

NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

"One interest will prevail . . . Christ our righteousness."

July/August 2009



WHY ART THOU SECULAR, YE OLDE NEW ENGLAND?

REFLECTIONS ON THE LEAST RELIGIOUS REGION IN AMERICA

Articles

Letters to the Editor

4 EDITORIAL:
Will update when layout confirmed

5

7

8

9

the Land

11 Reclaiming the Gospel of Luke—Part 1
by David J. DeRose

14 EDITORIAL:
More Grace-Oriented Than Jesus
by Shawn Brace

**Cover Photo: Oak Bluffs—Martha's Vineyard,
Massachusetts**

Back Photo: Phippsburg, Maine

NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

EDITOR
Shawn Brace

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Bill Brace

PROOFREADING EDITOR
Wanda Hopkins

LAYOUT DESIGN/PRINTER
L. Brown and Sons Printing, Inc.
1-800-486-1947

NEW ENGLAND PASTOR
(603) 456-2066
www.newenglandpastor.com
newenglandpastor@gmail.com

ADDRESS:
PO Box 185
Warner, NH 03278

New England Pastor is a bi-monthly magazine for pastors in New England, carrying forth the vision that Ellen White had for the area over a century ago: "I saw that when the message shall increase greatly in power, then the providence of God will open and prepare the way in the East for much more to be accomplished than can be at the present time" (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 149,). It is free of charge to those who pastor in New England. For all those living outside of New England who would like to subscribe, please call or email us.



Savior of the Universe

by Shawn Brace

Who needed reconciliation when Christ gave of Himself on the cross? Apparently more than just us as human beings.

I came across a wonderful passage a while back in my personal studies. Though I was extremely impressed with the implications of it, it kind of escaped the corridors of my mind until sometime later, when it was brought to my attention once again through a book I was reading.

Paul, in an unmatched treatise on the status of Christ, writes to the Colossians, “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (Colossians 1:19).¹ This is certainly an impressive statement to make, signifying the position that Christ holds in this universe. He is not simply a created Being, nor does He hold a position that’s inferior to the Father. “All the fullness” dwells in Him.

But Paul continues: “And by Him, to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth, or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (v. 20). A casual glance at this passage doesn’t reveal much. But a few things should jump out at us, begging to be explored further.

Paul, first of all, claims that Christ reconciled “all things to Himself.” The word for “reconcile” is a Greek word that is used only three times in all of Scripture. It is the word *apokatallasso* and—whereas the most commonly used word (*katallasso*, which, as you can see, is the root of our word) simply means “to reconcile”—this word means to “reconcile completely.” There is no further reconciliation that can take place when *apokatallasso* occurs. There is finality to it.

What I find even more significant, however, is the proposition that Paul makes in relation to *who* or *what* was needing

reconciliation. Instead of simply saying that humankind needed reconciliation, Paul boldly proclaims that *all things*—both on earth and in heaven—needed reconciliation.

We can understand that humans on this planet certainly need reconciliation, but who on earth needed reconciliation “in heaven”?

It is, indeed, somewhat a mystery. And yet this passage is a window into the deeper issues at stake. Evidently, Christ’s atoning mission wasn’t merely aimed at planet earth and humankind. The whole universe needed reconciliation as well.

Surprisingly, Adventists are some of the only Christians who believe that there is life outside of earth or heaven. And yet, just the same, even if there was only life in heaven (though the Greek word is in the plural here, thus more appropriately translated “the heavens”—perhaps signifying a larger arena), aside from this earth, this passage still reveals an incredible truth. That is, the hearts of God’s created beings were somewhat estranged from Him—even if ever-so-slightly. There must have been some event that triggered this.

A further meaning of the Greek word for reconciliation is to “bring back a former state of harmony.” Thus, the equilibrium of the universe was thrown off for some reason previous to Christ’s earthly accomplished mission.

But in the cross-event, Christ reconciled the whole universe back into harmony with Him. In his book, *In Granite or Ingrained?*, Skip MacCarty writes, “In the Christ event God was revealing something breathtakingly new, even to the universe that lies beyond sin’s borders, about His everlasting covenant promise and commitment to His creation.”²

Writing about this same passage, New Testament scholar N.T. Wright echoes this sentiment. “What has happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in other words, is by no means limited to its effects on those human beings who believe the gospel and thereby find new life here and

hereafter,” he writes. “It resonates out, in ways that we can’t fully see or understand, into the vast recesses of the universe.”³

Because of the cross, God’s creatures—both heavenly and earthly—have a much greater appreciation for who He is. This is why Revelation records the angels and as singing, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12). And this is why, in the end, when God’s people finally make the cross apart of their lives—apart of *our* lives—the universe will finally, once and for all, understand the full reconciliatory power of Christ’s cross.⁴

God’s infinitive love rises much higher than we could ever imagine. The waves of His cross have rippled out to the farthest reaches of His endless universe, reconciling hearts that we give little thought to. Christ, indeed, didn’t just become humankind’s Savior; He became the Savior of the universe.

1 All Scripture, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from the *New King James Version*. The word “Father” is supplied in this version.

2 Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2007), 69.

3 N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 97.

4 The Greek word *apokatallasso* is in the infinitive form, thus being simply translated “to reconcile completely” and stripping it of any tense. Thus, it is not fully clear, based on the grammar, as to whether Christ has already accomplished full reconciliation, or whether He is still in the process of doing so. At the very least, Paul makes it very clear that the cross is, and will be, the basis for this reconciliation.

Shawn Brace pastors four congregations in New Hampshire and Vermont. He and his wife, Camille, live in Warner, New Hampshire, and they recently welcomed their first child, Camden Shawn, into the world. When Shawn isn’t busy with pastoring, he loves spending time outdoors—especially photographing the beauty of New England.

Wealth Creation and the Kingdom of Heaven

By Alister Hunt



In diverse vocational fields, we marvel at the beauty, order, diversity, creativity, and energy that speak of God's character. As a financial economist I glimpse the Creator in the pervasive observation that wealth is created through voluntary transaction such that both parties are better off. Over recent years I have come to see this underlying principle of wealth creation as foundational to the Kingdom of Heaven. To illustrate, consider again the parable of the Talents.¹

In drawing lessons from this parable, we have perhaps overlooked that at its most basic level this is a story of wealth creation. Jesus tells this story, and two others, in the context of His imminent departure. So it's natural that the story begins in verse 14 with a departing Master trusting His servants. The basis of all relationships—commercial, familial, romantic, or spiritual—is mutual trust, and in this Kingdom illustration it's the Master that initiates trust.² Verse 15 indicates that the Master trusted all of His servants, since investing even a single talent is a significant act of trust. All transaction—whether commercial investment or the Creator placing His church and a ministry of reconciliation in our hands—necessitates trust on the part of the investor, and, as the parable goes on to illustrate, successful wealth-creating transactions necessitate *mutual* trust.

