

A New Attack Against The Sabbath - Part 1

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The last newsletter "Reflections on Terrorism" (No. 75) generated an unusual number of responses from different parts of the world. Some editors requested permission to publish portions of the essay. It was encouraging for me to read your gracious messages. Many of you share my concern about the need to eradicate the roots of terrorism by exposing the immorality of the religious intolerance found in various forms, not only in the teachings of Islam, but also in Christian churches.

THE LATEST ATTACK AGAINST THE SABBATH

In the last newsletter I promised to respond to the 40 pages document entitled "An Open Letter to Our Friends and Family," written by Pastor Greg Taylor, who served for the past 8 years until July 2001 as the senior pastor of the Foster Memorial SDA Church in Asheville, NC. In this lengthy essay which is circulating far and wide around the world, Pastor Taylor sets forth his reasons for rejecting distinctive Adventist beliefs, especially the Sabbath.

To do justice to the many issues raised by Pastor Taylor, I decided to divide my response in three parts, each of which will be posted in a separate newsletter. This newsletter evaluates the religious pilgrimage of Pastor Taylor, focusing especially on some of his characterizations of the Sabbath, Ellen White, Willow Creek, and Adventism in general. The next two newsletters will examine specifically Pastor Taylor's attempts to negate the continuity and validity of the Sabbath.

The reason for devoting three newsletters to a document which some may view of relative importance, is because during the past five years over 20 former Adventist pastors and Bible teachers have embraced the same "New Covenant Theology." This theology, which rejects the Sabbath as an Old Covenant institution which is no longer binding upon Christians today, has already influenced over 5,000 former Adventists to leave the church.

Besides those who have already left the Adventist church, there are many others who are contemplating to do the same thing, if they cannot find satisfactory answers to the anti-Sabbath arguments presented by former Adventists like Pastor Taylor. Practically every day I receive email messages from distressed Adventists, urging me to answer the arguments against the Sabbath and other Adventist beliefs that are now troubling them. The awareness of the extent of the problem, has motivated me to take time in my busy schedule to prepare a response to the latest attack against the Sabbath. It is my fervent hope and prayer that this service will help those who are sincerely seeking to know and do the revealed will of God.

AN UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

On October 19 and 20, 2001, I spent two delightful days lecturing on the campus of Iowa State University, in Ames, Iowa. My visit was sponsored by the Committee on Lectures, the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, and the SDA Student Association. Two of the lectures were delivered on Thursday and Friday evening to faculties and students in the "Gallery" auditorium, and one lecture on Friday morning in the class "Introduction to Catholicism" taught by David Hunter, Ph. D., a graduate from Notre Dame University in Patristic Studies.

The two major topics of my lectures were "The Global Vision of Pope John Paul II" and "From Sabbath to Sunday: How it Came About." I delivered the latter on Friday evening with 150 PowerPoint slides. Truly I can say that the response surpassed my fondest expectations. They all listened attentively and receptively. During the questions/answers period, several students asked very perceptive questions about the Sabbath. The subject was new to them, and they were eager to learn more about the Sabbath.

What impressed me most during this visit, is the tremendous potential for witnessing in the secular campuses of American Universities. There are thousands of young people in these universities whose minds are open to new truths. The Catholic Church has long recognized this potential and has established her presence in most universities. At Iowa State University, the Catholic Church contributed one million dollars to establish an endowed chair for Catholic Studies. Catholic Professor David Hunter, a most gracious person who invited me to lecture in his class called "Introduction to Catholicism," is paid by that Catholic endowment, which brings large dividends to the Catholic Church in terms of many young minds favorably impressed to accept the Catholic faith. I wish that our Adventist Church could also establish a permanent presence of American Universities where the leaders of tomorrow are trained.

NEW DIRECTORY OF SABBATH OBSERVING CHURCHES

The Bible Sabbath Association has just published the ninth edition (246 pages) of *THE DIRECTORY OF SABBATH-OBSERVING GROUPS*. The Directory lists over 400 Sabbatarian denominations and groups, including over 1600 congregations. Your church should find this directory helpful, especially when it wishes to invite other Sabbatarian churches or groups in your local area for special events.

The Directory is available for \$15.00, postpaid, from: *The Bible Sabbath Association*, 3316 Alberta Drive, Gillette, WY 82718. You can order it by credit card by calling 307-686-5191, or via email at: info@biblesabbath.org.

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER ON BACCHIOCCHI'S RESEARCH

If you are thinking of donating some good books to your friends for Christmas, you may wish to consider some of the 16 books that I have authored on vital aspects of the Christian faith and lifestyle. Your order will support my Biblical research and itinerant ministry. At present I receive no salary because on July 1, 2000 I took an early retirement (at the age of 62) from teaching at Andrews University in order to devote myself more fully to research and share Biblical truths through the printed page and spoken word. This venture of faith is largely supported by the orders I receive for my publications and recordings.

Here is your SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER on all my books and recordings:

- 1) The complete set of my 16 books, 22 cassettes, and 8 videos of the Sabbath Seminar lectures, for only \$200.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$535.00
- 2) The complete set of my 16 books for only \$140.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$305.00.
- 3) Five books of your choice for only \$50.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$100.00. The five books I would highly recommend as ideal gifts are:

THE MARRIAGE COVENANT: A timely book designed to strengthen the Christian home through a recovery of vital Biblical principles.

THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC: A much needed book to understand the Biblical teachings on worship music.

THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE: A most timely study that refutes the latest attacks against the Sabbath.

IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? A timely book that unmasks the popular deception of conscious life after death.

THE ADVENT HOPE: An important book to understand the biblical teachings on the certainty and imminence of Christ Return.

- 4) The two CD-ROM containing all my 16 books, 100 articles, the King James Version of the Bible, and all the PowerPoint lectures on the Sabbath and Second Advent, for only \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$140.00.

You can order all the items listed above by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by mailing your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE

Every week we process over 100 new subscriptions from people who received an ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER from a friend. Thank you for sharing these Bible studies with your friends. Just let them know that they can receive this newsletter directly simply by emailing us their request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 14,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of November and December 2001. Every Sabbath it is a great privilege for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometimes during 2002. All the weekends for 2001 are now taken, but I do have openings for 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle are now presented with PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

NOVEMBER 2-3: ORLANDO - MT. DORA SDA CHURCH, FLORIDA

Location: 18440 Us Highway 441, Mt. Dora, FL 32757

For information call Pastor David Canther at (352) 383-4100 or (352) 728-4880

NOVEMBER 9-10: MIAMI, FLORIDA: MARANATHA SDA CHURCH

Location: 18900 N. W. 32nd Avenue, Miami, FL 33055

For information call Pastor Keith R. Harding at (305) 620-9091

NOVEMBER 16-17: ERIE SDA CHURCH, PENNSYLVANIA

Location: 190 Hunter Road, Erie, PA 16509

For information call Pastor Thomas Cusack at (814) 864-8124

or Elder Lowell Freeman at (814) 739-2360

NOVEMBER 23-24: HENDERSONVILLE, NC - UPWARD SDA CHURCH

Location: Youth Activities Building of the Bonclarken Conference Center

located at 500 Pine Drive, Flat Rock, North Carolina

For information call Pastor John A Sweigart at (828) 697-9876 or (828) 696-7922

NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 1: DALLAS, TEXAS - RICHARDSON SDA CHURCH

Location: 1201 W. Beltline Road, Richardson, Texas 75080

For information call Pastor Paul Hunt at (972) 231-3254

DECEMBER 7-8: ROCK HILL SDA CHURCH, SOUTH CAROLINA

Location: 255 Neely Store Road, Rock Hill, SC 29732

For information call Pastor Werner Gil at (803) 329-4740

DECEMBER 14-15: WENATCHEE, WA - VALLEY VIEW SDA CHURCH

Location: 1201 NE 10th Street, East Wenatchee, WA 98802

For information call Pastor John Witcombe at (509) 667-1177 or (509) 670-0580

DECEMBER 21-23: ORLANDO, FLORIDA - HAITIANS SDA RALLY

Location to be given in the next newsletter

For information call Pastor Ronald Jean Baptiste at (407) 296-8941

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY UPDATE

One of our subscribers to our ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER is Attorney James Standish, JD, MBA, who serves as Director of Legislative Affairs at the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After reading the last newsletter he emailed me a gracious message offering to contribute some religious liberty alerts to our newsletter from time to time. I am most grateful to Attorney Standish for his willingness to keep us abreast of significant developments.

