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“The reality is that the days are no less evil, the prophetic signs are no less instant, the mission is no less urgent, and people are no less lost!”

“Conflicting core beliefs are not necessarily critical to the success of a spiritual movement.” (Clinton E. Taber)

## ASSOCIATION OR DENOMINATION?

**David Alves**

In a meeting this past week [May 2012] with Freeman Barton, I shared the following account, which he then asked me to write out and submit as an editorial: Recently, during a Sunday morning sharing time at our celebration center, I had been encouraging folks that remarkable things have been stirring in our sister Advent Christian churches. I told them that our Maranatha Conference of churches is beginning to see the water level rise that soon could involve a sweep of the Spirit in revitalizing the entire Advent Christian General Conference.

A woman stood to inform me, “You know pastor ... denominations are on their way out. God is not interested in our denominational differences. He’s doing away with them by drying denominations from the root. Why would he revitalize one?” She went on briefly to let us know that any surge forward was simply a death-throe. We could expect rapid and unalterable decline.

Well that was a downer, I thought. How should I respond? I waited to hear what the Spirit would say to me in answer. Then the response formed. “You know sister, you are absolutely right! Denominations are on the decline. And apart from a supernatural work of God, I doubt that they will survive what’s coming. But we, as Advent Christians, are not part of a denomination. We are an association!” She tilted her head and opened her eyes silently inviting me to continue.

“This is a somewhat simplistic explanation, but I understand an association of churches to differ from a denomination in the following ways. A denomination has walls around a particular theological or biblical truth that it feels duty-bound to guard and champion. This wall is its creed or test of faith. Associations of

churches have chosen to fellowship, holding certain distinctives as valuable, but not insisting upon them as a requirement of membership or belonging; they are not walls. They do not build walls around their distinctives, but simply invite fellowship with likeminded groups (churches).

Denominations lead from the top, down. Associations are usually served by leaders who are in cooperation together, and are far less hierarchical. They are more voluntary and free.”

She then looked very pleased and said, “Oh. Okay. Well that seems good then.”

As we think about this, perhaps an example can be helpful. Historically, the American Baptist Churches (ABC) of the United States have not been a denomination. They were an association of likeminded churches.\*\* Having pastored in that association for several years before I transferred my membership to the Maranatha Conference and Eastern Region, I fully understood and fit into the conference, region and ACGC because my background prepared me for ministry in an association.

Historically, Advent Christians have been a diverse people. We were Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Episcopalian. No doubt a smattering of others as well. The reason we were able to “associate” with one another despite all those denominational differences is that we had rallied around a biblical truth that we could all agree upon — the soon coming of Christ. As I understand it, our other distinctives sprang up as we walked together with the second advent and a biblical theology as our focus.

Tremendous opportunity opened for those early Adventists to learn from one another. The Methodists had something valuable to share with us — holiness, holistic ministry groups (class meetings), and healing (healing services were held in ABC churches in the 1800s). The Baptists gave us “adult believer baptism.” But all of us agreed that Jesus would return visibly and was our soon coming King; and, the Bible was the Word and will of God revealed.

William Miller never made it his goal to begin a denomination. He had a message to proclaim. His focus was the message of the imminent return of the King. The early Adventists welcomed anyone, of any denomination, with “no creed but the Bible” as a rally point for association.

We can be proud of this heritage. We are not a denomination in decline. Our free and voluntary association of Advent Christian churches has something of value to say to our age, and to the declining denominations in the West. As an association, we hold a valuable legacy and foresee a hopeful future.

Advent Christians are an interdependent people who: affirm the Church’s unity as given in Jesus Christ; gladly embody in our practice the ministry of the whole people of God; recognize God’s gifts for ministry and honor all offices of pastoral ministry; live and work together “in association;” and bring the free church tradition to cooperative and ecumenical Christianity.

**THE EASTERN REGIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
OF THE ADVENT CHRISTIAN GENERAL  
CONFERENCE  
PAST — PRESENT — FUTURE**

**Clinton E. Taber**

I. Origin and Purpose. II. Reviewing Our Past. III. Assessing  
Our Present. IV. Prescription for Our Future.

**I. ORIGIN AND PURPOSES OF THE  
EASTERN REGIONAL ASSOCIATION**

The Eastern Regional Association of Advent Christian Churches (ERA) organized as a not-for-profit corporation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on January 6, 1956. According to the Articles of Incorporation signed by Arthur B. Northup, Harold L. Faulkingham, Robert C. Hewitt, George S. Stone, Benjamin D. Tibbetts, Raymond W. Bowden, Donald E. Wrigley, G. Wendell Sterns and Ariel C. Ainsworth, the purpose of the region was:

To unify and advance the interests of the Advent Christian people and institutions in the Eastern Region of the General Conference of America;

To coordinate the work of the Advent Christian Conferences;

To strengthen the institutions and to counsel churches and pastors in their parish and Conference relationships;

To assist churches in securing competent pastors;

To assist pastors and candidates for the ministry in securing suitable fields of labor;

To promote evangelism within the Region;

To strengthen weak churches and to establish new churches in cooperation with the National Council of Home Missions.

The region existed informally for many years prior to 1956. The geographical area designated as the Eastern Region is actually the birthplace of the denomination, and it was home to most of the national and international affiliates of the denomination. The region was the home of the Women's Home and Foreign Mission Society, the American Advent Mission Society, the Advent Christian Publication Society, and the Boston Bible School and Ransom Institute, which later became the New England School of Theology and subsequently, Berkshire Christian College. These were all regarded as Advent Christian organizations and were governed by independent boards.

Key among these institutions was the American Advent Mission Society (AAMS). The AAMS under the superintendence of Harold L. Faulkingham played the same role in those days as the Eastern Region was organized to play. It is interesting that Faulkingham was one of the incorporators of the Eastern Regional Association.

The Eastern Region is one of five regions of the Advent Christian General Conference, the others being the Appalachian Region, the Southern Region, the Central Region and the Western Region. Each of those regions dates to roughly the same time as the official organization of the ERA, although, like the Eastern Region, the ministry of the region in a different form predates the official organization. The Eastern Regional Association is an integral component of the Advent Christian General Conference.

We must make clear to the supporting constituents what the ERA is and does. Much of the ministry is low profile, which can leave some wondering about its validity. We need to ask ourselves the question, if the Eastern Regional Association were suddenly to disappear from the life of the denomination, would anyone know it had disappeared? If the Eastern Region were no longer a part of our denominational life, what would be the impact on local Advent Christian churches, on pastors of the region, and on the conferences of the region?

The primary function of the region is to oversee the state of affairs among Advent Christian churches in the region and to otherwise provide counsel and leadership that will contribute to a healthy and growing witness for Christ in these last days of time. This ministry of oversight and care is carried out through a regional superintendent who is the chief administrative officer of the region. The fact is, however, he cannot change a great deal. His most important contribution is to encourage, facilitate, advocate, and educate. Whatever authority the superintendent exercises has to be earned through a ministry of respect and care for others.

The Regional Board of Directors is the governing body of the ERA. The board is made up of three executive officers who are elected by the delegate body of the association, along with the presidents of member conferences and the Eastern Regional representative to the Advent Christian General Conference. The primary function of the board is to employ the regional superintendent, set policy, and approve direction for the superintendent in administering the regional program. Conferences are an integral part of the regional structure and serve a valid purpose in providing fellowship and encouragement to member churches and pastors.