It appears arbitrary for the departing proprietor to entrust His servants with differing assets; to one five talents, to another, two, and to the third, one. But as the subsequent verses reveal, the Master appears to have known His servants. The differing financial outcomes are by no means predestined by the differing investments, since the servant entrusted with five talents could have as easily

buried the talents as the servant who received one.

Yes, the Master knows His servants. God is relational. While in His grace He extends trust to all, relationship based on past mutual trust facilitates greater investment. This is a pervasive principle of all relational transaction and consequent wealth creation.

Let's examine how the first two servants created wealth. Verses 16 and 17 say that they traded. As Matthew Henry comments on this passage, our work as Christians "is a merchant trade; things of less value to us are parted with for things of greater value."³ Henry then references the parable of the Pearl of Great Price.⁴ Wealth is always created when people interact voluntarily such that both parties are better off. When you buy a \$5 sandwich, you do so because its worth to you exceeds \$5. We know this to be true because no force or coercion is involved.

God risks. God trusts. God invests. God voluntarily interacts with others to mutual benefit.

You voluntarily part with something of lesser value, \$5 cash, in exchange for the sandwich that you perceive as having greater value. And the lunch café owner sells it to you because its worth to her is less than \$5. Again, we know this is so because nobody is forcing the café owner to sell you \$5 sandwiches. You prefer the sandwich and she prefers the \$5 cash. Thus, by voluntary trade both parties are better off.

The more carefully we examine the commercial, personal, or spiritual realms, the more we see this creative dynamic that is foundational to the Kingdom of

Heaven. This dynamic is what Matthew Henry calls a merchant trade; things of less value to us are parted with for things of greater value. The Kingdom of Heaven is characterized by this continual creative process as individuals interact voluntarily to mutual benefit.

But, back to the parable. One servant didn't create wealth. Verse 18 tells us that he dug the proprietor's investment in the ground. That is, he didn't trade or otherwise interact with others to mutual benefit. The servant comes confidently to his reckoning, knowing that while he had not increased the investment, he hasn't made it less. His fear of loss was greater than the desire to gain. He is proud, ironically, of the very thing the Master goes on to condemn.

In verse 24 the third servant says, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed." *How can that be?* How could the servant think that of the Master? We can imagine the Master crying out in frustration at His people (mis)perceiving non-existent faults of character, as God does in Jeremiah 2:5, 6. Did the Master seek to reap without sowing? Did He seek to gather where he hadn't scattered seed? Was the Master interested in wealth transfers rather than wealth creation? Of course not. The Master's act of "sowing" eight talents is central to the story.

God doesn't just ask us to live by the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven, but instead demonstrates them in His own actions. God risks. God trusts. God invests. God voluntarily interacts with others to mutual benefit. In this parable, God allows His actions rather than words to rebut slanderous lies.

The Master's unilateral act of trust was not reciprocated by the third servant. As illustrated here, the essence of sin is mistrust of God through misunderstanding His character. And the consequence is (a) an inability to participate in the creative dynamic

for which we were created,⁵ and (b) separation ultimately from the Giver of Life.⁶ More generally, an inability to interact with others voluntarily in trust separates us from the relational world for which we were created. If we misperceive God and therefore are incapable of trusting Him, we are also incapable of trusting those created in His image. And, if we can't trust, we can't transact voluntarily with others to create wealth. It's no surprise to this economist that the last-day blasphemous misrepresentation of God's Kingdom based on force foretold in Revelation 13 is accompanied by the end of voluntary transacting—buying and selling.

Love necessitates freedom, and free human interaction is always creative. We are created in the image of the Creator, and one aspect of this reflection is that we are created to interact voluntarily in a never-ending wealth-creating process. Like the Master, we are called to risk, to invest, to transact voluntarily, in full information, to pass up things of lesser value in exchange for things of greater value. To do so is to live by the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven.

God's character: selfless or selfish?

We cannot leave this topic without also addressing an important related issue. If wealth creation is an inherent attribute of God's universe, then does that mean we must always benefit from every interaction? More importantly, does God seek His own advantage, along with ours, in every transaction? Satan has represented God as selfish—are we doing the same?⁷

When we part with things of less value to us for things of greater value, as Matthew Henry puts it, we are committing a rational act that makes the world a better place. But we are called to consider more than ourselves in this rational calculus. Philippians 2:4 says, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the

interests of others." Parents are likely to pass up their life in an instant to save their child's life. They are passing up something they believe to be of lesser value—their own life—for something of greater value—their child's life. This is simultaneously an act of perfect rationality and unselfish love. Why? Because in analyzing the costs and benefits, the parents draw the circle around their family rather than just around themselves. God calls us to draw the circle ever wider, and ever-more inclusive.

And God leads by example. For

In perfect rationality, He lovingly and selflessly drew the circle around the Universe and gave everything for a clean universe, with one pulse of harmony and gladness ultimately beating through the vast creation.

the "joy" that was set before Him, He endured the Cross.⁸ He considered His own comfort, status, and life itself to be of less value than a restored relationship of trust and love reciprocated.⁹ In perfect rationality, He lovingly and selflessly drew the circle around the Universe and gave everything for a clean universe, with one pulse of harmony and gladness

ultimately beating through the vast creation.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45,46).

1 Matthew 25:14-30. See also Luke 19:12-27.

Quotes are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

2 Verse 14. See also Ephesians 4:7,8.

3 Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5 (London: Pickering and Inglis Ltd., 1925), 373.

4 Matthew 8:45.

5 Matthew 25:18.

6 Matthew 25:30.

7 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), 58.

8 Hebrews 12:2.

9 Philippians 2:5-11.

Alister Hunt, Ph. D., has provided financial, economic, and restructuring advice to international companies and governments for the last twenty years. He has also been involved in significant commercial litigation, relating to Enron, Worldcom, etc., over the last eight years. He has taught business in several world-class MBA programs, including most recently Boston University. However, he is most at home strengthening his local church in Boston, and spending time with his wife, Angela, and their three daughters—Grace, Olympia, and Liberty.