I would recommend visiting the website that Attorney Standish has developed at <<http://ola.adventist.org>> In the "Current Issues & Analysis" section, you will find a perceptive discussion of the constitutionality of Sunday laws. For specific questions you can contact Attorney Standish at <StandishJ@gc.adventist.org>

The brief article he has submitted for this newsletter, offers a perceptive analysis of the newly passed "Anti-Terrorism Act." You should find it informative.

"The Anti-Terrorism Act (H.R. 3162): A Threat to Religious Freedom?"
James Standish, JD, MBA
Director of Legislative Affairs
General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

On October 26, 2001, President Bush signed into law the USA PATRIOT Act (H.R.3162). The primary purpose of the Act is to prevent future terrorist attacks against the U.S. While the Act passed easily, it was not without controversy. The purpose of this summary is to explore whether the Act directly or indirectly threatens religious freedom.

It is worth noting that the Act directly addresses religious freedom twice, and in both instances it does so in a positive manner. In §102, the Act states that Muslim Americans "are entitled to nothing less than the full rights of every American." It also states that the "civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans," including Muslim Americans, "must be protected." Similarly, in §1002, the Act states that "bigotry and any acts of violence or discrimination against any Americans, including Sikh-Americans" are condemned by Congress.

It is also worth noting that the legislation is relatively moderate in comparison with past governmental efforts to ensure domestic security during war (e.g. efforts during WWII, WWI, and the Civil War). Finally, there is no reason to believe that the Congress or the White House has acted out of any motive other than to ensure that innocent Americans are protected against the current grave terrorist threat.

There are reasons the Act is controversial, however. Three primary areas have raised concern among civil liberty organizations like the ACLU. The first is the increased powers of the state to use surveillance techniques and exercise searches. The second is the ability to hold non-citizens suspected of terrorism for seven days without the necessary evidence to either charge them of a crime or to begin deportation proceedings. Finally, some question whether the Act's definition of terrorism is so broad as to make relatively innocent activity punishable.

New Powers for Surveillance & Searches

The Act creates new powers for governmental surveillance and searches. For example, it permits a single warrant for tapping all the phones used by a suspect; rather than the current limitation that requires an individual warrant for each phone tapped. It also permits government agents to execute searches without first notifying the owner of the property to be searched. The government is still required to obtain a warrant from a judge before such searches or surveillance are initiated. While governmental powers can always be misused in ways to inhibit freedom of faith, there does not appear to be reason to believe that these expanded powers pose a specific threat to religious freedom.

New Power to Hold Non-Citizen Suspects

The Department of Justice originally proposed that law enforcement be granted power to hold non-citizen suspects indefinitely while evidence of their terrorist activity is compiled. This proposal was moderated during the legislative process. The result is that non-citizens can be held for up to seven days before criminal charges are brought or deportation proceedings initiated.

The holding of individuals without the necessary evidence to charge them is controversial for an obvious reason - it significantly increases the likelihood of arrest and detention of innocent people. While seven days is not an enormously long period, neither is it insignificant. The provision does not apply to citizens, but it does apply to permanent residents of the U.S., and presents a significant erosion of procedures utilized to protect the innocent. In the face of terrorism by non-citizens it is understandable that the Congress felt such a provision was necessary, it is nevertheless a significant reduction in the protections afforded the innocent.

Definition of Terrorism

The ACLU claims that the Act defines terrorism too broadly. This is a serious claim, as organizations that are categorized as supporters or purveyors of terrorism are subject to significant penalties under the law, as are those that support such organizations. Despite criticism, the definition is actually rather narrow on its face. It includes only acts that are dangerous to human life, that are a violation of criminal law, that "appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping." While provisions of law can always be misused, the definition as it is written appears appropriate.

Biometric Identification

Interestingly, the Act includes a provision for a "feasibility study on the use of biometric identifier scanning system with access to the FBI integrated automated fingerprint identification system at overseas consular posts and points of entry to the United States." The purpose of using this identification system is to ensure that those wanted by the FBI do not receive permission to enter the U.S. Once again, such a provision appears reasonable in light of the threat to innocents. There is, however, always a danger that such systems of identification could be misused in the future.

Legislative Safeguards

There are some safeguards in the Act designed to limit the dangers to civil liberties. Under certain circumstances, the government can be sued for the misuse of information collected under the provisions. In addition, some of the surveillance provisions automatically terminate in 4 years. The provisions can be renewed at that time, but only by again going through the legislative process. Passing the provisions again will be made more difficult if law enforcement has abused the provisions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the Act limits certain civil liberties, it is moderate legislation in light of the current threat. While there is always a possibility that any limitation on freedoms will be used against faith groups, the Act does not contain provisions that can be identified as a specific threat to religious liberty. Thus, predicting how the Act could be used to inhibit religious liberty is a speculative exercise.

It is fair to say, however, that an environment in which civil rights are limited generally is often an environment in which religious freedom becomes susceptible to limitation. We will therefore continue to monitor legislative and executive actions closely; for we are told that "We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscious" (Ellen White, 5 Testimonies to the Church 714).

A NEW ATTACK AGAINST THE SABBATH - Part 1
Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

During the past few weeks several subscribers to our ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER have emailed me a copy of Greg and Paula Taylor's confessional essay entitled "An Open Letter to Our Friends and Family." In this lengthy document of about 40 pages, Pastor Taylor shares the spiritual pilgrimage which eventually led him and his wife to reject fundamental Adventist beliefs (especially the Sabbath), and to resign from the Foster Memorial SDA Church (about 500 members), in Asheville, NC, where Pastor Taylor has served as senior pastor for the past 8 years.

This document has been circulating widely across the USA and overseas. In fact several readers have urged me to respond to this "Open Letter," especially because it focuses primarily on the reasons the Pastor Taylor rejected the Sabbath as binding upon Christians today. He claims to have providentially discovered that in the New Testament the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ, our Sabbath rest, and consequently and it "no longer binding on Christians."

At first I hesitated to undertake this assignment, since I have examined at considerable length the same anti-Sabbath arguments in my book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*. In many ways the "Open Letter" recycles in a simplified and personalized way, Dale Ratzlaff's arguments against the Sabbath presented in his book *THE SABBATH IN CRISIS*. Like the Pastor Taylor, Ratzlaff served the Adventist church for 15 years, first as Bible teacher at Monterey Bay Academy and then as a Pastor in Southern California. Having spent a year of my life preparing a lengthy refutation of Ratzlaff's irrational methodology and conclusions, I did not feel that it was necessary for me to pay twice for a dead horse.

