

What Is A Christian Lifestyle?

Endtime Issues No. 71

4 July 2001

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The many messages I have been receiving from different parts of the world regarding lifestyle issues, are making me increasingly aware of the fact many Adventists are deeply troubled by the erosion of church standards. While in the past divisive issues tended to be more theological in nature, today they tend to be more practical. Some of the issues debated are worship styles, music, drinking, divorce and remarriage, outward adornment, Sabbath activities (going to restaurants or places of entertainment), sexual permissiveness, entertainment. It appears that some members lose their balance by becoming fanatics, others by becoming permissive or indifferent toward moral standards.

The awareness of this problem has motivated me to address in the next few newsletters this basic question: What does it mean to live a Christian lifestyle at the beginning of the third millennium while we are expecting our soon-coming Savior? If I can find enough time to research and think through this question, I might eventually publish a book on THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE. In this newsletter I am sharing with you what could become the introductory chapter of this potential book. Any constructive criticism you can offer me will be gratefully received. Incidentally, do you think that this is a relevant subject to pursue? Let me know what you think.

AN APOLOGY FOR FAILING TO REPLY

Some of you may be wondering why I have ignored your messages, especially since it has been my practice in the past to answer them promptly. Let me assure you that I have not become indifferent. It is simply lack of time. Lately I have been repeatedly away, speaking at campmeetings and weekend seminars. Upon my return, I usually find hundreds of messages in my mail box. Thank you for taking time to express your comments and concerns. Eventually, I hope to find time to briefly acknowledge all your messages.

It is becoming evident that my pressing schedule leaves me with little time for correspondence and preparation of the ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS. The wall calendar tells me that I am solidly booked for weekend seminars in North America and overseas every single Sabbath until December 8, 2001. This means that I will need to make some readjustments in my priorities. For example, it may become necessary to send this newsletter every three or four weeks, instead of the current two weeks. I would rather keep you waiting a little longer, but email you a more substantive Bible study.

What has consumed most of my time during these past two months, is the conversion of my SABBATH, ADVENT, and CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE SEMINARS into PowerPoint presentations. It has been for me a major undertaking to obtain through the help of relatives living in Rome, excellent pictures of significant places, documents, and people related to my Sabbath/Sunday research in Vatican libraries. Even for my devotional meditations on the Sabbath and Second Advent, I have searched through catalogues of over 10,000 evangelistic pictures, to find suitable illustrations for the major points of the sermons. Each presentation has between 70 to 100 PowerPoint slides.

This has been a time consuming but rewarding endeavor. Now I can fly out every Friday morning for my weekend destination with a sense of excitement, knowing that I am much better equipped to help our people and Christian friends of other faiths to understand and experience more fully the timely truths of the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian lifestyle. For the past thirty years I have attempted to communicate Gospel

truths by using my broken Italian accent and gestures. Now I can add a visual dimension through appropriate pictures. Incidentally, since a picture tells a thousand words, I may not have to speak so much anymore. The pictures will speak for themselves.

CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP AND CASUAL DRESS

This past Sabbath, June 30, 2001, I was privileged to be home with my wife and we worshiped together at our Pioneer Memorial Church. We found the Sabbath school dealing with a very thought provoking subject: "Tiny Sins, Huge Results." Our Sabbath school class discussed at some length the unusual punishment God inflicted upon Uzzah for failing to show respect toward the ark, and upon the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, for using common fire in the service of the sanctuary.

We were richly blessed also by Pastor Dwight Nelson's sermon which continued the "community series" by showing how only at the Cross a real sense of community can be experienced. The reason is that we all become vulnerable at the Cross: our sins are exposed, our masks are removed, and our common need of forgiveness and cleansing are heightened. A fitting sermon for the Lord's Supper that followed.

In the midst of such an enriching worship experience, my wife and I were distressed by the sight of some members dressed either very casually with blue jeans and T-shirts or with very revealing clothes. We could not help but notice several ladies coming into the sanctuary with dresses held by shoulder strings, without any jacket to cover the bare parts of their upper body. One lady wore a strapless and backless dress that was held by a single string attached to the waist line in the back and the bra line in the front. Incidentally, some of the ladies wearing revealing clothes, were not teenagers, but young adults.

There is no doubt in my mind that these fellow believers are sincere and see nothing wrong in their attire. Most likely they have been told that they can come to church dressed casually or even with revealing clothes. After all, the second service (which we happened to attend last Sabbath) is a contemporary style of worship where the atmosphere is more casual.

The purpose of these comments is not to condemn those who come to church with revealing or casual clothes. Let us not forget that some members may have ONLY casual clothes to wear for church. Rather my concern is over our responsibility as spiritual leaders to help fellow believers understand how to show reverence to God in His sanctuary through our outward appearance and deportment.