Reclaiming the Gospel of Luke—Part 2 by David J. DeRose



This article is Part 2. Part 1 was in the May/June 2009 issue, also available at www.newenglandpastor.com.

When church members followed the instruction to wed pastors and physicians in evangelism, heaven rejoiced and gave expression to its approval. Physician D.H. Kress and his wife, Laretta (also a physician), were among those who heeded this divine imperative. From a human perspective, the Kresses seemed to be too enmeshed in the health work of the church to engage in public evangelism. After all, with the encouragement of Ellen White herself, D.H. had been called from medical work in Australia to head our sanitarium in the Washington, D.C. area.

I'm sure most of D.H. Kress's contemporaries thought it untenable for the director of one of our health institutions to leave his post for weeks or months in order to engage in public evangelism. Kress himself struggled so intensely with the decision that Ellen White was impressed to write:

The Lord will assuredly guide you if you will seek to do His will, even though it should interfere with some of your desires and plans. If you walk and work in the counsel of God doors will be opened before you of opportunities for uniting the work of the ministry and that of the physician . . . [if] you and your wife will unite in medical evangelistic work, your usefulness will increase; there will open before you clearer views of duty.¹

Ultimately, D.H. and Laretta heeded God's call and made a radical change in their responsibilities, temporarily teaming up with evangelist G.B. Starr and his wife. The success of this physician-minister evangelistic team was endorsed by God's

messenger in words that should still speak powerfully to us today:

The work you have been doing in the city is meeting Heaven's approval. This experience is to be a lesson to others besides Elder Starr and Dr. Kress. You have demonstrated that if our physicians and our ministers would work together in the presentation of truth to the people, more can be reached than could be influenced by the ministers laboring alone. I trust that your example in this respect may be followed by other physicians.

shouldn't we be strategizing how we can incorporate physicians, dentists, and others trained in the healing arts into the organized work of the church?

I do not urge that you and your wife separate entirely from the Sanitarium. Your connection with the institution will increase your influence in the field. During your absence, other physicians must carry largely the responsibilities in the Sanitarium. In your work in the field you will gain a broader and more extended influence than if you were confined to an institution. It is not the Lord's plan that you should wholly disconnect from the Sanitarium, but it is His plan

that in connection with your wife you should go into the cities and seek to reach the people with the message of present truth. This work will help to make known the work of the Sanitarium and will also establish confidence in the minds of the people in the institution. The acquaintances you make as you attend meetings and present the truth from a physician's standpoint will help to give you an influence, and this line of work will then be the means of bringing to your sanitarium a class of people who can be greatly benefited. Arrange your plans so that you can engage in this line of work with freedom and so that your absence will not hurt the work of the institution. The health talks which you give in the meetings will be one of the best ways of advertising our Sanitarium. This is the work that I have been shown you should do.²

It is noteworthy that the divine endorsement provides more than a benediction on ministers and health professionals working together in public evangelism. The prophet had a vision that included profound implications for church organization. Ellen White did not see primarily a class of doctors, dentists, or nurses who left their clinical calling to be evangelists, but rather a cadre of health professionals employed by church-run institutions who devoted significant time to public evangelism. In fact, the cited passage suggests that only as we operate sanitariums—solidly Adventist health institutions that uplift God and his natural approaches to healing³—will our physician-evangelists have the greatest results. More than this, only as our medical institutions prioritize public evangelism for their health professionals will they truly thrive when measured both commercially and evangelistically.

Parallels with the Gospel of Luke

Inspiration saw the necessity for both a canonic gospel of Luke and an end-time divine imprimatur upon a class of healer-evangelists. However, just as the Gospel of Luke is typically regarded—often subconsciously—as providing help to the gospel story but not of sufficient stature to stand on its own, so Seventh-day Adventists have always been in danger of viewing the role of health professionals as a helpful appendage to our work—but not an integral component of the canon we provide as living epistles. Often we have failed to recognize our need for physician-, dentist-, and other health-professional-evangelists seamlessly integrated into our evangelistic efforts. In our early work, this integration should have flowed naturally from the inspired organizational model: all consecrated health professionals were to be employed by the church in denominationally-run medical institutions. Private practice was not an option. Setting up a health center apart from the organized church was not to be countenanced.⁴

Despite Ellen White's plea for health professionals who were employed by the church, ordained medical missionaries, and evangelistic teams that included health professionals, Seventh-day Adventists are in danger of disparaging the metaphorical message of the canonic inclusion of the Gospel of Luke. Today's secular pressures (including liability concerns and the current economic downturn) are providing fuel to arguments that Adventist physicians and dentists should support the church's mission but find employment independent of the church. Consequently, many consecrated health professionals have felt they had no other options than to run their own practices—or start their own institutions.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Rather than seeing the significance of Luke's gospel as primarily a rebuke to the church, perhaps consecrated Adventist pastors and administrators need to

reexamine whether God is calling them to reach out to the Lukes of today. If we truly believe it is “the divine plan that we shall work as the disciples worked”—and that that methodology involved the partnership of health professionals and pastors⁵—then shouldn't we be strategizing how we can incorporate physicians, dentists, and others trained in the healing arts into the organized work of the church? Indeed, just as the gospel medical evangelist teamed with the apostle Paul, could one of the keys to modern revival hinge on health professionals working more closely with the ministry in the work of public evangelism?

Many pastors and church leaders would no doubt say “Amen” to many of these implications. However, I believe most denominational workers tie their support to such a vision on an assumption which the biblical account does not support; namely, that health professionals will pay their own way in any such collaboration. So long as we as a church only embrace significant health endeavors that either run in the black or are budget neutral, we demonstrate that we do not see an intrinsically evangelistic purpose for those who engage in healing ministry. Sure, we may invest a small amount in a cooking school or some other community health program. However, few would countenance opening a medical clinic or bringing a small cadre of health professionals into conference employment unless there was some assurance they could pay their own way as a stand-alone cost center.

The contrast seems obvious. We have no problem investing in bible workers, Adventist schools, or a paid ministry. None of these entities have to pay their way in a strict revenue-generating sense—nor would we feel comfortable evaluating them on such a basis. Why don't we use that same metric in incorporating medical workers into our fold? This would not represent our shirking financial responsibilities. If we

believed in the evangelistic efficacy of health professionals, we would expect an investment in such workers to pay dividends in membership growth, tithe increase, and greater overall faithfulness.

Do we see how our current assumptions reveal we still need one of the implicit messages of Luke's gospel? The century-old words of Ellen White to Dr. Kress “[your] experience is to be a lesson to others besides Elder Starr and Dr. Kress” seem to endorse such a position. They argue eloquently that the Adventist church at every level should consider how it can better integrate health professionals into evangelism—and thus help the organized church reclaim a neglected aspect of the Gospel of Luke.

