

MOUNTAIN VIEWS

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ADVENTISM AND NON-CONFORMITY



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RMC Mission Statement

Our mission is to lovingly support and empower every member in our conference to know Christ and to make Him fully known through education, outreach, and service, and by communicating hope and encouraging an intimate connection with Christ and with each other.



by Shawn Brace

SETTING THE STAKES OR REMAINING OPEN?

One of the most heralded and influential theologians in nineteenth-century America was a man by the name of Charles Hodge. He taught at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, one of America's most important schools of divinity, and was an architect of the so-called "Princeton theology." An "Old School" Presbyterian who didn't care for the revivalism that swept over America in the nineteenth century, Hodge was devoted to classic Calvinism and had a deep suspicion of and disdain for novel theology and religious expression.

Of all the things Hodge wrote and said, however, one passing statement, shared in 1872 at the fiftieth anniversary of his professorship at Princeton, has captivated my imagination the most. Looking back at his long tenure at the seminary, which began just a decade after its founding, Hodge boasted, without a hint of irony or embarrassment, that "Princeton had never been charged with originating a new idea."

While perhaps given to a bit of hyperbole, Hodge viewed this as a badge of honor, of course. As a dyed-in-the-wool conservative, who believed it was his mission to preserve and defend the great verities that the Reformers had uncovered in the sixteenth century, Hodge looked with incredible suspicion at theological innovation.

I'd like to say that Adventism in the twenty-first century would not align with Charles Hodge. But I wonder.

Ironically, it was in this precise setting that Adventism arose. And their theological approach was diametrically opposed to Hodge's. Just about every theological idea the small Advent movement recovered—from the

the law” (Romans 13:10 NKJV). The preacher pressed his point home, “If the keeping of the law is love, then all our talk about the law, the law, the law, is clueless and blind, because righteousness is love!”

The fruit of the Spirit is the real antitypical fulfillment of the law.

I walked away from the scene stunned as the meaning of his sermon hit home. Painfully, I realized my hypocrisy. It meant that my baptism, my knowledge, my condemnation of other denominations didn’t make me a Christian—only the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit could do that. As it says in 1 Corinthians 13:2 (CSB), “If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.” My faith was powerless because I had viewed the very nature of God as “cheesy.”

Since those days, I have asked congregations, “What is righteousness?” And their answers were always the same, “the keeping of the law.” My heart aches at the many times I have heard in Sabbath schools, “All Christians ever talk about is ‘love, love, love’; we need to get back to the ‘truth!’” But doctrine is cold comfort when you’re in a nursing home and no one visits you. Doctrine is cold comfort for a child who needs a father. Doctrine is cold comfort when your boss is a tyrant and your responsibilities to family give you no option but to stay.

People need more from life than platitudes. They need Jesus. If I truly loved the “law of God” as I claimed, then I should have also been obsessed with “love,” because that is what it means to keep the law. As it says in James 1:27 (TVB), Real, true religion from God the Father’s perspective is about caring for the orphans and widows who suffer needlessly ... Needless suffering. Interesting word—needless. It means it doesn’t have to be that way.

I slowly came to realize that righteousness wasn’t something special, apart from normal life, above the “common.” Holiness had become an idol for me, as though it was the vehicle to God, rather than a gift from Him. The Truth I needed to “get back to” was Jesus. His life of love and sacrifice are the fulfillment of the truth! For He is the Truth (John 14:6).

Therefore, when a parent doesn’t yell and shame their kid when they mess up, they have performed a holy act. Instead, they come alongside their child, and with patient kindness, show them a better way. They are being like Jesus. The one who is closest to God is the mother that wakes up at 2 a.m. to lovingly feed her screaming child. Or the parent who works a 50-hour week doing a job they hate so their kids are provided for. And then when they get home, they love on their children, instead of drinking their troubles away. That is what real righteousness and character look like, because it is done in the Spirit’s fruit of love.

Need proof? Here is the biblical “here a little, there a little” formula:

God is righteous (Deuteronomy 32:3-4) and
The law is righteous (Psalms 119:75-76)



God is love (1 John 4:7-8) and The fulfillment
of law is love (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:13-14)



If God and the law are righteous, and God and
the law are love, then Righteousness is Love!

