

Ministry

International Journal for Clergy

July 1993

Lessons from
Waco



Depression and suicide

The article "Depression and Suicide" (March 1993) lacks understanding and addresses the issue only from a medical perspective, which I believe is incomplete. I would like to give "the rest of the story," based on my experience. I spent 18 years, from age 6 to 24, wavering between major depression and suicide. It was not because of bad genes or body chemistry. It was because I was raped, beaten, and verbally abused by my own father, and none of the family members stopped him. Everyone betrayed me. Death seemed a welcomed escape to me. Once I ran away from home for three days hoping that would improve matters, only to find that no one noticed that I had left. It's life experiences like these that cause people to be severely depressed and suicidal.

It is important to note that all the symptoms Dr. Nichols lists for depression are classic symptoms for sexually and physically abused persons. Seventy-five percent of incest victims consider and/or attempt suicide. According to various studies, 13 to 33 percent of girls are molested. Most of them never tell anyone. I myself was silent for 30 years.

In his article, Dr. Nichols suggests that "the family might gather around their sick one and tell the truth. 'John, we love you.'" However, the family may be the reason the person is sick. Persons with such depressive tendencies need to get help. Based on my experience, the best solution is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus still brings good news to the afflicted; He binds up the brokenhearted and proclaims liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoner (Isa. 61:1).

When I found Jesus at the age of 24, I began to live for Jesus, think of Jesus, and be healed by His great love. My depression and suicidal desires faded as His bright rays of love shone

on me. He is the true medicine that depressed persons need. If they cannot find that medicine alone, perhaps a Christian friend can lead them to Jesus, the great physician, the only one who can set us free from our depressions.—Name withheld.

■ I was brought up in the Advent Christian Church and believed that taking one's life was against God's will for a Christian. But sometime before my marriage in 1960 I had to face the deaths of others by suicide twice. One was a lay minister, and the other was an active Christian. What a shock to learn that one was depressed and hung himself in the barn; the other used a rifle. The news spread through the local congregation and shocked the community.

I remember trying to reconcile the deaths of these two men with my belief in the sanctity of life. In both cases, the Christian community to which these men belonged were very supportive of the families that had suffered such a tragic loss. At times they questioned whether either of the men would be forgiven by God and ultimately enjoy the bliss of Christ's kingdom. I am glad that the answer lies with God.—Edith M. Demarest, St. Clairsville, Ohio.

Are you listening, former pastor?

Dr. Herbert Martin's article "Are You Listening, Former Pastor?" (March 1993) and Roger Bryant's narrative (July 1992) prompt me to write some things that need to be said. It is possible that the church has treated wrongly people who were in a crisis such as Bryant was in, and I also may have been wrong in relating to such people. But I am afraid that we as a church might tend to put too much emphasis on the trials and hurts of members under church censure and unwittingly support people whose attitude should not be supported.

A disease causes pain; sin is a

disease. If a disease goes so far as to need surgery, it is going to cause pain. It's easy to blame the surgeon for not being careful enough (or not being educated properly, etc.). I am not in a position to judge Roger Bryant's view about the church handling his case. But as an ordained pastor I had to deal with similar cases and I have come to fear them because of the opposition from within the church. Only a few persons in the church understand that church censure is an "operation" that will cause pain to the member concerned and to the whole church as well. But if we are afraid of or opposed to performing such an operation because of the pain, we fail to save the person's eternal life and risk the spiritual health of the whole church.—Torsten Bretschneider, Greifswald, Germany.

Evangelism goes to Moscow

Thank you for J. R. Spangler's exciting article "Evangelism Goes to Moscow" (March 1993). Spangler states that the Moscow crusade in July will constitute the "greatest single evangelistic campaign our church has ever attempted." That record will stay only for two months. In September, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Voice of Prophecy Bible School, the Voice of Prophecy will hold a reaping crusade in Salvador, Brazil, in a hall that seats 80,000 people. Other reaping meetings are scheduled in various cities in Brazil in halls seating up to 40,000. While the baptismal goal for Russia in July is 4,000 to 5,000, the baptismal goal for Brazil in September is 15,000! Students from every Adventist college in North America will be holding pre-crusades and taking part in the reaping campaign, and hopefully will return to their colleges with a new vision of evangelism.—Tim Crosby, Newbury Park, California.

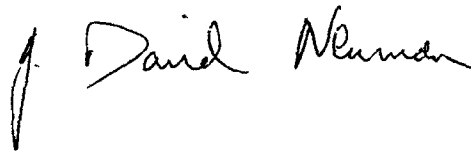
(Continued on page 29)

If you're receiving MINISTRY bimonthly without having paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 MINISTRY has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers, but we believe the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share with you our aspirations and faith in a way that we trust will provide inspiration and help to you too. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulders, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you cannot use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead.

While "Lessons from Waco" by Caleb Rosado will not undo that tragedy this article will help us understand why such catastrophes occur. Dr. Rosado, who first served as a pastor before entering teaching, brings the disciplines of theology and sociology to bear on the calamity that fell on the Waco community. Learn the distinctions between denomination, sect, and cult.

Alcohol may work well in cars but it destroys the human body. For centuries debate has swirled over whether the Bible teaches the moderate use or absolute prohibition of alcohol. "A biblical theology of drinking" by Roger Evans will probably not settle the debate, but it clearly points out the harmful effects of alcohol.

"Small group evangelism" is the seventh in our continuing education series on local church evangelism. It is still not too late to sign up for this vital topic. Craig Dossman has successfully practiced the principles outlined in this article. In addition, he has written a book on the subject, explaining in greater detail how your church can grow through small groups.



