Levada has dealt first hand in San Francisco with the culture of free love, feminism, the gay lifestyle, and the evangelical outreach to Catholics.

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Father Labib Kobti, pastor at St. Thomas More in San Francisco and U.S. Representative for the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, said: “When Levada expressed his surprise at his appointment, the Pope responded that he was in fact the right man for the task because he came from a world where evangelical groups were a challenge, where the message of Christ was being distorted, and that he had provided a compassionate but firm rebuttal to the many assaults that the church of San Francisco had faced during his years as head of the diocese.”

During the ten years tenure of Archbishop Levada, San Francisco’s Catholic church regained a religious presence and power that had faltered under the more accommodating administration of Archbishop John Quinn. It is evident that Benedict XVI believes that the revival of the Catholic church can best be accomplished from the top down by church leaders who stick to their guns.

### **Revival of Sunday Observance**

A second strategy of Benedict XVI to combat the moral relativism and indifferentism of many Western Catholics, is to revive liturgical practices, especially the Sunday Eucharistic celebration. Since his election, he has emphasized several times the centrality of the Sunday Eucharist. Speaking of the 2005 Sunday Eucharist year that was inaugurated by John Paul II, Benedict XVI said: “In a very significant way, my pontificate starts as the Church is living the special year dedicated to the Sunday Eucharist. How can I not see in this providential coincidence an element that must mark the ministry to which I have been called? The Eucharist, the heart of Christian life and the source of the evangelizing mission of the Church, cannot but be the permanent centre and the source of the petrine service entrusted to me.”

For Benedict XVI participation in the Sunday Eucharist is “the heart of Christian life and the source of the evangelizing mission of the Church.” He speaks of the Eucharist as “the sacrament of unity,” because Christ is “physically present in the Eucharistic bread everywhere on earth” Christians participate in the Eucharist.

The Pope said that the Eucharist will be at the center of his speech next August at the World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany and in October at Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme is “The Eucharist, Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church.”

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In his fiery sermon delivered on Sunday, May 29, at the close of the “Sunday Eucharistic Congress” held in Bary, Italy, Benedict XVI said: “This Eucharistic congress, which comes to a close today, intended to present Sunday again as a ‘weekly Easter,’ expression of the identity of the Christian community and center of its life and mission. . . .

“Sunday, day of the Lord, is the propitious occasion to draw strength from him, who is the Lord of life. The Sunday precept, therefore, is not a simple duty imposed from outside. To participate in the Sunday celebration and to be nourished with the Eucharistic bread is a need of a Christian, who in this way can find the necessary energy for the journey to be undertaken.” For the Pope Sunday observance is not an “arbitrary” practice established by the Catholic Church, but it “is the way God indicates through his law.”

In other words, for the Pope Sunday observance is a biblical imperative rooted in God’s law. The problem with this view is that Sunday observance is rooted in Catholic traditions, not in God’s law. Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days have a different origin, meaning, authority, and experience.

### **The Difference Between Sabbath and Sunday**

The difference between Sabbath and Sunday becomes evident when we consider the difference between biblical view of the Sabbath and the Catholic understanding of Sunday. In the Bible the essence of Sabbathkeeping is not the Eucharistic celebration, but the consecration of time unto the Lord. As Hebrews 4 explains, we stop our work on the seventh day in order to allow God to work in us more fully and freely (Heb 4:10). Sabbathkeeping is a faith response that enables the believer to enter into God’s rest. Contrary to Passover and other OT festivals, no objects are needed to observe the Sabbath—only a heart that loves the Lord and is willing to give God priority in one’s thinking and living.

By contrast, the essence of Sunday keeping is fulfilling the “Mass Precept,” that is, the participation in the Eucharistic celebration. The reason is, as Benedict XVI explains, that the Eucharistic bread and blood of Christ, is supposed to nourish the believer and provides “the necessary energy for the journey to be undertaken.”

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The problem with this Catholic view of the Lord's Supper, known as "transubstantiation," is that it turns the symbolic and spiritual meaning of the bread and wine, into the real physical body of Christ that believers can eat. In other words, the nourishment comes, not from the spiritual symbolic message of the Lord's Supper, but from the physical consumption of Christ's body. This view is negated by Scripture which describes the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup, not as a consummation of Christ's body, but as a "proclamation of the Lord's death till he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

### **The Objectification of Christ is Idolatry**

Any attempt to objectify Christ or the other members of the Trinity, by identify them with objects, shrines, icons, crucifixes, or statues, is condemned by the Scripture as idolatry. This is the fundamental problem of Catholic worship. It is an idolatrous worship largely depended on objects as worship aids. Believers are deceived into believing that through the Eucharistic elements, holy relics, images, sacred shrines, they can experience the divine.

