

*Present Truth in the Real World (1993)*

By Jon Paulien

CHAPTER ELEVEN

OUTREACH AS A CHURCH

The preceding chapter clearly shows that one cannot reach out to secular people in a vacuum. At some point one needs to confront the inevitable tension between the way the church does things and the way that secular people respond. We have to struggle with the question of how the Adventist horizon and the secular horizon can come together without compromising the best qualities of either. What can a local church or conference do to make a bigger impact in the secular environment?

***Education***

First of all, we need to educate our own Adventist people in a number of areas. We need to educate about the need for a strong devotional life in a secular environment. The principles outlined in Part Two of this book can provide a starting point for such education. We also need to educate about the importance of the SDA lifestyle. Rather than helping evangelism, lowering standards hinders it. It is the "secularized" churches that are in decline. When secular people look for a church, they often pick the most demanding ones. So to be conservative in the area of lifestyle is not a negative unless combined with a rigid and judgmental attitude. A principled approach to lifestyle brings the divine into practical, everyday

existence.

We also need to educate about the problem of horizons, to help our people understand that without a lot of listening and learning we will not be effective in reaching secular neighbors, friends, and family. In the process it is helpful to point out that the Bible does not offer a single, rigid model for outreach and evangelism. There are at least two great models of ministry, the fortress and the salt. Since most human beings are uncomfortable with change, it helps a great deal when we can see that opening ourselves up to change in the area of outreach will bring us into conformity with Scripture rather than the reverse.

### ***Multiply Ministries***

As part of the process of education, we need to encourage a multiplicity of ministries. Secular people are as diverse as snowflakes. They are not normally reached in large groups. Each secular person tends to respond in a unique way. The only way, therefore, to counter the pluralism of society is with the pluralism of the Holy Spirit, an explosion of all kinds of outreach ministries empowered by the Spirit. This will not come from central planning but from the members discovering the unique roles God has developed for each person. I am encouraged, therefore, by the spiritual gifts movement in our church. People are becoming interested in how the Holy Spirit has provided a unique mix of abilities to every Christian. No two people are gifted in exactly the same way. If secular people are as diverse as snowflakes, we need a missionary force that is as diverse as snowflakes. This is exactly what the Holy Spirit provides; every Christian discovering the unique niche where they can serve best.

Service is filled with joy and excitement whenever it flows not only from the gifts of the Spirit, but also from that unique burden or passion that God gives each person for ministry. Every person has a special passion for something. When a Christian ministers in the area of his or her passion, both maximum usefulness and personal fulfillment are attained. Many Adventists that I know have a consuming passion for New York City. Other people have a heavy burden for a particular ethnic group, or a particular class of society such as the handicapped or the wealthy. Others have a passion for the environment. I suppose it would be safe to say that I have a passion for the unchurched, and for those who have become disenchanted with conventional religion. If you have a life's passion, it is within that life passion that your ministry will be most effective.

My mom's passion is in the kitchen. She only recently found out that that was also her ministry. My parents carried a lifetime burden for a German-oriented church in a major city. For years they tried to give Bible studies and build that church in traditional ways, only to see it dwindle down to around twenty members. Sometime in the last decade something happened in that church. Among other things, my parents stopped trying to be what they were not and concentrated on the gift of hospitality that God had given them all along.

I came home from Andrews once, walked in the door and my Mom said, "Oh, I'd like you to meet your new brother!" He was sitting in the living room, bare to the waist with a gold chain around his neck and a big gold medallion on his chest. This was going to be an interesting brother! I soon learned of his homosexual orientation. He lived next door and he would just

come over for hours at a time and watch my mother do the housework. I don't know what the psychological dynamic was, but he absolutely adored my Mom as she opened her life to him.

I found out that my Mom had also developed a close relationship with some Buddhist girls who were also homosexually orientated. Buddhists! I thought to myself, what has happened to my conservative Adventist parents? One Sabbath there were twenty-five young people home for lunch, twelve were church members and thirteen were not, all shared the table out in the yard on a summer afternoon. Everyone felt at home. I began to suspect that my folks had also found home, the place where they could be themselves in service for God.

