Words from the Dean

We are at the point in another school year—my 14th as dean—where the end is in sight. From this vantage point, I am able to look back on enough of it to say it has been a very good year. Those of us who teach in the School of Theology—Ferdi Regalado, Carl Cosaert, Paul Dybdahl, Brant Berglin, Darold Bigger, Pedrito Maynard-Reid, Susan Bungard, Alden Thompson, and yours truly, David Thomas—continue to enjoy a strong level of collegiality amongst ourselves and with a good group of students.

We count it a real blessing to be occupied every day in the task of teaching young people the rudiments of the Gospel as it is understood in all its simplicity and complexity by Seventh-day Adventists.

I am inclined to say a few words about our students. You will see the graduates for this year in this newsletter, but I can attest that they are a fine bunch. And it is very good news that they will likely all be hired by the time summer is over. Of particular interest is that we are receiving interest in our graduates not only from the Northwest region but also from the Southwest and the Midwest. Word seems to be spreading that Walla Walla University is a very good place to prepare for ministry, and our graduates are increasingly occupying some very prominent pastoral and leadership positions. There is a very good theological balance in the School of Theology. (Please notice the article on page 14 in this newsletter affirming that we are not involved in something called “Spiritual Formation”!) There is a balance between academic learning and the practical/professional side of ministry, and a good balance between biblical, theological, historical, missions, and practics classes. Those who graduate here are well-prepared for entry into full-time ministry.

A continuing ministry within the professors in the School of Theology is to produce a Sabbath School commentary that is both written and spoken called Good Word. This production is also put out on the web so is available around the world. As we travel around, we regularly run into people who benefit from listening to Good Word. I invite you to listen by opening an Internet browser and entering wallawalla.edu/goodword. You will be able to listen to about 15 minutes of commentary on the Sabbath School topics. Many Sabbath School teachers avail themselves of Good Word commentary as they prepare to teach in places around the globe.

“Word seems to be spreading that WWU is a very good place to prepare for ministry ... .”

We appreciate very much those of you who continue to offer various kinds of support to the School of Theology and its students. Some of you donate books to us that we sell at a much reduced cost to departmental majors in an attempt to help them develop useful libraries. And we appreciate those who donate money to help with scholarships. We are very pleased to have some new and quite significant scholarships available now in addition to some long-standing ones. These are of great help to students.

These are challenging times in our world, particularly as we look at matters of religious liberty and how it is eroding around the world. We wonder if this is the precursor to what Jesus was speaking about when he spoke of “a time of trouble such as never was” before his coming to Earth again. If so, we resonate with those closing words of scripture, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.”

David Thomas

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WWU School of Theology Faculty

David Thomas, Dean
Apologetics/Theology

Brant Berglin
New Testament/Greek

Darold Bigger
Pastoral Administration

Susan Bungard
New Testament Religion Teaching

Carl Cosaert
Early Christianity
New Testament

Paul Dybdahl
Missions/New Testament

Pedrito Maynard-Reid
Ethics/New Testament

Ferdinand Regalado
Old Testament

Alden Thompson
Old Testament/Seventh-day Adventist History
Remembering J. Paul Grove
BY ALDEN THOMPSON

In 1961 I was a freshman at Walla Walla College. Elder Grove was my teacher. When I became his reader in my sophomore year, he became an important mentor in my life. I’ve had many wonderful teachers and colleagues during my years at WWU. Paul Grove towers above them all. I dedicated my book Inspiration to him as follows:

“You wanted us to ‘hear’ Matthew and Jeremiah and Habakkuk and we did. But there’s more: you inspired us to think, believe, and worship; you taught us to ask questions and to search for answers; you showed us how to live with some questions unanswered until the Lord returns and we are grateful.”

Elder Grove taught us revolutionary concepts in such a gentle way. In Hebrew Prophets, for example, we saw that the “Day of the Lord” was always a local day of judgment marked by dark days and falling stars but pointing to a final “Day of the Lord.” When Adventist cynics began pointing out that the dark day of 1780 and the falling stars of 1833 were not unique, but were recurring events in history, Paul had already shown us how to find that truth in scripture. During the turmoil of the 1970s and 80s, Walla Walla was a peaceful oasis, when other Adventist campuses were being torn apart by visits from Desmond Ford and Walter Rea. Not at Walla Walla University, thanks to Paul and the influence of the School of Theology.

But his classes didn’t simply teach us new and exciting things. They took us deep into the things of God. And that was especially true of Hebrew Prophets, at least for me. More than any other class I have ever taken anywhere, that one touched my soul.