Churches of the region are essentially autonomous entities in respect to our system of governance. However, each church by virtue of its affiliation with a conference of the region voluntarily surrenders a portion of that autonomy for the mutual benefit of the churches. This is especially true in the matter of credentialing workers, the calling or dismissing of a pastor, and the disciplining of same should that ever be necessary. Churches look to the regional superintendent for counsel in several areas of their life and ministry. The spiritual health and vitality of the local church is a matter of utmost importance and interest to the region in performing its role of oversight and care.

Pastors are primarily accountable to the local church that calls them and defines their level of ministry. However, most pastors are credentialed by the ERA and are therefore accountable to the region in matters of personal conduct and character. The Eastern

Region works closely with local conferences in the matter of credentialing workers, providing pastor care, and exercising discipline.

Finances for carrying out the extensive ministry of the region are provided by member churches on an apportionment basis. Church apportionments have been a staple of the region almost since its inception. Churches also fund the work of local conferences as well as the national and international ministries of the denomination.

The work of the region and the General Conference is linked in a system called United Ministries. At the 1992 Regional Convention, the delegate body voted to set the regional apportionment for local churches at 3% of a church's annual income from tithes and offerings. An additional 7% is needed by the Advent Christian General Conference to fund its total ministry, which includes gospel outreach in more than 30 countries.

## **Regional Organizational Philosophy**

The Regional Organizational Philosophy has been developed after years of experience working with conferences, auxiliary ministries, local churches and pastors, and after extensive interaction with denominational leaders. It includes the following:

1. People are more important than programs. They are the most valuable resource in the work of the kingdom.
2. Pastors are called, equipped and empowered by the Lord to lead the ministry of his Church in a hostile secular environment. These special servants of the Lord need the prayers, encouragement and support of the church and are encouraged to network with other pastors for accountability and encouragement.
3. Local churches are the center of ministry life as taught in Scripture. Everything done on a regional level should be

done with a view toward helping the local church become everything Christ created it to be. The local church is the bedrock of kingdom ministry. Nothing should be done for a local church that it can do for itself with better results.

4. Local churches are encouraged to network with all levels of denominational life to take full advantage of resources that will enable them to be better equipped and mobilized for the work of ministry.
5. Coordination of ministries should be attempted on all levels to reduce duplication and overlap.

The Regional Ministry Goals form a statement of what we are all about. As a part of the denominational resource network, the Eastern Region seeks to:

1. Help create a climate in which revival will break out by encouraging a ministry of prayer and promoting spiritual growth through fellowship networks and a deepened devotional life for all levels of leadership.
2. Encourage pastors and churches to be faithful to the Great Commission and Great Commandment resulting in new converts and kingdom growth.
3. Provide continuing education seminars and leadership training opportunities for pastors and lay leaders.
4. Continue to assist churches in identifying God's will for pastoral leadership and assist pastors to discern God's leadership for their lives.
5. Continue to assist churches and pastors in distressing situations by providing biblical counsel in a spiritually sensitive manner. Offer customized training models for local congregations as needed and requested.
6. Provide fellowship and encouragement for pastors and lay leaders through Pastoral Cluster Groups, and periodic Pastor's Conferences, the Annual Convention, and individual consultation.

7. Provide uniform standards for credentialing ministers.
8. Examine candidates for the ministry and credential qualified candidates.
9. Provide a pulpit presence through the superintendent that will inform our people about the nature of the last days, challenging them to aggressive witness and Godly living, and reminding them of the distinct biblical hope that is ours at the second coming of Jesus Christ.
10. Plan opportunities to bring people together to celebrate blessings and to strengthen bonds of fellowship.
11. Promote an equitable system of giving that will support the total denominational mission.

**At this strategic moment in our history, it is time that we work together:**

**1. to review our past as a means of understanding who and why we are; 2. to assess our current state; 3. to ask the how, when, and why questions that may provide perspective, and, 4. to consider what the Lord may want of us and ways to achieve it.**

## II. REVIEWING OUR PAST

### Advent Christian Origins

The Advent Christian denomination has an interesting and somewhat convoluted history. The denomination, organized in 1860, is one outgrowth of the Adventual Awakening of the mid-19th century led by William Miller who was used of God to awaken the Christian Church to the reality of the nearness of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Miller, a Baptist preacher from Low Hampton, N.Y., had become convinced from personal Bible study that the second coming of Jesus Christ was imminent. Miller and his associates concentrated on the biblical teaching concerning the second coming. As early as 1843 the Adventual Awakening was being criticized and misrepresented doctrinally by its detractors, prompting its adherents to issue a Declaration of Principles reflecting their beliefs (*Signs of the Times*, Boston, June 7, 1843).

The main difference between the 1843 Declaration of Principles and the 1900 edition is the specificity of the 1843 declaration. In that early declaration, no one was left to question their beliefs on the full inspiration of the Bible; the personal, literal, and imminent return of Jesus Christ; the resurrection of the dead; new heavens and a new earth, the deity of Christ; and the freedom of the believer to decide for himself what the Bible teaches concerning these things.

They believed with Miller that a careful study of prophecy indicates that the second coming would occur in the Jewish year 1843 (March 21, 1843 – March 21, 1844). Note their reticence: “... a mere point of time, however, is not an essential part of our belief. Our faith rests on the fact that the fulfillment of prophecy indicates that the Judge is nigh, even at the door; and the coming

of Christ will be our constant expectation from this hour, till the parting skies shall reveal Him.” The belief in the imminent return of Christ was so compelling that Miller traveled hundreds of miles under less than ideal circumstances to get the message out to as many as possible, in the shortest time possible, wherever possible, in every way possible. Lectures and Bible conferences were set up in halls and public buildings as well as in churches. Campmeetings attracted thousands of people and lasted for several days. Publications such as articles, pamphlets, religious newspapers and books were abundant. One other feature of the movement was the development of prophetic charts which kept preachers focused on the message and caught the imagination of the public.

One conclusion that can be reached regarding the Adventual Awakening of the mid-19th century: In spite of errors and misunderstandings, it confirmed *the effectiveness of eschatological preaching and the importance of a theology of hope!*

The Advent Christian denomination, formally organized in 1860, is an outgrowth of the Adventual Awakening of the mid-19th century. It should be noted that the Adventists, possibly as many as 200–300 thousand of them, had no intention of forming a new denomination.

After the Great Disappointment of 1844, a good number of Adventists returned to their home churches while others on the fringes never actually left their churches. Others, however, who bought into the belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ formed into special interest groups numbering in the hundreds and settled all over the country. They continued to believe that Jesus would return any day, and they wanted to be ready and wanted the lost around them to be ready. Many of them had been shunned by the leadership of the churches from which they came and were not welcome to return. Consequently, you had communities of believers in the imminent return of Christ clustered as special interest groups with no place to go. The message was still important to them, and in many cases these

special groups developed into churches and subsequently Conferences of Churches who in 1860 organized as the Advent Christian denomination.

## Theological Fragmentation / Missional Consensus

Some who have more recently looked at the organization of the denomination, most notably Bruce Jones and Stephen Brown, have concluded that the amalgamation of distinctly different Christian groups (“at least 9 denominations composed the post-Great Disappointment era of Millerism,” Brown, “Advent” 35), especially the Christian Connexion, has flawed the denominational DNA.