What eventually persuaded me to undertake this assignment, is the plea from several Adventists who have been badly shaken by this "Open Letter." Being a simple and sincere confessional story, the "Open Letter" has an enormous appeal to uncritical minds. In fact, some told me that they are troubled and confused by Pastor Taylor's anti-Sabbath arguments. They are hoping that my response will clear away the uncertainties that have risen in their mind. It would be presumptuous on my part to think that this response will clear the air and fully restore the confidence in the Sabbath of everyone. Ultimately what convinces people of Bible truths, is not merely human logic, but the working of the Holy Spirit.

Surprisingly Pastor Taylor's resignation from the Foster Memorial SDA Church, has not affected the church attendance. This has not been the case in other Adventist churches where a large number of members left the church together with their pastors, and established new independent Sundaykeeping congregations. Two members of the Foster Memorial SDA church informed me that the attendance has slightly increased since Pastor Taylor left on July 2001. The reason given is that many church members who received the "Open Letter," went back to their Bibles to reexamine for themselves the very Adventist doctrines challenged by Pastor Taylor. The outcome of this fresh investigation has been a strengthening of their faith in the Adventist message and a slight increase in church attendance.

For the sake of clarity, my response to the "Open Letter," is divided into two parts, according to the twofold division of the document itself. The first part evaluates the religious pilgrimage of Pastor Taylor, focusing especially on some of his characterizations of the Sabbath, Ellen White, and Adventism in general. This newsletter responds exclusively to the first part of the "Open Letter."

The next two newsletters will examine what the “Open Letter” calls “The Biblical Journey.” This is the most important part of the document, because it presents the reasons Pastor Taylor has rejected the Sabbath. I am devoting the next two newsletters to an examination of Pastor Taylor anti-Sabbath arguments, because these are the popular arguments used to negate the continuity and validity of the Sabbath. I trust that this service will be helpful to those who wish to be better prepared to share the Sabbath truth with people of other faiths.

Pastor Taylor believes that the Lord opened their eyes to the real meaning of certain NT texts, which in their view negate the continuity of the Sabbath for Christians. Pastor Taylor expresses his excitement with exclamations such as these: “I could hardly believe my eyes as I read this scripture . . . I must admit that this discovery affected me deeply . . . The whole study hit me so hard that I would wake up in the middle of the night and call upon the Lord.”

Did Pastor Taylor really discover “new light” which negates the creational and permanent nature of the Sabbath? Or did he grossly misinterpret the texts in question? The answer to these questions will become clear as we examine his methodology and conclusions in the next two newsletters. I have asked the Lord to give me the grace and wisdom to examine this lengthy essay with respect and objectivity. The ultimate goal is not to win an argument, but to help sincere people determine if the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping is still relevant for our Christian life today.

PART 1 THE PERSONAL JOURNEY

In the first part of his “Open Letter” Pastor Taylor relates his personal journey which I will attempt to summarize briefly, commenting especially on his characterizations of the Sabbath, Willow Creek, Ellen White, and the Adventist Church. The major analysis of Pastor Taylor’s arguments will be done in the next two newsletters. My intent is not to defame Pastor Taylor in any way, but rather to examine the validity of his allegations against the Adventist Church and his reasons for rejecting the Sabbath.

The impression I received from reading the “Open Letter,” is that Pastor Taylor is an honest and sincere man who wants to do what he believes to be right. The fact that he turned down the offer of the Carolina Conference to go back to Andrews University Theological Seminary for a year at full salary in order to clarify his thinking, suggests to me that he is a man of conviction. Unfortunately, he appears to be intellectually unstable, being easily swayed by new teachings, programs, and people. This conclusion appears inevitable from reading his religious journey where he describes the fluctuations that occurred in his theological positions as a result of new developments inside or outside the church.

Pastor Taylor was born and raised in a legalistic Adventist home that “strongly followed the teachings of E. G. White.” He says: “I knew a lot about the law, but little about grace.” The legalistic upbringing apparently influenced his rebellious attitude. On his senior Academy year he was “kicked out” from school and for the next four years he almost destroyed his life with “addiction to drugs and alcohol.” In his desperate condition Pastor Taylor felt the call of God to become a Christian. Eventually he “checked into a Christian [Adventist] recovery center called the Bridge Fellowship in Kentucky.” Seven months later he went to study at Southern Adventist University where he became “an Adventist by conviction” and was rebaptized.

By the time he was a college senior majoring in education, the local conference called him to serve as an intern for one year at a local church. At that time some theological crises hit the church when Desmond Ford attacked the doctrine of the investigative judgment and Walter Rea accused Ellen White of plagiarism. The impact of these developments were “devastating” for Pastor Taylor, especially since his senior pastor left the SDA church. He writes: “I went to the seminary wondering if I was an Adventist.”

Reading Pastor Taylor's spiritual journey, one senses that he has been easily influenced and swayed by people and events. It seems that every major event that he mentions, had an impact on his beliefs. Personally I went through the same theological crises that hit the Adventist church, but none of them shook my confidence in the Biblical soundness of the Adventist message. It appears that Pastor Taylor may suffer from mental and emotional instability, which makes him easily victim of questionable teachings.

THE SEMINARY EXPERIENCE AND THE EARLY MINISTRY

Pastor Taylor describes his experience at the Theological Seminary in positive terms. The classes he took from Ivan Blazen, Raoul Dederen, and Hans LaRondelle brought a degree of reassurance to his mind. Unfortunately however, his Seminary experience was early marred by the break up of his marriage. His wife of two years left him during the first quarter. Pastor Taylor writes: "When she left just before the midterms of the winter quarter, my main focus for the next year and a half was to survive."

This change in focus from seminary education to personal survival, may have weakened his seminary training, making it difficult for him to learn the proper methods of biblical interpretation. This may explain, at least in part, the reason for Pastor Taylor's gross misinterpretation of those Bible texts related to the Sabbath.

At Andrews he met a communication student Paula Wesner whom he married in March 1985 after leaving Andrews. They pastored a couple of district churches where they conducted evangelistic meetings. Pastor Taylor makes some perceptive comments regarding the deficiencies he found in the traditional evangelistic methods: "I became increasingly uncomfortable with the traditional evangelistic methods, which focused on last-day events and prophetic interpretation. I felt my calling was to reach people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to lead them to Him as their Savior, and help them to live in relationship with Him. What I encountered mostly in the traditional approach was targeted at people already in a church somewhere. The sessions only had one or two nights dedicated to the Gospel, and the rest to our distinctive doctrines."

A Deficiency of Traditional Evangelism. Pastor Taylor's comments about the doctrinal and prophetic emphasis of traditional evangelistic preaching, deserves serious considerations. Convincing people of the validity of our Adventist doctrines and prophetic interpretations, is and must remain a very important goal of our evangelistic preaching. But equally important is to help people understand how to translate these new doctrines into their daily life. In other words, we need to help people experience the transforming power of the Gospel in their own lives.

A reason for the popularity of my weekend seminars, is their attempt to help people understand HOW to experience mental, physical, and spiritual renewal on the Sabbath; HOW to live in the joyful expectancy of a soon-coming Savior. Countless times people have told me: "I have been an Adventist for 10, 20, or 30 years, but this is the first time I understood how to make the Sabbath a delightful and joyful experience; a celebration of God's creative and redemptive love."