In 1982, Paul Grove and I both attended Consultation II at General Conference headquarters, which was an attempt to bring healing to the church. After that meeting, Paul worked with Richard Fearing to hold a union-wide consultation at Camp MiVoden, the only union to do so. Pastors, administrators, and teachers spent one full day on Old Testament, one on New Testament, and one on Ellen White. It was wonderful, eye-opening. And it was Paul who made it happen. Paul also nurtured collegiality and diversity of opinion within the School of Theology.

Paul could also be funny. My roommate, Lester Wright, worked in the Mountain Ash office and used some leftover pictures to publish privately a little subversive booklet, The Mountain Hash. One picture showed a laughing Paul talking with Loren Dickinson, Don Eichner, and Hans Rasmussen, right next to the president’s office. Caption: “... then I buzzed Conard with my Cessna.” Right below it was another photo of the same men with sober faces. Caption: “... but Mrs. Evans [the women’s dean] called the President.” Lester was worried that Paul—whom he greatly admired—might be offended. But Edna Grove reported that soon thereafter Paul quipped as he was leaving the house to go flying: “I’m going out to buzz Conard.”

In more recent years when I occasionally talked with Paul, he was always encouraging and supportive. I look forward to talking to him more in the kingdom someday. In the meantime, I miss him greatly. I pray that I can remain faithful to all that he taught us and to all that he modeled for us on how to follow our Lord and Savior until He returns.
Serving in the Pastor Mentoring Program

Junior theology major Kenton Gonzalez is currently serving at the College Place Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church. Uniquely, Kenton has been in the Pastor Mentoring Program at this church, which had no pastor when he arrived! Instead, Kenton worked with the elders of the church until May when the new pastor arrived. Every weekend from “Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon,” Kenton says, he is highly involved in the Spanish church, calling this a “sacred time” that he devotes to this congregation. Kenton works primarily with youth, coordinating a Friday night vespers, a Sabbath School, and other activities. The group has grown from four to more than 20 young people in the last few months. Once a month, Kenton and his youth group are in charge of the church service, providing music, a drama, or other special feature. Kenton also preaches sermons in Spanish that he calls “intergenerational” messages. In addition to weekend activities, he wants to start a weekly youth Bible study.

In reflecting on the pastor mentoring experience, Kenton says he is learning not to be afraid to try new ideas, that listening to your group is very important, and to treasure all of the ways that God is working in the lives of church members. Classes in the School of Theology that Kenton says have directly influenced his work in the Spanish church are “Church Worship,” “Introduction to Faith and Ministry,” and “Systematic Theology.” He sees his coursework “connecting together and forming a holistic approach to ministry.”

The Pastor Mentoring Program has reinforced Kenton’s commitment to ministry and strengthened his resolve and desire to be a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. He is one of 10 students involved in the program this year.

A Good Word

Words FROM SCRIPTURE

Micah 6:8

“He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?”
2015
School of Theology
GRADUATES

Jefrey Bockmann
PLANS: Earning a master's degree in either theology or education in order to teach secondary education.
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: The professors at WWU, especially in the School of Theology. Their wise, knowledgeable, and caring instruction has impacted my life in a way that will be forever beneficial.

Jesse Churchill
PLANS: Working for the Washington Conference.
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: Helping to start and pastor a student church.

Joshua Jamieson
PLANS: Continuing to work as worship/youth pastor at the Aldergrove SDA Church in B.C., Canada.
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: Getting to meet people who would become lifelong friends, as well as getting to play music with so many talented people.

Rebekah Rogers
PLANS: Marrying Lucas Smith (former Theology graduate) and working as a social worker in Nashville, TN
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: Getting to know my professors and some of the greatest people I know.

Jessica Suitsev
PLANS: Staying in Walla Walla for now and seeking employment
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: The faculty, staff, and fellow students who have drastically changed my life for the better. I have been taught to guard my honesty, uphold my ambition, expand my intelligence, preserve my honor, maintain my dedication to service, and most importantly, continue my mission for Christ.

Sean Lehnhoff
PLANS: I will be teaching Bible and History at San Gabriel Academy.
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: Being a part of the leadership team in both Campus Ministries and the student-run church service.

Tyler Martin
PLANS: Being a youth pastor at the Bend SDA Church.
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: The always-open doors of the teachers, preachers, and mentors in the Theology department.

Katie Palumbo
PLANS: Pursuing a career in chaplaincy and young adult ministry.
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: My student missionary experience in Kenya. It was there that I decided on a career in ministry because God showed me the power of living life in loving service to others.

Jacob Wilkinson
PLANS: Associate Pastor at Spokane Valley SDA for two years, then seminary.
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: Spending time with professors outside of class.