Worshipping God through objects ends up upstaging preaching, which is God's chosen means for communicating the faith and nurturing the spiritual life of His people. The Apostle Paul explains that "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ (Rom 10:17). This means that saving faith comes through the reading, preaching and hearing of the Word of God, and not through the partaking of the physical body of Christ or the veneration of "holy" objects.

Church history teaches us that when the preaching of the Word was gradually replaced by a visual worship consisting of the staging of the Mass, Passion Plays, veneration of images, relics, processions, and pilgrimages to holy shrines, the apostasy of the church set in, ushering in what is known as the Dark Ages. The sixteenth century Reformers overwhelmingly rejected the use of objects to worship God as a violation of the Second Commandment. They relied on the preaching of the Word to save souls and the Gospel made significant advances.

Benedict XVI's strategy to revive the Catholic faith, especially in Western Europe, by encouraging people to participate actively in the rituals



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of the church, is doomed to fail. The reason is simple. Ritualistic religions, whether they be Christian or pagan, gradually become formalistic and mechanical. People go through the motion of rituals that do not engage their mind nor do they warm their hearts. This explains why million of Catholics in Latin America are joining evangelical churches. They find the rituals of the Catholic church devoid of meaning and power to change their lives.

### **Benedict XVI's Political Strategy**

*Politically*, Benedict XVI is committed to continue the peacemaking efforts of the late John Paul II. In choosing the name Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger laid out the path of peace and reconciliation he wants to pursue for the world and for the church.

In his first General Audience in St. Peter's Square on April 27, 2005, Benedict XVI explained to the world why he chose the name: "Filled with sentiments of awe and thanksgiving, I wish to speak of why I chose the name Benedict. Firstly, I remember Pope Benedict XV, that courageous prophet of peace, who guided the Church through turbulent times of war [World War I]. In his footsteps I place my ministry in the service of reconciliation and harmony between peoples. Additionally, I recall Saint Benedict of Norcia, co-patron of Europe, whose life evokes the Christian roots of Europe. I ask him to help us all to hold firm to the centrality of Christ in our Christian life: May Christ always take first place in our thoughts and actions!"

### **The Influence of Two Previous Benedicts**

The two Benedicts who serve as a role model for Benedict XVI, are known for their efforts on behalf of world peace and of church renewal. The first Benedict was the founder of Western Monasticism. His mission and monastic movement played a decisive role in spreading Christianity in Europe during the sixth century when Christianity seemed to be losing its faith and identity.

The second Benedict is Pope Benedict XV who was pontiff from 1914 to 1922. He had the difficult task of providing leadership for Roman Catholic countries pitted against each other during World War I, each claiming a just fight and praying for victory. He came up with a

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Seven-point Peace Plan for the warring nations. The plan demanded a cessation of hostilities, a reduction of armaments, a guaranteed freedom of the seas, and international arbitration. The plan was rejected, but some of its proposals were included in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Point Peace Plan in January 1918.

Benedict XVI has repeatedly stated that, like Benedict XV, he wants to be known as “the peace Pope.” Surprisingly, this is the very description found in the Papal Prophecies of Malachy (1094-1148), archbishop of Armagh, Ireland. We noted in Newsletter 128, that this Irish priest supposedly received a strange vision of the future 112 popes who were to rule the Catholic Church from his time in the twelfth century until the end of time.

The legend for the present pope 111 is: “*gloria olivae*—the glory of the olive.” The phrase suggests that the pontificate of Benedict XVI will be distinguished for seeking to promote peace around the world. If the prophecy is correct, then the words of Revelation 13:3 about “the whole earth followed the beast with wonder” (RSV), will soon be fulfilled. The next pope in Malachy's list of papal prophecies is the last pope who ushers in the final judgement and destruction of the earth.

### **The Catholic Church Must Influence Political Choices**

Benedict XVI believes that the Catholic church has the right to influence political decisions. In a speech on “Church, Ecumenism, and Politics,” he insisted that “the Church must make claims and demands on public law. . . . Where the Church itself becomes the state, freedom becomes lost. But also when the Church is done away with as a public and publicly relevant authority, then too freedom is extinguished, because there the state once again claims completely for itself the jurisdiction of morality.” The latter, according to the new Pope, is a prerogative of the church.