Just imagine if Adventism was known for its love! If when people spoke of us, they didn’t automatically think, “Oh, the vegetarians,” or, “Oh, the Ellen G. White thing.” What



These principles—and questions and challenges—also apply to our lives beyond the church and our witness in the wider world. Some years ago, the then Australian Attorney General made headlines and sparked public discussion when he made a speech to the national parliament in which he asserted that people should have the “right to be bigots.” He was speaking in the context of debating possible limits on freedom of speech, particularly in considering how that speech might hurt or harm others. It was awkward for some to have this question put so bluntly, even if in supporting that right. But there are certainly those among the Christian community who consider being considered a bigot a badge of honor.

Even as we might defend the principles of freedom, we must also recognize that the unbridled exercise of some of these freedoms are not without consequences. Whether in our churches, families, or communities, what we say matters and how we listen and respond matters. This is as true for our neighbor down the street or that mother sitting along the pew or the faceless person you are arguing with on social media. We might insist on our freedom to speak, but others will be equally free to dismiss us as jerks or bigots. Sometimes we and they might both be right—but by virtue of them being right, we are wrong.

When we resort to the language of rights and freedoms to defend what we might say or how we respond to people around us and among us, we have probably already lost the debate, even if only by turning it into a debate. We are called to live beyond the law, above insisting on our freedom of expression, laying down the verse-cudgels of the culture wars. Instead, we offer an alternative vision for life, for community, for well-being and seek to live it out in our churches and in the world around us: “But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!” (Galatians 5:22, 23, NLT).

We might have the right to speak, freedom to insist on our view of the world and how we think it should be, but we have the greater responsibility to love, the calling to kindness and the practices of faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we focus more on these, we will not only change our attitude to the world around us, but, it seems will also transform the environment of our churches. Them is us; they are we. That should require us to re-imagine and reformat our churches and communities, and rethink some of our assumptions, even some of how we have formed and expressed our theology in the past. But there’s no law against that.

Nathan Brown is a writer and editor at Signs Publishing near Melbourne, Australia. His Christmas devotional book *Advent: Hearing the Good News in the Story of Jesus' Birth* is great for seasonal reading and gifting. Email him at: nathanbrown@signspublishing.com.au

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by Rajmund Dabrowski

ALWAYS A MAVERICK

As I watched David Bowie in a commercial advertising Audi in the Spring of 2004, what struck me as important was its simple tag line. The ad issued a call to *Never Follow*.

Honestly, what it communicated to me was the opposite of what I learned from Jesus' call to His followers: *Follow me*.

The marketing campaign tried to position the European car-maker as a product that many were to follow. Some did, more so in Europe than in America. Three years later, the company ditched the slogan. "You have to be bold to be noticed in America—certainly bolder and more aggressive than we've been," they said. Well ...

On the surface, this slogan does not connect with Matthew, Zacchaeus, and many others from Jesus' entourage, if I may be so irreverent, except that all of them had to fail first, forsake their ego, and fly into the hands of ... wonder.

David Bowie's involvement in the Audi ad made sense to me. Never follow the crowd! His words, spoken in a video he shot: "There is no progress without failure. And each failure is a lesson learned. Unnecessary failures are the ones where an artist tries to second guess an audience's taste, and little comes out of that situation except a kind of inward humiliation."

That's a lesson from our contemporary culture. For me, there was another lesson, one all of us had to learn and many continue to learn throughout their lives.

In the mid-1980s, a straw vote was requested by the General Conference on allowing the ordination of women. An upcoming world church session was potentially including it on its agenda. I recall voting at the Polish Union Executive Committee. I know how I voted.

We know the history of the ordination of women drama experienced by the church. Years later, I visited my dad, then a church leader in Poland, and I asked him if he remembered the outcome of this straw vote. He remembered the vote and that there was one Yes vote. After a short silence on my part, he looked at me and said, "You have always been a maverick."

What an affirmation. I responded with a smile!

Nonconformity and free expression were and continue to be a part of my daily breakfast, so to speak. Apart from my own thought processes, as an Adventist Christian, I learned from the best: the pioneers of the Advent movement.

One of them stands out for me—Michael Belina Czechowski, a compatriot and pioneer missionary leader in Adventism. Before embracing Adventism in 1857, this

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