John Wilson
PLANS: Seeking a job in pastoral ministry and trusting that God will lead.
HIGHLIGHT AT WWU: Meaningful conversations with friends, the Theology Retreat every year, and “living” at the Prayer House
Senior theology major Jesse Churchill was one of two Walla Walla University students to win “Best in Festival” and “Best Dramatic Short” at the SONScreen Film Festival held at La Sierra University in April for their film *The Way*. Churchill and Erik Edstrom created the film as a modern retelling of the biblical story of Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. The SONScreen festival features the creative work of students at various Seventh-day Adventist universities. This particular competition included 15 separate entries.

The annual InTents evangelism meetings were held May 4–9 on the WWU campus. Pedrito Maynard-Reid’s “Public Evangelism” class planned and led out in the meetings, with assistance from others on campus, such as ASWWU and the Chaplain’s office. The speakers for the InTents meetings were theology and religion majors: Jake Wilkinson, Tyler Martin, Alden Weaver, Jordan Stephan, Stephen Farr, Rebekah Rogers, John Wilson, Jessica Suitsev, and Jon Jennette. Music worship was led by Melody Ezpeleta. Attending the meetings were hundreds of students, faculty, and staff each night, with prayer groups following the meetings as well as opportunities to sign up for Bible studies. The meetings this year also featured a service component, with food donation sites across campus to distribute to those in need in the community and “blessing bags,” composed of household necessities for the homeless. The annual InTents meetings give students the opportunity to worship and witness in an informal, outdoor environment and to deepen their relationship with God.

**Gratitude for Scholarships**

Students in the School of Theology are deeply grateful for the scholarships that make their education possible. This year, more than 30 students received scholarships. Thank you to our generous alumni and friends for the following scholarships awarded in April 2015!

- **DeLaine Anderson Memorial Scholarship** ($5,500)
- **Bivocational Ministry Scholarship** ($10,000)
- **Alice I. Bowden Memorial Scholarship** ($6,000)
- **Center for Bible, Faith, and Mission Scholarships** ($9,500)
- **Richard and Dena Hammill Scholarship** ($1,000)
- **Paul and Frances Heubach Memorial Scholarship** ($1,500)
- **Oland F. Hubbs Memorial Scholarship** ($1,00)
- **Mary E. Marker Memorial Scholarship** ($3,250)
- **Matiko Award** ($500)
- **Daniel A. Ochs Memorial Scholarship** ($250)
- **Gayle L. Saxby Memorial Scholarship** ($800)
- **Eva Stratton Vliet and Jess Vliet Scholarship** ($700)
- **Theology Student Aid Dean’s Award** ($5,368)
New Book by Bigger Explores the Hard Work of Forgiveness

Personal tragedy has fostered Darold Bigger’s interest in the subject of forgiveness. Bigger serves as professor of religion and social work at Walla Walla University and is assistant to the president. Pacific Press will soon release his book A Time to Forgive: One Family’s Journey After the Murder of Their Daughter and an accompanying DVD workshop “Forgive Now.” All profits from this project will benefit children of Micronesia, where Bigger’s daughter, Shannon, served as a student missionary while a student at WWU.

Bigger asserts that the more profoundly we experience forgiveness, the more completely we are able to forgive. This conclusion is supported in the book by Bigger’s own story, by exploring the subject of forgiveness, and finally with biblical and theological evidence that is then applied in practical reflections and exercises. The DVD-based workshop and study guides allow individuals or groups to listen to presentations by Bigger and his colleague Barbara Hernandez, former WWU professor.

Experiencing God’s gift of forgiveness

A Time to Forgive distinguishes itself from non-religious books about forgiveness by adding a crucial spiritual dimension and describing how letting go of hurts while facing past wrongs and preventing future injury is the hard work of true forgiveness. Bigger’s book also differs from most Christian books about forgiveness by claiming that the act of forgiveness is a gift from God, not a human achievement. Profound forgiveness of others is possible because of God’s gift of forgiveness to us and that forgiveness instills self-esteem and value that translates to a new and accepting attitude toward others, even our offenders.

While he validates the effectiveness of known forgiveness methods, Bigger also acknowledges in the book that some offenses are so heinous or wounds so intense that ordinary methods are insufficient to bring healing. In those cases, a revisiting of the Christian doctrine of salvation by faith provides a necessary shift in focus and a tangible change in perception and attitude. God changes our view of ourselves, and that change empowers us to share forgiveness with others.

Cosaert Serves Church at Home and Abroad

Carl Cosaert, professor of biblical studies, was recently named president-elect of the Adventist Theological Society (ATS). Cosaert will serve two years as president-elect and then two years as president. He also recently completed a term as president of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS).

