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To Be Like Jesus: Dr. C. Mervyn Maxwell's Life Ambition: A Tribute to a Professor Emeritus

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I wish I could say I was one of Mervyn's students! But I was a seminary student at Andrews when he arrived to be a teacher there, and I had already taken all the subjects he was teaching.

Then I went my way and he went his. When I felt impressed to select the topic of Adventism for my dissertation, the more I studied about the spirit of the pioneers, the more I discovered, in reading Mervyn's works, a kindred spirit. We shared an experience of Jesus I think God wants each of us to have, an experience that brings people closer together. And so when, from time to time, I visited Andrews University, we had brief talks

Then we [the Damsteegt family] went to the Asian mission field [in Korea and Thailand]. When we came home, there was a call from the Church History Department. I think Mervyn was very much involved in this. I looked forward to the privilege of being his colleague. However, when I joined the department, Mervyn left.

But he wasn't far away. Whenever I faced an apparently insoluble problem and cried out, "Is there anybody who can tell me the answer?" I thought of Mervyn and called him. And with his encyclopedic mind, he guided me through the maze of Adventism to further insight. I praise the Lord for those times. They were beautiful.

Over the years, when I hear people talk about him, there is one thing that is amazing: The impact he had on students. He knew how to communicate the essence of Adventism. But he was a specialist—a University of Chicago scholar in Early Church History! He could give you the most sublime lectures about Chrysostom and Irenaeus and Hippolytus—even a few weeks ago. And yet his love led him to grasp the essence of being a Seventh-day Adventist today. And

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instead of rising in the celestial heavens of scholarly Adventism, he had a great burden to make it relevant to everyone.

Look at his contributions. I wish I had his gifts. I haven't. I pray to the Lord that He will raise up another hero to make the theology and church history seem relevant. Mervyn took these topics and made them significant by combining them with simple, moving little stories, heart-touching and uplifting. By the way, I think that you, Stanley, have inherited some of that ability! Friends, I tell you, if God calls you, follow His call. Stanley, follow in the footsteps of your Dad!

Anyone who experienced Mervyn's Adventist Heritage tours of Battle Creek will say there is no comparison between his and the ones offered today. Mind you, the people in Battle Creek do the very best they can. But without Mervyn, the tour is not the same. I'm not saying this simply to lift him up for you, Pauline. It's the truth, and nothing but the truth.

I wish we had recordings of all the fascinating anecdotes Mervyn shared during his lifetime. His emphasis was always the past and its lessons for today. Many of our scholars today, and I'm including myself here, have to remind ourselves about the questions Mervyn always asked himself before he wrote or lectured. These are the questions he asked of a body of historical documents: "What is it all for? What are we going to do with this? Can we not bring it down to an earthly level?"

Fortunately, a couple of years ago, when it seemed Mervyn wouldn't make it, Jim Nix got together with a video team and produced *The Heritage Attic*. On this video you see "Uncle Mervyn" with the children telling stories about the Adventist pioneers, like the story of J.N. Loughborough and the Three Cent Silver. In this video you can see how Mervyn used his scholarly knowledge and popularized it in narrative form. These are unforgettable stories, and yet the message is as relevant to kids as it is to adults. We can praise the Lord.

Then a few years later, after another illness that nearly took Mervyn's life, Melchizedek Ponniah put together another video, entitled *Three Angels Over Battle Creek*. Much of the essence of Mervyn's Battle Creek tours are preserved on this wonderful video. Both these videos are available at the ABC Bookstores.

More than 700,000 readers have been blessed by Mervyn's books. Many of them have been used as textbooks in high schools, colleges, and graduate programs. I think of *Moving Out*, *God Cares*, *Tell It To the World*, and *Magnificent Disappointment*. The two volumes of *God Cares*, explaining the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, have been sold by colporteurs around the world.

In my opinion, the two most outstanding books Mervyn wrote are *Tell It to the World* and one of his last works, *Magnificent Disappointment*. I have been using *Magnificent Disappointment* to stimulate students who didn't see the relevance of Christ's present-day duties in the Most Holy Place after October 22, 1844. I have also used it for my churches for prayer meeting. I used to recom-

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mend this book to every student in my class. This is a unique book. One of the most profound crises in the Seventh-day Adventist church today is losing the relevance of Christ's on-going work in the heavenly sanctuary. Scholars, writers, and editors in the church today want to be contemporary. But there is nothing more contemporary today than Christ's work in the sanctuary which started on October 22, 1844, on the day of the Millerite Movement's Great Disappointment. *Magnificent Disappointment* is the most brilliant attempt to explain the topic to the church today. Unfortunately, the Pacific Press has let the book go out of print.¹

