

Q. Social justice is a huge movement in the Christian church. New ideas of tearing down our church walls and moving out to the world's need is growing. What are your thoughts on this?

A. You are correct that social justice is huge in today's church, and this has pros and cons. God is a God of justice; His heart bleeds for the oppressed. If we love God, our hearts must be broken with the things that break His heart. I believe it was Ian Thomas who said that Jesus died, not in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves. Being a Christian church and not becoming involved in some of the social causes in the world around us is a contradiction. But once again, we return to the principle of balance. Jesus did not go to the cross for the social ills of society; He gave His life for the sins of the world. More than anything else, people need the Lord. They need the Bread of life more than they need physical bread. So as a church, we must live between the two worlds of taking up the cause of the oppressed whenever and wherever we find opportunity, and preaching the gospel to dying men and women so they may have life, even if their justice is never served in this life.

Q. You once said that you believe the kingdom of God is bigger than the Church of God (Seventh Day). Explain what you mean by this.

A. That comment was intended to help the members of our church guard against feelings of exclusivity. It may disappoint some to read it, but CoG7 is not the whole of God's family on Earth. As a denomination, we must be "distinct, but not exclusive." Lots of people love Jesus and belong to the Lord who do not believe or practice their faith exactly as we do. His kingdom is not limited to any denomination, for which we should be grateful.

Q. The upcoming convention will mark your twelfth year in your current position, which means that for many of our teens you are the only Conference president they've known. Share your heart with our church's youth about your spiritual journey and your deepest desire for them.

A. Through the influence of a godly grandmother, I learned about Jesus early in life, was baptized at age twelve, and soon began preaching. The call to vocational ministry became so strong that at the end of my second year of college, I transferred to our church's ministerial training school. After that, I entered full-time ministry. I pray that all CoG7 youth and young adults will come to know Christ in a personal way and discover their God-given purpose in life. Third John 1:4 summarizes my heart's desire for our church's youth: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (NIV).

Q. Entering the world of young people is key to reaching them. As the father of two, how well do you understand their world? Can you relate to what's going on in their lives?

A. This is a critical stage in one's personal and spiritual development. Youth are asking questions: *Who am I? Why am I here? Whose values will I embrace: those of my parents or those of the culture?* These questions are not unique to the youth of our generation, but the challenges they face are like none other. In the cultural context of our generation, truth is relative, morality is out of vogue, and evil is multiplied through the images and voices that bombard youth daily. To love our youth and serve them effectively, we must enter their world. Lord, help us do so individually and corporately.

Q. Your description of the culture paints a grim picture. Is there anything positive on the horizon for this generation?

A. Through the providence of God, the increase of sin has another side: the increase of God's grace: "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20, NIV). Those modern inventions through which evil is multiplied in our day are also the means through which the gospel is multiplied. Exciting things are happening in the lives of young people, both in and outside our church. The record sale of Rick Warren's book **The Purpose Driven Life** is evidence of a hunger for meaning and purpose in our culture. And as I travel throughout the Church, I meet young people who thirst for God. Testimonies, reports of baptisms, youth camps, and other events confirm a bright outlook for our youth.

Q. As a Christian, do you ever feel that God makes Himself absent from the world? If so, why?

A. No, I do not experience such feelings, though I recognize that others, including Christians, do. Elements such as disaster, famine, and injustice can cause some to perceive that God is absent from the world, but He is not. In fact, when such elements shake our faith, we should try to imagine what the world would look like if God actually removed Himself from it. In the words of the late Francis Shaeffer, we serve a "God who is there." He is not only there but near. He isn't the great clockmaker who puts the world together and leaves it to unwind by itself. Rather, God is involved in the world and in the minute details of our lives. He seeks a deep and personal relationship with us.

Q. Some question whether life exists on other planets. As Christians, should we concern ourselves with these ideas?

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A. Tom Skinner was a member of the Harlem Lords before his dramatic conversion to Christianity. In his latter years, Skinner remarked that his spiritual journey was greatly impacted by his decision to not dwell on the questions he couldn't answer but on the answers he couldn't escape (not a direct quote). As believers, we should guard against preoccupation with disputable questions and focus on what God's Word clearly reveals. Quite often the quest to find life on other planets reflects a desire to undermine the existence of God and the biblical account of Creation. Christians should not be overly concerned with such matters. Scripture teaches that God created life on this planet, and our thoughts should focus on how to protect life and introduce the living to eternal life in Christ.

Q. Do you feel global warming is a real threat? Should Christians concern themselves with being “green” or environmentally conscious?