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False messiahs

Eric Calvin Ward

My family made a Sunday afternoon visit to some old friends we hadn't seen in a while. As we prepared for dinner, I passed a well-appointed bedroom with a picture poised on decorative pillows, the portrait of a bald, middle-aged Black man. Curious about who he was, I learned that he was the newfound god" of this prosperous family.

Their "messiah" had recently flown to Los Angeles from New York. (I was surprised that God would need to "fly the friendly skies.") His picture was also at the head of the dining table, behind the best of the family's china and silver setting. The family placed the picture there for every meal eaten in that house. I say house because what I considered for many years to be a home for this couple and their two lovely daughters had become merely a house. You see, the husband and wife received orders from their messiah, Father Divine, that for the sake of their faith they could no longer sleep in the same bedroom. Any cohabitation between this husband and wife of three decades must cease, for such conduct was sinful and of the flesh—evil. They were to live as born-again "virgins." Additionally, all properties owned in joint tenancy had to be deeded over to the "kingdom," in the name of the Most Reverend Father Divine, otherwise known as George Baker.

Thousands across America and Canada flocked to this new messiah for free meals, free dormitory housing, and a free lifestyle in renovated apartments and second-rate hotels. Members had freedom from the burdens of marital and material cares.

According to Father Divine, one's husband was now a brother, and the wife became a sister. Children were simply younger brothers and sisters. Therefore there were no fathers and no mothers, only one Father Divine. Without marriages in this kingdom, many families disintegrated, disinherited children, and deeded over millions of dollars in real estate across North America. In the new kingdom, getting sick or dying was considered the result of secret sin that hadn't been confessed to Father. You may have read about all this in *Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and other magazines.

The messianic shock

Then came the shock to Black America. That ebony messiah had left the United States, skipped across its northern border, and married a young white Canadian woman.

Immediately his disillusioned, disgruntled, and dismayed followers wanted to know why their messiah could demand that his tens of thousands of followers dissolve their marriages and live celibate lives, while he could marry. The marriage was especially resented by the kingdom's Black female "virgins." Why didn't "Father" pick one of them to be "Mother Divine"?

Next came war in "heaven." Harlem in New York City happened to be part of that heaven. Father Divine called a press conference there to explain to the world why he had the right to marry. He announced that he was fulfilling Bible prophecy. The problem, he said, was not with him getting married, but with the spiritual ignorance of his critics. He demanded, "Haven't you ever read Revelation 19:7: 'Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him [Father Divine, supposedly]: for the marriage of the

Lamb is come, and his wife [the white Canadian sister] hath made herself ready.'"

The messiah's explanation yielded only further disappointment, which deepened into despair, delusion, and finally defeat and disintegration. The final climax to this modern-day pseudo-messiahship came when Father turned up missing from his weekly banquets. Rumors circulated that he was ill. Days passed into weeks. The news spread that he would make a television appearance. He appeared with "Mother Divine," who did most of the talking. Father seemed to be feeble. Some weeks later, word leaked out of the kingdom that Father had died and was buried.

In such deception, delusion, and demise ended a messiah, his kingdom, and his credentials. He had indeed fulfilled Bible prophecy—Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, predicted: "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and . . . if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24).

Since that prophetic declaration of Jesus, hundreds have come and gone, declaring themselves messiahs, prophets, or divinely commissioned leaders. Only recently the terror of Waco showed the world how real and tragic such claims can be. Persons like David Koresh, a high school dropout, rock musician, and polygamist, have the audacity to say, "If the Bible is true, then I'm Christ."

How does one discern the truth when so many messianic hoaxes abound? For Christians, there's only one rule: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). Following the Holy Scriptures is our only safety from deception by pseudo-messiahs.

The real Messiah

The biblical testimony bears witness to only one Messiah, only one Redeemer: Jesus Christ. In support of that claim, the Bible points out seven realities about Christ:

1. Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, is the only man ever born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38).

2. Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, is the only man who ever claimed prior to death that He was dying for the sins of the world. No other Messiah has ever claimed this and proved it (John 12:31-33).

3. Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, is the only man who ever demonstrated that He could go to the grave and return from the dead when He chose (John 10:17, 18; 2:19,21).

4. Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, is the only man in history to ever walk on water and permit a disciple to do the same, without sinking (Matt. 14:22-33).

5. Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, is the only man who ever left earth by space flight, went to heaven, and returned to earth the same day (John 20:17-19).

6. Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, is the only one deemed worthy by the Father of worship by the angels of heaven (Heb. 1:5, 6).

7. Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, is the only person who ever claimed that He will bring every holy angel in heaven with Him when He soon returns the second time (Matt. 25:31). Our belief in Christ's glorious return is based upon more than 265 promises or references in

the Old and New Testaments.

When Christ came the first time the religious, political, and social leaders did not accept Him. Why? They expected a military Messiah, leading armies. Jesus appeared as a baby in the cradle. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). Nevertheless Jesus Christ, the real Messiah, is the only one who can save from the *power* of sin (drugs, alcohol, promiscuity), the *pollution* of sin (addiction, licentiousness, profanity), and the *presence* of sin (defeat, disease, death).

Final deliverance will take place at Christ's grand and glorious appearance in the atmospheric heavens. That's good news from the real Messiah to the pulpit as well as to the pew. ■

Pastors beware

Martin Weber

W

hat do you do when you sense that a parishioner is inappropriately attracted to you? Worse yet, what about when something inside

you responds to that person's attention?

Every vocation has its risks. Politicians are in danger of getting voted out of office. Construction workers are in danger of falling off buildings. And pastors are in danger of falling from their moral integrity. Specifically, I'm referring to unwise friendships with members of the opposite sex.