When my parents left that city a few years ago, there were nearly a hundred young people in that church. Many of them made a point to come over to me and say, "We're so sorry your parents are leaving--they're the reason we're in this church." My folks deny to this day that they had anything to do with that, but there are powerful results when we reach out to people in the way that the Holy Spirit designed us personally to do it. Many people are gifted in the area of giving Bible studies. Although Bible studies did not work well for my parents, I do have a gift for them, so the gifts of the Spirit are not hereditary. We serve happiest and we serve best when we serve in harmony with the gifts and passions that God has given each of us. If we are gifted in the area of Bible studies, we will love it and be successful at it. People will sense that we are making a difference. My parents discovered their unique ministry late in life and when they did they began reaching a class of people that you or I might never reach.

Nothing will "energize the laity" as much as discovering God's unique plan for each person's life and outreach. No pastor can reach the secular community by himself or herself. It takes an army of people working under the empowerment of the Spirit. When a church activates the energy of the Spirit, it is amazing the different kinds of ministries that will emerge. When people serve God where they don't fit, they go through life unfulfilled and with little success in evangelism. But when you serve at the center of your life's passion, life becomes the greatest thing on earth. There is no substitute for knowing that you are where God wants you to be and that you're doing what God wants you to do.

I speak here from personal experience. I genuinely believe that I am currently placed where God wants me to be to do what He wants me to do. I do not feel that I am doing the job as well as I could, I have so much to learn and so much growing to do, but various providences over the years make it clear that I should not seek fulfillment elsewhere. And it is hard to top the feeling that comes when you know that you are where God wants you to be and that you're doing what God wants you to do.

A spirit-driven multiplicity of ministries is the perfect compliment to the incredible diversity of the Information Age. Secular people are best reached one on one through personal interaction; therefore, it is better to have a hundred ministers than just one. If there are a hundred members in a church, there can be a hundred ministers if the church catches this vision.

### ***Workplace Evangelism***

One reality of the current situation is the fact that we have moved from the Industrial Age into the Age of Communication. This change in the way people think, work and do business has serious implications for our attempts to reach out to the secular world. I believe that in coming years the best place for evangelism is going to be the workplace. It is in the workplace that more Seventh-day Adventists come in contact with secular people than anywhere else. The workplace is the best place to reach secular people. But many opportunities are lost because the outreach possibilities of the workplace are either misused or go unnoticed. We must not allow misguided or unethical attempts to evangelize the workplace to steer us away from our best opportunity.

One of the best ways to reach secular people in the workplace is through excellence in work performance. Noteworthy excellence impresses secular people that a person has something special going for him or her. This is related to the attractiveness that was mentioned at the close of Part Two. Let me illustrate the powerful impact of excellence on corporate attitudes with a story that occurred in the School of Technology at Andrews University.

There is a firm in Chicago called AGS&R that is considered one of the top two or three multi-image operations in the United States. The Andrews University media-tech department likes to take students to see AGS&R's operation so as to better understand what that kind of life is like. At one of these meetings a student asked the company president a question, "I'm a Seventh-day Adventist, and that means I don't work from Friday night to Saturday night. If I

wanted a job in your company, would that be a problem?"

The President replied, "Yes, that would be a problem because when projects are due around here, we have to work around the clock and on weekends in order to meet deadlines. If you had that kind of restriction, we wouldn't hire you."

Well that was a real deflator to these young people who were soon to be seeking jobs in the marketplace. But they stuck with their program anyway. Not long after that, Andrews paid fees to enter a number of student multi-image projects at a festival in Chicago. When the program came out the teacher discovered to his dismay that all the presentations were scheduled on Sabbath. Since many of these presentations had been shown on Sabbath at the General Conference and in other church settings, the teacher spent some time wrestling with his conscience, but came to the conclusion that even though these presentations might be appropriate in a Sabbath context, the audience was not going to be in a Sabbath mood. Somehow he felt this was not the thing to do. So he went to the head of that festival and said, "I'm sorry, we cannot allow these things to be shown on Saturday, they have to be moved to another time."

The organizer of the festival said, "I'm sorry. The program's made out and the way it is the way it is."

The teacher replied, "Well, if that's the case, give me the programs. You can keep our money, but we won't be there."

"Oh, let's not be rash about this. Let me see what I can do."