As a Cardinal, the new pope was a staunch critic of the U.S. led invasion of Iraq. Even after the war, Ratzinger remained firm in its criticism: “it was right to resist the war and its threats of destruction. . . . It should never be the responsibility of just one nation to make decisions for the world.”

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**Benedict XVI Influences the Political Process**

Benedict XVI influences the political process by mobilizing bishops and priests to promote the Catholic church agenda. During the U. S. election of 2004, he wrote a memo to Cardinal Theodore of Washington, indicating that priests were to deny communion to supporters of abortion rights. The result was that Catholic John Kerry was denied, not only the communion, but also the votes of many sincere Catholics.

Another example is the emotionally charged referendum intended to dismantle Italy's strict law on assisted fertility. The referendum was conducted on June 12-13, but failed to pass largely due to the influence of Benedict XVI. The Pope urged the Catholics to boycott the referendum behind the slogan: "Life cannot be put to a vote: Don't vote".

During the two days of voting, less than 26 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot, leaving the referendum far short of the 51% needed to pass. This is most unusual for Italy, where 80 to 90 percent of the people usually turns out to vote. Benedict commended the bishops and the priests, calling them "truly good pastors," for influencing the moral choices of the Italian people.

The referendum is seen as a test of the Catholic Church influence in Italy and Europe as a whole. It shows that even in Italy, where over 90% of the Catholic go to church only three times in their lives—that is, when they are *hatched*, *matched*, and *dispatched*—they still listen and follow the dictates of their church leaders.

Benedict XVI is determined to win the heart and minds of people everywhere. He believes that the Catholic Church has the right to influence the political process by leading people to believe that what is right for the Catholic Church, is good for the country and the world. The initial results of Benedict XVI's strategy suggests that he is winning major victories.

**Conclusion**

Pope Benedict XVI has only been in office for about two months. Yet, within this short time he has already taken significant political, ecclesiastical, and ecumenical initiatives which show the influence of the

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papacy, both in the political and religious world. The many positive facets that make Benedict XVI a devout and deeply committed Catholic, must not blind evangelicals to the fact that he strongly stands for traditional Catholic teachings and practices. For the past 25 years prior to his election, Ratzinger has been a ruthless enforcer of Catholic Doctrines. He firmly stands for the teachings that have divided Protestantism from Roman Catholicism. The great Protestant truths of Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, and faith alone, are still unacceptable to the new pope.

Ecumenical Christian unity for Benedict XVI is possible only in Catholic terms. We have seen that an increasing number of religious leaders are willing to overlook historical doctrinal differences and accept the Pope as the undisputed religious leader of a New World Order. This reminds us of the prophetic endtime vision of Revelation 13:3: “And all the world marvelled and followed the beast.”

### **BACCHIOCCHI RESPONDS TO CRITICISM ABOUT HIS COMMENTS ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA**

The brief report about South Africa I posted in my newsletter No. 130, was intended to be informative, not accusative. My brief comments on the racial policy being implemented by our Adventist leaders in South Africa as well as my general observation on the socio-economic situation of the country, were designed to express my impressions, not to give a researched analysis of the issues. Every person is entitled to share his or her first impressions.

### **FRANK PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS**

Much of my report dealt with the unprecedented warm reception and response I received in all the churches. I made few comments about the socio-economic situation, simply because I was shocked by the crime, poverty, incompetence, and corruption that I saw in South Africa. If you read past newsletters you will see that I am very frank in describing what I see in any countries I visit, including my own country of Italy. In fact, I do not hesitate to point out that our Italian government is one of the most corrupt governments in the world.

Few years ago about two thirds of our Italian politicians were fired and jailed, because of the kick-back scandal that was uncovered. The lat-

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est news indicate that Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, may be guilty of the same crime. In Italy, a major problem is the failure of the Catholic Church to develop a moral national conscience of honesty toward God and fellow beings. Dishonesty is condoned on the assumption that at the end of life, the Catholic church can help practically anyone to make it through Purgatory into Paradise.

For me the issue is not whether the government of a country is black or white, but whether it governs the country effectively, by promoting investments, reducing unemployment, improving the standard of living, and offering security to its citizens. What I saw, heard, and read in the Johannesburg *Star*, seems to indicate that the situation is deteriorating. An article in *Star* compares the increasing poverty, crime, unemployment to a time-bomb that could explode at any time. If what I read, saw, and heard is inaccurate, no problem. Thank God for that. I was just reporting my impressions. If my impressions were wrong, thank God for all the prosperity and security that South Africa is allegedly enjoying.