Brown says, “Significant ambiguity inheres in our DNA” (34). In an address delivered at the William Miller Chapel in June, 2007, he cites the existence of Arianism inherited from the Christian Connexion group as a fundamental flaw. Brown’s contention is that Arianism has compromised the biblical teaching regarding the nature of God, leaving us with a less than satisfactory understanding of who God really is. This heresy was a clear shift from the position of the early Adventists in the 1843 Declaration of Principles. The divergent theological positions held by segments of the Adventist remnant have created theological stresses that cannot be overlooked.

How did it happen that a theologically fragmented movement, whose leaders resisted the idea of forming a denomination, less than 20 years after the Great Disappointment, officially became a denomination? My sense is that while the Adventists who formed the denomination held conflicting theological ideas, the belief in the imminent return of Christ over-rode their differences. Christ was coming soon and people needed to be saved. They had personally witnessed the powerful movement of God’s Holy Spirit transforming lives in response to the preaching of the gospel and the urgency of the hour. I believe the organization of the denomination was an attempt to preserve the movement.

The Advent Christian denomination has made a valuable contribution to the kingdom of God. God has used us as a denomination in spite of our theological pluralism and in spite of our dysfunctional polity. Only eternity will reveal the thousands, the hundreds of thousands, possibly even millions who over this span of time have been added to the kingdom through the faithful witness and preaching of the gospel. Churches and institutions of the denomination have touched thousands of lives here in North America and around the world with the love of Jesus. People living in darkness have seen a great light because of the outreach of this denomination. Hurting, struggling, and hopeless lives have been relieved, reclaimed and given hope. The Adventist movement confirmed *the effectiveness of eschatological preaching and the importance of a theology of hope.*

## ASSESSING OUR PRESENT

### Unity of Purpose

Here we are 150 years old wondering, Why are we here? What is our mission? The reality is that *the days are no less evil, the prophetic signs are no less instant, the mission is no less urgent, and people are no less lost!*

Having reviewed our past, we are faced with the sobering reality that all is not well. If we truly believe God raised this denomination up for a purpose, the time has come for us to rediscover that purpose; We must (1) define the obstacles that hinder us from achieving that purpose; (2) assess our resources; and (3) develop a strategy to utilize our resources most effectively in achieving God's purpose for us in these last days of time.

The compelling call to proclaim the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ with special emphasis on his personal and imminent return was both Adventism's rallying cry and its reason for being. God was obviously involved in raising the Adventists of the mid-19th century. The impact of this Awakening could not have been achieved apart from the anointing of the Holy Spirit. *Conflicting*

*core beliefs are not necessarily critical to the success of a spiritual movement providing there is passionate agreement on a single Bible doctrine that unites and motivates its adherents.*

Tim Fox writes on returning from the Asian Summit, November 13, 2007,

I am grateful that we belong to a group of God's people who are not a creedal or a cultural people. We are a Kingdom people! As Kingdom people we have Calvinists and Wesleyans, charismatics and traditionalists, emergers and sustainers, black, brown, and white, westerners and easterners, southerners and northerners, Yankees and Red Sox fans — all who are a display of God's glory ... and who jointly are looking for the blessed hope of the return of Jesus to this tired old world.

Our unity and joint proclamation of the lordship and second coming of Jesus is what has gained us the blessing of God. Were we to focus in on any one of the points that so divide Christendom, the blessing would leave us. It has always been our unity that causes God to smile upon us.

### Assessing Our Losses: Churches and Conferences

Our denomination has been in a state of decline for the past 100 years. We have lost many churches and conferences. According to *The Advent Christian Manuals*, the highest number of churches in the ERA was 326 in 1903 organized into 15 conferences. At the turn of the century there was an Adventist group known as the Bible Missionary Society of Southern New York and Northern Pennsylvania that reported six churches in addition to the Northern Pennsylvania and Southern New York Conference listing four churches. The Northern Pennsylvania and Southern New York Conference disappeared from our landscape in 1927 although some of the churches continued independently. The Ontario Conference of five churches disappeared in 1929. The Vermont Conference of six churches disappeared in 1937.

The Catskills Conference of six churches disappeared in 1957. The New Brunswick Conference of six churches disappeared about 1959. The Hoosick Valley Conference of 13 churches disappeared about 1965. The 10 Northwest Pennsylvania Conference churches had disappeared by the late 1960s.

In most of these cases, conference organizations disbanded, but surviving churches affiliated with other existing conferences or remained unaffiliated. In 2008/09, the International Conference with three churches merged with the Maranatha Conference, leaving the Eastern Region with six conferences and 75 churches. Of the six conferences remaining, the New York Conference has one church, and the Nova Scotia Conference has two.

In addition to churches lost, we have lost educational institutions. Aurora University is no longer considered to be Advent Christian, and Berkshire Christian College continues to exist only as a distance education non-degree granting institution. We have lost the stand alone mission agencies and publications, although they continue as a part of the Advent Christian General Conference. We have also lost a few campmeetings while several others are wrestling with issues that threaten their survival. The biggest loss we have experienced is the loss of spiritual energy and vitality.

## Reasons for the Decline

The question arises as to why has this decline been so rampant and unabated. It is not because we have not tried to check it and right the ship. Our leaders, historically devout men and women of God, have prayerfully developed programs and strategies with limited results. The most common explanations are that the denomination was birthed with a flawed theological premise and a dysfunctional polity. Bruce Jones and Stephen Brown both reflecting on the state of the denomination agree that doctrinal disunity has been a serious problem since the formation of the denomination in 1860. Jones cites the elevation of the doctrine

of Conditional Immortality as a major problem while Brown focuses on the influence of Arianism. There is no question but that doctrinal pluralism was always present. It did not matter as much to the founders of the denomination because of the overriding interest in the doctrine of the second coming.

The denomination was launched with a strong commitment to perpetuate the message of the second coming believed to be imminent. The fervent belief in the imminent return of Christ was a strong motivating factor. The decline may be attributed to what happens when a spiritual movement finds its loss of the power of the message that characterizes it. When the urgency of the message is reduced or lost, the impetus wanes.

The Advent Christian denomination is the remnant of a spiritual movement or revival. Spiritual movements are common to the history of the Christian Church and are God-breathed. Typically, these movements have had a profound impact on the church but have a limited life span. Is it possible the Adventist Awakening was never intended to be a permanent fixture on the landscape of church history? A spiritual movement is not dependent on organization or even people but on the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. I remember reading Clyde Hewitt's, *Midnight and Morning*, and pleading with God, *Do it again, Lord! Do it again!*

The numerical decline can be attributed to several other factors: the failure to hold the youth; rural orientation; small churches with a single family dominant; the difficulty of pastoring a small church; *the loss of our message and our evangelistic zeal!* The reason why there were so many Advent churches 100 years ago was the message we preached and more importantly the evangelistic zeal.

#### IV. PRESCRIPTION FOR THE FUTURE

Whatever the reason for decline, the issue we are facing is not the past but the future.

## Challenges for the Advent Christian Denomination

As we look to the future, we must do so with awareness that any strategy we employ for advancing the work of the kingdom through the Advent Christian Church will be met with significant challenges. Some of these challenges include the following.

**Lessening respect for the Church** in our culture and the secularization of society since 1960. A recent report by the Barna Group identified the northeast as the least religious segment of the country. Doing church in this part of the country is more difficult than anywhere else. The implications of the secularization of society are profound for the Christian Church in the future.