1 Idem., *The Kress Collection* (Payson, Ariz.: Leaves-Of-Autumn Books, 1985), 169.

2 Ibid., 168.

3 See, for example, *Counsels on Health*, 204-208; 250-255; 271-273; *Review and Herald*, December 16, 1909.

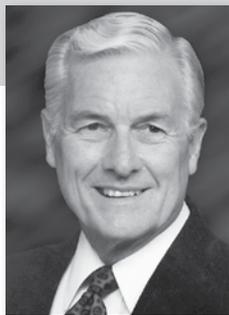
4 See, for example, *Evangelism*, 546; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981, 1987, 1990, 1993), 73-75; *Counsels on Health*, p. 524.

5 See Idem., *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1942), 140.

David DeRose, MD, MPH, is a board-certified specialist in both Internal Medicine and Preventive Medicine. He runs CompassHealth, Inc. and serves as Associate Pastor of the Portland, Maine, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Faith: Christianity's Most Divisive Word

by Herbert E. Douglass



Sometimes even today we can see why the meaning of New Testament "faith" (*pistis*) has caused more

division in the Christian church than any other subject. The same issues of whether faith is fundamentally objective or subjective or something else arise in many books, articles, and blogs in all churches today. It seems that our Lord's haunting cry was more prophetic than rhetorical: "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth" (Luke 18:8, NKJV)?

Often one notes that Ellen White emphasized that Martin Luther "so clearly taught" the great doctrine of justification by faith.¹ But then the grand interpolation begins—*expressing a doctrine of justification by faith that Luther had himself rejected*. The problem of course is that most remember Luther as Melancthon froze him in the legal scenarios of much Protestant atonement theories ever since. This shift from the real Luther to court analogies prepared the way for a transfer from faith in Christ Himself to faith in a doctrine about Christ.

Many are the studies that reflect this fundamental shift in early Protestantism. As one book suggests,

In some measure, Melancthon appears to stand under the influence of legal conceptions other than those of Scripture. In fact, his views on justification underwent significant change in the period of 1530-1534. . . . Melancthon [narrowed] his conception of justification to a mere declaration in this period. . . . For Melancthon justification no longer signifies the presence of the new creation. . . . Unlike Melancthon he [Luther] understands that the reckoning of divine righteousness creates the human being anew, so that sin is no longer present. Imputation is not a mere declaration for Luther, but an effective divine word.²

The reason why I cite this book among many is to establish Ellen White's reference

to Luther as one who "clearly taught" the truth about righteousness by faith *in contrast to* the teachings of 1) the Catholic Church and 2) those of later Protestants who followed Melancthon.

The reason for this issue, whether in the first century, or the sixteenth, or the twenty-first, is that the phrases "justification by faith," "sanctification by faith," and "righteousness by faith" are all conditioned by how "faith" is defined. Faith in the Bible is not an event but an experience, leading to the event of the cross being made into a substitute for an experiential union with Christ. In other words, it's not an objective justification, nor a subjective justification, but a mighty ellipse wherein the objective death of Jesus grounds the intelligent, grateful man or woman responding with the "obedience of faith" (see Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5).

Simply put, Luther and Paul understood faith as God's work *in us* that responds to God's work *for us*. Perhaps these few words say it all: "Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us."³ Has anyone said it better?

Throughout the Bible, faith is a word that is used to describe "response to God in action." Hebrews 11 is a clear and graphic description of men and women who have faith. No theological mental constructs, just simple illustrations.

By faith Enoch pleased God, but "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (verses 5, 6); by faith, Noah built an ark and "became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (verse 7); by faith Abraham "obeyed when he was called" (verse 8); by faith Abraham "offered up Isaac" (verse 17); by faith Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;" by faith, "he forsook Egypt" (verse 27); etc.

An old hymn that most of us sang in our childhood or after we became Adventists is entitled, "Trust and Obey." Probably no better phrase sums up Hebrews 11 or the lives of anyone who truly rejoices in the "obedience of faith."

Ellen White has put it beautifully:

To talk of religion in a casual way, to pray without soul hunger and

living faith, avails nothing. A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as the Saviour of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. He who waits for entire knowledge before he will exercise faith, cannot receive blessing from God. It is not enough to believe about Christ; we must believe in Him. The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power.⁴

Only when faith is understood within this description can we really understand the simplicity of justification or sanctification or righteousness (same Greek word as justification) by faith. Faith is simply saying "Yes" to God—whatever He has said and will say to us comes from a Person worth trusting.

- 1 See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1950), 253.
- 2 D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifred, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 68-70.
- 3 White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1956), 63.
- 4 Idem., *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), 347.

Herbert E. Douglass, Th.D., is a theologian and retired college administrator. Born in Massachusetts, he was president of Atlantic Union College as well as an associate editor for the *Adventist Review*. A prolific writer, he has authored over 24 books, including *God At Risk*; *Why Jesus Waits*; *A Fork in the Road*, and *Messenger of the Lord*: the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. He currently resides in Lincoln, California.

Why Art Thou Secular, Ye Olde New England?

by Shawn Brace



There is no doubt that secularism in New England runs deep. Anyone who has ever

worked for the church here knows the challenges that this region presents when trying to spread the Gospel. I can think of numerous individuals who have come here from afar, hoping to take this region by storm, only to retreat to a more receptive part of the country after a few years.

And the research now backs up this intuitive and anecdotal view. According to a recent study done by Gallup, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts are the least religious states in the country respectively. Rhode Island and Connecticut are all in the “top 10” (or bottom 10, depending on how one chooses to look at it) when it comes to least religious states.¹

Naturally, one wonders why New Englanders are apparently so hostile to the Gospel and Christianity. And why, somewhat related to this, the region seems to be so liberal politically—as many are quick to recognize.

I do not pretend to have all the answers. But I would like to—very informally—offer a few reflections on why this might be the case. This is not exhaustive, of course, and it is nowhere close to being a scientific treatment of the issues. But, as someone who was born in New England and has lived here my whole life (with a few hiatuses to Michigan and Scotland), I have been able to brood over this issue a bit over the years. And, hopefully, it will eventually help me turn the tide here in this wonderful region.

