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A Quiet Conversion Experience

ANTE JERONCIC
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF RELIGION

Ante Jeroncic, assistant professor of religion at Andrews University, describes being arrested and imprisoned for his commitment to keeping the Sabbath in the same matter-of-fact manner as he shares the story of how he came to know Jesus after his mother bribed him with pizza just to get him to church. Ante's experiences speak to the powerful, quiet influence of the Holy Spirit. — Author

Religion was always in question when Ante Jeroncic was growing up. Although he was born in Yugoslavia, Ante spent his early years in Germany. His mother was Catholic while his father was an agnostic. When he was ten years old, Ante moved with his mother to what was then Yugoslavia, and that's where his mother learned about Adventism. Curious about the new religion, she decided to go to confession and ask her priest about it. Incredibly, the priest told her that Adventists were good people, and it would be alright to attend their church.

Eager for her son to join her, Ante's mother invited him to church as well. When he expressed disinterest, she offered to buy him a pizza if he came to church. "I bought my soul with a pizza, I could say," he said with a laugh. There was nothing special about the Sunday evening service he attended, which included nothing to attract a 16-year-old. In fact, a few months earlier, he had been taken to an event designed for the youth, but had remained unmoved. By the end of this ordinary service, however, Ante was converted. "Sometimes,

we think we have to provide a special atmosphere and use gimmicks to bring people to Christ," he says. "For me, it was the Holy Spirit working. It was the quiet, the singing and the absence of noise that got me converted."

At first, Ante was a very conservative Adventist, and he believed that even things like having fun and going to parties was sinning. Rather than feeling limited by this, he later realized that he actually experienced a new sense of freedom. "For me, Adventism was not constrictive," he says, looking back on his experience. "It was like breathing fresh air. I saw the world differently, literature differently, art differently. High school assigned books and literature, and I was never interested; but, suddenly, when I had that shift, I started



Ante Jeroncic stands beside his mother, Emilija, who encouraged his spiritual growth early in his life.

reading literature and philosophy and art." As he developed these new interests, Ante realized Christ was able to free him both from his sin and from the fear he saw in others that the devil was always hanging over their shoulder, waiting for them to make a mistake.

It wasn't long before Ante's new faith was tested — Sabbath soon became an issue. Many students attended school during the Sabbath. One class was held only on Friday evenings, so Ante missed the entire class. As difficult as this was, larger tests were to come as Ante was

conscripted into the Yugoslavian Army. At the time, he had been a Christian for only two years. In a country that had no religious freedom, Ante was forced to answer the summons and serve in the Army. Worse, no literature was allowed in the Army. "Things like keeping a journal were considered subversive, let alone having a Bible," Ante recalls.

The Army posed other challenges. Nearly everything was made with pork or lard, and Ante was only able to attend church every other week. In spite of these difficulties, he was still determined to keep the Sabbath. Ante's decision had heavy consequences. He was eventually arrested and placed in investigative prison, then moved to the capital, Belgrade, where he spent a short time in solitary confinement. "They



I realized that each decision to stay faithful starts instilling into you a fortitude.

wanted to charge me not just for disobeying my superior, but for being subversive and undermining the country,” says Ante.

Although he faced five to 13 years imprisonment, many people agitated on his behalf and Ante was released. “It was a very formative experience for me,” he recalls. “I realized that each decision to stay faithful starts instilling into you a fortitude.” After seeing Ante led away in handcuffs, his fellow soldiers were amazed to see him return; this gave him a unique opportunity to witness to them.

After the Army, Ante decided to continue his education. Ever since his baptism, he had wanted to study theology, so Ante enrolled in Adriatic Union College for his bachelor’s degree. Since it was only a three-year program, Ante already had been planning to leave when the Yugoslavian Civil War broke out in 1991. Additional concern about being drafted prompted him to move to South Africa. While there, Ante completed his bachelor’s degree at Helderberg College (then

affiliated with Andrews University) and his masters in theology at Stellenbosch University.

After moving to the United States, Ante served in various pastoral positions in Illinois while working on his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Although Ante loved pastoring, he knew he also wanted to teach. After praying about it, he unexpectedly received a phone call, and was asked if he would be interested in applying for a position at Andrews University. He joined the faculty in 2006.

“My troubles that I had are nothing exceptional,” says Ante. They did help him grow as a Christian, however, and gave him a new understanding of what it means to be faithful to Christ. “It just shows that God really gives strength and helps us,” he says.

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