The contemporary worship style that utilizes beat and swinging music, is apparently encouraging a more casual atmosphere where people treat the church as if it were a place of entertainment. Surprisingly, this is what I found when I searched for "Contemporary Worship" on the internet. Many of the churches promote their contemporary worship style by emphasizing their casual dress code. For example, one church in Houston, Texas, called "CrossRoads Church," lists as its first characteristic, "Casual – no need to dress up. We are interested in you, not your clothes. Come like you would come to the movies."

This philosophy poses a serious question: Is going to church like going to the movies? Can we treat the church as a place of entertainment where people can come with casual clothes to have fun with God? The examples of Uzzah, Nadab and Abihu, which we studied in last week's Sabbath school lesson, teach us otherwise. They teach us that there are dire consequences for failing to show respect for sacred places set aside for meeting with God.

Perhaps we Adventists can learn a lesson from our Catholic friends. Their respect for their place of worship is evidenced by their dress code for church. Countless times I have seen people upset for not being allowed to enter St. Peter or other cathedrals in Rome, Italy, because they were wearing shorts, or sleeveless dresses. The message is clear. If you want to enter a Catholic church, you must be dressed modestly, as it befits a place of worship.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am NOT proposing that we should set up guards at the entrance of Adventist churches who will keep out anyone dressed casually or immodestly. Rather, what I am proposing is that we need to educate our members on how to show respect for God, not only on His HOLY DAY, the Sabbath, but also in His HOLY PLACE, the church.

Perhaps, we could even have a Sabbath School Quarterly dedicated to the study of the HOLINESS OF GOD, examining some of the practical implications for our Christian life today. Incidentally, the Editor of the Sabbath School, Clifford Goldstein, subscribes to this newsletter and from time to time has interacted with me. Perhaps he may find this idea worth pursuing. A little encouragement from some of you may be helpful.

Adventist churches should be known as places where God is worshipped reverentially in the beauty of holiness. After all, each of our three distinguishing doctrines, namely, the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, and the Second Advent, contributes in its own unique way to the definition of what church worship should be like

The Sabbath teaches us to respect the distinction between the *sacred* and the *secular*, not only in time, but also in church worship. Worship in the earthly and heavenly temples also teaches us that God is to be worshipped with great reverence and respect. Belief in the certainty and imminence of Christ's coming should inspire us to live upright and holy lives, especially by treating God with reverence in His sanctuary.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the seminars for the months of July and August 2001. Every Sabbath it is a great privilege for me to meet many subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminar. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometime next year. All the weekends for 2001 are now taken. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle are now presented with PowerPoint slides which give added realism to our message.

JULY 6-7: NEW YORK CITY — DUNAMIS SDA CHURCH

Location: 461 Montauk Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11208

For information call Pastor Canute Birch at (914) 771-6328

JULY 13-14: HOUSTON, TEXAS: WEST OAKS SDA CHURCH

Location: 14440 Richmond Avenue, Houston, Texas 77082

For information call Pastor Hus Bugayong at (281) 530-5960 or Pastor Gibson Nkosi at (281) 970-4732

JULY 20-21: HINSDALE SDA CHURCH IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Location: 201 North Oak Street, Hinsdale, Illinois 60521

For information call Pastor John Rapp at (630) 323-0182

JULY 27-28: HOLLAND, MICHIGAN —FIRST SDA CHURCH

Location: 11279 Ottogon, Holland, Michigan 49423

For information call Pastor David Grams at (616) 395-0806

AUGUST 3-4: MIAMI, FLORIDA: MIAMI TEMPLE SDA CHURCH

Location: 9175 SW 44th Street, Miami, Florida 33165

For information call the senior Pastor, Dr. Robert Boggess at (954) 252-3450 or (305) 223-2102

AUGUST 10-11: HOUSTON, TEXAS: WEST HOUSTON SDA CHURCH

Location: 2390 NW Sam Houston Parkway, Houston, Texas 77043

For information call Pastor Ottati at (281) 955-5110

AUGUST 17-18: SPOKANE, WA: SPOKANE VALLEY SDA CHURCH

Location: 1601 S. Sullivan Road, Veradale, Washington 99037

For information call Pastor Stan Hudson at (509) 926-3500 or (509) 926-5866

AUGUST 25: ORLANDO, FLORIDA: WALKER MEMORIAL SDA CHURCH

Location: 1410 W. Avon Boulevard, Avon Park, Florida 33825

For information call Pastor Douglas Jacobs at (863) 453-7110 or (863) 453-6641

COVER LETTER FOR SABBATH BOOK

During the past few months, numerous churches have sponsored the distribution of my book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*, to the pastors of their district. The response has been gratifying. I have received positive responses from ministers of various denominations, some of whom have accepted the Sabbath and moved their church services from Sunday to Saturday. One non-SDA minister has ordered two cases of this book for a summer institute dealing with the relevance of the Sabbath for today. The reason this book is proving to be more effective than my previous three Sabbath books, is undoubtedly because it deals in a systematic and compelling way with the latest attacks against the Sabbath.