There is an urgent need to help Adventists experience more fully the existential benefits of the Adventist message. If people accept the Adventist beliefs as a necessary requirement for salvation, without enjoying their benefits in their daily lives, then the Adventist message becomes for them an alienating imposition. They will grudgingly hold to the Adventist doctrines as if they were a bitter medicine needed to get well. Such a negative attitude predisposes people to accept the so-called New Covenant Theology, promoted by former Adventists like Taylor, because it offers them a justification for rejecting what they have never enjoyed in the first place.

Eventually Pastor Taylor accepted a call to serve as full time youth pastor at the Kettering SDA Church, in Ohio. He describes his experience at Kettering as rewarding but taxing. In fact, after serving there for six and a half years, in 1993 the Pastor Taylors gladly accepted a call to minister at the Foster Memorial SDA Church, in Asheville, North Carolina.

EXPERIMENTING WITH THE WILLOW CREEK METHODS

At the time the Pastor Taylors arrived in Asheville, the Foster Memorial SDA church was moving to a more contemporary style of worship by “trying methods used by the Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago.” The goal was to reach the unchurched people in the community. During the eight years of his pastorate in Asheville, Pastor Taylor and some of his leading church members “visited Willow Creek for numerous training events.” In fact, the local head elder, William Bryan, informed me in a telephone conversations that he and other local church leaders went nine times to Willow Creek to attend their training seminars.

Pastor Taylor describes his visits to Willow Creek with these words: “The worship times were like a little taste of heaven for us. I remember us discussing how this movement of God was so much more vibrant than anything we had ever experienced in Adventism.” Impressed by the Willow Creek experience, Pastor Taylor tried hard to implement its methods to reach the unchurched. According to his testimony, the initial results were quite encouraging as the average church attendance grew from “120 before the transition to . . . a vibrant congregation of 500 members.”

These figures are not quite correct. Elder Ken Coonley, President of the Carolina Conference, informed me that in 1993 when Pastor Taylor arrived at the Foster Memorial SDA church, its membership in the books stood at 419, and when he left on July 2001, it was 492, with an average church attendance of about 300 members. This means that the actual numerical growth during the eight years of his pastorate was less than 100 members. The contemporary worship style with a band often playing rocky type of music, hardly contributed to a significant church growth.

THE SABBATH: A STUMBLING BLOCK TO REACH THE UNCHURCHED

Pastor Taylor himself acknowledges that the new contemporary worship style did not reach the unchurched people in the community, as he had anticipated. Most of the people they were reaching were former Adventists. This fact became a cause of serious concern. He wanted to find out the reasons. The answer came from an evaluation conducted by Carl George, an outreach and church growth specialist, in another Adventist church which faced a similar stagnation problem.

Pastor Taylor reports that “Carl George's assessment was that they could not break into the unchurched community because of the Sabbath issues. This was too great a barrier for most people not brought up or married into Adventism. For pastors who are called to reach people for Jesus, this seemed problematic. We must reach the world yet we are encountering a barrier that is a part of the very structure of Adventism.”

When Pastor Taylor discovered that the Sabbath “constitutes a stumbling block” to reach the unchurched, he began to re-examine the validity of the Sabbath for today. During a summer sabbatical the Pastor Taylors spent their time visiting both Adventist and Sunday churches. He describes their experience with these words: “We were struck with the lack of spiritual vitality in all of the Adventist churches we visited. While the people were sincere, there was such a dearth of life, it was depressing. It was almost as if they were just going through the motions of ‘doing church.’ The Sunday churches were the other way around. With the exception of one church we visited, all of them had such life and joy that it was contagious. We would rejoice when we were in these churches of various denominations or independent communities. When we would visit the SDA churches, we would get so sad and depressed. I remember praying, ‘Why, Lord, if the Sabbath is so significant and part of your moral law that is binding on all Christians, why

are you clearly blessing other churches, while the Adventist churches are, at best, maintaining?"

Pastor Taylor's characterization of Adventist churches as lacking "spiritual vitality" in contrast to Sunday churches allegedly full of "life and joy," is contradicted by my personal experience. I preach every single Sabbath in vibrant and happy Adventist congregations across the USA and overseas. They sing joyfully unto the Lord, praising Him for His creative and redemptive love. Perhaps Pastor Taylor associates the "spiritual vibrancy" of some Sunday churches with the physical stimulation provided by the beat type of worship music which causes people to shout, swing and dance. If that is the case, then he needs to remember that the church is not a place of entertainment. The worship service is to elevate people spiritually, not to stimulate them physically.

The spiritual vibrancy of a congregation can hardly be measured by the beat music or the shouting that takes places during the worship service of some Sundaykeeping churches. When I see popular charismatic preachers, like Rev. Parsley preaching like a circus clown, in crusades attended by thousands of people, I feel embarrassed for the way he profanes the Gospel. But I do have great respect and admiration for preachers like Dr. James Kennedy of Coral Gables, Florida, who expand the Word of God with perceptive insights in a worship setting of reverence and solemnity. The fact that Dr. Kennedy's large congregation does not sing beat music and shouts "Hallelujah" like that of Rev. Parsley, does not means that it lacks "spiritual vitality."

Ultimately the spiritual vitality of a congregation is reflected in the victorious daily life of its members, Do the members live a clean lifestyle, abstaining from alcohol, drugs, and intemperate practices? Do they treat their family members with respect? Do they honor their marriage vows of faithfulness till death shall part them? Are they committed to bring up their children in the fear and love of God? Do they dress modestly, decently and with reverence, especially in God's sanctuary? Do they worship God in the beauty of holiness with appropriate sacred music? These are some of the biblical criteria to determine the spiritual vibrancy of a congregation. A visiting observer can hardly establish by the external appearance alone, whether or not its members are spiritually vibrant.

THE INFLUENCE OF ANTI-SABBATH LITERATURE

At the time when Pastor Taylor began questioning the Sabbath, he received anti-Sabbath literature from some friends who had left the SDA ministry and established Sundaykeeping congregations. The study of this literature had a decisive impact on him, which he describes with these words: "I was amazed to discover that the New Testament does not teach Sabbath the way I thought it did. I learned from Colossians 2:16-17, Galatians 4:10, Romans 14:5-6, and Hebrews 3-4, that Sabbath was an institution that pointed forward to Jesus and therefore was no longer binding on Christians. The New Testament points to a Person (Jesus) as the true Sabbath, not a day. I discovered that the Law is reinterpreted, in Christ, for all believers. The New Testament makes very clear which portions of the Law have carried over in Christ and which have not. Finally, I found that the day of worship is NOT the final test of loyalty to God, rather the test is a full surrender to Jesus Christ sealed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I realize that this understanding needs further development, so I have included a brief survey of my discovery process in the appendix."

Pastor Taylor's new understanding of the Sabbath as fulfilled in Christ, rests on a blatant misinterpretation of the texts he cites. His methodology and conclusions will be examined in the next two newsletters. At this point it suffices to note that the Pastor Taylor has come to believe that though resting on the Sabbath has some social, physical, and spiritual merits, "to insist that it always be on Saturday, or that it is mandated by scripture, is adding to the Word of God an unnecessary requirement for new believers. It constitutes a stumbling block that is not necessary. It gets in the way of many coming to

Jesus. We believe that we should remove all obstacles from the path of the true seeker except the scandal of the cross.”