Whether we like it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, pastors carry with them an aura of attraction. I hate to call it sexual attraction, but that is exactly what it amounts to for many members of your church. Let's take a frank look at the problem and how to deal with it. I'm approaching it from a man's perspective—the way women relate to male clergy.

Regardless of your physical appearance, there is something about your leadership that many women find intriguing. You can deny that to your own danger, yet it's true. Many a theology graduate who had never considered himself attractive to the coeds on campus suddenly discovers in the pulpit an enthusiastic female following.

These admirers aren't necessarily immoral people. They may indeed be sincere Christians, and yet temptation allures them just the same. It's a law of human nature that people are drawn to those who meet their needs. Women have a deep emotional need for a man's encouragement, guidance, tenderness, and affirmation. If their own husband fails to provide this emotional support, they may be drawn to another man. Since pastors represent the loving qualities of the Good Shepherd, they appear to provide all that may be lacking at home. In reality, we all know that the pastor's own wife can sometimes be the most emotionally deprived woman in

the church. Her husband is away night after night, comforting and caring for others of the flock. After he finally droops into his own doorway, he often drops into bed too emotionally exhausted to feel like communicating with his own wife. Of course, the women of the church may not know about their pastor's shortcomings, so they may find themselves



fantasizing about some kind of emotionally fulfilling relationship with him.

Perhaps unaware of what they really want from the pastor, these women may approach him with a request for spiritual help. As they file out the door after a sermon, they fervently murmur, "Pastor, I was so blessed by your insights this morning. Could you stop by sometime soon and explain them to me further?"

The unsuspecting man, no doubt
(Continued on page 28)

Lessons from Waco

Caleb Rosado

Understanding
the chaos of
cults and sects.



Caleb Rosado, Ph.D., is professor of sociology at Humboldt State University in California where he specializes in the sociology of religion. He is a frequent contributor to Ministry.

The world watched in horror as a fatal inferno ended the standoff between an armed cult and U.S. law enforcement officers. The 51-day drama outside Waco, Texas, began Sunday morning, February 28, 1993, when some 100 agents stormed the Branch Davidian compound to confiscate illegal weapons. Cult members responded with gunfire that killed four lawmen. The ensuing siege climaxed in the fiery destruction of the cult's compound and scores of its members.

Shockingly, those who fired on the federal agents belonged to a religious organization. Whatever happened to "turn the other cheek" and "blessed are the peacemakers"? News reporters referred to the group as "the Branch Davidians of Seventh-day Adventists." That preposition *of* has raised great concern among Seventh-day Adventists. What can the church do to protect itself from the bad press that arises from misdeeds of former members?¹ And what can any church do to prevent the spawning of cults and sects?

First, we must clarify the difference between a cult² and a sect. Some media reports of the Waco tragedy labeled the Branch Davidians as a cult; others called them a sect.³ This confusion can be resolved if we understand the process of secularization and its relationship to religion.

Religion and secularization

When the First Amendment became part of the Constitution of the United States, it prohibited Congress from passing a law establishing religion or preventing its free exercise. Learning from

the experience of Europe, Congress shunned state religion or a state church. The unique result became what Rodney Stark calls a "religious economy"—the vast market of diverse religious groups competing to attract converts or clientele.⁴ This religious economy gives rise to *religious pluralism*, defined here as a large number of competing religious groups seeking to meet the spiritual needs of a diverse population. In religious pluralism no particular group dominates.⁵ This policy contrasts sharply with other countries where religious monopolies exist, and the state favors one group.

Sociologists most often use the term *church* in a technical sense to refer to the dominant religious institution in a country, such as the Roman Catholic Church in Italy, Spain, or Poland. In a religiously pluralistic market such as the United States, we do not find a dominant church, but competing denominations.⁶

Almost all religious faiths begin as otherworldly groups, conservative in belief and behavior. In time, however, they accommodate to their societal environment and lose their spiritual fervor. This move toward worldliness concerned John Wesley. Realizing that a religious revival could not be sustained, he observed: "I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches. How then is it possible that Methodism, that is, a religion of the heart, though it flourishes now as a green bay tree, should continue in this

state? For the Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal; consequently they increase in goods. Hence they proportionately increase in pride, in anger, in the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life. So, although the form of religion remains, the spirit is swiftly vanishing away. Is there no way to prevent this—this continual decay of pure religion?"⁷

Wesley was describing the process of secularization whereby the supernatural declines in significance. Secularization gives rise to secularism, a way of life that negates the influence of the supernatural in both belief and behavior. But the gradual process from sacred to secular becomes self-limiting in that spiritual decline often gives rise to revival and cult formation.⁸

During the 1960s a decline of religion in mainline churches, as measured by the drop in attendance and membership,⁹ seemed to signify a loss of interest in religion. We observed the "God is dead" movement—now dead itself. People failed to realize that religious interest had not died but shifted to growing conservative denominations.¹⁰ Stark and Bainbridge suggest that God merely changed residences: "The scholars in the heart of Christendom who proclaim the death of God have been fooled by a simple change of residence. Faith lives in the sects and sectlike denominations, and in the hearts of the overwhelming majority of individual persons. New hopes enter the marketplace of religion with every new cult movement. . . ."

"Far from marking a radical departure in history and an era of faithlessness, secularization is an age-old process of transformation. In an endless cycle, faith is revived and new faiths born to take the places of those withered denominations that lost their sense of the supernatural. Through secularization, churches reduce their tension with the surrounding sociocultural environment, opening fields for sects and cults to grow and, in turn, themselves to be transformed."¹¹

To Stark and Bainbridge, secularization "does not end the human need for religion"; on the contrary, it encourages religious experimentation.¹² This experimentation provides entrance for sects and cults, since "secularization means the transformation of religion, not its destruction."¹³ When religion becomes too secular, either revival will break out

in sect formation or there will be novel religious innovations seen in the emergence of cults. Sects and cults are two quite different responses to secularization.