To encourage and facilitate this outreach endeavor, we are offering *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* by the case of 32 copies for only \$190.00, postage paid, that is, only \$5.90 a copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. To order a supply, simply call us at (616) 471-2915.

Many of you have asked me to prepare a cover letter that you can attach to the book. Your pastor can modify this letter in accordance with his convictions. Here is the sample letter that you are free to modify.

Dear Colleague in Ministry: or

Dear Pastor . . . (If you know the name)

In recent years church leaders and scholars of various denominations have reexamined the question of the validity and value of the biblical Sabbath for our tension-filled and restless society. Over thirty doctoral dissertations dealing with the Lord's Day have been presented at American and European universities. Pope John Paul II himself has devoted his Pastoral Letter *DIES DOMINI* (THE LORD'S DAY) to this subject. He makes a passionate plea for a revival of Sunday observance by recovering the Biblical meaning and function of the Sabbath.

The renewed interest in the study of the Sabbath stems largely from both social and ecclesiastical factors. Socially, we live today in a tension-filled and restless society where many seek for inner rest and release. Ecclesiastically, there is a marked decline in church attendance in many Western countries. These trends have motivated church leaders and scholars to reexamine the relevance of the biblical Sabbath for our day.

One of the foremost scholars in this field is Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D. He has written four major books on historical and theological aspects of the Lord's Day. His doctoral dissertation *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY* was published by the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy, where he was the first non-Catholic to graduate. He was awarded a gold medal from Pope Paul VI for earning the academic distinction of *summa cum laude*.

One of Bacchiocchi's Sabbath books, entitled *DIVINE REST FOR HUMAN RESTLESSNESS*, has been translated into over 20 languages. Its foreword is by Dr. James Wesberry, who has served for over 25 years as the Executive Director of the LORD'S DAY ALLIANCE OF THE USA. He writes: "No one, no matter of what faith or denomination he or she may be, can read this book without finding divine rest for his or her restlessness" (p. 9).

For the past 26 years he has served as Professor of Theology and Church History at Andrews University, in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He has authored 16 books which have been favorably reviewed by scholars of all persuasions.

Enclosed you will find a gift copy of Bacchiocchi's latest book entitled *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*. Ministers of various denominations have found this

book most enlightening. Sensing that you also might appreciate this timely study, your local Seventh-day Adventist Church decided to offer you a gift copy.

If the reading of the book raises questions in your mind which you would like to pose to the author, feel free to contact Dr. Bacchiocchi by phone at (616) 471-2915 or via email at <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net>. For his benefit, please identify yourself as a minister and recipient of his book by our local (for example, Scranton, PA) church.

Thank you for taking time to read this timely book. May the Lord continue to richly bless your ministry with His wisdom and grace.

Warmest Christian Regards

Signed by your church pastor

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE?

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
Retired Prof. of Theology, Andrews University

What does it mean to live a Christian lifestyle at the beginning of the third millennium? Some might question the relevance of this question by arguing that the Christian lifestyle today is not any different from what it has always been. After all, Christ's teachings on how to live have not changed. What has changed, however, is the historical and cultural setting in which Christians are called to live and witness for Christ.

Our ancestors in Europe and America lived in a rather homogeneous society largely influenced by Christian values. Historians characterize the Middle Ages as the "Age of Faith," when the whole population of certain towns and cities would work together to build Cathedrals whose artistic beauty remain unsurpassed.

Today we live in a pluralistic and materialistic society whose values are often openly and avowedly anti-Christian. In Western Europe many of the magnificent Cathedrals of the past stand as silent monuments to a faith that once was alive, but today is dead. During my recent travels in Europe I have often been saddened by the sight of impressive Gothic churches turned into warehouses, because their membership had declined and died.

Erosion of Christian values. The gradual erosion of the Christian faith and values can be seen in the adoption of the "new morality," which is merely a new version of the old immorality. The Biblical condemnations of illicit sexual acts, which past Christians accepted as normative for their life, today have become for many a license for sexual experimentation. This is evidenced by the introduction and use of "softer terms." Fornication is now referred to as "premarital sex" with the emphasis on the "pre" rather than on the marital. Adultery is now called "extramarital sex," implying an additional experience, like some extra-professional activities. Homosexuality has gradually been softened from serious perversion through "deviation" to "gay-variation." Pornographic literature and films are now available in "adult stores" to "mature" (very ironic!) audiences.