But another small caveat: my New England roots may not go back as far as some others. On my dad’s side, his family was originally from New Brunswick, Canada, and they moved to Massachusetts when he was just a kid. Similarly, my maternal grandfather was originally from Nova Scotia, Canada. His family eventually

moved to Massachusetts as well. The furthest my roots go back in New England is my maternal grandmother, who was born and raised on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Her mother is German, however, who, I believe, was born in the motherland. I am not sure where my great-grandfather was born, however, but it is probably safe to say that the longest line of New England heritage goes through him.

So my New England-ness may not be as deeply rooted as that of others, but, as at least a third generation New Englander, I am at least somewhat “qualified” to speak on the subject!

So here are the issues that I believe contribute to the secular nature of New Englanders.

1. Independence. New Englanders have always been independently minded. The pilgrims came to this land because they wanted to get out from underneath the religious oppression that they were experiencing in Europe. Of course, the early New England Puritans then proceeded to set up their own oppressive religious climate, which ultimately led Roger Williams to establish Rhode Island—which, for the first time in America (and probably the world)—promoted the separation of church and state.

Williams was extremely progressive religiously—maybe even more so than any other churchman in history. Although he established the first Baptist church in America, he soon split off from that group, saying that “God is too large to be housed under one roof.”²

Vermont is also a classic example of this independent thinking as well. Although there is some debate as to its political independence throughout history, Vermont first seemed to be a republic before it joined the union. Even today, there are many within the state who would like to make Vermont an independent republic again. Such people have banded together and called themselves “The Second Vermont

Republic,” describing themselves as “a nonviolent citizens’ network and think tank opposed to the tyranny of Corporate America and the U.S. government, and committed to the peaceful return of Vermont to its status as an independent republic and more broadly the dissolution of the Union.”³

Old time Vermonters can be very traditional, and yet they are very independent. They may be personally opposed to same-sex unions, for example, but they are not going to bug anyone else who chooses to pursue this lifestyle. And, consequently, what has happened is that the out-of-staters (“flatlanders,” as they are called) have taken advantage of this independent thinking and flocked to Vermont, trying to set up their own “Utopian” society.

Thus, it is not necessarily “true Vermonters” who are pushing for same-sex unions, for “nudist” towns, for liberal politics. It is the “flatlanders” who have seen the vacuum in Vermont’s government and moved to the state to set up their own liberal agenda. But, interestingly, there is now a backlash starting among old-time Vermonters who are getting frustrated with these flatlanders taking advantage of them, setting up their liberal agenda, buying all their property, privatizing their land (historically, hunters have had free reign over anyone’s private land. But now flatlanders have bought up a lot of the land and posted “Private Property: No hunting” signs, and this has greatly frustrated the old-timers). Because of all these issues, it is not uncommon to see signs—whether painted on barns, or stuck beside the road—saying, “Take Back Vermont.”

All this is to say that New Englanders are very independent thinkers. There is kind of an unspoken rule that says, “I’ll stay out of your business, if you stay out of mine.” New Hampshire’s state motto is “Live Free or Die.” Thus, we don’t really like it when others cross the line into our private lives, supposing that they know how we should

live, what we should think—at least not when it comes to religion.

2. *Affluence.* New England is a very affluent region. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire typically rank in the top five or ten of the wealthiest states in the country (this extends to other Northeastern states outside of New England to include New York and New Jersey).⁴ Closer to home for me, the community in which I minister—Lebanon and Hanover, New Hampshire—was recently declared by *Forbes* to be “the least vulnerable [community] in America to the economic crisis,” essentially declaring it to be “recession-proof.”⁵

Of course, everyone knows the challenges of wealth. If individuals in a community or region feel comfortable economically, there is little impetus to look outside oneself for anything else. And this is directly related to that “independent thinking” that I mentioned above. What need is there for God if all of my needs can be met by my own money, my own hard work, my own abilities?

3. *Education.* New England is really the epicenter of education in the United States, and maybe even the world. Four of the eight Ivy League schools (Harvard, Yale, Brown, Dartmouth) are in New England, and most of the “Little Ivies” (Amherst, Bates, Bowdoin, Colby, Middlebury, Tufts, Wesleyan, Williams), as well as places like MIT, Wellesley, Smith, and Mount Holyoke, are all in this small region. There are over 100 colleges and universities in the Greater Boston area alone!⁶ (This accounts for over 250,000 students in the cities of Boston and Cambridge themselves every year.) And New England is really the cradle of the “prep school” educational model as well.

All of this lends itself to a very “liberal” landscape. And, as you are, no doubt, well aware, college campuses are the hot bed for “progressive” and “ivory tower” thinking, and knowledge has the tendency to “puff up” (see 1 Corinthians 8:1). There is a natural arrogance that accompanies the acquisition of knowledge, and such people often feel little need for God.

4. *Catholic “backlash.”* The reality is, a large percentage of those who are religious are Catholic (besides English, the predominant ancestries in New England are Irish, Italian, and French). This has affected the religious landscape in a number of ways. First, many of those Catholics are “nominal” Catholics, and, though they do not attend Mass regularly, nor have a great deal of interest in their religious heritage, they would never, ever consider being anything else but Catholic. The phrase, “Once a Catholic, always a Catholic” most definitely applies.

On the other hand, there are many others who were raised in a Catholic

***Hopefully, by His grace,
we can overcome some of
these challenges and see the
message spread with vigor
in this part of the world.***

environment, but have now become hostile towards religion because of Catholicism’s abuses—both religiously and politically. There are many people who are bitter because of the sex abuse scandals, the church’s views on homosexuality, divorce, and contraception, and other theological issues. As a result, these people want nothing to do with God or religion. (Admittedly, if my understanding of God was that He would burn people in hell forever, I would be turned off towards religion as well.)

I just happened to pick up a book recently at Borders that spoke to this point beautifully. It is called, *Being Catholic Now*, and it was written/edited by Kerry Kennedy—one of Robert Kennedy’s 11 children.⁷ She interviews 37 individuals with Catholic backgrounds (from Bill O’Reilly to Bill Maher to Frank McCourt to Doris Kearns Goodwin to Nancy Pelosi), and reveals their perspective on the present climate of the Catholic church. I was able to read some of it, and I found a lot of it quite enlightening.

I think this Catholic component has a huge influence on New Englanders’ openness to religion and God.

Conclusion

All of these components, plus others, lend themselves to the reality that New England is a very secular and politically liberal region. In many ways, I cannot blame New Englanders for their animosity towards God and religion. If I believed some of the things they have been taught about God, I would be very hostile towards Him as well.