Closer to home, Advent Christians have their own set of challenges to deal with if we as a denomination are going to have a dynamic witness for Christ in the years ahead. For one thing, we must recognize that **we are not immune from what is going on in the world around us**. We, too, face the problem of cultural conditioning. We are a denomination of small churches competing with the attractions of the Mega Church. The biggest challenge may be **understanding what the mission of the local church is** and knowing how best the region can come along side it to assist in fulfilling that mission.

One principal we must live by as a denomination is that every level of denominational life exists to help the local church fulfill its God-ordained mission. Acts 2 describes the Church as a learning community. They devoted themselves to the apostolic teaching. They devoted themselves to fellowship, to worship and to prayer. Verses 42 and 43 reflect a deep spiritual experience that created a sense of awe as they watched God work signs and wonders. There was excitement in their life together. We gain an understanding of the Churches' life, teaching and activity, not only from Acts but also from the letters of Paul, most of which were written to local churches. It is interesting how God used persecution to open the door of salvation.

God's purpose for his creation in the very beginning of time was the formation of a people, who would live in fellowship with

him, in his kingdom paradise, for his glory forever. Through the finished work of Christ and the establishment of his Church, God's purpose now became a work in progress, a work which will be completed at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The early years of the Christian Church provide us with the clearest understanding of God's intention and purpose for his Church. As Christianity spread throughout the known world of the 1st century, communities of believers gathered in cities and towns as local churches. Little or no formal organization appeared to be present in these local churches. Apostolic leadership governed their life. As time went on, elders and deacons were added to the local church with their qualifications and duties clearly defined by the Apostles.

A review of the life of the church in the New Testament reveals the understanding we need in the 21st century. The early church gathered in worship, sang praises to God, experienced utterances, enjoyed the ministry of the Word (sound doctrine) and teaching of the Word (addressing everyday issues of life). They observed the sacraments and prayed. The early church was a caring community of believers. They exercised spiritual gifts and gave God the glory in all things. They were mission minded, commissioning workers to take the gospel to other cities and lands. They were committed to spiritual growth and doing good works. They exercised discipline over members when needed.

This brings us to today. What are God's expectations for his church in the 21st century? What has changed or should change from what the New Testament church looked like? How does the 21st century church relate to the characteristics of the 1st century church? Somehow we need to develop a common recognition of what a biblical church is, after which we need to look at what the local church is equipped to handle on its own and what the other levels of denominational life may provide by way of encouragement and assistance.

Another challenge we face as a denomination is what I call **the challenge of a unifying purpose or vision**. Do we know why we exist as a people? Do we have a unifying passionate

commitment to a purpose that defines our reason for being and becomes our rallying cry?

One challenge we face is **the decline in the number of churches** that has characterized history over the past 100 years. Currently there are 75 recognized Advent Christian Churches in the Eastern Region. Possibly as many as 15 of these churches are fragile and apart from a special work of God may not be here in 10 years. How do we address this problem? Healthy churches with healthy pastoral leadership will likely meet any challenge they face and continue as a viable spiritual force in their community. How do we identify the unhealthy churches and how do we diagnose what ails them? Once we have done that, how do we nurse them back to health if they are not good patients? We have the tools in place but too often churches are not cooperative.

An aggressive church planting initiative could, if effective, infuse new life into the region. How do we go about it? Where will we find the church planters? How much money will it take and where will it come from? The region has been aware of this need for a long time, and at least two serious attempts have been made to address it over the past 25 years with limited results.

Another challenge the region faces is the need to provide **new pastoral leadership**. Ever since Berkshire Christian College suspended campus operations in 1987, the denomination has been without a full term Advent Christian ministerial training base. Some alternative means for training are available, but at best we are turning out 3–4 potential pastors annually. Given the current state of affairs, they may be all we need. One other factor is that students graduating from seminary today are looking for full-time pastorates with larger compensation packages due to indebtedness incurred from years of schooling. As a denomination, if we see ourselves as a viable kingdom partner in the years ahead, the matter of pastoral training should be high on our agenda.

Perhaps **the greatest challenge we face is a spiritual one**. What we cannot do in our own wisdom and strength, God can

do through a new move of His Holy Spirit. God is greater than any challenge we will face or any obstacle that may confront us.

One final challenge is **leadership transition**. This affects us first at the board level, made up largely of conference presidents. Conference presidents do not usually stay in office for an extended period, leaving the board susceptible to significant turnover. It is difficult for a board to effectively oversee the work of the region with new people coming on board every few years, often with a limited knowledge of the region and limited experience. Perhaps the most challenging transition relates to that of regional superintendent. By the time this article appears in print, a new superintendent will be in place. May the Lord be with him!

## Options for the Future of the ERA

I see four options for the ERA.

### Option 1. Continue as Is — Business as Usual.

If we decide that no significant changes are necessary, these are the probable outcomes: surface needs are met; candidates for ordination will be examined; we lose more churches; regional leadership is frustrated because they have no mechanism to intervene; income gradually diminishes.

### Option 2. Merger of the Region with ACGC.

Regional officials have opposed this move in the past, but at least the idea should be considered. Such an action would produce the following possible outcomes. The ERA as an independent structure would be eliminated and its assets turned over to ACGC. Churches would look to ACGC and the conferences. ACGC would not inherit the churches' favorable view of the region. ACGC's involvement with local churches would increase dramatically, requiring additional staff.

### Option 3. Board Management.

The Regional Board of Directors assumes the administrative ministry needs of the region, utilizing board members (conference presidents) to service the needs of regional churches and pastors. Possible outcomes: the board would need to meet at least quarterly; churches might not feel the need to support the region financially through the apportionment system due to a perceived decrease in cost for the region; conferences would need to become more active in servicing the needs of churches and pastors.

It is difficult for me to imagine that the work of the region could be effectively managed in this way because the board members are busy pastors and are sometimes bivocational.

### Option 4. Retool the Region.

This approach is probably the safest, least disruptive and most fruitful, depending on a fresh vision, competent personnel and resources. The format for this exercise created and facilitated by John Fenlason seems the appropriate place to begin.

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Baron W. Stone (1772-1844), one of the early founders/leaders of our movement (*Stone-Campbell Movement*), wrote, "I blush for my fellows who hold up the Bible as the bond of union, yet make their opinions of it a test of fellowship; who plead for union of all Christians, yet refuse to fellowship with such as dissent from their notions. Vain men! Their zeal is not according to knowledge, nor is their spirit that of Christ. Such antisectarian-sectarians are doing more mischief to the cause and advancement of truth, the unity of Christians, and the salvation of the world, than all the skeptics in the world. In fact, they create skeptics" ("Remarks," *Christian Messenger*, August, 1835, p. 180; cited by Al Maxey, *Reflections* #534, June 8, 2012)

## PROPOSITION AND RESPONSE

### THE CONDITIONAL PRINCIPLE IN THEOLOGY

According to Clarence H. Hewitt and

James A. Nichols

David W. Davis

In the preface to his *The Conditional Principle in Theology*, Clarence Hewitt states that it was written because of “an unfortunate trend in certain denominational circles toward a Deterministic theology, or what might otherwise be called an attempt at a Calvinistic Adventism” (7). Undoubtedly, Hewitt wanted to prove from Scripture carefully and systematically that God’s promises were conditional upon the action/reaction of man. Thus, the work is to show how the “conditional principle” plays out through Scripture and ultimately, through theology.

