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Questions People Aren't Asking

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People AREN'T Asking

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WHAT might your reaction be if you were invited to hear a public lecture on the subject, "The Maiden, the Moon, and the Monster" or perhaps, "The Dragon and the Woman in the Wilderness?" With our background of vocabulary and training it is not difficult to determine

just what the speaker has in mind, but of what appeal would these subjects be to a person not so oriented? They sound like the title to some kind of perverted novel.

A man like Billy Graham can draw a large crowd on the basis of his own name appearing on the advertising, but we have not many such men among us. Thus the language announcing the subject is a telling factor in the decision of the individual to respond favorably or unfavorably. It becomes apparent then, just how important the publicizing of that subject is.

With this concern in mind, some weeks ago a questionnaire was prepared to be put to a cross section of people in several cities in the Midwest with the desire to discover what subjects were of greatest interest. Not only was it hoped that this would lead to a more relevant statement of the subject to be presented but also that we might discover what subjects people most want to hear.

Several hundred of these questionnaires were mailed to an arbitrary group of names taken from the telephone book. The percentage of response was encouraging. However, it was also felt that some significant information might be gleaned from those who would not reply to a mailed questionnaire, so a group of students was enlisted to

get a sampling of various neighborhoods in several cities.

While infallibility is not argued for the conclusions, nor mechanical perfection for the questionnaire itself, yet it would seem at least to indicate some significant feelings from a variety of people. Our great concern must be to make the preaching of the gospel relevant and not to spend our time answering questions people are not asking.

Nor is it suggested herein that we ought only to preach on the subjects listed. However, as beautiful as is our message, it does no one any good who does not hear it. Therefore in our approach we should meet the needs and the interests of the modern mind; we should concern ourselves with the concerns of the people. It would seem that this might be a legitimate definition of the phrase, "The everlasting gospel in a present-truth setting."

The extremes in response to the questionnaire are immediately evident. First at the "low" end: The only subject that received as few votes as "The Judgment" was the subject "Heaven." Both received votes on only 4 per cent of the questionnaires. It is understandable that men are not eager to hear about the time of judgment—or perhaps they do not know enough to care. But why such lack of interest in heaven? Has it been spiritualized away? Has materialism made it seem too unreal? Or is it not preached enough to whet the modern appetite? Whatever the cause it would seem evident that at present these two subjects are not good drawing cards.

Working up from the bottom of the list the next items are "Modern Miracles" with 6 per cent, "The Christian and His Money" and "Speaking in Tongues" with 8 per cent each, and "Conversion and the New Birth"

and "The Unpardonable Sin" each with 9 per cent. Even with the new "tongues" movement being such an item of current interest very few seemed concerned about it.

"Conversion" did not rank high either. Perhaps if this were camouflaged with a more enticing title (which possibility must be allowed for each of these subjects) it would have drawn wider response—but when labeled for what it is, it did not draw a heavy reply. However, it should be noted here that the subject, "The Secret of Being a Victorious Christian," was also listed and had a comparatively small 13 per cent.

Since the early days of Joseph Stalin, Adventist evangelists have sought to attract a crowd by advertising a subject that would reveal the part Russia is to play in world affairs. This has generally been a drawing card for an exposition of Daniel 2. However, only 12 per cent replied that they were interested in "What the Bible Says About Russia." Perhaps this avenue of approach needs some restudy. Even "The Sabbath-Sunday issue" is above Russia as a topic of interest with 14 per cent, and the "State of the Dead" is above that—with 20 per cent! Perhaps we need not be so introverted on our "peculiar beliefs."

"Bible Prophecy" and "Happiness in Marriage" tie at 20 per cent with "State of the Dead," and the "Second Coming of Christ" is just ahead with 21 per cent. "Getting Along With Others" got 22 per cent.

Proceeding up the list this investigator was more than a little surprised. "The Law of God" had 24 per cent! This has seemed to many to be a subject in which few had interest, and in our advertising we have attempted to call it almost anything else. Perhaps there is a keener interest in the subject today than in years past, and this could account for the fact that the cries of "legalism" are being heard less frequently.

Much in the news today is the subject of church union. This is also borne out in the degree of interest shown. The topic "Comparative Beliefs of Other Churches" and "The Ecumenical Movement" drew 27 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively. Also with 28 per cent was the "Problem of Why the Innocent Suffer."

Heading the list were two subjects of a similar nature. "Evolution and the Bible" with 28 per cent, and "Can a Scientific Mind Believe the Bible?" with 35 per cent—more than a third of all the questionnaires returned.

Human nature is forever the same. The need of the human heart does not change. But the overt concerns of the mind may be reached only with issues and vocabulary that are relevant. Seventh-day Adventists must preach the everlasting gospel. But the message must be couched in language that will appeal to the man who hears it.

The appeal, then, of this short report is for a continual cutting edge and constant growth—especially in the matter of public appeal. These questionnaires have made me rethink my advertising approach. The following is a copy of the questionnaire we sent out. The added figures indicate percentage of votes received in poll.

DEAR SIR:

As a teacher of young preachers I am concerned about the accusations that the churches of our land are not meeting the needs of the people. *I do not want your name*, but I do need your help!

Would you please take sixty seconds to check the appropriate blanks below, and then slip this prestamped envelope back in the mail now while you are thinking about it. And thank you so very much.

Please place a *check mark* beside the *five* subjects you would most like to hear discussed:

Per Cent

- 35 Can a Scientific Mind Believe the Bible?
- 28 The Problem of Why the Innocent Suffer.
- 20 Bible Prophecy and the Future.
- 13 The Secret of Being a Victorious Christian.
- 20 Happiness in Marriage.
- 9 Conversion and the New Birth.
- 28 The Church and the Race Issue.
- 21 The Second Coming of Christ.
- 14 The Sabbath-Sunday Issue.
- 12 Why Are There So Many Different Churches?
- 4 Heaven.
- 20 What Happens When a Man Dies?
- 13 Christian Standards, Dress, Amusements, etc.
- 8 Speaking in Tongues.
- 9 The Unpardonable Sin.
- 29 Evolution and the Bible.
- 18 The Christian and Good Government.
- 4 The Judgment.
- 12 What the Bible Says About Russia.
- 22 How to Get Along With Others.
- 24 The Importance of the Law of God.
- 6 Modern Miracles.
- 28 The Ecumenical Movement (Church Union).
- 11 The Christian and Labor Unions.
- 17 How to Have Prayers Answered.
- 8 The Christian and His Money.
- 27 Comparative Beliefs of Other Churches.
- 11 What the Bible Teaches About Hell.

Your age: 21-30 _____ 31-40 _____ 41-50 _____
over 50 _____

Church member: Yes _____ No _____

Thank you so much for your help.

(Signed) Don Jacobsen