That’s why He has called some of us here! Hopefully, by His grace, we can overcome some of these challenges and see the message spread with vigor in this part of the world. This is where the early Advent message began, and I believe, before His return, that message will return with power to this place.

1 Frank Newport, “State of the States: Importance of Religion,” *Gallup*, 28 Jan 2009. Available online at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/114022/State-States-Importance-Religion.aspx> (accessed 30 July 2009).

2 See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Williams_\(theologian\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Williams_(theologian)) (accessed 30 July 2009).

3 See <http://www.vermontrepublic.org/> (accessed 30 July 2009).

4 Marquis Canaday, “Maryland is America’s Wealthiest State: New Jersey and Connecticut Follow Closely,” *Associated Content*, 10 Sept 2007. Available online at http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/365994/maryland_is_americas_wealthiest_state.html (accessed 30 July 2009).

5 Drew Joseph, “Leb. deemed safe from economy,” *The Dartmouth*, 20 Oct 2008. Available online at <http://thedartmouth.com/2008/10/20/news/lebanon/> (accessed 30 July 2009).

6 See <http://www.bhcc.mass.edu/inside/54> (accessed 30 July 2009).

7 Kerry Kennedy, *Being Catholic Now* (New York: Crown, 2008).

Shawn Brace pastors four congregations in New Hampshire and Vermont. He and his wife, Camille, live in Warner, New Hampshire, and they recently welcomed their first child, Camden Shawn, into the world. When Shawn isn’t busy with pastoring, he loves spending time outdoors—especially photographing the beauty of New England.

Wake Up! by Jim Ayer



Revival is deeply important to me and here's why: For years after my Damascus Road conversion, I was consumed with a burning desire to know the Lord, to become His best friend and follow His every desire. Remember the prayer of Christ found in John 17:3? "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Knowing Him is the empowering force of all we are and everything we hope to become. And I wanted to become everything He desired me to be.

Early in my experience, I discovered true fellowship as my heart and mind melted in wonderful seasons of prayer and study time with my best Friend. I sacredly guarded hours of personal time each day to sit at His feet and learn of His will for my life. He empowered me to walk in His steps and I obeyed as He said, "This is the way, walk ye in it." At His command I stepped forward, His biddings became enabling, and I experienced victory over many sins in my life as God transformed me, ever so slowly, into an "Overcomer."

But as I became burdened with life's trials and failed to protect the foundational ground of study and prayer, I settled into the perfect sleepy-virgin, non-action, slumber-time agenda.

Praying less and studying less led to creeping compromise. Christian mediocrity wrapped its tentacles around me and tightened its death grip upon me. This was not a good time to receive a call from a conference president who asked me to pastor a brand new church. I said "no" to him, to God, and to ministry!

The Deceiver had succeeded in lulling me to sleep, but I still looked like a Christian. I still preached and sounded like a Christian; however, my grasp on the wedding garment had slipped through

my tithe-paying fingers, and I was rapidly slipping from a wise to foolish virgin. I ignored the signs: I had failed to "examine myself and see if I were in the faith." I really didn't want to examine myself because, inside, I was dying a slow death—perhaps like some of you. I lacked the vibrant fellowship I once experienced with my Lord, His power was missing, and victory over sin was a thing of the past because I was void of the fire of the Holy Spirit!

Many years ago, a young pastor sat in the study of H.M.S. Richards, awed by the aura of the mighty man of God. He asked Richards what the secret was behind his powerful preaching and His biblical acumen. For a moment, Richards lamented the study habits and spiritual state of ministers, and then in his typical gentle but resonant voice said, "I'm afraid our pastors don't even pray four hours a day."

That was the kernel of this great preacher's power: prayer. Imagine what the Holy Spirit could do in us if we spent four hours in the audience chamber of the King each day?

George Muller used to say to the brethren who "had too much to do" to spend proper time with God, "that four hours of work for which one hour of prayer prepares, is better than five hours of work with prayer left out; that our service to the Master is more acceptable and our mission to man more profitable, when saturated with God's blessing—the dew of the Spirit."¹ Dew, my friends, takes time to gently settle upon the rose petal, sometimes an entire night.

As I wandered my newly chosen pathway apart from the Holy Spirit, I experienced great success in worldly enterprises, but after years of enjoying the fruits of *my labor* in the world, God woke me from my death-slumber and revived me. He not only brought me back to life but to vibrant life! Prayer took on an exciting new dimension, the burning desire to know Him returned, and I again

hungered for fellowship with Him. The Holy Spirit, once again, took up residence, and God led me back on track and soon into full-time ministry.

Having been a full-fledged Laodicean and a classic Foolish Virgin, I can tell you that God has much more in mind for you and for me than we can ever imagine or dream. That's why revival is such an important topic to me. Actually, it's not a topic at all. It is life itself, bringing dry bones to life. It is this generation's adrenalin, a wake-up call to breathe the very atmosphere of Heaven.

Pastor, I want to ask you a candid question: If the Holy Spirit were removed from your church today, how long would it take for anyone to recognize the fact, and could your church continue to do everything it is now doing? A preacher of the past century by the name of Samuel Chadwick made this educated observation: "The study of Pentecost reveals a startling contrast between the promise of power and its absence in the Church today."²

Some time ago I attended a meeting where many of our church's world leaders were present, and their overriding concern was the great need for revival. Our Division leaders were yearning, and still are, for revival to take hold of the church. This weighed most heavily upon their hearts and minds. If we are to lead the church to victory, it is time to wake up, to plead for the tongues of fire to fall on us, and to prepare our members for the King's coming!

We preach Daniel 2, stating that our time in history is the time of *the feet of iron and clay*. But who can deny that we are at the end of the *toe-nails of time*! We are almost out of time. Our world is living between two verses in the Bible. In Revelation chapter 6, verse 13 has already been fulfilled, but verse 14 has not occurred . . . yet! We find ourselves in a cosmic hyphen of time, seemingly trapped between two verses, but think of it: just one verse to go. And we know that

“the final movements will be rapid ones.”³ But, it is also true that “it is the privilege of every Christian, not only to look for, but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴

Years ago we were told that we may need to spend many more years in this world because of insubordination.⁵ Rather than going into the land to possess it, we saw giants and turned back. We were, and are, insubordinate to our Captain.

We are wandering to and fro as the church searches for new ways to attract membership, to set a new face upon her to appeal to a generation of desert dwellers. What we really need is to be revived by the Spirit and power of God—to raise up the standard of our Captain once again in preparation for the final battle. We are a prophetic movement whose very message will provoke thought, stir hearts, and attract those who are hungering and thirsting. It’s time to wake up and go forward!