In his book, *The Christian Manifesto*, the late Christian apologist and philosopher, Francis Schaeffer, notes that Christians have failed to see that the change in values is a symptom of a much larger problem, namely, "a fundamental change [that has occurred during this century] in the overall way people think and view the world and life as a whole."¹ He goes on to explain that, "The shift has been *away from* a world view that was at least vaguely Christian in people's memory (even if they were not individually Christian) *toward* something completely different —toward a worldview based upon the idea that the final reality is impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance. They have not seen that this worldview has taken the place of the one that had previously dominated Northern European culture, including the United States, which was at least Christian in memory."²

The gradual shift that has taken place during this past century *away from* a *theistic view of the world* in which God is the ultimate reality from whom we derive and to whom we are morally accountable, *toward a materialistic view of the world* in which matter is the ultimate reality from which we derive, but to which we are not morally accountable, has produced the secular values that dominate our society today. The criterium for what is right or wrong is no longer divine revelation but human feeling and pleasure. If a certain action makes a person feel good and gives pleasure, then it is right for them and should not be censured by others.

Nominal Christian Society. The problem is compounded by the fact that today Christians have to contend not only with the anti-Christian values of our secular society, but also with something more insidious, namely, a nominally Christian society that lives by the same secular and anti-Christian values held by non-Christians.

Christians divorce at approximately the same rate as non-Christians. Christians consume alcoholic beverages at about the same level as non-Christians. Christians watch movies which portray violence, infidelity and perversion like the non-Christians. Christians dress, dance, gamble and adorn themselves like the non-Christians. Christians listen to the same rock music and attend the same rock concerts frequented by non-Christians. In most communities, Christians behave so much like their non-Christian neighbors that they are indistinguishable from them, apart perhaps from their going to church.

The outcome of this trend is that many sincere Christians are confused about what it means to live as Christians today. The confusion is keenly felt especially among those Christians who belong to churches that have historically upheld a high moral standard of Christian conduct. Our own Seventh-day Adventist Church is a case in point. Historically, our Adventist church has emphasized the importance of living pure and healthy lives in preparation for the soon-Coming Savior. This means choosing amusements and entertainments that meet the highest standard of taste and beauty dressing in a simple and modest way; avoiding the use of outward adornments such as earrings and necklaces; adopting the most healthful diet possible; abstaining from the unclean foods identified in the Scripture, as well as from alcoholic beverages and drugs harmful to our bodies.

Creeping Compromise. In theory, these principles of Christian behavior are still part of our Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs. In practice, however, there is an increasing number of Adventists who are neglecting or even rejecting their church standards, choosing instead to eat, drink, dress, dance, divorce, remarry, adorn their bodies and amuse themselves like the rest of the world. Their argument is that the church standards are restrictive, outdated and engender legalism. They interpret the freedom of the Gospel as freedom to live their Christian life in accordance to societal trends and practices.

The compromise in church standards causes considerable pain to those Adventists who are committed to live their Christian faith according to the teaching of their church. In a sense, they feel betrayed by those who wish to be members of the Adventist church while at the same time living like the rest of the world. These fellow believers approach me constantly in person and/or by letters to share their concern and to ask what can be done to stop the creeping compromise. Some feel that our church leaders must deal with the problem by taking a stronger stand against those who do not live in accordance to church standards.

Church Rules are not Enough. There is no doubt in my mind that church leaders do play an important role in upholding high moral standards. The history of Israel teaches us that leadership can make a great difference in the moral life of the people. Repeatedly we are told that bad kings led the people into apostasy, and that good kings brought about spiritual revival and reformation. Today, however, we live in a different society where individualism prevails. Many are not inclined to accept moral standards of Christian living imposed on them arbitrarily by church leaders.

An example is the Roman Catholic Church who in recent years has hardened her position on contraception, abortion, celibacy, and divorce, yet it has failed to persuade the majority of its members. Surveys indicate that the vast majority of Catholics ignore or reject the official policy of their Catholic church on these matters. The same holds true in Protestant churches where church members often ignore the official pronouncements of their church leaders. This erosion of respect for the authority of religious and civil institutions should concern us, because it fosters deeper uncertainty and doubt.

In my view the solution is to be found not in simplistic ecclesiastical rules or pronouncements about how Christians ought to live, but rather in studying and discovering together what the Bible has to say about the Christian faith and practice. It is important that believers become Biblically informed and convinced about the rightness or wrongness of certain actions.

Today it is no longer sufficient for a pastor or a denominational paper to tell church members, for example: "Don't drink alcoholic beverages because it is sinful." The response of many individualistically minded members will be, "Who says it and why?" What we need today is to present convincing Biblical and medical reasons for the imperative of total abstinence. This is what I attempted to do in my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE: A BIBLICAL STUDY ON THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES*. It is only to the extent that Christians are able to understand and accept the fact that the consumption of alcohol and drugs violates Biblical principles given by God to ensure their physical and spiritual well-being, that they will feel compelled to live an abstinent lifestyle.