What is “*the scandal of the Cross*” for Pastor Taylor? Presumably for him it is primarily the “doing and dying” of Jesus on the Cross. But is this ALL what people need to know about the Gospel? This restricted view of the Cross as the payment for our past sins through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, ignores *the triumph of the Cross* manifested in a life of obedience. Paul affirms this truth eloquently in Romans 8:3-4, saying: “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” The Good News of the Gospel is that Christ’s atoning death has not only paid for the *penalty* of our sins, but also gives us the *power* to overcome sin and to live according to the ‘just requirements of the law.”

IS THE SABBATH A STUMBLING BLOCK TO REACH THE UNCHURCHED?

The charge that the Sabbath is “a stumbling block” that “gets in the way of many coming to Christ,” is a serious accusation leveled against the Lord of the Sabbath Himself. This accusation ignores that the Sabbath is Christ’s gracious invitation to come to Him to find rest in Him. Through the Sabbath Christ invites us to stop our work, so that He can work in us more fully and freely. This is the message of Hebrews 4:10, which speaking of the Sabbath, says: “Anyone who enters God’s rest also rest from his own work, just as God did from His” (NIV). Simply stated, we rest from our work on the seventh day in order to enter into God’s rest.

The Sabbath has always been “a stumbling block” for many people, but the reason is to be found not in the nature of the commandment itself, but in the condition of the human heart. Those who wish to spend the Sabbath time seeking for pleasure and profit, rather than for the peace and presence of God, obviously find the day a stumbling block. But Jesus never taught to do away with His commandments, if they proved to be a stumbling block to a marketing oriented church growth. Instead He said: “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:10).

Christ spent much of His public ministry teaching people how to keep the Sabbath, not as rules to obey, but people to love. More coverage is given in the Gospels to the Sabbath teachings and healings of Jesus than to any other aspects of His ministry. The reason is that Jesus believed that proper Sabbathkeeping is important to the spiritual growth of His followers.

The self-centeredness of the human heart largely explains why the Sabbath commandment has been under the constant crossfire of controversy. Over 3000 treatises disputing the Sabbath have been published since the Reformation. There has been no major controversy over the other 9 commandments of the Decalogue. Why? Most likely because the Sabbath touches us in our intimacy more deeply than any other commandment. It summons us to consecrate the 24 hours of the seventh day to God. Most people are very touchy about their time. They want to use their Sabbath time to pursue their own interests.

The Sabbath is a stumbling block for many, because it challenges us to offer to God not lip-service by going to church for one hour on Sunday morning or on Saturday afternoon, but the service of our total being by giving priority to God in our thinking and living during the 24 hours of the seventh day.

An article entitled “Saturday Night Live at Church,” published in the *Sunday* magazine of the *Lord’s Day Alliance of the USA*, indicates that about 10,000 American Protestant churches are now following the examples of Catholic Churches by anticipating the first Sunday service to Saturday afternoon. One of the churches mentioned is the Willow Creek Community Church, which “features two services on Saturday night.”

The Saturday evening services are especially popular with those who do not feel like getting out of bed on Sunday morning. They prefer to enjoy the sanctuary of their bed rather than that of the church. The reduction of the principle of Sabbathkeeping to an hour of church attendance, either on Sunday or Saturday afternoon, makes the Sabbath less of a stumbling block for those who are more interested in *holidays*, than in a *Holy Day*. But this reduction clearly violate the essence of the Sabbath commandment which consists in the consecration of the 24 hours of the seventh day unto the Lord.

SUNDAY SERVICES IN SOME ADVENTIST CHURCHES

Few Adventist pastors, who like Pastor Taylor find the Sabbath a stumbling block to reach the unchurched, are experimenting with regular Sunday morning worship service, in addition to that of the Sabbath. During the past few months I have received reports from different parts of North America about SDA churches that are adopting Sunday worship service to facilitate the outreach to their communities. I have been repeatedly asked to comment about this practice.

In my view there is nothing wrong with holding meetings on Sunday as part of a temporary outreach endeavor, like an evangelistic campaign or various types of seminars. The problem arises when Sunday worship services become a regular feature of an Adventist church. The predictable result is that gradually the Sunday morning service will displace and replace the Sabbath service. This is the lesson of history.

As a church historian, I am reminded that Sunday worship began, especially in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, as an addition to Sabbath worship. Gradually, Sunday worship replaced completely the Sabbath worship, especially since it was more convenient to go to church on Sunday—the day that was made a civil holiday by Constantine in A. D. 321.

History often repeats itself. The current promotion of Sunday worship by few Adventist churches in addition to Sabbath worship, is no exception. An example is recent adoption of Sunday worship by several former Adventist pastors and Bible teachers, who have embraced the so-called "New Covenant Theology." These men initially promoted the introduction of Sunday worship in addition to Sabbath worship. But it was not long before they moved their church services exclusively to Sunday. I predicted this development two years ago while debating some of these former Adventists. I was accused of using defamatory and scaring tactics. What has happened has proven the accuracy of my prediction.

On the basis of what has happened in the past, I dare to predict that those SDA churches that are now conducting regular Sunday worship services, in addition to Sabbath services, will eventually for convenience sake eliminate altogether church services on Saturday. How can we expect Sundaykeepers to accept the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping when they are invited to worship regularly on Sunday in an Adventist Church?

The notion of conducting a regular Sunday worship service as a way to reach Sundaykeepers who are more free and accustomed to go to church on that day, is inspired not by Scripture, but by the church growth marketing strategy. The underlying philosophy of this strategy is to give to people what they want. By contrast, the Biblical philosophy is to give to people what they need. Going to church on Saturday may not be popular and convenient for some, but Jesus never promised that it would be easy to follow him. The problem is that many want to wear a crown without carrying the cross.

THE ACT OF RESTING FOR GOD ON THE SABBATH

By labeling the Sabbath as a “stumbling block” for people to come to Christ, Pastor Taylor ignores the profound religious meaning of the act of resting for God on the seventh day. It is an act that makes all the activities of this day—whether the formal worship service or the informal fellowship and recreation—a worship offering to God since they all of them spring from a heart deliberately committed to honor God on His holy day.

To appreciate the profound religious significance of the Sabbath rest as worship to God, we need to remind ourselves that our life is a measure of time, and the way we spend our time is indicative of our priorities. We have no time for those toward whom we feel indifferent, but we find time for those for whom we love.

To be willing on the seventh day to withdraw from the world of things in order to meet the invisible God in the quietness of our souls means to show in a tangible way our love, loyalty, and devotion to God. It means to be willing to tune out the hundreds of voices and noises that clamor for attention, in order to tune our souls to God and to hear His voice.

It means not merely to sandwich in one hour of worship for God in a hectic day spent seeking for selfish pleasure or profit but rather to serve God wholly during the Sabbath, by offering Him the service of our total being. The unique opportunity the Sabbath provides to serve the Lord makes the day, not a stumbling block, but a stepping stone to come to Christ and fellowship with Him more fully and freely on His Holy Day.

AN UNPRECEDENTED INTEREST FOR THE SABBATH

It is hard to believe that the Pastor Taylor finds the Sabbath a stumbling block for people to come to Christ, when many today are expressing an unprecedented interest for the Sabbath. Church leaders, religious organization, and people of all walks of life, are rediscovering the validity and values of the Sabbath for their lives. The newly released *Directory of Sabbath-Observing Group*, announced in this newsletter, lists 400 Sabbatarian churches and groups in America, most of which have come into existence within the past thirty years.