In the first chapter Hewitt asks a question that many Advent Christians are still asking: What makes the Advent Christian denomination distinctive from others? The answer is unequivocally Conditional Immortality. Hewitt felt so strongly that this was so that he wrote,

If we shall ever lose our grip on [Conditional Immortality], allow ourselves to obscure it, undermine it by the gradual adoption of contrary views, or cease to proclaim it fearlessly, we shall rob ourselves of our only reason (or at least our greatest reason) for continued existence. (7)

Hewitt makes a strong case that the conditional principle applies not just to man’s future immortality at the second advent of Jesus Christ. Instead, it is a principle played out throughout

Scripture. The rest of the chapter argues that the following are conditional upon man's response to God's Word: (1) the blessings of God (Ps 24:4, 5; Mal 3:10; Eph 1:3); (2) national blessings (Deut 8:18–20; 2 Chron 7:13, 14); (3) physical healing (John 9:7, Matt 9:6, Luke 17:14); (4) answers to prayer (Mark 11:22–24; James 5:15); (5) forgiveness of sin (Isa 55:6, 7; 1 John 1:9); (6) Salvation (John 3:3; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9); and (7) eternal life (John 3:16; Rom 2:7; John 15:6; 1 John 5:12). [8–13]

Human will prompts or rejects God's blessings according to Hewitt. He ends the chapter by stating, "*All the mercies of God are conditioned upon human factors: attitudes, choices, or actions*" (13, his emphasis).

The second chapter is titled, "The Conditional Principle and the Doctrine of Man." Here Hewitt shows how the conditional principle applies to systematic theology (the idea that truth may come not only from the Bible but also from science, philosophy, human reason, etc.). He shows that theologies that embrace conditionalism are probably trustworthy, but those that do not, no matter how popular, should be rejected. He writes,

In other words it [Conditionalism] becomes a standard in the light of which the application of the methods of science, philosophy, and pure reason to classifying and systematizing the truths of Revelation may be judged ... But if, on the other hand, such a projected over-all framework shall be found to be incompatible with this basic and regulative principle of Conditionalism, and if it can make no logical or consistent place for such a plain truth of Revelation within itself, then it must be rejected. (14)

Applying conditionalism to the nature of man (anthropology), Hewitt argues that natural immortality cannot be true for immortality — according to the Scriptures — is based upon man's choice to repent, turning to Christ for forgiveness and the promise of life at his second advent. Driving this point home, Hewitt argues, "The second point in the doctrine of man is therefore

his moral freedom, either to accept or reject the grace of God in proffered blessing” (17). Next, in applying this principle, Hewitt argues that man must have the freedom to respond. He says, “Is it conceivable that God calls upon all men to repent, believe and be saved, unless men are free and able to respond? Either they are free, and they are able, or God is insincere and His invitations are a mockery!” (18)

The final argument that Hewitt makes in the second chapter is that the Calvinistic view of total depravity cannot be true in light of the conditional principle in theology. Hewitt says that an innocent baby is not guilty before God because of its own sinfulness — it does not even know right and wrong. When speaking of original sin, Hewitt says,

Original sin is that corruption and depravity of the moral nature which all men inherit from Adam ... it is not personal sin ... it is rather that perverted strain in our transmitted humanity which invariably results in wrong choices and personal transgressions as soon as the individual reaches the age of accountability. 20

In the third chapter, the conditional principal is applied to the doctrine of God. After making the argument for God’s personality — discerned because God has thought, feeling and will — and that God gave the same to man, Hewitt argues, “He [God] will refrain from imposing His own will upon the will of man in the matter of salvation.” (24). The author continues by explaining that even though God’s foreknowledge allows him to know the choices his creatures will make, God is still not the cause of their choices. After making the point that “Adventual Conditionalists acknowledge an infinite and sovereign God”(27), he goes on to talk about God being self-limited. Hewitt argues,

When He [God] created free moral agents in His own likeness, and endowed them with the power of self-determination, He knew that in so doing He was placing some limitations upon His own sovereignty” (28).

The final and most compelling argument Hewitt makes regarding the conditional principle in light of the doctrine of God is that of Christ's atonement. Did Christ die for the world or for only a few — called the elect? Hewitt is articulate in his writing to show that Christ's atonement was far from limited, but because of the conditional principle, "whosoever will" may come to Christ. He writes, "But it is conditional in its appropriation and saving power. That is, it is for all, but it actually becomes operative only for those who comply with its conditions" (21). The final point in this chapter is that since Christ's death was for an unlimited atonement, the church should evangelize — for all are free to choose Christ!

The book takes a more serious turn in chapter 4; here the conditional principle is played out against the doctrine of election. Here Hewitt emphatically states,

Determinism (God has ordained some to be lost and some to be saved) and Freedom are absolute contraries the one to the other, as incompatible as two concepts could possibly be ... A Calvinistic Adventism is as much an anomaly as a Roman Catholic Adventism. (33)

The author makes another strong point in stating, "But if the principle of Conditionalism is valid and true, election cannot well be on an individual basis. For it is clear that determining the destiny of an individual cannot rest with both God and that soul. If God chooses, the man is not really free to choose. If man chooses, God's election must rest on other than an individual basis."

Hewitt takes several pages (34–41) to explain Supra-lapsarian belief and how it led to the Westminster Confession, "the standard confession of faith of English, Scotch, and American Calvinists." Understandably, the author rejects this viewpoint as "arbitrary election." In seeking to prove the idea that God in his foreknowledge knew those that would accept the gospel and those are the ones God ordained to be saved, Hewitt puts down

a stake, which he wants Advent Christians to “tie to.” This stake is in Hewitt’s words “There is no genuine freedom in the absence of the power of contrary choice.” He goes on to explain, “If the will is truly free, always there must be two alternatives, either of which it is possible for the man to choose” (33). To make his argument stronger, Hewitt quotes Justin Martyr,

If this man is destined to be good, and that one to be evil, then neither the one nor the other can be justly approved or condemned; so that unless we suppose that man has it in his power to choose the good, and refuse the evil, no one can be accountable for any action whatever. (Apology 1, 43 [Hewitt 40]).

Hewitt’s last three of his six chapters are directed against the Reformed view of predestination. There is no question for Hewitt that Calvinism and calvinistic ideas of predestination and the conditional principle are mutually exclusive; both cannot be right, nor can there be a way to merge the two. Either man has free will to choose or he is forced to accept what has been predetermined as his only choice.

Chapter five contrasts the conditional principle and the doctrine of perseverance. Here Hewitt presents the idea that true election is not individualistic, but applies rather to a group or class. He writes,

Again we say that in a Conditional theology, election must be on a group or class basis. Not only the elect are called, but all are called; not only the elect may believe, but all may believe; the elect are simply the great class of the whosoever who believe and come; while the non-elect are simply those who reject God, not those whom God rejects ... God never reprobates anybody! ... God foresees. He foreknows. He foretells. He foreordains, but He does not force or predetermine any man’s choice of salvation or perdition. (44–45)

In the last pages of this chapter, Hewitt shows how the doctrine of perseverance or “once in grace always in grace” plays out against the conditional principle. Again, the author shows how mutually exclusive are the Calvinist and Conditionalist views of this doctrine in light of conditionalism. Hewitt writes,

By denying that regenerate persons can fall away and be lost, this theory denies both the freedom of their wills and the principle of Conditionalism. For the doctrine of human freedom would require that even after regeneration the will is still free: free to persevere, or free to fall away. (46)

The author ends with two stories of “sinning saints” and a hypothetical argument, where in Strong’s Systematic Theology one cannot ever lose his salvation, but if one repudiates the faith, it was because he was a hypocrite and was never truly converted.