It is this conviction that has motivated me to write several books dealing with some significant aspects of the Christian lifestyle. During the past 30 years of teaching and preaching around the world, countless times I have seen radical changes in the lifestyle of people who became convinced by Scripture and convicted by the Holy Spirit that certain habits or actions were wrong. There are many sincere Christians across denominational lines who want to know how to live in accordance with the principles that God has revealed in the Bible. They appreciate when someone takes time to show them from the Bible and from personal example how to live the Christian life. I meet these sincere people practically everywhere I share my itinerant ministry. It is to these sincere Christians that I dedicate my ministry of Biblical research and proclamation.

Sincere but Wrong. There are many sincere Christians who are sincerely doing what is wrong. To illustrate this point I will give few examples. There are Christians who sincerely believe that there is nothing wrong in premarital sex as long as they love their partner. They sincerely believe that a Christian can be a homosexual or a lesbian as long as they are committed to their partner. They sincerely believe that Christians can watch violent or sexy movies as long as they do not become emotionally involved. They sincerely believe that they can listen to rock music as long as the beat is not too strong or the words are not too profane. They sincerely believe that they can divorce their marital partner, if they no longer find fulfillment in their relationship.

They sincerely believe that they can consume a moderate amount of alcohol and drugs, as long as they do not become addicted. They sincerely believe that women can serve as the head of the home and of the church, as long as they are competent to do the job. They sincerely believe that they can spend their Lord's Day seeking for personal pleasure and profit, as long as they do not disturb the privacy and peace of others. They sincerely believe that they can wear different kinds of jewelry as long as it is not too gaudy or too expensive. These are the people who frequently ask me: "What is wrong with . . .?"

One wonders: "How can so many Christians be sincere and yet sincerely wrong on different aspects of Christian living?" It would seem to me that part of the problem is a lack of understanding of the claims of the Gospel in our daily lives. The concern of many Evangelical theologians, preachers and evangelists has been to emphasize how we are saved, rather than how do we live our new life in Christ. To put it differently, the concern has been to teach people how to become Christians, rather than how to live the Christian life. To be more specific, we have failed to help people understand how the acceptance of the Gospel affects the way we eat, drink, dress, adorn and amuse ourselves, as well as the way we relate to such larger issues as abortion, poverty, pollution, nuclear war, and social injustices.

Salvation versus Conversion. This new trend which emphasizes salvation more than conversion, is gaining acceptance in our Seventh-day Adventist Church. This movement began about 30 years ago when I was a student at the SDA Theological Seminary. The need to counteract legalistic attitudes which stressed the importance of obedience in the process of salvation, led some teachers and preachers to promote what became known as "righteousness by faith." I remember sitting in classes and at various campmeetings, listening to teachers and preachers who expanded with passion the message of "righteousness by faith."

In essence, the message of righteousness by faith stresses that our assurance of salvation comes to us, not through our acts of obedience, but through the “doing and dying of Jesus.” There is a profound truth in this teaching. After all, salvation is a divine gift, not a human achievement. The problem arises when righteousness by faith becomes righteousness by presumption. That happens when believers presume to be righteous in the sight of God because they have verbally accepted Christ’s atoning sacrifice, without experiencing a conversion or a change in their lifestyle. This can be a deceptive mentality, because the assurance of salvation comes to us when we experience the transforming power of God’s grace in our lives.

The emphasis on salvation rather than on conversion, is contributing to neglecting the teaching and discipling of new converts into the practice of Christian living. The reason is that many assume that it is more important to teach people how to accept Jesus as their Savior than to teach them how to become a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17) by the power of the risen Christ (Phil 3: 10). The assumption is that once people have accepted by faith Jesus as their Savior, they will automatically learn how to live their new life in Christ. Obviously this is not true. New converts need to be taught by word and example how to live their Christian life.

The Legacy of the Reformation. The tendency among Evangelical Christians to deal more with faith and less with good works, may be partly the legacy of the Reformation. One of the great watchwords of the Reformation was *Sola fide*, “by faith alone.” The Reformers rediscovered and rightly emphasized that “Justification,” or acceptance with God, must be regarded, not as a human achievement through good works, but as a divine gift of unmerited grace through the atoning death of Christ, received by trusting in Him alone.

On this central truth of the Gospel there can be no compromise. But, although justification is by faith alone, this faith is not alone. If it is an authentic faith it will inevitably bring forth good works. We must avoid the danger of constructing a relationship with Christ based exclusively either on faith or on works. The two must be kept together as the two sides of the same coin. This has been a concern of our own Seventh-day Adventist Church, namely, to help people experience the reality of salvation by living clean, healthy and holy lives. As Adventists we strongly believe that faith is the root of our Christian experience while good works are the fruit. Both of them must be present in an authentic Christian life. A tree must bear fruit or else Christ will condemn it.