The problem is not the alleged inaccuracies of my report, but the foul language used by some to defame me as if I were a criminal. I have never been insulted so badly by people of any country. I like to believe that those who engage in such defamatory campaign, represent a small, but strong politically minded black minority. Their hateful language only shows that their Christianity is skin deep. It is a hallmark of Christian maturity to be able to disagree without becoming disagreeable to one another. Let us learn to have a respectful dialogue.

A shining example of Christian maturity is Prof. Sylvan A Lashley, A Carribean who has served as President of Caribbean Union College and Atlantic Union College. Currently he works as an Attorney. We have exchanged a dozen of messages in a most cordial and respectful way. He is a most gracious and congenial individual, though he does not agree with me in everything.

## **THE RESPONSE OF THE ADVENTIST CONGREGATIONS**

All the congregations where I spoke in South Africa were racially mixed. At Helderberg the church and the overflow tent was packed with Black, Colored, and White members. The same was true in Pretoria, where perhaps the white members may have been the majority. The response of the various Adventist racial-groups was inspiring and heart-warming.

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At the Bassonia SDA church both the sanctuary and the large fellowship hall were packed every night with members of all races. My impression was that the black members may have been the majority, but there was a good representation of colored and white members as well. In all my travels around the world, I do not recall ever having received such a marvellous response. I will treasure the happy memory of the moving expressions of appreciation received. The last evening at Bassonia I felt like crying for joy, because I could feel that the Lord was using me to meet the spiritual needs of our fellow believers and of the many friends who attended the meetings. During the whole lecture tour, I felt well accepted by all the racial groups. Nobody ever expressed a criticism about anything that I said.

I was greatly impressed by the eagerness of our South African believers of all races to deepen their understanding and experience on Biblical truth. This is indicated also by the fact that over 2000 South Africans are subscribers to my newsletter. Some of them told me that they travelled hundreds of kilometers to attend the meetings. Never before I received so many orders for my publications and recordings. I mention all of this to reassure every one that South African Adventists of all races will hold a special place in my heart.

### **A DISTRESSING ASPECT OF OUR ADVENTIST CHURCH POLICY**

What distressed me about our South African church is the policy of forced integration of white and black conferences being pursued by our South African Adventist leaders. I am told that the General Conference is supporting such a policy. If it is true, then for consistency sake, the General Conference should first of all implement such a policy of forced integration in the USA, where black (Regional) conference function independently within the same Unions. In the West Coast, where black churches do not have yet their own Regional Conferences, repeated attempts have been made in recent years by black Adventist leaders to set up their own Regional Conference. So far they have not received the majority vote from their own black members.

The existence of separate black and white conferences is not perceived to be discriminatory in the USA. A proof is the fact that there

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are black churches in white conferences, and white Hispanic churches in black conferences. Such a mixture can be seen, for example, in the Greater New York Conference, the Northeastern Regional Conference, the Florida Conference, and the Southeastern Regional Conference. Churches have the right to choose under which conference they wish to operate.

My point is that if in the USA our Adventist church has adopted a tolerant policy which allows not only for white and black conferences to co-exist, but also for black and white churches to choose the conference to which they want to belong, I do not see why our leaders in South Africa feel compelled to promote forced integration — a policy which has proven to be a total failure in the USA. In America churches and public schools are more segregated today than even before.

My comment that Helderberg has become a black college and consequently white students have no white college to attend, was interpreted to mean that black students have forced white students out of the school. Obviously, that is not what I meant. To my knowledge black students have never forced white students out of any Adventist College.

The reality is that when a College becomes predominantly or exclusively black, white students go to another college where their race is adequately represented. This gives them a better chance to date and marry within their own race. This is what is happening in America, where predominantly white Adventist colleges receive the largest enrollment of white students. The problem is that in South Africa white students do not have the option to attend another Adventist college that is predominantly white. Both Bethel and Helderberg college have become exclusively black.

The response of some black South African Adventists is that white students have no reason to stay away from black colleges, because we are one in Christ and we all belong to the family of God. Christ has abolished all racial distinctions and consequently there is no problem for white students to date and marry persons of another race. In fact, some see interracial marriages as the surest way to overcome the results of sin manifested in skin pigmentation of some races.