Sects

We can define a sect as a religious group that claims to be the true expression of a traditional religious faith, and whose beliefs and behaviors challenge the norms of society. Sects are break-away, schismatic groups that "present themselves to the world as something old. They left the parent body, not to form a new faith, but to reestablish the old one from which the parent body had 'drifted' (usually by becoming more churchlike). Sects claim to be the authentic, purged, refurbished version of the faith from which they split. Luther, for example, did not claim to be leading a new church but the true church, free of worldly encrustations."¹⁴ Christianity itself began as a sect of Judaism.

We find expressions of renewal in most religious organizations. For example, Seventh-day Adventists began after various believers broke away from Methodist, Baptist, and other mainline denominations to form the Millerite movement, which heralded the anticipated coming of Christ on October 22, 1844. After that Great Disappointment, many Adventists recovered and went on to reclaim biblical teachings they felt other churches had neglected.

Because of the beliefs that a sect recovers, it may represent the genuine expression of the original faith. Over the years Seventh-day Adventists have viewed themselves this way. And Adventists are not alone in holding such a view. To H. Richard Niebuhr, the

denominational aspect of a religious organization represents accommodation to the world, "the church's confession of defeat and the symbol of its surrender."¹⁵ But God's true people can never be totally at home on this earth. Why? The gospel remains at odds with this world (see 1 Cor. 1:18-31). Thus, a sect can be the purer form of religious expression, divorced from the influences of outside society.

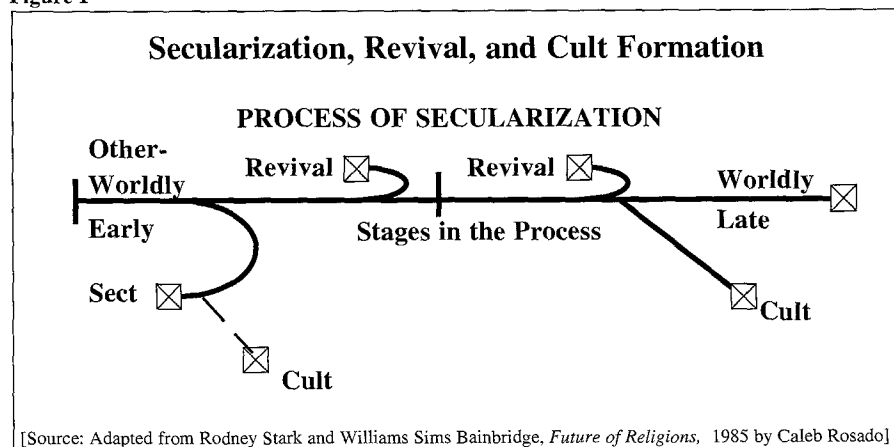
Cults

A cult, in contrast, is a *new* religious movement that represents a radical break from existing religious traditions. Sometimes a sect becomes "the beginning phase of an entirely new religion"—a cult.¹⁶ While we call first-century Christianity a sect of Judaism, it was a cult to the various religions in pagan Rome (such as Mithraism, which Christianity replaced by the fourth century). Whether domestic or imported, a cult represents a new and different form of religious expression in society.

We need to make four additional points about sects and cults. First, though sects and cults differ, they are not "functional alternatives" to secularization. Rather they are different responses to secularization at different stages of the process. "Sect formation is, in part, a response to early stages of weakness in the [religion] provided by the conventional churches. Cult formation tends to erupt in later stages of church [or denominational] weakness, when large sectors of the population have drifted away from all organizational ties to the prevailing faiths."¹⁷ (See Figure 1.)

Second, because sects are concerned with revival, they tend to proliferate in areas where conservative religions are

Figure 1



strongest. Cults, however, tend to emerge where secularization has had the strongest effect on religion, areas weak in traditional religion.¹⁸

Third, not all revivals result in sect formation. There may be occasional periods of spiritual renewal in an organization, moving it back from the brink of spiritual decline and secularism. Seventh-day Adventists have experienced several of these episodic revivals in overseas fields, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and on college campuses in the United States. The fact that these have taken place in less-developed societies and on college campuses is not coincidental, since change usually starts with groups that have the least invested in the prevailing system and therefore have little to lose but much to gain with spiritual change.

Fourth, it is also possible for a sectarian group to evolve into a cult. This is the significance of the broken arrow in the above graphic, showing that a sect can sometimes become a cult. This takes place when a sect's teaching ceases to be a return to "old truths," and becomes "new light," so that it moves the group completely away from past connections, resulting in the emergence of a "new religion."¹⁹ This was the case of the Peoples' Temple and Jim Jones. It began as an emotionally charged Christian sect, with Jones after nine years being ordained by the Disciples of Christ, that evolved into a cult when Jim Jones began to regard himself as God and moved into extremes of doctrine and behavior.²⁰ The same became true with the Branch Davidians, which began as a sect under Victor Houteff and evolved into a cult under the leadership of Ben Roden and then David Koresh.