Surprisingly, even within mainline denominations (Baptist, Methodists, Mennonite, and Pentecostal), there are churches that are moving their services from Sunday to Saturday. A brief report of this development is found in chapter 7 of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*. The chapter is entitled “Rediscovering the Sabbath.”

For the sake of brevity I will mention only one Southern Baptist Church which I have known personally. On February 11-12, 1999 I was invited to present my Sabbath Enrichment Seminar at La Sierra University, in Riverside, California, . On Friday evening, at the end of my testimony, the University Pastor, Dan Smith, alerted me that Pastor Allan Stanfield of the First Baptist Church of Lucerne Valley, was sitting in the last pew with some of his church members. We visited with Pastor Stanfield for half an hour and I gave him a gift copy of my latest book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*.

Pastor Stanfield came back next Sabbath morning and Sabbath afternoon. Upon leaving on Saturday evening he told me that he was eager to rediscover the Sabbath for himself and his congregation. A week later he ordered a case of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*, which he passed out to the leading families of his congregation. For the next six weeks his members met on Wednesday night to study the Sabbath, using the book as a study guide. Then on Wednesday evening, April 21, 1999, the church held a business meeting in which they voted almost unanimously to move their church services from Sunday to Saturday. The following Saturday, April 24, the church worshipped for the first time on the seventh-day Sabbath. Since then other Southern Baptist churches have followed the same example. Surprisingly, they have been able to remain within the Southern Baptist convention.

A clear indication of the unprecedented interest for rediscovering the Sabbath can be seen also in the sudden appearance of books and articles promoting the seventh day Sabbath. A fitting example is the book *Catch Your Breath: God's Invitation to Sabbath Rest* (1997), authored by Don Postema who serves as pastor of the Campus Chapel at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. In his spiritual search for inner peace and rest, Postema tried various resources including Eastern mediation. One day he was struck by the fact that "Jews and Christians have a practice as near as our Bible, as close as our tradition, as available as the next ten minutes or weekend: the Sabbath."

The book provides a practical and creative guide for meaningful Sabbathkeeping. Its aim is not to argue for the validity of the Sabbath, but to invite people to *practice* it. Postema writes: "The benefit of the Sabbath is not simply in the study of it but most assuredly in the practice of it—in *living* Sabbath. Reading and thinking about Sabbath is like reading travel brochures and dreaming about great vacation spots but never going there for a vacation. It is interesting. You can learn a lot. But you can't have the experience unless you make the journey." The book offers practical suggestions on how to make Sabbathkeeping an experience of mental, physical, and spiritual renewal.

A most unlikely place to find an article promoting the Sabbath is in the weekend edition of *USA TODAY* (April 2-4, 1999). The two pages article is entitled "Remember the Sabbath?" and is adapted from Prof. Wayne Muller's book *THE SABBATH: REMEMBERING THE SACRED RHYTHM OF REST AND DELIGHT*. Muller offers 10 suggestions for making the Sabbath an enjoyable experience. He closes making a plea for renewed Sabbathkeeping in America today. "Let us take a collective breath, rest, pray, meditate, walk, sing, eat and take time to share the unhurried company of those we love. . . . God does not want us to be exhausted; God wants us to be happy. And so let us remember the Sabbath."

Another unlikely place to find an article promoting the rediscovery of the Sabbath is *HEMISPHERE*, the magazine of United Airlines. On a United Airline flight to the West Coast I was surprised to read in the July 1997 issue of their magazine a delightful article entitled "Ancient Wisdom," written by Nan Chase, a frequent contributor to *The Washington Post*. Chase tells the story of how she discovered the Sabbath by reading about it in a book she found in the waiting room of doctor's office. She was surprised to read that Sabbathkeeping can strengthen marital relationships by bringing the husband and wife closer to one another.

She decided to join the Sabbatharians in observing the Sabbath from "sundown Friday until sundown Saturday" by "no cooking, no shopping or paying of bills, no pulling of weeds or pruning shrubs, no cleaning or repairing the house, nor even talking about or thinking about work and the office." Chase describes the benefits of Sabbathkeeping saying: "My personal life, my professional life, and my family life have all improved, and I plan to go on celebrating the Sabbath."

The foregoing examples of people from different walks of life who are rediscovering the Sabbath as a divine remedy for our tension-filled and stressful lives, discredit Pastor Taylor's contention that Sabbath "constitutes a stumbling block" for many to come to Christ. The fact is that today more than ever before people need the rest and renewal which the Sabbath is designed to provide. A correct understanding and experience of the Sabbath makes people receptive and responsive to Christ's invitation to come to Him and find rest in Him. Thus, the Sabbath can be, not a stumbling block, but a stepping stone to come to Christ.

A NEW LOOK AT WILLOW CREEK METHODS

Pastor Taylor's frank admission that the Sabbath constitutes the major stumbling block to implement the Willow Creek outreach methods, deserves serious consideration. The issue at stake is whether or not the Adventist Church should modify or even abandon those distinctive beliefs that make it difficult to implement popular church growth strategies. The question is, what is more important for the Adventist evangelistic outreach: the message or the methods?

Historically Adventists have believed that God has called the Adventist Church to proclaim a special endtime message to prepare sincere people for a soon-coming Savior. The imagery of the three angels flying in the midst of heaven found in Revelation 14 characterizes the Adventist mission to proclaim a special endtime message to the world. Like countless fellow believers, I joined the Adventist Church because of its message: a message which has given me the reason for living, loving, and serving the Lord.

In recent years, however, the concern to implement church growth strategies which focus on methods, has increasingly weakened the importance of the Adventist message. The outcome is that more and more people are joining the Adventist Church, especially in North America, because of the programs or the worship style of local churches. A clear understanding and acceptance of the distinctive Adventist beliefs is no longer a requirement for membership. If the present trend continues, the Seventh-day Adventist Church will eventually lose its identity and mission. It will become just another evangelical church.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me state emphatically that methods are important, but they must not obscure or replace the message. Jesus Himself used effective methods such as parables, stories, and rhetorical questions to teach people in an arresting way. We need to constantly improve our methods of communicating our message to make it more appealing to the mind-set of our generation.. Personally I have spent over 1000 hours during the past few months preparing the new PowerPoint presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent. I found that this new visual method of presenting our message makes a world of difference.

Few days ago I delivered my PowerPoint lecture "FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY: HOW IT CAME ABOUT?" with about 150 slides at Iowa State University. The response from faculties and students was very gratifying. Some of them bombarded me with questions, showing a genuine interest to learn more about the Sabbath. It was evident that the new visual method heightens the interest and understanding of the subject.

The problem arises when methods become more important than the message. Pastor Taylor's experience fittingly illustrates this point. His numerous visits to Willow Creek to learn the church growth strategies of this mega-church, eventually led him to reject the Sabbath, because he perceived it to be an obstacle to implement such strategies. Pastor Taylor's experience should serve as a wake-up call for our church leaders who have promoted pilgrimages to Willow Creek to learn new methods to foster growth in local Adventist churches.

In a telephone conversation Elder Ken Coonley, President of the Carolina Conference, told me that Pastor Taylor's rejection of the Adventist message, especially the Sabbath, in order to implement Willow Creek methods of church growth, has been a wake up call for Adventist Church leaders, like himself. "In the future," Elder Coonley said, "the Carolina Conference will no longer sponsor pastors or local church leaders to Willow Creek seminars." This information may not be well-received by those who have become accustomed to attend Willow Creek training sessions at the expenses of their Conference.