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**RACE IN THE BIBLE**

In my preliminary investigation I found that nowhere the Bible suggests that racial distinctions are a human evil invention. God is the Creator of all the distinctions in the human and subhuman world. There are 25 different types of Fox animals in different parts of the world. Each type developed its characteristics in accordance to its habitat. Each type of fox, whether red or gray, is a divine creation, not the result of sin. The same is true of all animals, fruits and vegetables. Look at the variety of color and taste of apples. Dark red apples are not more sinful than the light green ones. The same is true of the distinctive racial groups of people.

Races are classified in 9 major categories: European, Indian, Asian, Melanesian, Polynesian, American Indian, African, Aboriginal Australian. Each race has developed its own unique features. I served 5 years in Ethiopia and I was amazed by the beauty of some men and women. Some of them looked like perfect statues. I am not surprised that Moses fell in love with an Ethiopian lady (Num 12:1-2). There is beauty in every race, simply because each race is part of God's creation.

The division of the earth at the time of the Tower of Babel, was God's action. Though the division was the result of human rebellion, the development of new races as a result of inbreeding within an isolated people-group, must be seen as part of the original genetic pool created by God. Gender and racial distinctions are not human inventions, but a divine creation. God built within each species the possibilities to develop amazing variations. The Bible teaches us to accept, respect, and appreciate the distinctions that God has established both in the human and subhuman creation.

There are no indications in the Bible that racial and ethnic distinctions must be abolished because they are the result of sin. . The text usually quoted to argue for racial integration is Galatians 3:28, which says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Some focus on the Greek/Jew aspect of this text to argue that in Christ all races should be melded into one people. The problem with such a reasoning is the failure to recognize that the text affirms the soteriologi-



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cal unity of mankind, that is, salvation is open to all races and sexes, not the sociological integration of all races, that is, the melding of all races into one new race.

The Gospel did not perform the miracle of eliminating all racial and gender distinctions in the Apostolic Church. Greeks remained Greeks and Jews were still Jews. Males and females were not transformed into unisex beings. The text teaches us that all races have equal opportunity for salvation and to become part of spiritual Israel. But this does not mean that God wants everyone physically melded into one race.

Twenty years ago when I researched my book **WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**, I found that liberal scholars were eager to promote the abolition of functional, gender, and racial distinctions. These scholars see all these distinction as the legacy of a sinful past. My research shows otherwise. Scripture defends these distinctions as part of the order of creation, not as a result of sin.

It goes without saying that **WOMEN IN THE CHURCH** made me very unpopular in some Adventist circles. To this very day I am still a *persona non grata* in some Adventist Universities. My aim has never been to seek popular approval, but divine approval. My commitment is to seek to understand the teachings of the Bible, especially on issues we face today. Surprisingly, even in our church some jump to such simplistic conclusion that if we are one in Christ, then all forms of racial distinction are immoral and to be rejected. This seems to be the conviction that is influencing the policy of forced integration in our Adventist church in South Africa. The problem with this policy is the failure to understand what unity in Christ means and how it expressed in the OT and NT,

I take comfort in the thought that my research reaches beyond the boundaries of our church. For example, **WOMEN IN THE CHURCH** has been adopted as a text book in numerous seminaries. I am told that it has also influenced the Southern Baptist Church about 5 years ago, to reverse their decision on women ordination. Incidentally, the Southern Baptist Church is the largest Protestant denomination in the USA.

I have reason to believe that a thorough biblical study on the race issue can help us to put to rest some prevailing misconceptions. One of them is that racial distinctions are an immoral—a sinful legacy to be

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eliminated. My preliminary study shows otherwise. All distinctions in the human and sub-human creation are part of God's creation to be accepted and respected. There is nothing sinful about them. They are part of the beauty and variety of God's marvelous creation.

### **Respect for Divinely Established Distinctions**

We live in an age when divinely established functional and sexual distinctions are rejected as an immoral legacy of the Dark Ages. The new social "Gospel" teaches functional and sexual interchangeability. Men can be women and women can be men, both functionally and sexually. I discuss this philosophy at great length in my book *WOMEN IN THE CHURCH*. This philosophy has given impetus to the ordination of women and of homosexuals. The reasoning is that if functional distinctions do not matter, why should sexual distinctions matter? By extension, the same reasoning is applied today to racial distinctions: If we are one in Christ, why should racial distinctions matter?

My impression is that the Bible teaches us to respect all the distinctions that God has established. For example, we read: "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does this things is an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deut 22:5).