Established sects

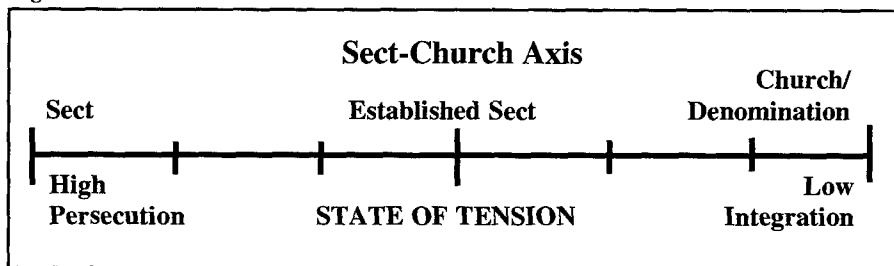
As cited previously, Seventh-day Adventism is a sect, though it is becoming more and more accommodated to this world—in other words, more denomination-like, especially in areas where its institutions such as hospitals and colleges dominate. In such places revivals usually break out, as mentioned earlier. Black and Latino Adventist churches tend to be more sectarian—in tension with the world and separatist—than White Euro-American churches. This is partly owing to the reality that society, with its racial and class hostility, is in tension with persons of color,

who in turn seek refuge in the church.²¹ To say that the Adventist Church is a sect is not to suggest something negative, but to recognize how it emerged on the American scene, its growth and development, and its doctrinal beliefs.

Because of their numerical growth, institutional presence, and global organization, Seventh-day Adventists more specifically reflect the sociological topology of an *established sect*. This category best describes Adventism because the very term itself, *established sect*, reflects a duality, a dynamic tension. William H. Swatos, Jr., describes this as a "seeming contradictoriness . . . , 'sect' indicating world rejection yet 'established' connoting world acceptance."²²

Figure 2 shows that there are degrees of sectarian tension. Sect and church/denomination are polar opposites. Between them are degrees of sectarian and denominational development.

Figure 2



Stark and Bainbridge assert: "The ideal sect falls at one pole, where the surrounding tension is so great that sect members are hunted fugitives."²³ Such was the case of the early church under Judaism and the Roman Empire, and then under the Spanish Inquisition. "The ideal church [or denomination] anchors the other end of the continuum and virtually is the sociocultural environment—the two are so merged that it is impossible to postulate a basis for tension."²⁴ Such was the position of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, and is the situation of many North American mainline denominations and European state churches.

In time, as an otherworldly group progresses and becomes an established sect, on its way to becoming a denomination, schismatic groups will appear, or what Adventists call "offshoot organizations" or "apostate movements." These are sects that break away from the main sect, in this case the Seventh-day Adventist Church.²⁵ Since the church's

beginnings, several offshoot or other sectarian groups have emerged. Besides key individuals such as Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, A. T. Jones, D. M. Canright, A. F. Ballenger, and Desmond Ford, there have been splinter groups such as the Messenger party (1853-1854); The Hope of Israel and the Marion party (1858, 1866); the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement—German (1915); the Reformed Seventh-day Adventists—Rowenite (1916); the United Sabbath Day Adventists (1930); and the Shepherd's Rod movement (1929), which later took the name Davidian Seventh-day Adventists.²⁶

As can be noted or assumed from the names of these various groups, and similar to Martin Luther's attitude toward Catholicism and William Miller's attitude toward Protestant churches in the 1830s and 1840s, these groups were interested not necessarily in breaking

with the church, but in reforming it. Each believed they had "new light," and were the "authentic, purged, refurbished version of the faith."²⁷ But because they were found to be wanting both theologically and sociologically (in terms of behavior and attitude), relations were severed.

Branch Davidians

The Davidians emerged in the person of Victor Houteff, a Bulgarian and a member of a Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Los Angeles. In 1929 he was espousing his teachings in a Sabbath school class he taught. In 1930 he published his teachings in *The Shepherd's Rod*, from which he took the initial name of the group. There is no space in this brief article to go into his teachings, which focused on Bible prophecy.²⁸ Essentially the group believed that God would restore the kingdom of David, of which the Davidians were the core group, after God had slaughtered the Seventh-day Adventists who rejected the

Shepherd's Rod message. "The 144,000 would be Seventh-day Adventists left over from the slaughter of Ezekiel 9."²⁹

Disfellowshipped in 1930, Houteff and 11 followers (including children) moved to Waco, Texas,³⁰ a religiously conservative area with at present some 200 churches, most of them fundamentalist. (Keep in mind what was said earlier about sects flourishing in areas where traditional religion is strong.) They bought property near the city and called their place Mount Carmel, after the biblical place where Elijah overcame the prophets of Baal.³¹

In 1942 the group took on the official name of Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, because of government regulations during World War II. Houteff died in 1955. He left no successor as president of the Davidians, since he did not expect to see death. But already beforehand, as is common with new sects, splinter groups were emerging because of disagreements with Houteff's teachings.³² Into this confusion stepped Houteff's widow, Florence, who took over the leadership of the group.

In 1959 she predicted that God would intervene in history and establish the kingdom of David. Some 1,000 people sold everything and gathered at Mount Carmel to await the restoration of the kingdom, but the prophecy failed.³³ After the big letdown, more splinter groups emerged, but the one founded by Benjamin Roden, Branch Davidian, became the largest and most important. In 1962 Florence Houteff officially disbanded the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists,³⁴ though a number of Davidian groups continued to operate without connection to the Branch Davidians in Waco.

At this time in the process of sect transformation, the Davidians shifted over to become a cult, the Branch Davidians (the significance of the broken arrow in Figure 1). The process of sect-to-cult shift took place with the emergence of splinter groups that began to espouse, not new/old teachings, as sects do, but radically new teachings that fundamentally broke with the Bible, basic Christianity, and Seventh-day Adventism. Ultimately their leader came to regard himself as King David and Jesus Christ. He also made extreme demands and behavioral expectations of his followers.

