

Perspective Digest

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Should PD Present Several Points of View on Theological Issues? (Work Station One)

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Two letters from readers deserve special attention and responses in this column. They raise questions concerning the editorial policy of *Perspective Digest*. In essence, to what degree is the magazine open to viewpoints other than those “centrist” positions of the Adventist Theological Society? Following are the letters (unedited) and my responses (uncensored).

The first is from Robert T. Johnston of Lake Jackson, Texas:

“No, this isn’t one of those ‘I didn’t like what I read so please cancel my subscription’ letters—I haven’t yet subscribed! I enjoyed several of the articles in the second edition of *Perspective Digest*. However, especially when reading outside my field of expertise, I like to read both sides of an issue. Theology is one of those fields where I especially value a balanced presentation. For that reason I have enjoyed magazines such as *Spec-*

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trum and *Adventist Today*, which offer ‘clusters’ of articles, providing multiple perspectives on a common theme.

“Dr. Davidson’s article, ‘Then Was *This* Christian “Glad and Lightsome,”” quoted publications by two

Loma Linda theologians, Provonsha and Graham, in the process of arguing his theology of forgiveness and Christ’s substitutionary death over theirs. These gentlemen are both recognized scholars within the Adventist community, the cited books were published by SDA publishing houses, yet Dr. Davidson’s article was not balanced by an article offering an apologetic presentation of the theology of these gentlemen. Since, as Dr. Davidson pointed out from his own experience, it is possible to misread—or selectively read—the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy differently than Dr. Davidson, wouldn’t it be wise to follow the biblical admonition that there is wisdom in

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the counsel of many, and present several points of view? Truth can stand up to scrutiny; it also may have more facets than one individual can adequately present.

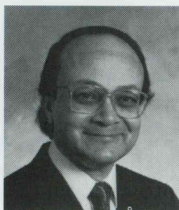
"I'd be interested in subscribing if you change your editorial policy in the future." (Signed) R.T. Johnston, Lake Jackson, Texas.

Fair Questions

• Certainly, Brother Johnston's letter asks fair questions in a good

spirit. For readers who may have missed Davidson's article in *PD2*, the references to the two theologians were in the endnotes, not in the body of the article. Five references were given to two publications by these authors, so that a reader could determine, should he or she wish to do so, their viewpoints on aspects of retributive justice. Another endnote, not mentioned by Johnston, referred to another theologian's "recent denial of penal substitution."

I ' D L I K E Y O U T O M E E T . . .



If you read mastheads (few do), you'll note that Angel Rodriguez is now associate editor of *Perspective Digest*. Dr. Rodriguez (Th.D., Andrews University, 1980) has been a pastor in Puerto Rico and, among other academic positions, president of Antillian College and academic vice president of Southwestern Adventist College. Since 1992 Dr. Rodriguez has been associate director, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of SDA.

Those of you who have read his article "Those Troublesome Psalms" (*PD1*, 1996) will not be surprised at his professional affiliations, which include, in addition to the Adventist Theological Society, the American Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion. In Dr. Rodriguez I have observed the heart of a pastor, the considered judgment of a scholar, the commitment of a sincere Christian, and the warmth of a friend. I believe his work on *PD* will reflect these gifts.—R.R.H.

Hegstad: Should PD Present Several Points of View on Theological Issues?

Upon reflection, a rereading of *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, and a conversation with ATS President Richard Davidson, I've decided that copy or footnotes mentioning Adventist theologians who differ with centrist Adventist positions will not appear in *Perspective Digest*. There is a place for them in monographs and other scholarly publications, including *JATS*, from which Davidson's article was digested.

Readers should note that the "Goals of the Adventist Theological Society" (see page 15), include investigation of "unsettled questions." Thus *PD*, a publication of the society, will look at all sides of *some* issues. For one example, in *PD3*, three theologians and a pastor responded to an article that espoused a viewpoint contrary in some respects to that of *The SDA Bible Commentary*. But *PD* will not look at *all* sides of *all* issues. Some issues are settled: the seventh day is the Sabbath; immortality is conditional; Jesus Christ is the Messiah; He shed His blood as propitiation for our sins, etc. Readers who wish to explore all theological nuances of the substitutionary atonement will be able to do so this year, during which *PD* joins the church in emphasizing "salvation." A good place to begin is on page 33.

Johnston's letter asks also whether it would not be "wise to follow the biblical admonition that

there is wisdom in the counsel of many, and present several points of view."

The religious teachers of Christ's day thought so. Thus when "Truth" Incarnate spoke, the people were "astonished." Why? Because "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29, KJV). No equivocation. Simple. Direct. *Exclusive*—"I am the way, the truth, and the life." Sad the circumstance of the theologian who searches the Scriptures for propositional truth while failing to meet Truth *Incarnate*.

Would the "counsel of many" include Buddhist, Moslem, Hindu, and other non-Christian views? Since Johnston's stated context is "biblical," I would assume not. And here is a point to be made: even *his* context *excludes*. Further, Scripture itself uses the term "truth" to exclude "error." Error is not a corollary of truth. Some matters have been settled within "centrist" Christianity and within "centrist" Adventism. One such truth: the propitiatory atonement. Note, however, that in forthcoming *PDs*, non-blindfolded ATS theologians will be walking *around* the salvation "elephant," with none finding it strangely like a rope or like a wall. Error may creep in because one spends too long gazing at one feature of a subject: for example, the love of God to the exclusion of His wrath.

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Could That Be “James”?

Now to the second letter, which purports to be from Cardinal Gibbons:

“I appreciate the copy of *Perspective Digest* I recently received and your special invitation to join ATS. For several years now, I have been receiving *JATS* and have enjoyed reading it, but the powers that be in that society do not desire my membership.

“You see, my perspective on some things is a little different than theirs. If you are truly wanting to produce a publication that gives food for thought, it seems to me that at least some of the articles might deal with issues that are controversial rather than the straight “party line” of a group of scholars(?) who know what they have been taught and don’t want to be confused with another perspective.

“The Republican Party at the present time is trying to present an image of willingness to be inclusive. Should not the ‘Adventist theological leaders’ also be willing to make the same endeavor?

“Thank you for your time, and I look forward to further reading of your editorial work.”

Cardinal Gibbons

College Place, Washington

• Let’s see: Is that *James* Cardinal Gibbons? We’ve printed mail from Estonia and Australia; but your letter,

despite the earthly address, seems to be the first we’ve received from the “nether regions.” If you’re willing to deny the existence of Purgatory, ATS officials might consider a submission. They are really “uninclusive” on that subject. Come to think of it, the state-of-the-dead doctrine might be another barrier, unless you really didn’t “pass” in 1921.

By the way, congratulations on the sale, if not the theology, of your book *The Faith of Our Fathers*. Most every ATS official has one in his library right alongside the “Biblical Exposition of Twenty-Seven Fundamental Doctrines” in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. Which book reminds me: A WWC theologian recently suggested that Adventists junk the 27 and return to the simple affirmation of the faith of our fathers. (That’s the faith of our *Adventist* fathers, you understand.) Assuming that action is politically unfeasible, I would suggest that, instead, we add a 28th doctrine: Religious Liberty! You’ll recall that the good Monk Beza called religious liberty a “diabolical doctrine” because it left every man to go to hell in his own way! Perhaps you’d like to share your perspective on that. Try me at CompuServe: 102555,1262. And be sure to include your passing grade in Church History from the Pontifical Institute so that I’ll be able to distinguish you from all the false Cardinal Gibbons that I expect to surface.—R.R.H. □