The final chapter is titled, “The Conditional Principle and Systems of Theology.” Here Hewitt in his words seeks

to set before the reader the New Testament teaching with regard to “perseverance of the saints”; and to get a bird’s-eye view of the field of Systematic Theology in order to discover which, if any, of the several systems of theology recognizes, or is based upon, the Conditional Principle, and is therefore hospitable to the doctrine of Conditional Immortality. (50)

A good number of verses are investigated in most of this chapter that show God plans to “perfect” his work within his children. These verses climax with Hewitt’s definition of the perseverance of the saints: “We believe that the grace of God works effectively in the heart of the believer to eternal salvation; but not in the absence of the conditions of its working, namely, continued faith and obedience, the human will co-operating.” This, according to Hewitt, does not undermine human freedom and is in keeping with the conditional principle.

The last three pages deal with where Conditionalist theology belongs. The author states that of all the western theologies — Augustinian, Lutheran, Calvinistic (also called the Reformed Theology), Pelagian, Semi-pelagian, Socinian, Tridentine and Arminian — that it is the Arminian theology that best coincides with the conditional principle (8).

The chapter ends by stating why Calvinism should be rejected and Arminianism should be embraced.

We take our stand squarely with the Arminians. From the beginning of our history we have recognized that our theological position is Arminian in character. To depart from that stand, and to try now to crawl under the Calvinist umbrella, would be in my considered judgment, as I stand face to face with the grim Reaper, not only a betrayal of our heritage but also a grave threat to our future. God help us to be true to the message He has given us! (60–61)

*The Conditional Principle in Theology* struck a nerve within the denomination and was countered by Dr. James A. Nichols Jr. in his paper titled, “The Conditional Principle” (no date given, some time after 1954). In this paper, Nichols challenges several of the arguments presented by Hewitt, and he explains biblical conditionalism. In his words, it is “quite compatible with biblical Calvinism, but is in many respects out of harmony with the types of Arminianism advocated in the pamphlet.”

Nichols first asks, “What kind of Conditionalism, what kind of Arminianism, what kind of Calvinism?” These are good questions. The challenges Nichols makes to Hewitt’s ideas are these.

1. Room should be left for God’s freedom of action, challenging Hewitt’s, “All the mercies of God are conditioned upon human factors: attitudes, choices, or actions.”

2. The conditional principle “does not imply the falsity of

the Biblical doctrine of unregenerate man's innate depravity and guilt," opposing Hewitt's "inbred sin does not mean inbred guilt."

3. Nichols stated that the conditional principle was misused by Hewitt to uphold human ability, thus negating such statements as "Every invitation of the gospel, therefore, implies that the human will is both free and able to say a simple 'yes' to God."

4. Next, Nichols feels that Hewitt also misused the conditional principle to limit the sovereignty of God with statements like: "Thus, when it comes to the moral realm, God has, by a sovereign act of His own self-determining will, determined that his power, or decree, shall not extend over the moral decision of free beings."

5. Nichols next takes issue with Hewitt's idea that the atonement was in no sense limited, pointing out that only those that believe will have their sin covered by Christ's sacrifice.

6. Nichols also feels that the conditional principle is misused when it is interpreted as inconsistent with the doctrine of God's election of individuals for salvation in a Conditionalist Theology."

7. The next mistake Nichols feels Hewitt makes is where "The Conditional Principle is inconsistent with the doctrine that all regenerate people will freely continue to meet the conditions and finally secure full salvation," which opposes Hewitt's arguments against perseverance of the Saints. This area seemed most important to Nichols who spends nearly one-third of the paper proving that Hewitt was actually arguing against the "Necessitarian View of Perseverance," citing many biblical examples and passages. However, it should be noted that both Hewitt and Nichols rejected the common "Once Saved Always Saved" doctrine.

8. Nichols also felt the conditional principle was misapplied when God was not included within it, causing it to be focused only on man — this is similar to argument one.

9. Nichols's ninth argument against Hewitt's pamphlet is that the practical results of accepting the conclusions set forth in Hewitt's pamphlet are that God would not be sovereign and would have no foreknowledge.

In concluding his paper, Nichols states,

The reader has now discerned that this paper comes to very different conclusions from those set forth in the pamphlet. On the other hand, he has also come to realize that these conclusions “are not always the same as those against which the pamphlet was written.”

Again Nichols believes that many of Hewitt’s arguments were against a “Necessitarian Calvinism,” not biblical ideas that Calvin embraced, which Nichols calls “Biblical Calvinism.” Winding his argument down, Nichols calls all parties to believe the Scriptures and the truth found therein, whether Arminius or Calvin agrees or not.

Finally, Nichols directly states that the conditional principal should not be limited to any one theological position, but should only be tied to biblical truth, which includes man’s and God’s actions.

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**“THERE’S A GREAT CHANGE COMING”**  
**Scriptural Meditation at the Funeral of**  
**Arthur “Bud” Ballard**

**Floyd McIntyre**

A friend of mine from the Midwest gave me a Christmas gift last year. It was a subscription to a magazine that I would have otherwise never read. The second issue arrived in yesterday’s mail. The cover had the following wording; “Where do we find hope?” Sadly, the article suggested that we find hope by persevering, by never giving up trying to bring about change through the political process and social justice.

No doubt the world needs to be changed. And social justice is commendable, but it will not be brought about by the political process alone. However, the Bible declares that there will be a day of great change.

Even if we could bring about all the changes that we feel are needed, the biggest and most important change of all will only occur when individuals are changed from being mortal to immortal by the grace of God alone through faith in the Son of God alone.

Today we are once again confronted by death — the end of life — even the very long and well lived life of a chosen child of God, but nevertheless death has occurred and we are helpless to reverse it. So how should we think about these things? What is next for Bud? What is next for any of us who will succumb to our own mortality?

The Bible does provide us with an answer or explanation to this very troubling question.

## I. The Explanation

It is found in a number of places in Scripture, but perhaps the best place to start is with the words of the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians. We read them earlier but hear them again:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess 4:13–14).

The key phrase for us here is in the beginning: “we do not want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep.” This is clearly an important statement for some people who feel that we can never know anything about what happens to people after death. They think there is no sense in trying to figure it out. In some cases folks create their own ideas about what happens. And they find comfort in false ideas and imaginations. But the apostle desires that we know. He gives the rest of the explanation in the next few verses:

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (15–18)

Notice that the apostle makes it clear that this is not his own idea but rather, as he puts it, “a word from the Lord.” Notice the sequence of events:

1. The Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command from the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God.
2. Then those who have died as believers in Jesus will be raised.
3. Then the Christians who are still alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.
4. And finally all Christians will always be with the Lord. And we are to encourage (comfort) each other with these words!

These words of explanation speak of a coming resurrection. Our resurrection. And this is based upon the resurrection of Jesus and his power to raise the dead.

## II. The Experience

Before Jesus was crucified, he ministered on earth to many, some of whom had lost loved ones to what was understood to be death. On three occasions he raised them to life and on two of those occasions he explained to those who were so troubled that

their loved one had not died in the sense of final death, but were sleeping and he raised them back to life. First there was a son of a widow, then the daughter of Jairus, and finally his friend Lazarus. Time does not permit us to read all of these stories today.

Of course the most profound experience of all was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus himself after the crucifixion. And therefore because he lives and has the power to raise the dead, we can have the assurance that we shall live also.

The experiences recorded in the Scriptures leads us to an expectation.