Roden relocated the Mount Carmel center to its present location, not far

from the original site. He claimed to be the antitypical David, but in 1978 he died. His wife, Lois Roden, took over the group and, now stronger than ever, espoused the teaching that her husband had not supported—that the Holy Spirit was the feminine part of the Godhead. She began publishing a magazine called *Shekinah*, with emphasis on *she*. Lois Roden also promoted the ordination of women.³⁵

In 1981 former Adventist Vernon Howell joined the group and soon wrested leadership from George Roden, son of Lois and Ben Roden, after an open confrontation that involved gunfire. Howell changed his name to David Koresh, proclaiming his belief that he too was the antitypical David of the Bible, and Koresh—Hebrew for Cyrus, king of Persia, of whom the Bible says that God would "direct all his ways," and that he would rebuild the city of Jerusalem and let the captives go free (Isa. 45:13). All of which David Koresh applied to himself.

Koresh also taught that he was a sinful incarnation of Jesus Christ. And because he was Christ, only he could have sexual relations with the women in the compound. Additionally, only he could open the seven seals of the book of Revelation. Koresh exploited his vast knowledge of the Scriptures to suit his own interests and manipulate his followers into submission.

The lust of power

More can be said about Koresh, but four things with which he became obsessed raise important questions. Why the obsession with the seven seals and the belief that he alone could open them? Why the centralizing of possessions and controlling of the money? Why the obsession with graphic, promiscuous sex that he alone could engage in? Why the obsession with guns and high-powered weapons?

While all four factors are on the surface vastly different, they all have one important common denominator—*power!* David Koresh, like most cult leaders (Jim Jones, Charles Manson, and others), became obsessed with power. All of us desire power, for without power we are helpless, and there is nothing meaningful about a powerless existence. But the right use of power is based on *choice*, not coercion. That is how God uses power—without violating free

Koresh, like most cult leaders, became obsessed with power.

moral choice.³⁶ So why these four areas?

In an age of rapid social and cultural change where all social values are for sale, spiritual confusion results. Some people become vulnerable to a cult leader who stands up and proclaims that he or she alone holds the key to unlock the future and give meaning to history and daily living. When the cult leader has charisma, persuasion, and a profound knowledge of the Bible, he exudes a tremendous source of personal power, generating much adulation and personal esteem from followers, many of whom are neophytes in biblical understanding. Such is the significance behind the claim to be the only one to open the seven seals of the book of Revelation, a complex series of prophecies not many Christians understand.³⁷

We live in a society where money is regarded as one of the greatest sources of power. According to the apostle Paul, it is the love of money that lies at the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). By extension, wealth and possessions become a source of independence and a manifestation of self-will. When members joined Koresh's group, all forms of independence had to be relinquished, including the ownership of material possessions. Depriving members of outside influences, Koresh not only centralized wealth in himself but also controlled the group, making it completely dependent on him.

Sex has always been one of the strongest of human drives and one of the most violent weapons used against women. One only needs to reflect on the use of rape as a weapon of war, with the most recent example being its use against the women of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Serbians. Couple this source of power with the concept that women must be submissive to men in absolutely everything to the point that they have no personal conscience. Koresh urged the Davidian women to help him as the

sinful Christ experience sin so that he could save sinful human beings. In doing so, he promised they would be "queens in heaven."³⁸ The total force of deceptions together gave Koresh tremendous power to manipulate and control.

In a violent society such as ours, the ultimate source of power lies in weaponry. Extreme cult leaders like Manson, Jones, and Koresh have bought into Mao Tse-Tung's philosophy: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Koresh's

obsession with guns was nothing more than a latching on to the final form of power—the ability to inflict death. For Jim Jones it was the power to convince people to inflict death willingly on themselves. That's power! For Koresh, opening the seven seals, controlling the money and possessions of his followers, having exclusive use of the women for sexual purposes, and possessing a weapons arsenal comprised four levels of power, the ultimate form of which is the ability to control life and death. Thus, it is not

who dies, but who determines the time, place, and manner of death that is the one with the power.

The charred corpses of an estimated 86 men, women, and children bore grisly testimony that the most seductive force in the world is power. It is the one thing human beings crave most, and in order to possess it the most heinous crimes are committed. While Koresh's departure in a blaze of self-inflicted glory may not have been his preferred climax to the siege, it did allow him to control the final outcome. He took the lust for power to its ultimate limit. ■

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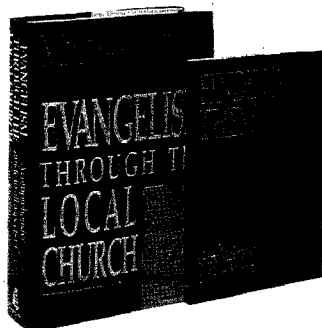
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¹ This question will not be addressed in this article since it is the topic of research I am currently engaged in for a paper, "The Sociology of Damage Control—The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas." I will be presenting at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, October 29-31, 1993, in Raleigh, North Carolina.

² Because the term *cult* has such a negative connotation in popular thinking, sociologists often prefer the term *new religious movement*. But Eileen Barker, one of England's leading sociologists on NRMs, and author of the book *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction*, says: "Some are not new, some are not religious, and some are not moving at all" (as quoted by Andrew Brown, "Over the Edge Into Collective Lunacy," *Independent*, Mar. 4, 1993 [a London, England, newspaper]).

³ See "Secrets of the Cult," *Newsweek*, Mar. 15, 1993; "In the Name of God," *Time*, Mar. 15, 1993; "The Evil Messiah," *People*, Mar. 15, 1993. The newspaper stories are too numerous to list, since virtually all newspapers carried the story during the first two weeks of March 1993 and beyond. The principal newspaper that published an important series on the group was the *Waco Tribune-Herald*. The four-part series was run February 27-March 2, 1993.