The Necessity of Good Works. Our Adventist conviction on the necessity of good works to validate the authenticity of our redeemed relationship with Christ is based on the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. In the Gospels Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the importance of good works in the life of those who follow Him. It is not the one who confesses Christ by calling Him “Lord, Lord” but the one who “does the will of my Father who is in heaven” that will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7:21). In the parable of the “Sheep and goats” Jesus teaches that on the Day of Judgment our attitude toward Him will be revealed and judged, not by what we have professed to be, but by what we have practiced in terms of deeds of love to the least of our brethren (Matt 25:34-41).

The apostles place the same emphasis on the necessity of good works in the life of a Christian. We are all familiar with the well-known statement of James that “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17, NIV). Similarly, Paul teaches that we have been “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10, NIV). What ultimately counts, Paul says, is not circumcision or uncircumcision, “but keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19); or as he puts it in Galatians 5:6 “faith working through love.”

In his apocalyptic vision, John saw that the saints who endured to the end were “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev 14:12). This passage indicates that Christians who have the faith of Jesus keep His commandments.

The two go together. As Christ says: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Unfortunately, faith and works have not always been kept together in Evangelical thinking and practice. The tendency has been to maximize faith and minimize works. This may explain why there is a vast amount of literature explaining how we are saved by grace through faith in the atoning death of Jesus but very little literature explaining how to live the Christian life.

There is general agreement that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. The disagreement begins once we start defining, what does it mean to be saved in terms of lifestyle? In other words, what are the good works that issue from a living and authentic faith? Sad to say in this area there is little agreement and consequently a very limited amount of religious literature. I discovered this fact when searching for books dealing with practical aspects of Christian living. In the computerized catalogue of our Andrews University library which holds over 200,000 religious publications I found only half-a-dozen books dealing with practical aspects of Christian living and even these are rather superficial.

Fear of Legalism. Perhaps it is the fear of being labeled as "legalists" that has kept many Evangelicals authors from addressing some of the specific aspects of Christian living. Even in our own Adventist church there has been a tendency in recent years to avoid teaching, writing and preaching on "church standards." I have searched in vain in our official publications of the past 15 years for articles dealing with such issues as divorce, remarriage, dress, adornment, drinking, Sabbathkeeping, dancing, and Christian music. Yet these have been important church standards in the history of our Adventist church.

The reluctance to teach members how to live the Christian life derives from the fear that such teaching can cause a sense of guilt and insecurity in the mind of those who do not live up to God's expectations. To avoid troubling consciences many writers and pastors choose to dwell on the "doing and dying" of Jesus or to put differently, on His unconditional love and forgiveness.

The message seems to be: "You do not need to feel insecure about your salvation because Christ has done it all. He accepts you no matter what you are. Just trust in His doing and dying for you and you are saved." This message is true but incomplete. The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus accepts us as we are *but* He will also empower us to become what we ought be.

To be faithful to the Biblical mandate, we must teach people not only how to profess their faith and love for Christ but also how to practice such faith and love in their daily living. We must show people not only how to commit their lives to Christ but also how to maintain a dynamic relationship with Him. Our relationship with Christ has at least four components: *doctrinal, devotional, ecclesiastical and ethical.*

Doctrinal Relationship. Our relationship with Christ is *doctrinal* because it is based on certain fundamental Biblical doctrines about who Christ is, what He has done for us on the Cross, what He is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary, what he will do for us at His Second Coming and what He wants to do in us and for us now. Unless our relationship with Christ is securely grounded on sound Biblical doctrines, we can become victims of extremes in our lifestyle. One danger we must guard against is *legalism*, the attempt to win or earn salvation by good works. The Bible teaches us that salvation is a divine gift and not a human achievement. We engage in spiritual exercises such as Bible study, meditation and prayer not to earn or merit salvation, but to experience the reality of salvation.

Closely related to the danger of legalism is *pharisaism*, the pretense of being more spiritual than one really is. Pharisees perform their devotional exercises to impress others

about their holiness, rather than to express their faith and love for Jesus. They pretend to be saints when in reality they are only sanctimonious.

Another danger to avoid is *isolationism*—the attempt to serve Christ by withdrawing from the secular society into private communities of fellow-minded believers. Some reason that it is easier to live the Christian life and perform our spiritual exercises away from the negative influences of our secular society. But the Bible teaches us that our spiritual exercises should serve not as a pretext to isolate ourselves from the world, but as a means to equip us to serve in the world (John 17:15).

Devotional Relationship. Our relationship with Christ is also *devotional*, because it entails our adoration and commitment to Him expressed through devotional exercises. The term “devotion” expresses better than the term “piety” our response to Christ’s call, because it connotes not merely pious deeds but also a total commitment to Jesus Christ. In the next newsletter we shall examine three important devotional exercises which can help us cultivate our relationship with Christ: prayer, meditation and Bible reading.

Ecclesiastical Relationship. Our relationship with Christ is also *ecclesiastical* in the sense that it involves fellowship with the members of Christ’s church. In the New Testament there is an organic unity between Christ and His church. The church is seen as the body of Christ, that is, the new organism which He chose to manifest His presence and to accomplish His saving mission. Church members are compared to parts of the body. “When each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love” (Eph 4:16).