“What interested me in helping out with ATS is their global outreach to the world church,” said Cosaert. “I’ve traveled for ATS internationally and have seen the blessing this organization has been in helping to educate church leaders as they grow in their understanding of the biblical basis of our Adventist beliefs.”

ATS resources are available by request from church leaders and seminaries for theological assistance, training for workers, Bible symposia, and camp meeting speakers. The ATS regularly touches Adventist leaders, pastors, theologians, and lay people with the inspiration, power, and depth of God’s Word.

In his work with ATS, Cosaert has traveled to Africa, Australia, and other international locations. On a recent ATS trip to Mexico, he helped with the recording of a video series titled “Faithful to the Scriptures” that is being prepared as a gift to the world church in connection with the North American Division Ministerial Council and the General Conference Session in 2015. The series will consist of 26 programs, each 30 minutes in length. The purpose of the series is to introduce church members to the books of the Bible and what it means to be faithful to them. The series will be available online this summer at ATSacademy.org.

Cosaert presents at Annual Council

Cosaert was also recently asked to present a summary of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee position favoring the ordination of women at the Annual Council last fall at the General Conference in Washington, D.C. Cosaert had 20 minutes to present the committee’s case, which was one of three views presented. Cosaert says he was honored to have been able to speak on behalf of women in the church in their struggle for equality in ordination.

A final decision on the ordination of women will be taken up in July 2015 during the General Conference session in San Antonio, Texas. When asked about his expectations for the General Conference, Cosaert said, “I hope the Spirit will lead and guide the church as it makes a very important decision regarding whether it is acceptable for division executive committees around the world to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in their territories.”

Cosaert’s presentation can be viewed at adventistreview.org/church-news/theology-of-ordination-position-no.-2.
Setting the Record Straight About Spiritual Formation
BY DAVID THOMAS

On the face of it, the phrase “spiritual formation” would seem to be innocuous, even favorable, describing the task of forming the internal spiritual dimension that is so important to all of us. But, as I suspect many of you may already know, the phrase “spiritual formation” has come to refer to the surreptitious infiltration of various kinds of eastern mystical meditational ideas and techniques, which are alleged to be flooding into Christianity and into Adventism as part of a great conspiracy of the Devil. What is astonishing to me is that some people believe that Walla Walla University, the Walla Walla University Church, and the School of Theology are primary places where the spiritual formation described above is happening. In fact, some of these allegations have been widely produced in videos, books, and Internet presentations. Individuals have made speeches, laying out claims and allegations very publicly. These charges and allegations are very serious, indeed. And they are untrue.

Those of us who live and work in and around Walla Walla University know that eastern mystical meditation is a mind-altering meditational technique wherein people try to transcend their humanity in order to penetrate the transcendence of God. And I can say categorically that such meditation is not practiced or endorsed here at WWU at all. Those who claim otherwise say this kind of mystical stuff is “everywhere” at WWU. I say, if it is “everywhere,” then it must be “somewhere.” The problem is that nobody can find a “somewhere” where mystical meditation is being practiced or endorsed. It is simply not the case that this kind of thing is found on the campus, nor in the church. Put another way, those making these allegations against WWU have created a fantasy. For reasons I do not understand, they have amassed all kinds of evidence and drawn conclusions that have no substance in reality. What they have never done is check their conclusions with those against whom they make their allegations. When formulating opinions, before going public with them, it is normally standard practice to engage with those about whom you write or speak to see if the conclusions you have arrived at are, in fact, true. This has never been done. So, I say again quite plainly, spiritual formation (as understood in a conspiratorial or negative way) is not a part of life at WWU or the School of Theology. It is not! We do not practice mystical meditations nor do we endorse them no matter what you hear from those far away.

I would conclude by observing that, up to this point, we have deliberately chosen not to engage in public debate with those who criticize us on this matter because, once a conspiracy theory is abroad, any and all evidences and occurrences get co-opted to support the conspiracy. We prefer not to be caught in that dynamic. We do sincerely hope, however, that those who make allegations about spiritual formation at WWU will realize they are completely wrong in their conclusions. Ours is an open campus: the church services are televised, we are under the supervision and direction of the University Board of Trustees (church leaders and lay people), church leaders are often on our campus interacting with us, and we are visited by the Adventist Accrediting Association as are all other campuses. There is no conspiracy or underhandedness going on here. It is time for all this to come to a halt, for making such egregious allegations against fellow Christians without concrete substantiation is unconscionable. It boggles the mind to think how readily some who profess faith in Jesus believe the very worst about their fellows! In the interest of openness, I include here my phone number and invite you to call me if you have interest in firsthand conversation—(509) 527-2194.