⁴ Rodney Stark, *Sociology*, 4th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1992), p. 410. For a fuller elaboration of the religious-economy paradigm, see Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); and R. Stephen Warner, "Work in Progress Towards a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (March 1993).

⁵ The specter of the mass suicide of the members of the Peoples Temple in Guyana, the World Trade Center bombing with connections to Muslim extremists, and the Branch Davidian standoff in Waco are again raising questions as to whether religion ought to be regulated. For a discussion of this issue, see Thomas Robbins, William C. Shepherd, and James McBride, *Cults, Culture, and the Law: Perspectives on New Religious Movements* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985).

⁶ See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), for how denominations develop in response to their environment.

⁷ As quoted in Niebuhr, p. 70.

⁸ See Rodney Stark and William Sims

Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 1985).

⁹ See Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ See Dean Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

¹¹ Stark and Bainbridge, p. 529.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹³ Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 279.

¹⁴ Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Niebuhr, p. 265.

¹⁶ Keith A. Roberts, *Religion in a Sociological Perspective* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1990), p. 196.

¹⁷ Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, pp. 444, 445.

¹⁸ See both works of Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion* (1985) and *A Theory of Religion* (1987), as well as Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990*.

¹⁹ Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, pp. 186, 187.

²⁰ See Jeannie Mills, *Six Years With God: Life Inside Rev. Jim Jones Peoples Temple* (New York: A&W Pub., Inc., 1979). See also Mel White, *Deceived* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1979).

²¹ For the experience of the Black church, see C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Experience Into Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974); and C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990). No comparable study has been written about the Latino church. Work, however, is under way.

²² William H. Swatos, Jr., *Intro Denominationalism: The Anglican Metamorphosis*, Monograph Series 2 (Storrs, Conn.: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1979), p. 12. For an excellent study of this duality in Adventism see Gary Schwartz, *Sect Ideologies and Social Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and the most recent study by Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-Day Adventism and the American Dream* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

²³ Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, p. 23.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Church is used here in its more popular and nonsociological sense, meaning a religious organization.

²⁶ For information on all these groups, see the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976).

²⁷ See the definition of *sect* given earlier in this article.

²⁸ Several documents were published by the Committee on Defense Literature of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists briefly delineating the teachings of the Davidians: *The History and Teachings of "The Shepherd's Rod": The Story of the "Shepherd's Rod" (1955); Some Teachings of the Shepherd's Rod Examined (1956); Report of a Meeting Between a Group of "Shepherd's Rod" Leaders and a Group of General Conference Ministers (1959).*

²⁹ Marc A. Breault, "Some Background on the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Movement From 1955 to the Early Part of 1991," unpublished manuscript, Apr. 17, 1991, revised May 27, 1991.

³⁰ The name Waco is an anglicization of the Spanish word *hueco*, meaning "hole."

³¹ 1 Kings 18:20-40.

³² See *The History and Teachings of "The Shepherd's Rod": The Story of the "Shepherd's Rod."*

³³ Breault. For a discussion of how religious groups respond when prophecy fails, see Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (New York:

Harper and Row, 1956).

³⁴ "Davidian SDA's—Shepherd's Rod," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*.

³⁵ See *SHEKINAH*, vol. 1:1, Dec., 1980. The magazine, an 8" x 11" newspaper format publication, consists not only of articles by cult members but also reproductions of articles on the teachings of the group from national and area newspapers.

³⁶ See Caleb Rosado, "The Stewardship of Power," *Ministry*, July 1989.

³⁷ For an understanding of David Koresh's teachings on the seven seals, see Marc A. Breault, "Vernon Howell and the Seven Seals," photocopied document, n.d.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

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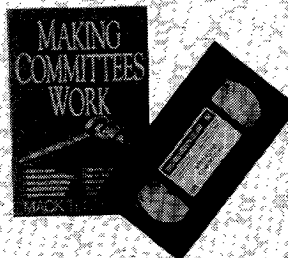
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A biblical theology of drinking

Roger S. Evans

An examination of drinking and drunkenness in the Old and New Testaments.



Roger S. Evans, pastor of Delaware/Westerville Seventh-day Adventist churches in Ohio, is a Ph.D. candidate in history of Christianity at Ohio State University.

Seventh-day Adventists have not felt compelled to develop a theology of wine until recently, when surveys of their young people revealed an increasing percentage of them to be drinking alcoholic beverages, especially wine. For these youth the traditional stance of total abstinence is obviously no longer a compelling deterrent. What is the scriptural position?

A surface reading of the biblical texts might seem to suggest that wine drinking in moderation is not condemned. However, such "proof-text" approach is not an acceptable way of determining Bible truths. Our young people demand clear *biblical* statements on issues affecting their lives. If we are a people of the Word, then we need to demonstrate the biblical command not only in doctrine but also in lifestyle issues. With that in mind I have attempted an honest look at wine consumption in the Bible and how it is perceived by inspired biblical writers. This article will examine only those texts that speak to the moral issues surrounding the use of wine and/or drunkenness.

Wine in the Old Testament

The Old Testament primarily uses two words for wine: *yayin* (more than 140 times) and *tirosh* (38). Where *tirosh* is used, no moral issues are involved. Indeed, *tirosh* is most often understood to be "new wine," and The New King James Version translates it as such 37 times. Therefore this study will be lim-

ited to major texts that use *yayin*. *Yayin* occurs throughout the Old Testament. Standard scholarly works define *yayin* as the fermented juice of the grape, indicating such to be the usage in Scriptures.¹ Although attempts are made to demonstrate that *yayin* can refer to fermented as well as unfermented grape juice, there simply is no proof for this.² Some point to Isaiah 16:10 as using *yayin* to speak of unfermented grape juice. The text reads, "No treaders will tread out wine in their presses."³ Wine fresh from the presses cannot be fermented, and therefore the text must refer to unfermented grape juice. However, such interpretation has some problems.