When the time came, all of the Andrews programs were rescheduled for Sunday and they won festival awards. When the festival was over, the organizer came up to the teacher and said, "I want you to know something, we understand why you took the stand that you did. We really do understand your convictions."

What was he saying? He was saying, "There's something special about you people, your work is the best. Evidently your convictions must have something to do with that."

Not long after that a graduating Andrews student went down to AGS&R and said, "I'm from Andrews University. I'm a Seventh-day Adventist. I don't work from Friday night till Saturday night, and I'd like a job here."

The personnel director looked him in the eye and said, "You're hired."

The student said, "What do you mean I'm hired?"

The personnel director said, "You're hired."

The student repeated, "Why?"

"For a very simple reason. You guys are the best."

"Well what about the Saturday restriction?"

The personnel director responded, "We can't mess with that. There's something about you people that's different--that provides a special excellence in your work. If we were to make you compromise your convictions, you probably wouldn't be any good."

Now is that a witness? Is that being the salt of the earth? I call that workplace evangelism. It may be different than anything we have called evangelism before. But the



workplace is becoming the best place to make a difference for Christ in the secular environment.

You would be amazed at the hundreds of Adventists that work in the Federal Office Buildings in Washington, DC. Several have even reached some of the highest levels. It is tragic that so many are misunderstood in their own churches and do not receive the encouragement and support that would enable them to salt this whole country! A few years back, however, an idea was born that could revolutionize the outreach of this church, making federal office buildings centers of Adventist influence!

The first step was to find all the Adventists who worked in a particular office building and encourage them to take one lunch a week together. Now this could be frightening from an administrative perspective. You might bring together six Adventists from six different churches in three or four different conferences. But these groups all had one thing in common. They were all interested in the same area of the government's operation. Their work often gave them more in common with each other than they had with their neighbors or the members of their local church! By getting together once a week for lunch, they could talk about what it means to be an Adventist in the Department of Housing and Urban Development, for example. What contribution can the faith make to the needs and concerns that energize the work in that department? From time to time the groups invited Adventist speakers with specialized expertise to address such concerns and opened the meetings up to their workmates. "Hey, we're going to have this lunch meeting to discuss this issue that's been troubling our

department." Since the government encourages and provides space for such informal work-related get-togethers, the possibilities are enormous.

If the workplace is the best place for evangelism, then I would suggest that we need Seventh-day Adventists everywhere in the workplace. "Go ye into all the world" should not be limited to specialized moments for outreach. Our occupations are part of the world also. Christ longs to reach people in the workplace through Adventist Christians who are fully devoted to Him. The possibilities are especially large in media, education, journalism, and the arts because these are the occupations that influence more people than any other. Such opportunities offer enlarged spheres of influence. I must repeat, however, that such outreach is not for everybody. It should never be undertaken without a full awareness of the dangers discussed in Part Two.

Clifton Davis was a very special student of ours at the Seminary. It was clear that he had the capacity to make a major impact in the secular world if he could find the right niche. I was concerned that the pastorate might not be the place for his unique gifts. There are many, many successful black evangelists in North America. Clifton would clearly have been successful as an evangelist in the fortress and crusade model. There is nothing wrong with that mode. It has a continuing role to play in our outreach. But I had never met a person with Clifton's level of ability to relate to the secular mind. So for three or four months, I felt a burden from the Lord to challenge him to an outreach more along the lines of the salt model. I had no specific idea in mind, and I never quite got the opportunity to share it with him.

Finally one day I saw him in the hall and said, "Clifton, I need to see you in my office;

there's something I need to talk to you about."

He said, "That's interesting. There's something I want to talk to you about." When he arrived at my office he said, "What did you want to talk to me about?"

I said, "Well, you tell me first what you wanted to tell me."

He replied, "Well, I got a call last week from Hollywood. They want to revive my old show and modify it a little bit to where I become pastor of a local church and play that on the show."

I said, "Well, what about the Sabbath?"

"I told the producer that and he said, 'What's the Sabbath?'"

So I said, 'What do ya mean, what's the Sabbath; you ought to know, you're Jewish; don't you remember, from Friday night sundown to Saturday night sundown.' 'Oh,' he said, 'I had no idea you guys were into that!'"