The point of this metaphor is that there is an indivisible unity between Christ and His church. Consequently we experience the fellowship of Christ as we fellowship with fellow believers. We shall examine our Christian responsibility toward the church in a future newsletter.

Ethical Relationship. Our relationship with Christ is also *ethical* because Christ calls us to follow Him by living our daily lives in accordance with the moral example and principles He has revealed to us in His Word. In previous newsletters we have dealt with such practical aspects of Christian living as outward appearance, music, marriage, and Sabbathkeeping. Other aspects will be discussed in future newsletters.

Some may view with disfavor this focus on practical aspects of Christian living. They may even dare to say that these studies promote a works-righteousness. The possibility of negative criticism has never deterred me from studying and sharing Biblical teachings relevant to our lives today.

The truth of the matter is that today more than ever before we need to help Christians understand how to live their Christian life in an anti-Christian secular society. For many today Christianity has become a cultural heritage or a religious subject to investigate, rather than a call “to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world” (Tit 2:12).

Evangelical Theologians Call for a Revival of Piety. Many respected evangelical theologians are recognizing the decline of practical piety in Christian living and are addressing it in their writings. They lament the “crisis of piety” or “the loss of piety.”¹³ In his book *The Crisis of Piety* Donald G. Bloesch, a highly respected evangelical theologian, writes: “Our age presently finds itself in a crisis of faith. Too many people have only a speculative and not an experiential knowledge of the truth of faith. . . . It cannot be denied that modern Protestantism is troubled by the demise of genuine piety.”¹⁴

On a similar vein Walter Wagoner notes that the concern of theological seminaries today is to produce scholars of religion rather than men of piety. The result is that Protestant seminaries have largely ceased to be “worshipping, praying communities.”¹⁵

Wayne Oates believes that there is a “conspiracy of silence about personal religion” not only in theological schools but in church life in general.⁶

Christian Life and Salvation. It is encouraging to hear the voices of evangelical theologians calling for spiritual renewal not merely by changing the shape and form of church worship, but primarily by calling Christians to live out the Gospel in their daily life. This has been a fundamental concern and conviction of our Seventh-day Adventism, namely, that the way we live our Christian life is vital to the process of salvation because it reveals and validates our love and faith commitment to Christ.

In the past, Adventists have been accused of *legalism* for emphasizing the role of practical godliness in salvation. Today some evangelical theologians have come to recognize that this is the only way to save the church from capitulating to the secular culture of our time. Donald G. Bloesch admits: “We need a fresh understanding of the decisive role of the Christian life in our salvation. . . . The Christian life must be viewed as being something more than a by-product and sign of salvation procured for us by Jesus Christ. It should be understood as the appropriation of this salvation in faith and love. . . . If the church is to maintain itself in a secular age it must again sound the call to consecrated devotion and holiness. It must place the accent not upon organizational efficiency but rather upon the spiritually disciplined life. Only in this way will it avoid a total capitulation to the culture.”⁷

The recognition of the decisive role that Christian life plays in our salvation is the first important step in the right direction. The next equally important step is to help people understand what is a Christian lifestyle and how to live it. When individuals respond to Christ’s calling and declare themselves to be His followers, they will never be the same again. They have become a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), walking “in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

Teaching by Discipling. Learning to walk is not easy. It takes a lot of effort on the part of the child as well as the constant watch and coaching of parents. Similarly, learning to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4) takes time, effort and help. In New Testament times new converts learned how to live the Christian life by becoming disciples. Discipleship was a model which predominated in the society of the time.

At the time of Jesus a disciple (in Greek *mathetes*) was a person who learned a trade, a skill or a philosophy by living close to the Master. For example, a young man who wanted to learn a trade often lived in the craftsman’s house, sweeping the floors and cleaning the tools and watching the craftsman. As the lad showed diligence, the craftsman would gradually teach him the technical skills of the trade.

The same was true of a student who wanted to learn from a distinguished philosopher. He would ask the master if he would accept him as a disciple, for masters always chose their disciples. If the master agreed, the young man would commit himself not only to listen but also to serve the master almost like a slave. He might do the cooking, washing and cleaning for the Master. This was not seen as exploitation of the student class. To the contrary, it was seen as a privilege for the disciple to be close to the master and observe how the master lived out his philosophy in his daily life. A disciple was never an unwilling student because it was considered an honor to be a disciple of a great master. He lived close to the master in order to learn his skills, his wisdom and conform his life to the teaching of his master.

In the New Testament the same word *disciple* is applied to Christians because they were expected to learn their Master’s teaching in order to pattern their lives after His. This required a considerable investment of time and resources both on the part of the disciple as well as of the trainer (discipler). The training of new disciples was not usually done publicly during a three-week crash crusade, but personally over a period of time by those who were already mature disciples.