A. Global warming is a controversial subject, with evidence to support both sides of the issue. Noticeable warming and cooling of the planet have occurred at different periods in recorded history. Some of the claims regarding climate change are not scientific proof but statements that reflect a majority opinion. I am not suggesting global warming isn't a real problem, but I would guard against driving stakes down on either side of this issue too quickly, given the unsubstantiated and often contradictory data that we hear. Instead, we must develop a balanced view of the subject. The environment is important, and Christians ought to treat it with appreciation and stewardship, while being careful to not worship it. Neither should we allow politically driven ideas to cloud our thinking about the world or plant fear in our hearts. We live in a broken world, but God is still in control. The Bible teaches that the planet groans to be delivered from the brokenness sin has brought upon it (Romans 8:18-22). Therefore climate change is not the most important dilemma facing humanity.

Q. There was much debate between youth of our church about our current president, Barack Obama. What are your feelings about him and how the Church should respond to his leadership of this country?

A. The Church should respond to the leadership of President Obama in the same way it should respond to the leadership of any president: according to the instructions of God's Word. Two passages stand out in this regard: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for

there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Romans 13:1, NIV); and “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Timothy 2:1, 2, NIV). The former calls upon us to submit to the governing authorities, and the latter commands us to lift up holy hands in prayer for our leaders. Because God is sovereign, no political election escapes His notice, and all civil authority derives its power from Him. Therefore we submit to all authority, except where such submission requires disobedience to God (Daniel 3:16-18; 6:7, 19). Beyond this one exception, failure to honor our leaders and pray for them is to disobey the Word of God. And when the philosophy of a leader seems in conflict with God's will for the nation, that's even more reason to pray for him.

Q. What is your opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and what does the Bible say about it?

A. There are differing schools of thought within the Church regarding Israel and whether or not the Jews are still “God's chosen people.” Regardless of where one may be on this issue, it should be clear that God has had a unique relationship with the Jewish people throughout their history. The very existence of the modern state of Israel testifies to God's commitment to the Jews and to the truth of His prophetic Word. It should also give us comfort that those who plan to “wipe Israel from the face of the earth” will not succeed. I am confident that God will use the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in the unfolding of His plan for the future of planet Earth and the destiny of humanity. Whether or not the Palestinians have a right to a portion of the land is a different question, with which I struggle a lot. What I do know, however, is that God's love extends even to the Palestinians, as it does to all people.

Q. There is often a split in the Church between traditional and progressive thinking, especially between older members and youth, that often drives youth away. What are your thoughts?

A. The generation gap isn't unique to CoG7; all generations in every church face this problem. It manifests itself in various areas of church life: music and worship style (traditional versus contemporary) and in whether to focus

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seek new and innovative programs that will serve the needs of the family, the older generation feels that their labor and sacrificial giving over many years is no longer appreciated. The key to bridging this gap is balance, once again, on the basis of love for one another. For example, caring for one another within Christ's body should preclude any bent on making sure that my type of music gets sung every Sabbath, with indifference to what someone else may like. Worship wars begin when various people in the same congregation take this approach. In contrast to the worship wars, imagine what it would look like if everyone preferred others above themselves (Romans 12:10). Youth should love their elders, and the older generation should care for and reach out to their young people by making sure that they aren't asking them to tolerate what they wouldn't if they were in their circumstances. It all goes back to the principle of love and our mutual concern for the well being of others.

Q. You have been an inspiration to all and have impacted many churches, especially in the Hispanic community. But there always seems to be a barrier because of the language and culture. How are you planning to unite Hispanic churches and work them more and more into the Conference? What would be the next move in changing the typical “English church” or “Spanish church” into “Church of God”?

A. I would hope that the barriers between cultures in our church have decreased significantly over the past decades. As I travel throughout the Church, I observe wide acceptance of cultural differences among our brethren. But even so, areas of improvement are yet to be made. Various culture groups tend to flock together, which will happen naturally because we are who we are. You mention Hispanics, the fastest growing segment of our church at this time. I am pleased to affirm the Conference's commitment to serving the needs of Hispanics among us through the translation of literature and

other services provided to enhance their participation in the life of the Church. Given past disappointments, we've been reluctant to form a Hispanic department, seeking instead to serve such needs through our various ministries. But more recently, a new position of Hispanic Services coordinator has been created. More details will be shared as this new effort is up and running. All this is in addition to deliberate efforts to encourage and cultivate cultural diversity on all levels of the organization. Since I'm speaking to the youth of the Church, let me not miss this opportunity to say that the greatest potential for unity across cultures lies within the hearts and minds of our young people. Your values and mindset shape the future of the Church. And when it comes to cultural diversity, the future looks bright if what I see among our youth is for real. I am convinced that it is.