The producer said that because Clifton is an African-American, and he figured the Sabbath was only for Jews.

"Maybe some of us are keeping it because you don't," Clifton told him. "In any case, I would want Sabbaths off."

The producer said, "Actors don't get that kind of stuff."

"If you want me on the show, I get Sabbath off."

"Well, I'll see what I can do."

He called Clifton back a day later and said, "You've got the Sabbath."

Clifton then said, "One more thing, I want some control over the script, I don't intend to do just anything someone might think up."

The producer protested, "Actors never get control of the script, that's unheard of."

"Then I'm not on the show."

"Well, I'll see what I can do."

Clifton told me that he had been given significant control over the script through a board of pastors who would examine each script before it would be passed. Things were sounding quite interesting.

I then said, "If you take that route, it would be kind of nice for you to still have some kind of connection with the Adventist pastorate."

"You're not going to believe this, Loma Linda Church just called me up and said they'd like me to be half-time pastor and half-time in Hollywood!"

I don't know how you relate to that, but to me it sounded too much like the hand of God when you put it all together. There have been things on Clifton's show that bother me and other Adventists. But the show was not designed to satisfy an Adventist audience. What Clifton did needs to be understood in the light of the entire setting of what this book is all about. I believe in zero-based evangelism. That means that we try almost anything once and if it doesn't work, try something else. I believe this attitude to be in harmony with counsel that has guided us as a church for years:

Men are needed who pray to God for wisdom, and who, under the guidance of God, can put new life into the old methods of labor and can invent new plans and new

methods of awakening the interest of church members and reaching the men and women of the world.

Ellen G. White MS 117, 1907 (quoted in Ev 105)

Means will be devised to reach hearts. Some of the methods used in this work will be different from the methods used in the work in the past; but let no one, because of this, block the way by criticism.

RH, Sept 30, 1902

Clifton's presence in Hollywood has made a difference. Hollywood is a unique people-group. You certainly don't reach Hollywood people from the outside. The place is so insulated that Hollywood actors tend to marry only other Hollywood actors or actresses. The only way to reach these people is from inside. And as I talked to Clifton, I became more and more convinced that God had something special in mind here. Remembering how God used Esther helps me to understand that God has bigger ideas and plans than we do. Not only has Clifton been able share Christ with some major public names, but I have noticed two changes in Hollywood since his arrival. One, Christians are being portrayed in a more positive light than used to be the case. In the past Christians only made it on television as Bible-thumping bigots or hypocrites hiding secret vices. Today, Christians are occasionally portrayed as normal people who struggle with significant issues in life. Two, I've noticed more and more actors and athletes who are willing to admit to a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is what salt ministry is all about. Influencing the larger society in behalf of the kingdom of God.

But no secular outreach is more dangerous to spirituality than Hollywood. So I warned Clifton along the lines of Part Two of this book. "You must listen to me, Clifton. What you're doing is going to be the most dangerous thing you've ever tried to do since you became a Christian. You're going back into a setting in which you were once an entirely different person. And frankly, the odds are pretty strong that, without special safeguards, you're going to lose your way."

I continued, "What you need is a person who knows you better than you know yourself, who will watch you, and observe you, and stay close to you. And you must be open and honest with this friend. You need to make a contract with your friend that if the day ever comes when

he says, 'Clifton, you're losing it,' you'll quit Hollywood on the spot and walk away. If you don't do this, I can't advise you to go."

He said, "I know a person like that, and I will do that."

The day may come when Clifton decides it was a mistake. If you don't agree with what he is doing, I respect that, and he respects that. But instead of writing a hate-filled letter, let me suggest something more effective; pray for him, he needs our encouragement and our prayers. And so it is with many others in similar positions. If the workplace is becoming the best place for evangelism, it will at times be necessary to take some risks. Unless the "preacher" is daily energized by the disciplines of the Spirit, he or she can drift until they become a "castaway," to use Paul's language in 1 Cor 9. We need to spiritually hold up the hands of those taking such risks for Christ. It is not for everybody, but if God should bring you to a special place of influence know that you are in that job for a specific purpose and that you will have the opportunity to exalt God in a unique way.