The distinction extended to the inbreeding of cattle, mixing of seeds, or even cloth-threads. "You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two different kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two different kinds of stuff" (Lev 19:19). The reason for such instructions appears to be the need to respect the order of God's creation. God does not to approve blurring the distinctions which He has established.

### **The Origin of Racial Distinctions**

The Bible teaches that all races descend from our first parents, Adam and Eve. All the genetic diversity we see today, was built in at the beginning. Prior to the building of the Tower of Babel "the whole earth had one language" (Gen 11:1). The rebellion at the Tower of Babel resulted in people being scattered over the earth. Such a scattering produced two effects: one genetic and the other linguistic.

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Genetically, the separation of inbreeding populations produced distinct phenotypic characteristics within each separate population. Linguistically, each separate populations developed their own distinctive language. The result was that different races and cultures were formed, with certain features becoming dominant in each group.

Paul alludes to these distinctions when he says that God “made from one [Adam and Eve] every nations men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitations” (Acts 17:26). Obviously the “boundaries” refers not only to the geographical areas, but also to the racial and linguistic characteristics of each people group.

### **Interracial Marriages**

In the Bible there are a few examples of interracial marriage. A notable example is the Cushite (Ethiopian) woman that Moses married (Num 12:1). No clues are given as to when and why Moses married this African woman, whose name is not even given. The only thing that we know is that she was not well-accepted by Aaron and Miriam. This led them to challenge Moses’ authority. God punished Miriam with leprosy. The punishment reveals, not God’s approval of interracial marriages, but God’s condemnation of the rebellious attitude of Aaron and Miriam.

Another example is the marriage of Ruth, the Moabite, to Boaz, an Israelites. Prior to her marriage she expressed her faith in the true God of Israel (Ruth 1:16). These examples of interracial marriage in the Bible are the exemption, rather than the rule. The rule was to avoid marrying foreigners because of the danger of apostasy. “You shall not marry with them [Cananites], giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons. For they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (Deut 7:3-4; Ex 34:10-17).

This instruction was ignored by the Jews, especially when they returned to their homeland after the Babylonian exile. Many of them, including the priests, married native women and had children from them. We read in Ezra 9:1-2: “The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices ... They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race

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with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.”

Ezra, after a night of prayer and supplication, called all the people instructing the men “to put them [the wives] away with their children” (Ezra 10:44). Plans were laid out on how to carry out the instruction of sending away all the foreign wives with their children. A long list is given in Ezra 10 of all the priests, Levites, and leading men who obeyed the command by sending away their foreign wives and children.

The text suggests that the preservation of the Jewish race was very important in their thinking. Ezra led into the renewal of the covenant by issuing an absolute ban on mixed marriages. He required that all who wished to remain within the Jewish covenant community, had to immediately divorce their non-Jewish wives.

I find such drastic action unreasonable. After all, Ruth the Moabitess, was accepted into the Jewish community of faith after accepting the God of Israel. Why not give the same chance to all the non-Jewish wives and children that Jewish men had married? Undoubtedly some wives, like Ruth, had come to appreciate and accept the Jewish religion and were willing and ready to worship the God of Israel.

It appears that in Ezra’s mind the preservation of “THE HOLY RACE,” was very important. Thus he opted for a radical and, in my mind, irrational solution, that is, the expulsion of all the non-Jewish wives and children, irrespective of their leaning toward the Jewish faith. I find this radical action merciless. Yet this helps us to understand the importance of the race factor in the Old Testament.

The Jews were instructed not to marry foreigners, because people are conditioned not only by culture and education, but also by racial and genetic patterns. This is why God has set some boundaries for the orderly functioning of the human family (Acts 17:26; Gen 10:25,32; Deut 32:8).

Over half a century ago, when the U. S. declared war on Japan, the government rounded up and imprisoned Japanese-Americans just for being Japanese. The government never considered the political leanings of the

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people. It assumed that people of the same race are genetically predisposed to support the policies of leaders of their own race. This example shows how difficult it is to be rational when racial tensions arise.

No matter which races are combined, there exists an inherent possibility for different ways of thinking to clash. Moreover, children of interracial marriages are confused about who they really are. Racial bigotry can cause tensions within the family. Life is hard enough without adding the burden of interracial tensions.

### **BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL**

**An important point to note is that there are no derogatory** references in the Bible about black skin color. On the contrary, Solomon quotes his lover as saying “I am black but comely” (Songs of Sol 1:5; KJV). The text suggests that “BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL” in the Bible. There are no indications in the Bible of inferior status assigned to those of black skin. The reason is that God is the Creator of all races. Racial distinction are not the result of sin, but are part of God’s design for the orderly functioning of the human family.