This was true especially when Christianity reached beyond the boundaries of Judaism into the pagan world. Baptisms, then, were performed, not daily like at Pentecost, but usually yearly, at Passover time. The reason being that it took at least a year to prepare a new convert from paganism for baptism. New converts received daily instruction from mature Christians on how to live the Christian life.

Paul offers us a good example of the considerable personal investment he made in discipling new converts. He reminds the church at Thessalonica how he taught them by word and example after their conversion. He says: "We were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also ourselves, because you had become dear to us. For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day . . . while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:8-12).

In this passage Paul reveals his concern to teach his new converts not only by precept but also by example how to lead a life worthy of God's calling. The apostle recognized the importance of role modeling two thousand years before psychologists established this truth by experimenting with laboratory rats. He was convinced that the most effective way to teach new converts how to live the Christian life was by being a good role model. Unabashedly he says: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (Phil 4:9). And again, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

Discipleship Today. The Biblical model of discipleship to train new converts on how to live the Christian life is still relevant for us today. We live in an age when we like to see things happening fast. We are proud of our fast food restaurants, fast microwave cooking, instant communication, fast jet travel, fast computers, fast printers, fast production of all sort of goods. Our culture places a high priority on speed. Thus it is not surprising that when persons respond to an altar call to accept Jesus, we try to process them as fast as possible into church membership. We take them through a short prayer, a compressed series of Bible studies on the fundamental beliefs of the church, then baptism and a warm handshake to welcome them into church membership. After that they either sink or swim depending on their resources.

Very few new converts are taught the Biblical principles of Christian conduct and even fewer are shown how to live out those principles in actual life situations. Yet when new believers accept Christ they are at the critical moment of their life when they are open to the radical changes in their lifestyle. But they need some mature Christian who can show them what changes need to be made.

For example, someone needs to show them how to lead the family into a meaningful daily worship experience, how to pray, how to stop using alcohol and drugs, how to prepare healthy meals, how to dress modestly, how to choose wholesome types of entertainment, how to become involved in the programs of the church. Sometimes what new converts need most is not indoctrination but a demonstration of how to live the Christian life. There are skills in Christian living that can best be learned by the example of a godly Christian. It has been rightly said that Christianity is more caught than taught.

Discipling new converts in the Christian life requires a considerable personal investment of time and energy of one believer for the spiritual well-being of another. Those who understand and live their Christian life effectively are best equipped to share their experience with younger believers. Discipleship is costly, but it is the tested way that works.

Conclusion. Summing up, there are two essential components in a Christian lifestyle: faith and works, being and doing, faith and action. The practical way in which we live our Christian life is important because it validates our faith and love for Christ. Learning to live the Christian life, however, is not easy. It requires considerable investment of time and efforts on the part of new converts as well as of mature Christians willing to help them.

Sometimes I feel foolish and presumptuous for attempting to write on aspects of Christian living, especially since some of the topics are complex and controversial, requiring more reading and thinking than I am able to do. Yet I persevere in this endeavor mainly because my concern is not to produce a polished piece of scholarly research, but rather a practical guide to help ordinary Christians to understand and apply those Biblical principles which are relevant to our Christian living today. This is what I will continue to do in the next newsletters. Please do not hesitate to offer me any constructive criticism which can help me fulfil this challenging task.

ENDNOTES

1. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works*, vol. 5: *A Christian View of the West* (Westchester, Illinois, 1982), p. 423.
2. Ibid.
3. Edward Farley, *Requiem For a Lost Piety* (Philadelphia, 1966); Edward W. Brueseke, "The Parish Ministry in a Crisis of Faith," *Ministers' Quarterly* (Fall, 1996), pp.13-17.
4. Donald G. Bloesch, *The Crisis of Piety. Essays Towards a Theology of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, 1968), pp.13, 37.
5. Walter Wagoner, "Winds and Windmills: A Weather Report on Seminary Education in the USA," *Bulletin of the Department of Theology of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, VI, no. 4(Summer, 1996), 6. See also by the same author, *The Seminary: Protestant and Catholic* (New York, 1966).
6. Frank Stagg, E. Glenn Hinson, Wayne E. Oates, *Glossolalia* (Nashville, 1967), p. 82. See also George MacLeod, "Nearing the Eleventh Hour?" in *The Coracle* (December 1966), p. 13.
7. Donald G. Bloesch (note 4), pp. 42-74.

THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE

Every week I receive a average of 100 new subscription from people who received an ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER from a friend. Thank you for sharing these Bible studies with your friends. Just let them know that all what they need to do to subscribe is to email me a request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 13,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

Contact Information

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
Retired Professor of Theology and Church History
Andrews University
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Phone (616) 471-2915 Fax (616) 471-4013
E-mail: sbacchiocchi@qtm.net
Web site: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>