THE NEED FOR AN INTERNATIONAL ADVENTIST EVANGELISTIC INSTITUTE

Learning from other religious organizations tested methods of church growth, is a commendable effort. We can discover fresh ideas applicable to our outreach efforts. The problem arises when we become so eager to implement church growth strategies of other churches that we compromise our message and mission. Adventists have been known to be trailblazers in healthful living, breakfast cereals, global mission, disaster and development programs (ADRA), medical and educational institutions. The challenge we face today is to become trailblazers in communicating the everlasting Gospel to our endtime generation. To accomplish this objective it would be helpful to establish an

International Evangelistic Institute, devoted specifically to develop new strategies to reach Christians and non-Christians with our message.

At present the North American Evangelistic Institute has little to offer that is uniquely Adventist. A colleague who teaches at the Theological Seminary, told me the other night that 95% of the many publications displayed and sold at the institute are authored by non-SDA specialists in church growth, leadership, and church management. We need to study what these specialists have to say and distill from them any method that can enhance the proclamation of our message. But ultimately we need to develop our own Adventists evangelistic methods which reflect the biblical foundation of our message.

Elder Charles Watson, a perceptive Englishman who prior to his recent retirement served as Vice-President of the SDA General Conference, expressed this concern to me in a recent message: "Many Seminary graduates are primarily interested in the area of church management and appear to be more familiar with John Maxwell's books on Leadership and Church Management than with the Scripture. . . . John Maxwell's series are not based on a Scriptural foundation. Remove the title on the cover of the book and most of the content would apply to equally to the running of any secular club."

Our Adventist Church has been blessed through the years with gifted Bible scholars, evangelists, pastors, and media specialists. The establishment of an International Evangelistic Institute could foster the input of these various experts from different countries, with the goal of finding fresh ways to make our message more relevant and appealing to our generation. An important aspect of this project could be to explore ways to translate the doctrinal acceptance of the Adventist message into an existential experience. This need is suggested by Pastor Taylor's perceptive comments about the deficiency of traditional Adventist evangelistic crusades.

If a successful International Adventist Evangelistic Institute could be established, where the innovative ways of presenting the Adventist message are tested and taught, then Adventist pastors and lay members who are eager to improve their outreach skills, can make their pilgrimage to this Adventist Institute, rather than to Willow Creek.

Some might argue that no Adventist Evangelistic Institute can ever compete with Willow Creek in terms of numbers and resources. This may be true. But God has not called our church to establish a 15,000 members mega-church in one location, but to preach the Gospel to every nation.

OBSESSION WITH NUMBERS

There seems to be an obsession with numbers today. Churches that have grown from zero to several thousand members are held up as a model for Adventist churches to follow. Frankly I am suspicious about churches that attract thousands of people, because Christ never promised that His Church would become a popular movement. It is estimated that Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles, during his 15 years of intense evangelistic outreach to the Roman world, may have converted between 300 to 400 people. The churches that he established in different parts of the Empire, were home churches, not mega churches. Most of them consisted of few families that met for worship in a home. In fact, in his epistles Paul mentions by name some of these leading families.

Some justify mega churches by pointing to the thousands who were converted in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and soon afterwards. This argument ignores that the many Jews who believed at that time, did not have to make radical changes in their lifestyle. They simply accepted Jesus of Nazareth as their expected Messiah and became "believing Jews." They did not have to change religion. These believing Jews were still Jews in their lifestyle. Luke characterizes them as "zealous in the observance of the law" (Acts 21:20).

The situation changed dramatically when Christianity reached beyond Judaism into the pagan world. Then the conversions became fewer and far between. Usually it took a year to indoctrinate a pagan into the Christian faith. To prepare pagans for baptism, catechetical schools, that is baptismal classes, were established. Pagans who wanted to become Christians had to attend these schools that trained them into the Christian faith for months or even years.

According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, by the end of the first century Christianity had grown only to 0.6% of the population, that is, about one million Christians in a population of 181 million people in the Roman Empire. The history of the Early Church is largely a story of a moral minority being ridiculed and persecuted by an immoral pagan majority, that was deeply offended by the exemplary lifestyle and noble teachings of Christ's followers. Eventually Christianity became a popular movement that attracted millions of pagans, but the outcome was the adulteration of the Christian message.

Much of the church growth strategies promoted today are based on a market research, which identifies what people want a church to offer them. Most people want a church that gives them soothing sermons, entertaining programs, physically stimulating beat music, good schooling for their children, delicious fellowship dinners, great social programs, professional counseling services, etc. Those churches which best recognize the services people want and succeed in providing them, grow and sometimes become mega-churches with thousands of members. This method of church growth raises serious questions, because the mandate of the Church is to give people what they need, and not necessarily what they want.

What Christians need today is not always what they want to hear. For example, Christians need to be to accept the sanctity of life and to respect the sacredness of their marital commitment. They need to be constantly reminded to give priority to God in their thinking and living on His Holy Day, They need to be instructed on the Biblical distinction between sacred music for worship and secular music for entertainment. They need to be reminded to accept and respect everybody, whether rich or poor, black or white, educated or uneducated. They need to be taught how to live "sober, upright and godly lives" in a secularly minded and perverse generation (Titus 2:12).

A church that teaches and upholds Biblical moral standards, may never become a mega-church like Willow Creek. The reason was discovered by Pastor Taylor himself, when he found that biblical teachings like Sabbathkeeping are "a stumbling block" to reach the unchurched—a softer term for what the Bible calls the "Gentiles." The solution to the problem is not to abandon those biblical teachings which are a stumbling block to secularly minded people, but to help people discover the relevance of biblical truths for their lives today. Churches committed to teach Biblical moral principles may grow slowly, but their influence will be widely felt. Let us never forget that when Christianity was a *moral minority* it turned the Roman world upside down. By contrast, when it became an *immoral majority* it turned biblical truths upside down.

GRADUAL REJECTION OF ELLEN WHITE

Besides the Sabbath, the second major stumbling block for Pastor Taylor is the prophetic role of Ellen White. Pastor Taylor writes: "We have come to the conclusion from our research that she is not reliable as a prophetic voice." The reason given is that allegedly "Ellen White clearly, knowingly and extensively copied from other sources while claiming that she was NOT doing so except in a few rare cases. Some estimates of her borrowing are as high as 80%. Even the *Desire of Ages*, my favorite EGW book, has, according to a church sponsored study, 'no significant line of thinking that is original' to her."

The allegation that Ellen White borrowed as high as 80% of her writings from other sources, is patently false. The eight years in-depth investigation into Ellen White's use of literary sources conducted with scientific criteria by Fred Veltman, Ph. D., indicates that only 31% of the 15 chapters of *Desire of Ages* examined, had some degree of

dependency upon material appearing in 500-plus literary sources. “The average dependency of the 823 dependent sentences rated just a little higher than the level of ‘loose paraphrase.’” (*Ministry*, October 1990, p. 6).

The criterium for determining the reliability of an inspired author, is not originality or literary independence, but the authority and truthfulness of the information communicated. As Fred Veltman puts it, “She saw herself as a messenger of the Lord. I believe that the issue that concerned her was the authority and truth of her messages—not their originality” (*Ministry*, Dec 1990, p. 12). We do not reject 1 Chronicles because it was largely copied from “the records of Samuel the Seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer” (1 Chron 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29; 12:15; 16:11; 20:34; 24:27).