E. M. Bounds made this profound statement in his book *Power through Prayer*:

The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. . . . What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Spirit can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come

on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer.⁶

“Wake up the watchmen,” is the word of the Lord to his messengers. At this time the truth is to go forth with power, for the time in which to work is short.

We can see the Promised Land! We are at her borders, and God is looking to you and to me to spread this message with conviction and with force, giving the trumpet a certain sound. Our Lord’s greatest desire is to empower you and me with an abundant infilling of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of joy, the Spirit of love, and the Spirit of power, the power to make your ministry more than you can ever imagine possible!

Notice this statement: “When [our] churches are revived, it is because *some individual* seeks earnestly for the blessing of God. He hungers and thirsts after God, and asks in faith and receives accordingly.”⁷

Will you be that *some individual* that God revives and helps usher the church into Glory? If you have been a keeper of aquariums instead of a fisher of men, say a life-changing “yes” to Jesus today. Put aside the work of God and, once again, get to know the God of the work. Let Him revitalize your life, empower your ministry, and cause you to preach with fire as never before! When you do this, people will come to watch you burn.⁸

- 1 A.T. Pierson, *George Muller of Bristol: His Life of Prayer and Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Classics, 1999), 130.
- 2 Art Chadwick, *The Way to Pentecost* (Fort Washington, Pa.: CLC Publications, 2001), 43.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), 11.
- 4 Idem., *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 69.
- 5 See idem., *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970), 696.
- 6 E.M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 9, 10.
- 7 White, *Review and Herald*, March 13, 1888. Italics supplied.
- 8 Some statements in this article are taken from the author’s book, *He Shall Lift You Up* (Coldwater, Mich.: Remnant Publications, 2008).

Jim Ayer is Vice President for Advancement with Adventist World Radio and producer and host of the popular television series Making Waves. Before joining AWR, he was Vice President for Public Affairs and Global Events with Amazing Facts Ministries. He is also an international speaker whose love and passion is evangelism. His travels have taken him to more than 52 countries. His manual for churches, Satellite Evangelism for the 21st Century, has been widely used in many parts of the world. He has also written several books including, He shall Lift You Up; Reclaiming Lost Members; Judgment & Hell . . . God May be Kinder Than You Think; and Overcoming the 3D’s. In addition, he has authored numerous magazine articles with a special emphasis on revival.

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT
WWW.NEWENGLANDPASTOR.COM

The Everlasting Covenant: God's Promise and His Oath

By Louise Jones



I have never completely understood the depth of the forgiveness we have in Christ until

I understood the depth of His sacrifice for the world. And, once I understood this, it has given me a new insight into His love—a love which will never be fully understood or grasped until eternity. God's everlasting covenant, made to Abraham, embraces the entire human race. He has staked his very existence on the fulfillment of this covenant. The Lord's promise to us involves redemption and the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus. There is no greater love than this. My prayer is that as we meditate upon this kind of love, our minds will be "in heavenly places" and our hearts will be melted by His infinite grace.

The Promise of Salvation

Through the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, we are promised salvation in Christ. After the Fall of Adam in the garden of Eden, even before Adam and Eve repented, God appeared to them and promised, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).¹ And the Lord promised to Abraham: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee. And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3). And Genesis says of Abraham: "So he believed in the Lord. And He counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Since we are the children of Abraham by faith, all of God's promises made to him are for us. Paul writes, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). And, "Hope maketh not

ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). Therefore, in Christ, we have the assurance of salvation. The great apostle Paul understood this when he proclaimed: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The Promise of Forgiveness of Sins

In Christ, through His everlasting covenant, we are given the promise and the assurance of forgiveness of sins. God tells us, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isaiah 43:25). We are also given the assurance, "For as the Heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:11, 12). God has also cast our sins into "the depths of the sea." So when we confess our sins, they are gone in His eyes. Vanished. Annihilated. And there is one more verse to cover this beautiful truth: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but thou hast in love to my soul cast all my sins behind thy back" (Isaiah 38:17).

In the 1893 *General Conference Bulletin*, we read a reflection on Isaiah 38:17 in a sermon presented by A.T. Jones:

How many? [Congregation: "All"]. Where are they then? [Congregation: "Behind his back."] We are before His face, and the sins are behind His back. Who is between us and them? [Congregation: "God."] And He is upon His throne, isn't He? Then when I have confessed my sins to the Lord, He and His living eternal throne stand between me and those sins, and Satan and everybody else in this universe cannot bring them back. For he has got to get the Lord and His throne out of the way before they can

get those sins back to me again. And I am going to be glad of it.²

When Satan comes to us to bring up all of our past sins, we can say, "Get thee behind me, Satan." We have the assurance from the Lord that our sins are blotted out, in the depths of the sea, and behind His back. In Christ, we are completely forgiven and looked upon as if we had never sinned.

And God's assurance of the forgiveness of our sins is immediate, without any delay. As He spoke the word and the worlds were created, so He speaks forgiveness and our sins are immediately forgiven. In the wonderful book *Lessons on Faith*, A.T. Jones wrote, "Jesus said to a certain person, 'Thy sins are forgiven.' How long before it was so? There was no length of time whatever between the word 'forgiven' and the thing."³ When we confess our sins to the Lord, in that second they are forgiven by the power of His creative word. By faith, we can tap into the creative energy and power of God's word and be thankful that when He says something, it is backed by all the powers of the universe.

The Cost of Our Salvation: God's Oath

With the understanding that in Christ we have the assurance of salvation and the assurance of forgiveness of sins, the question remains: How can this be? That is why it is important to look at the oath made by God to us and what it cost Him to make this oath. The everlasting covenant made to Abraham and to us is backed by an oath. It was by an oath that Jesus was made "a surety of a better testament" (Hebrews 7:22), which is the new or everlasting covenant to us of redemption and forgiveness of sins. We are redeemed through the precious blood of Christ. His blood is His life, of which we are made partakers through faith. Through this covenant we are made partakers of the divine nature. We are told that the Lord will never break His oath to us, as is recorded in Genesis: "And it came to

pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces” (Genesis 15:17). I believe that the Lord was putting His own existence on the line in His promise to Abraham and to us of everlasting life.

We may often feel our deep unworthiness and sense our weakness, feeling despondent over sins committed, feeling afraid that the Lord will not accept us. But God reminds us, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1). But isn’t that all of us? He continues: “Incline your ear, and come unto me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (verse 3). Jesus fully understands our infirmities and inclines to us to listen to our prayers. He has staked His throne and even His own existence to do this for His people.