### III. The Expectation

Paul's letters both to the Thessalonians and particularly to the Corinthians help us to understand what to expect. The Corinthian letter tells us that we can expect CHANGE. The entire fifteenth chapter is given to a discussion of the notion of resurrection, which is the real hope of the Christian. And at the resurrection **a great change is promised.**

That which is perishable, that which is mortal, shall be changed. Paul declares that we shall not all die; some will be alive when Jesus returns. But whether awake or asleep, when the Lord does come back to this earth, all his children WILL be changed. the change will occur very quickly! In a moment! In just a blink (or twinkling) of an eye. When that trumpet blast shall sound both the Christian who has died along with those who are alive will be changed from mortal to immortal, from perishable to imperishable.

The best known verse in the whole Bible is undoubtedly John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Don't miss the contrast here between perishing and living. The believer will not PERISH, or cease to exist, but rather he will live eternally following the resurrection.

Our bodies will ultimately wear out. That will happen to us all if we live beyond those 70 or 80 plus years the psalmist spoke about. Even if disease or accident ends our life prematurely, regardless of the age of death, for the Christian, there is “a great change coming.”

But the change is only for those who know Jesus as Lord and Savior as Bud did. And if any of us want to see him again, we, too, must repent of our sins and confess Christ as our Savior, for eternal life is exclusively promised to those who are believers in Jesus. I am sure Bud would agree and would hope you would make that same confession of faith that he did so many years ago.

Closing Prayer: Father, we thank you for the privilege of knowing Bud, a man of faith. Thank you for the opportunity to review a life lived for God and for the challenge to give our lives to Christ as well. Our hope is firmly fixed on the promised return of Jesus. May we all experience that great change from mortal to immortal when he comes. In Jesus name we pray, AMEN.

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## CONDITIONALIST REVIEW

Peterson v. Fudge — Again

A couple of recent examples show that the debate about the eternal destiny is as vigorous as ever. One is a small book, largely of reprints, condensed and popularized in support of eternal conscious torment. The other is a movie about the case for conditional immortality as represented by the work of Edward Fudge. First the book. *Hell: For Real or Does Everyone Go to Heaven?* General editors: Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 2011. 89 pages.

This book is intended to “provide readers with a simple, brief, and biblical explanation and defense of hell,” that is the

traditional view that includes “eternal, conscious torment” (8). It has six chapters: “Is Hell for Real?” by Albert Mohler; “What Jesus Said about Hell” by Robert Yarbrough; “Three Pictures of Hell” by Christopher W. Morgan; “Three Perspectives on Hell” by Robert A. Peterson; “Does Everyone Go to Heaven?” by J. I. Packer; “Preaching Hell in a Tolerant Age” by Timothy Keller.

Mohler begins with a summary of the cultural factors that have led to a general decline in popular attention to the subject of hell. Modern society has “a changed view of God, ... a changed view of justice, ... the advent of a psychological worldview, ... a changed concept of salvation,” and a changed view of God’s goodness (20–22). Conditionalists share Mohler’s concern about the impact of modern culture. Conformity to the current culture is perhaps the most insidious temptation that the Christian Church has faced from the first century to the present.

Each of the other chapters is worth separate consideration. Here we are limited to certain points that are common to most of them.

1. The traditionalists insist on using the word annihilation despite the fact that it is an emotionally laden term that invariably carries a misimpression of the doctrines involved.
2. Many proponents of eternal conscious punishing mollify the penalty. Not this sextet. They do not hesitate to use the word “torment.”
3. The same set of verses that may be congenial to eternal torment are referenced. In a popular book like this at least, the strong arguments in favor of conditional immortality are ignored. Many of Jesus’ references to hell, for example, do not specify any length of time, but they are all cited in favor of eternal torment.
4. It is interesting to note the tendency of each contributor to wander into the territory of his fellow contributors. Yarbrough moves from “What Jesus Said about Hell” into Paul, the Old Testament, early church history, and into “the moral vertigo of much of contemporary Western culture” (Mohler’s territory). Packer moves from Universalism to a condemnation of conditional immortality.

This book will give some handy reinforcement to people who are already conditioned to traditional views. I doubt that

it will convince anybody who is seriously examining the various possibilities.

On the other side, Edward Fudge in his own words:

**gracEmail®**  
**REACTIONS REVEAL GOD'S TOUCH**  
**God's Grace via Movie**

**Edward Fudge**

Viewers in five theaters of special pre-release showings in Houston, Texas and Athens, Alabama, have been overwhelmingly positive about the movie “Hell and Mr. Fudge.” Attendees praise the producers and director for their technical expertise, but also laud the film’s spirit and message. Audiences have reserved greatest appreciation for its intangible but skillfully-interwoven themes of commitment to God, fidelity despite opposition, the cost of discipleship, and the startling difference between flesh-based “religion” and a living relationship with God.

After one showing, a high school girl deeply involved in evangelism and her mother asked to share her story with me. She has been struggling in Bible study and prayer over the common tradition of unending torment, which she has been told is the Bible’s teaching. Somehow she had learned of this film, tracked down details, and asked her mother to bring her to see it. She told me repeatedly that “Hell and Mr. Fudge” was God’s answer to her prayers.

Other audience-members were touched by the beauty that characterizes this movie at many levels. One macho man said (and his wife confirmed) that he never cried at movies, but that he broke down twice during this one and wept without shame.

Feedback from viewers makes clear that this movie touches people deep within — whether they are religious or irreligious makes no difference. It has a message to communicate but not an ax to grind. It conveys that message gently and with grace. “Hell and Mr. Fudge” involves theology and includes some technical

language. Yet even children still enjoy it. I strongly believe that this movie project is of the Lord, if I am graced with any discernment of such matters at all.

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## REVIEW ESSAYS

*What They Didn't Teach You in Seminary: 25 Lessons for Successful Ministry in Your Church*, by James Emery White.

Reviewed by Michael Alix

The statement, “They didn’t teach this in seminary” is very common in pastoral ministry. I graduated from seminary in 2008 with an MDiv and became the senior pastor of Blessed Hope Church in Waterville, Maine, in October of 2010. When picking up *What They Didn't Teach You In Seminary: 25 Lessons for Successful Ministry in Your Church*, I was a bit skeptical at first. The author, James Emery White, is the founding and senior pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, N.C., what many would call a fast-growing mega church. But he has also had some time in the seminary world, not just as a student and alumnus, but as the President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary for a short period of time. While he was president, I was in the second year of my MDiv studies at Gordon-Conwell and even took a theology class with him. So you can say that James Emery White has some “street cred” when it comes to the topic of how seminaries prepare pastors and what the seminaries miss.

I will say right off the bat that I was skeptical of the book, as I am with most mega church growth guys. So I will lay my biases out on the table and say I was reading with an eye to confirm my skepticism. While I found many things I expected from a pastor of a large church, I also found some very positive things to be gleaned from the book.

First, we will start with a few negatives so that we can end on a positive note. White admits that seminaries do a great job of preparing pastors to be teachers and handle the word of God, but they fall short when it comes to the vocation of ministry and the day in and day out expectations of a local church. In an effort to remedy this, he attempts to inform pastors out of seminary of some areas that they need to be aware of that the seminary did not address or only addressed at a surface level. It is obvious through the chapters that he runs in the crowd of large church mentality. Occasionally he mentions how smaller churches or “solo-pastors” might deal with issues.