Skin pigmentation was not a problem in Bible time. In the Near East the skin color was pretty uniform. The Jews were instructed not to marry foreigners, because people are conditioned not only by culture and education, but also by racial and genetic patterns. This is why God has set some boundaries for the orderly functioning of the human family (Acts 17:26; Gen 10:25,32; Deut 32:8).

In Leviticus 17-18 there is a repeated mention of the foreigners who lived among the Israelites as foreigners. They had to observe specific Mosaic laws, but they were still different—they were foreigners. The integration of foreigners into the Jewish race was a rare and difficult process that required for men the surgery of circumcision. This explains why foreigners remained GODFEARERS, and were treated as a separate class.

### **Racial Distinctions in the Apostolic Church**

The situation in NT is essentially the same. Believers were taught to accept and respect every race, because in Christ there is no distinction between Jews and Greeks. But the spiritual unity in Christ, did not abol-

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ish racial distinctions. The Apostolic Church understood that accepting people of all races as equal in Christ when it comes to salvation, does not eliminate racial or ethnic distinctions. This principle is exemplified in the division of the Apostolic Church between THE CHURCH OF THE CIRCUMCISION, that is, JUDEO-CHRISTIANS, and THE CHURCH OF THE UNCIRCUMCISION, that is, GENTILE CHRISTIANS.

If we accept the Apostolic Church as a model for Christian churches today, then we must accept that racial distinctions have been a reality from the very beginning of Christianity. The Apostles understood that Gospel teaches acceptance and respect of all races, but not their elimination or integration of races. I need to do more research on this matter, but my preliminary research leads me to conclude that racial distinctions were accepted in both the OT and NT as part of the order of God's creation.

Paul himself admits that he was commissioned to minister to the Gentiles (the uncircumcised), while Peter to the Jews (the circumcised) (Gal 2:8). The two churches co-existed side by side in mutual respect during the first two centuries. No attempt was made by the apostles to integrate the two churches, because Scripture teaches that God has created us equal, but different. The Apostolic Church understood that differences in gender and race have to be respected.

Gradually a rift developed between the Jewish and Gentile churches, as a result of the Roman repressive anti-Jewish measures, which outlawed the practice of Judaism in general and the Sabbath in particular. I have examined this development in my doctoral dissertation. The outcome was that Gentile Christians came to distance themselves from Jews and Jewish-Christians, especially by abandoning even the Sabbath.

The point is that the Gospel teaches to accept and respect every person, irrespective of color, race, or culture, because soteriologically, that is, in terms of salvation, we are one in Christ, that is, equal before God. But the Gospel does not promote forced racial, cultural, or ethnic integration, because sociologically it recognizes and respects the racial, cultural, and ethnic distinctions established by God.

Paul alludes to these distinctions when he says that God "made from one [Adam and Eve] every nations men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their

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habitations” (Acts 17:26). Obviously the boundaries, as noted earlier, are not only geographical, but also cultural, linguistic, and racial.

### **The Problem of Accepting Gentile Christians**

The problem in the Apostolic Church is that Jewish-Christians were apprehensive about interacting socially with Gentile Christians. It was through the vision of a great sheet containing clean and unclean animals, that God taught Peter not to be afraid to interact socially with Cornelius, a Gentile, because “what God has cleansed, you must not call common [unclean]” (Acts 10:15).

The issue of the social acceptance of Gentile Christian was deeply felt in the Apostolic Church. In fact, the first Jerusalem Council was convened in 49 A. D. to address this very question. The decision formulated by the Council was to inform the Gentiles who accepted Christ to respect four specific Mosaic laws (abstention from idolatry, unchastity, strangled meat, and blood) found in Leviticus 17-18. The original intent of these laws was to make it possible for foreigners (geer) to live among the Israelites.

In other words, the Mosaic law regarding the foreigners living in Israel, was now applied by the Apostolic leaders to the Gentile believers who wanted to live among Jewish believers. The foreigners in the OT and the Gentiles in the NT, were to be accepted and respected, but they were not expected to abandon their ethnic identity by becoming Jews. There are no provisions in the Bible for forced integration, that is, Gentiles becoming Jews or vice versa.