Those who fault Ellen White for using information from other authors, ignore that most of the information contained in the Bible was NOT communicated by God directly. In most instances, divine revelation assumed the form of guidance in the selection and evaluation of available information.

Moses, for example, was presumably guided by God in the selection and reconstruction of the oral tradition of patriarchal history. Luke wrote his “orderly account” of Christ’s life by gathering testimonies from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:2-3). It is a known fact that the writers of the synoptic Gospels used sources containing information about the life and teaching of Christ. Unfortunately these sources were lost and we cannot establish the extent of literary dependency of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. New Testament scholars have long debated this question, known as the “Synoptic Problem.” We do not reject the Matthew, Mark, and Luke, because of their literary dependency upon other sources.

God does not encourage laziness by providing information already available in other sources. This helps us to understand why Ellen White spent countless hours seeking for the historical accounts of the events she had seen in vision. She recognized her limitations. When the revision was done of *THE GREAT CONTROVERSY* in 1911, she thanked the scholars who made the necessary corrections. I have reasons to believe that if she was alive today, she would appreciate any additional corrections competent scholars could offer to her writings.

The fact that Ellen White used various sources in her writings, tells me that she was not a “lazy writer,” but a diligent investigator of truth. This is proven by the fact that her library had about 2000 books—far more than most preachers or even professors have today.

My guess is that people who devote their time and efforts to discredit Ellen White, or the Bible writers for that matter, most likely have a problem in accepting their admonitions. I found this to be true in my research of the Sabbath. Those who want to spend the Sabbath time seeking for personal pleasure and profit, are inclined to develop a subjective theology that releases them from its obligation.

On a personal note, what has established my confidence in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, is the fact that she speaks to my spiritual needs. For many years now, my wife and I, have been reading from the daily devotionals of Ellen White. For us they are a constant challenge and inspiration. Often we start the year with the devotional book of the year, but after few weeks, we switch to one of Ellen White. The reason is simple. No one seems to speak to our spiritual needs as Ellen White does.

DOES ELLEN WHITE DEPRIVE ADVENTISTS OF THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION?

Pastor Taylor believes that Ellen White has had a profound negative effect on the spiritual life of Adventists, by depriving them of the assurance of salvation. He expresses this conviction with these startling words: "For us, the biggest problem with Ellen White is the effect she has had on the SDA church. There is still wide misunderstanding of the gospel of grace in Adventism. In our years of service this has been an enormous barrier in helping people find assurance. It is not that she did not teach grace. She did teach it beautifully at times, but she also taught perfectionism. Adventists are still basically confused as a people about the very core of the Christian faith. It is so difficult for most Adventists to grasp the Gospel because of these statements. We have never seen an Adventist church truly dedicated to applying the writings of EGW that is a vibrant, alive, growing, happy church community. The responsibility for this falls directly on the shoulders of EGW. Surely a church with 100,000 pages of 'inspired' writings should have an even greater grasp on the Good News than other churches. Sadly, this is not the case."

In this statement Pastor Taylor levels two major accusations against Ellen White: (1) She deprives Adventists of the assurance of salvation by teaching perfectionism, in addition to the Gospel of grace. (2) Churches that apply her writings are NOT "a vibrant, alive, growing, happy church community."

The problem with these accusations is that they are based on Pastor Taylor's subjective perceptions, most likely conditioned by the turmoils and instability of his past life. May I ask Pastor Taylor, "What is it that gives to a believer the assurance of our salvation? Is it only the confession to believe in God's *forgiving grace* through Christ's atoning sacrifice? Or is it also the experience of *cleansing grace* manifested in living in a newness of life?"

The fact that Ellen White constantly exhorts believers to overcome known sins in their lives, does not mean that she deprives them of the assurance of salvation. After all we find the same exhortations throughout the Bible. Much of the book of Amos that we are studying this quarter in our Sabbath School, consists of strong denunciations of the sins of the Israelites. The same is true of the message of all the OT prophets. They spend far more time exposing sin, than reassuring people of their salvation.

Like their OT counterpart, the New Testament writers exhort believers to acknowledge sin in their lives and overcome it by God's grace. For example, John writes: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). The assurance of salvation comes to us, not merely by confessing our sins, but primarily by experiencing the cleansing power of God's grace, which enables us to overcome the sins that we have confessed.

Like John, Paul constantly exhorts believers to overcome sin in their lives. "Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life . . . and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:22, 24). This transformation from the old to the new nature is a constant process which entails human effort and divine grace: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13). Did Paul misunderstand the Gospel by urging believers to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling? Did he deprive believers of the assurance of salvation by urging them to live according to "the just requirements of the law" and to "walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4)? The answer is obviously "NO!" The Apostle understood that believers experience the assurance of salvation when they experienced the transforming power of the Gospel in their own lives.

Contrary to Pastor Taylor's accusations, Ellen White did not misunderstand the Gospel of grace. Like Paul, John, and the rest of the NT writers, she understood that the Good News of the Gospel, consists not only in the payment of the penalty of our sins at the Cross, but also in the power to overcome sin in our daily life. For example, she writes: "All who receive Christ as a personal Savior are to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel and its saving power upon the life. God makes no requirement without making provision for its fulfillment. Through the grace of Christ we may accomplish everything that God requires" (COL 301).

The second allegation that congregations that apply her writings are NOT "a vibrant, alive, growing, happy church community," is patently false. The most happy and vibrant fellow-believers that I know, are those who follow the principles outlined in the writings of Ellen White. They enjoy living a clean and healthy lifestyle and they experience the transforming grace of the Gospel in their daily life.

This is not to deny that there are a few Adventists who develop legalistic attitudes from reading Ellen White's writing. They have a gloomy, accusative attitude, and tend to be critical of everything and everybody. They look upon themselves as the living examples of perfection and measure everybody by their own standards. Their problem, however, is the misuse of the Ellen White's writings.

Jesus faced the same problem in His ministry when he confronted the legalistic attitudes of the Scribes and Pharisees. Their legalism was derived from a fanatical application of the teachings of the Scripture. Do we then reject the Bible because some have develop legalistic attitudes from reading it? Obviously not. The solution is to be found in teaching people to be balanced in their thinking and living, avoiding the extremes of fanaticism on the one hand, and relativism on the other hand.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing evaluation of Pastor Taylor's religious journey, suggests that he may suffer from mental and emotional instability, which makes him easily victim of erroneous teachings. It seems that every major event that he mentions, had an impact on his beliefs. Events inside and outside the church have influenced and swayed his theological positions.

Pastor Taylor upbringing in a legalistic Adventist Home where there was too much law and too little grace, could well have predisposed him negatively against the Sabbath, Ellen White, and the Adventist Church in general. Most likely the Sabbath came to symbolize for him all what he hated most about the Adventist church. This resentful attitude eventually led him to a life of addiction to drugs and alcohol.

The recovery that he experienced later in life, may not have eradicated the negative attitudes toward the Sabbath, Ellen White, and the Church that he developed in his early life. Psychologists inform us that emotional scars can last a lifetime. The intellectual instability manifested in the fluctuation of his theological positions, may well reflect the emotional scars still present in his life.

Let us pray for Pastor Greg Taylor that God may bring healing and stability to his life; that he may experience the assurance and joy of salvation by living in harmony with the principles the Lord has revealed for our mental, physical, and spiritual well-being.

NOTE: The next two newsletters will provide an in-depth analysis of Pastor Taylors's anti-Sabbath arguments.

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