You can see this most often when he talks about hiring staff to fill holes in a ministry. Being part of a small denomination and serving a church that is not small but also not large, the idea of hiring someone to fill a ministry need is very foreign. I appreciated his emphasis on hiring people from within rather than without because you can run into trouble hiring unknown people, but it would have been nice to have read more about raising up volunteer leadership rather than paid staff. He does address volunteers in a minimal fashion. I rarely got the feeling he was writing with small church pastors regularly in mind, especially small church pastors not located in the “Bible belt.”

Many of the ideas that White talks about are not quick fixes, especially if a church is small and struggling. For example, he has one chapter about not dying out because of old age. While I agree churches need to minister to all age ranges, his solution to becoming a younger church is a bit disingenuous. Essentially his recommendation to keep your church young (he claims it will not alienate the older generations) is to hire young adults, platform young adults, and acknowledge young adults.

Now he does address at the beginning of the book that you must focus on the character, competence and ability to be catalytic (creative, energized, spring in step, etc.), chemistry, and calling of an individual being placed in ministry. He is not saying that we should put any “old” young person up front. But I am a bit wary of doing something just to be “appealing” to any type

of group. I agree that we need to involve and give young adults a chance, I am one, but don't try to pull the wool over the young person's eyes and stick their peers up in front just to appeal to them. It is surface level attraction ministry that will fade unless you are able to amp it up over time. What you win them with is what you keep them with, and many times you have to step it up in order to keep them because they are expecting more, and that can get us into dangerous territory.

We also don't want to forget Paul's instruction to submit to our older generations and to learn from them. I don't believe White is saying this, but I was a bit disappointed in platforming young adults to lure young adults in. Also, should we just be about looks? Can we learn from the back lash over airbrushing celebrities? People want us to be honest and real, not necessarily sleek and young.

My final negative critique is that apart from some famous quotations or a Scripture verse at the beginning of each chapter, White does not regularly base his argument in theology or argue that handling things in the way he proposes is most glorifying to God and his kingdom. Granted, much of what White addresses does not necessarily require an extracted Bible verse, but it would be nice to have his solutions grounded in the gospel. For example, there aren't many verses about having a clean and orderly platform, but the issues he does address, like what a leader and church does or does not do, should be grounded firmly in gospel commitment.

Now that I have given the negatives, I have to say that I generally enjoyed and appreciated the book. While I was many times overwhelmed by all that I don't know, and I am very aware at the long road ahead, it is helpful to read and know that people have gone before and survived. White's insight is varied and wide ranging. He takes on some minutia, like nursery, as well as big picture issues, like conflict resolution.

White writes in a very readable and straight forward manner. Not at any point did the book feel to drag on. The chapters were short, to the point and logical. He gives plenty of first-hand

stories of both success and failure. While most pastors will not have “success” on such a grand scale as White, he does give us sign posts to look for and calls our attention to areas that we may not think are truly pertinent to our ministries.

Finally, he is honest. I appreciate that he does not back down from sharing the success and failures he has encountered. He even shows his heart, weakness and temptation to be prideful in the growth of his church and the need to have the best, including getting well known worship leaders from other churches. As he admits, it is a bad idea, especially doing it in the way he did it.

I would generally recommend this book for any pastor. It is quick, easy and very practical. One may not agree with some of his philosophy, but there are still many nuggets from which anyone can benefit. I will end with this, however, there are many things you can read in a book or have a conversation about, but it still does not totally prepare you to deal with it until you are in the thick of it. A church’s success cannot rely on the pastor’s charisma, administrative gifts, smoke, lasers or clean bathrooms, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ and the means of grace with which he has supplied his Church.

**“ ... the creative fruitfulness of disagreement and conflict. ... ”**

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*A Traveler’s Guide to the Kingdom: Journeying Through the Christian Life*, by James Emery White. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press 2012. 204 p.

This book takes you to nine special places that the author has visited and introduces you to one special historical figure associated with each place. From the place and the person he draws spiritual lessons. This pastor of a thousand-member evangelical church begins the tour in a pub, and he ends it in a concentration camp.

The first visit is to the Eagle and Child Pub, Oxford, England, frequented in the recent past by C. S. Lewis. The theme is “You are converted.” White quotes Walter Hooper who says that Lewis was “the most thoroughly converted man I ever met” (9).

The pilgrimage moves on to Iona Abbey on an island off the northwest coast of Scotland. The heroic figure is Columba, who reintroduced Christianity into Britain and founded many monasteries. The theme is, “You are spiritual.” The author is not quite sure of the dynamics, but for him, “Iona is ... a spiritual place. It feels like you are standing on the edge of the world, alone with your spirit before the Spirit” (33).

We move on to St. Catherine’s in the Sinai (Moses), the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg (Nelson Mandela), Chartres Cathedral in France (Abelard), the Billy Graham Library, Charlotte, N. C. (Billy Graham), Lutherstadt in Wittenberg, Germany (Martin Luther), Ten Boom House, Haarlem, Holland (Corrie Ten Boom), and Dachau concentration camp (Elie Wiesel).

The two most interesting chapters for me were the ones on apartheid and on the Holocaust. The contrast between Nelson Mandela and Elie Wiesel is striking. Sometimes human suffering destroys faith; sometimes it strengthens it. White recounts the incident in Wiesel’s book, *Night*, in which the prisoners in Dachau were forced to witness the hanging of three people including a boy about 12. The boy died slowly and painfully. Someone in the crowd asked, “Where is God now?” Wiesel answered to himself, “Where is he? Here he is — he is hanging here on this gallows” (179). Mandela’s Christian faith remained strong during 18 years of imprisonment for opposing apartheid. He became president of his country. His “refusal to hate” has made possible a unified peaceful South Africa.

A pleasant mix of travelogue, history, personal interest stories, exhortation and spiritual advice — such as this book by a multitalented prolific author. (The Library of Congress lists about one book by White per year for the last 20 years.) The books reviewed above are not easy bedtime reading. For this one and the one that follows, however, recline at the end of the day

with your feet up, and enjoy a half hour at a time of interesting and beneficial reading.

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*Voila*, by Edna Davis Amnott; edited by Brenda Amnott. Pike, N.H.: REBA Books, 2005.

Mrs. Amnott recounts the rigors of life in rural central New Hampshire in the early 20th century, including the Great Depression. Among the challenges were moves from Canaan, N.H. to Crouseville, Maine (where Edna’s mother, Susie Davis, became pastor of the Advent Christian Church while her father was state evangelist), to three Massachusetts towns: Colrain, Otis and Lenox, and full circle to Pike, N.H.

Edna reveals the emotional struggles of a tall awkward girl amidst parents who were well known leaders and outgoing sisters, 11 and two years older. She became a spiritual champion in the process (although she would not say so). She and Ray (“Pappy”) raised four children — Helen, Ray, Tom and Joel. From 1969 through 1986, she gave valuable assistance to the library at Berkshire Christian College (BCC). During that time, she and Ray provided board, room and good spiritual input for several students.

Edna had a face-transforming smile and an attractive sense of humor. Towards the end of her time at BCC, she posted a cartoon picturing three or four old ladies, the caption reading, “I’m so old, all my friends [in heaven] think I didn’t make it.”

*Voila* is not only a compelling account of a family’s struggle against odds; it is also a significant bit of Advent Christian history. It is a worthy companion to Edna’s older sister’s biography of their parents, *Frank and Susie*, 1983. This 155-page book, plus numerous plates of photographs, is available from Reba Books, 1354 Brushwood Rd., Pike, NH 03780. Price \$14.95 post paid.

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