The Apostolic church gradually and painfully understood that the universal salvation offered through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, meant the acceptance and respect of people of different races and culture. Such an acceptance did not result in forced integration. The Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians learned to accept and respect one another, but they continued to co-exist as independent churches. To use today’s language, we might say that in the Apostolic Church there were the JEWISH CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE and the GENTILE CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE.

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Gradually the Judeo-Christian churches disappeared, largely as a result of the Roman repressive measures against the Jews and their Sabbath. To avoid such measures Gentile Christians distanced themselves from Jews and Jewish Christians in order to show to the Roman authorities their separation from Judaism and their Sabbath, as well as their integration into cycles and worship the pagan society, especially by adopting the Day of the Sun. In my dissertation *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY* you will find a lengthy analysis of this process.

### **APPLICATION TO OUR TIMES OF THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH**

When we apply the example of the Apostolic Church to our times, it is evident that forced integration did not work in apostolic times and will not work today. The reasons are theological and practical. Theologically, racial and cultural distinctions are part of God's design for the human family. Practically, most people want to retain their cultural and racial identity. For example, the Hispanics in America are the fastest growing ethnic group. They are so committed to preserve their ethnic identity, that they insist in speaking Spanish at home, at school, in the church, and in the society at large.

The same situation exists in our Adventist Church. In some conferences the number of ethnic churches outnumbers the English-speaking churches. The reason is that most people prefer to worship and fellowship with members of their own culture and race. At Andrews University numerous ethnic churches have been established, sometimes at great sacrifices. We have Korean, Hispanic, Filipino, Caribbean, Black, African, Asian, and other Adventist churches. Unfortunately, there is no Italian Church. I would love from time to time to worship in an Italian church to hear my melodious Italian language and to interact socially with believers who share my cultural heritage.

It is the same desire to preserve one's cultural and racial identity that is influencing parent to send their children to a school where their own race is adequately represented. For example, most white parents have no problems yet in sending their children to Andrews University, because black students make up 27% of the student body. They feel that there are still ample opportunities for their children to date and marry members of their own race.



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The situation is much different at Atlantic Union College where 83% of the students are blacks. Most white parents do not feel comfortable to send their sons and daughters to a school where the racial mix is predominantly black. Thus, they usually send their children to Southern Adventist University which at this moment has only 11% of black students. The situation is rapidly changing as the influx of blacks at Southern Adventist University has been increasing dramatically in recent years. The explosive enrollment of white students of the past few years, will not last for ever. Soon white parents will have to face the reality that even Southern University will no longer be the “most white” Adventist university in North America.

In the light of the American experience, white South African parents can hardly be blamed for failing to send their sons and daughters to Helderberg college—an almost totally black college. The issue is not racism, but the lack of a balanced racial mix that provides white students opportunities to date and marry within their own race. If Helderberg was racially mixed like Andrews University, I believe that most white parents would have no problems in sending their sons and daughters there.

## **Conclusion**

This preliminary investigation has shown that the unity in Christ proclaimed by the Gospel, does not abolish racial, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic distinctions. The Bible teaches us to accept and respect as members of the family of God, people of all races, languages and culture. Since racial distinctions have been established by God, they are to be accepted and respected, not abolished.

The biblical solution to the racial problem is not forced integration. America has experienced first hand the total failure of forced integration by bussing students away from their own ethnic schools to integrated schools. The result has been that today schools in America are more segregated than ever been before. The solution proposed by the Bible is to accept and respect people of all races, without forcing the elimination of racial or cultural distinctions, which God has established for the orderly functioning of the human family.

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People have the right to live, worship, study, and marry within their own racial and cultural heritage. Some may feel comfortable to study, worship, or even marry within a different culture. That is their own prerogative. But there are no indication in the Bible that the aim of the Gospel is to eliminate all racial or cultural distinctions.

The great multitude of the redeemed consists of an amazing racial mixture of people from “every nation, from all tribes and people and tongues” (Rev 7:9; 14:6). It is evident that racial distinctions are here to stay until Christ’s coming. What will happen at that time we do not know. I have reason to believe that we will all speak ITALIAN, because after all Italian is the most musical language. Consequently ITALIAN will help to preserve musical atmosphere of the new earth! (Please laugh!).

While we live in this present world, let us accept and respect the racial distinctions that God has established for the orderly functioning of the human family. Let us resolve to uphold at all costs the dignity of all people as beings created in the image of God. It would be inconsistent for our Adventist Church to be involved in world mission, without accepting people of all races as sons and daughters of God, created in His image and redeemed by Christ’s atoning sacrifice.