There is one theme Dr. Maxwell returned to time and time again. "Are you ready for Jesus to come?" With all our knowledge about the Judgment and 1844 and all the discussion about contemporary issues like women's ordination, worship style, and contemporary Christian music, the question still remains, "Are we ready today?" Don't lose yourself in the controversies and conflicts of this life. Are you ready today? This was Mervyn's great theme. It can even be found in his source book on Adventist theology. In his classes, after reading Mervyn's source book, every student was given a final test in which he had to give an intelligent explanation. I think Mervyn has gotten the answer better than most of us. He dealt with this problem in Malachi 3:

"The Lord shall suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant. Behold he is coming saith the Lord of hosts, but who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears. For he is like a refining fire, like the fullers soap. And he will sit and also refine a fire of purifying silver. He will purify the sons of Levi. Who will be able to stand?"

And the echo can be found in Revelation 6. When he comes and the sky parts, will you be able to stand? It's not a matter of the nature of Christ, whether you can explain perfectionism, or whatever. The question is, "Will you, when you face Christ, be able to stand when he appears?" This is a nagging question. Many Adventists will say, "Oh yeah, that is simply the teaching of Ellen G. White. Let's go on to something more practical!"

Are you ready? To give you a flavor of Dr. Maxwell's concern about readiness, let me read from one of his favorite authors. Ellen White in *Great Controversy* continues here, "Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of the Holy God without a Mediator."² What do you do with this passage? Many will say,

¹ Those interested in can purchase it, however, from Stanley Maxwell at his web site: www.maxwellsgiftsandbooks.com.

² We find this in Rev 15:8 (NIV), "And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from the power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed." Thus, the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the wicked ceases. We find a relevant thought in Rev 22:11 (NASB), "Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the

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“Read it for your devotions and pray about it.” Not Dr. Maxwell. He would say, “Here truly is a challenge. To stand in the sight of the Holy God without a Mediator. What are you going to do with this?” Mervyn explains in a most beautiful way how we can meet Jesus. He says, “Those who receive the seal of the Living God and are protected in the Time of Trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully.” Too many, when they read these words, cringe. “What are we going to do, my Lord?” But then Dr. Maxwell continues: “Here is beauty. To be as gracious as Jesus, as kind as Jesus, as sensible, as dependable, as generous, as prompt to do the right thing. This is every Christian’s prayer:

Be like Jesus this my song
In the home and in the throng.
Be like Jesus all day long.
I would be like Jesus.

What do you say, friends? Remember, it’s a promise. Jesus shall purify the sons of Levi, and if we will, we are all sons of Levi. What does it mean “without a Mediator”? Does it mean Christ’s followers will be left during the time of trouble to wrestle with temptations on their own? No, no no! Jesus will still be their Guard and Guide and Stay. Still the Lord and King. Still their Help in time of storm. And then he continues. “Yes, they will be spotless. Their robes, their characters are perfected. Through the grace of God and through their own efforts, they will be conquerors in the battle with evil.”

Friends, don’t pass over that sentence. “Through the grace of God and their own efforts, they will be conquerors in the battle with evil.” And so then he beautifully illustrates what it takes to stand with Jesus. It takes everything we have. But it takes everything of God to keep us there. Praise the Lord for Mervyn’s remarkable insight, challenging us to be like Jesus every day.

In the controversies and conflicts he was involved with in his lifetime, he was always, like a Christian gentleman, wanting to be like Jesus. Even in dealing with his greatest opponents. We would say, “but Mervyn, look what is happening to yourself!” He would smile and say something kind, neat, and beautiful about those great opponents. This is true Christian greatness. We can praise the Lord for examples like Dr. Maxwell.

To be like Jesus has been a great challenge to me. If the Lord gives me the grace, I want to walk like that. I want to be like that—to be like Jesus. The task resting upon us is to share this message of hope and encouragement to fellow

one who is holy, still keep himself holy.” The saints are never without a mediator until they have received “the seal of the living God” (Rev 7:2), after which the books are closed, so they cannot be lost, while the Holy Spirit will cease trying to convince the wicked to repent, so they can no longer be saved. What is intended here is not the idea that the saints must live for a time without possibility of forgiveness, so if they sin they will be lost. If it were, it would not be biblical. God promises in Josh 1:5 (NIV), “I will never leave you or forsake you.” Jesus repeats this promise in Matt 28:20 (KJV), “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Fear not; be faithful. [editor’s comments]

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Adventists and to other people around the world. Be like Jesus every day. May the Lord impress us to carry on this wonderful legacy of Adventism that Dr. Maxwell so ably shared throughout his life. Be like Jesus every day. That was his goal. That is my goal.

Let's all make that our goal. "Be like Jesus every day! / I would be like Jesus!" Amen.

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