In his book *The Everlasting Covenant*, E.J. Waggoner wrote,

It is the word of God in Christ that upholds the universe, and keeps the innumerable stars in their places. “In Him all things consist.” If He should fail, the universe would collapse. But God is no more sure than His word, for His word is backed by His oath. He has pledged His own existence to the performance of His word. If His word should be broken to the humblest soul in the world, He Himself would be disgraced, dishonoured, and dethroned. The universe would go to chaos and annihilation. Thus the entire universe is in the balance to insure the salvation of every soul that seeks it in Christ. The power manifested in it is the power pledged to the help of the weak. So long as matter exists, so long will the word of God be sure. “Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in Heaven.”⁴

Can We Rejoice?

When we understand what it cost God and His Son Jesus Christ to save us

through the everlasting covenant, can we rejoice? Can we, even in the midst of tears and pain, look up to the throne of grace? All of Heaven is looking for a people who will do just that. I believe that when we understand the beauty of the everlasting covenant and what it cost our Lord in terms of His oath, words cannot express the depth of love that the Father and the Son have for us. It is like being silenced as if we were in the presence of a Holy God. And it is only this kind of love that will constrain God’s people to serve him with hope and with joy all the days of our life.

In closing, please note just two quotations from *The Desire of Ages* which speaks of the heart of Christ as He willingly chose to go to the Cross so that we can share His throne. Speaking of Christ’s experience in Gethsemane, Ellen White writes,

The humanity of the Son of God trembled in that trying hour. He prayed not now for His disciples that their faith might not fail, but for His own tempted, agonized soul. The awful moment had come—that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. . . . The words fall tremblingly from the pale lips of Jesus, “O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.” Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world’s Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise up before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts the baptism of blood, that through Him perishing millions may have everlasting life.⁵ (pages 692-93)

Again, reflecting upon Calvary, she writes,

Upon Christ as our surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted as a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that never can be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.⁶ (page 753).

I pray the Lord will bless us as we continue our journey with Him in the understanding of His everlasting covenant.

- 1 All Scriptures are taken from the *King James Version*.
- 2 *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, vol. 5 (1893), 405. Also available in pdf format online at <http://dewsberry.com/content/es/content/atjones/1893GeneralConferenceBulletin-Jones.pdf> (accessed 30 July 2009).
- 3 A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, *Lessons on Faith* (Brushton, New York: TEACH Services, Inc., 1995), 51.
- 4 E.J. Waggoner, *The Everlasting Covenant* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Glad Tidings Publishers, 2002), 88-89.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), 692, 693.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 753.

Louise D. Jones is a member of the Braintree Seventh-day Adventist Church in Braintree, Massachusetts.



The Gospel in Nature by Bill Brace

It was what we call a picture-perfect day

when a few weeks ago my wife and I accompanied a small group of our church members on a boat/ferry ride out of Portland, Maine, to the islands of Casco Bay. Geographically, it was a first for me, and a delightful one. The sun was out (for only the second time in what seemed like forever), the temperature was ideal, and the idyllic beauty around us was intoxicating.

My wife has been a lover of the sea since she was a tyke while spending her summers on Cape Cod. Now, after three-plus decades of marriage, her affection for the wind and the water has wonderfully rubbed off on me. Casco Bay, for those few who do not know, is not only the scene of Ellen White's baptism, it is also a little bit of heaven. So, after spending my first twenty minutes in conversation with an old friend whom I had accidentally bumped into earlier at the dock, I turned my attention to the picture around me—the host of family sailboats tacking along the ocean's surface, the summer abodes reclining upon the frequent, small islands and the blue sky above. I basked in the occasion of the moment that included both Christian fellowship and the simple wonders of nature at its finest. The three-hour-round-trip ride was far too short for my liking but when I stepped ashore at the conclusion of our outing, I felt more refreshed and invigorated than I had in many-a-week.

Nature can do that for you. Perhaps it is because I have spent twenty-six years now in urban ministry that I have a deeper appreciation than the average Joe for the great outdoors and its unspoiled beauty. Just in case you doubt my suggestion that city ministry has its challenges, I

would refer you to a cover story from the prestigious *Boston Globe* a few months ago with its blaring headline, "How the City Hurts Your Brain."¹ The tenor of the article, based upon extensive research by the folks at Harvard University and the University of Michigan, sounded like something out of the Spirit of Prophecy.

One of my great discoveries in the days of my early ministry was to come across a sermon on the gospel in nature by a vaunted speaker within our ranks. Its contents were truly revealing. A biblical study of wonderful inspiration. With its theme intact, but several alterations of my own, I have shared the message with many different audiences throughout the years. (If such constitutes some form of plagiarism, this is my public confession.)

The gospel in nature? Well, the scriptures declare such a thing for sure. The words of Paul in Romans 10:14-18 give us our initial evidence, "How . . . shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? . . . So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: '*Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.*'"²

And who are those "preachers?" The Psalmist tells us: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalm 19:1-4).

Yes, the righteousness of God surrounds us in our natural, physical world. If only we would open our eyes

with discernment, we would see it all. Yes, nature has been marred by sin, yet it remains a testimony to the gospel in which, "where sin abound[s], grace abound[s] much more" (Romans 5:20).

The gospel is all about restoration, about healing, both spiritually and emotionally. All I know is, after spending time in God's beautiful world of colors and creatures and unspoiled vegetation, whether in my extended family's summer home amidst the trees and lake of Nova Scotia each August, or just in a simple picnic next to a stream, I feel greatly invigorated to minister to the hordes of the asphalt jungle.

Finally, is it any wonder the young girl baptized in Casco Bay had it right when she later wrote, "*Nature* and revelation alike testify of God's love."³

- 1 See Jonah Lehrer, "How the City Hurts Your Brain," *The Boston Globe*, 2 Jan. 2009. Also available online at http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2009/01/04/how_the_city_hurts_your_brain (accessed 29 July 2009).
- 2 All Scriptures are taken from the *New King James Version*.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1956), 9. Emphasis added.

Bill Brace has been involved in urban ministry for over twenty-five years. He pastors Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Braintree and Norwood, Massachusetts. In addition, he maintains an active radio ministry. His program "Portraits of God" is currently heard on several stations around the United States. He and his wife, Melanie, live in Norfolk, Massachusetts, and they have three grown children, one son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, and three beautiful grandchildren.

NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

PO Box 185
Warner, NH 03278

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 43
Barre, VT