First, this reference is found in the middle of a prophecy concerning Moab, a prophecy full of symbolic language. To force a literal reading of *yayin* would, therefore, be a violation of sound biblical hermeneutics. Second, even if the text were to be interpreted literally, it does not necessarily imply fresh wine. Both fermented and unfermented grape juice can be said to come from winepresses. Third, the weight of evidence points to *yayin* as fermented grape juice. Why would the biblical writers use *yayin* for unfermented grape juice when they had *asis* (juice of grapes, not yet fermented) and *mishrah* (a drink made from macerated grapes). Indeed, Numbers 6:3, listing the products of the grape forbidden to the Nazarites, uses both *yayin* and *mishrah*.

Whether *yayin* indicates both fermented and unfermented grape juice is a modern question. Biblical writers seemed to have no interest in defining

words like *yayin*. When they used *yayin*, it can be assumed that their readers understood them to mean fermented grape juice. If they wanted to make a point that the grape juice used in connection with cultic services, covenants, vows, or religious celebrations was not fermented, they could have done so.

Pentateuch

The first biblical mention of wine is found after the Flood (Gen. 9:21, 24). However, the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:37, 38 indicate that wine was known to the antediluvians.⁴ "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." While it cannot be shown that "drinking" here is associated with wine or other intoxicating beverages, it seems odd that the Lord would condemn the mere act of eating and drinking any more than He would condemn the act of marriage. What Jesus is describing is an attitude of a people who, despite the seriousness of the times and repeated warnings of God's impending judgment, continued to live heedless of those warnings.

Back to Genesis 9. Noah was lying naked while drunk, and Ham saw his nakedness. Shem and Japheth went in backward and covered their father. The incident led to the cursing of Ham. It shows that at least to Noah, Shem, and Japheth, a son seeing his father's nakedness was considered a sin. The laws on sexual sins in Leviticus ("The nakedness of your father . . . you shall not uncover" [Lev. 18:7]) are a later reflection of this understanding. God's wrath is visited upon the Canaanites for participating in these sins. "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. . . . Therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants" (verses 24, 25).

Genesis does not speak of Noah awaking from his sleep, but awaking "from his wine." The language is significant: whether Ham's sin was intentional or not, this experience would not have happened if Noah had not become drunk. Thus the abuse of wine does play a role in this story. A larger story, however, is being told here. Ham's descendants, the Canaanites, were a condemned people (Lev. 18:25, 28) because of their own

immorality and the immorality of their forefather. The story provides the Israelites with an explanation of why they had the right to drive the Canaanites out of Canaan ("I am casting out [these nations] before you. For the land is defiled" [Lev. 18:24, 25]). The Israelites knew that the actions of Noah and Ham on that evening changed their history.

A story that also changed the history of Israel is found in Genesis 19. Lot and his daughters, following the destruction of their native cities, found themselves in a cave. The two daughters convinced themselves that the only way that their father's lineage could be continued was for them to have sex with him. They knew that their father would never concede to this, and the only way to accomplish this was to get him drunk. Why Lot agreed to drink to the point of stupor for two consecutive nights is not known, but we have here an intentional misuse of wine for evil purposes. Wine (or strong drink) was a necessary ingredient in the evil.

Both daughters bore sons who were the progenitors of the Moabites and Ammonites, bitter enemies of Israel. Sorrow, trouble, and grief caused by the actions of Lot's daughters seemed to be the main purpose of telling this story. There is no mention in the text of anyone being condemned. However, the daughters knew that incest was considered a sin, at least by their father. A later reflection of this understanding is seen in the laws given to Israel (cf. Lev. 18). Lot's daughters must have also known that drunkenness lowers a person's resistance to behaviors in which one would not normally engage, and that extreme drunkenness carries an inability to be aware of one's actions or the actions of those around. Thus, these two stories, although not *primarily* concerned with the drinking of wine, carry an implicit condemnation of drunkenness.

This condemnation is explicit in Deuteronomy 21:18-21, which speaks of punishment of sons who are stubborn and rebellious. A son so accused was to be taken before the elders of the city by his parents who would say, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard." Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones" (verses 20, 21). While stubbornness and rebelliousness describe attitudes, gluttony and drunkenness describe behavior

Drunkenness is to be avoided not only because of the consequences it might bring, but also because it simply is sinful.

arising out of these attitudes. Both attitude and behavior stood condemned as grievous sins.

Thus to the writer of the Pentateuch, drunkenness is to be avoided not only because of the consequences it might bring, but also because it simply is sinful.

Historical section

Consider the Hannah-Eli episode. Hannah's grief over her barrenness led her to the Temple to pray. "Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, 'How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!'" (1 Sam. 1:13, 14). Eli, the priest, was disgusted and dismayed by what he perceived as Hannah's drunkenness and rebuked her. It can be assumed, then, that drunkenness in Israel was an offense, and something that the priest considered sinful. And Hannah, too, understood this to be the case; she said, "Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman" (verse 16), or a daughter of Belial (Hebrew for worthless, reckless, lawless). In the Scriptures "Belial" is associated with idolatry (Deut. 13:13), homosexuality (Judges 19:22, 10:13; cf. Gen. 19:5), sacrilege (1 Sam. 2:12-17), drunkenness (1 Sam. 25:17, 36), and ultimate destruction (2 Sam. 23:6). Therefore, by protesting that she was not a "daughter of Belial," Hannah was telling Eli that the sins associated with the worship of Belial, which included drunkenness, were uncharacteristic of her. She understood that God abhors drunkenness.

Second Samuel 11 provides another message on drunkenness. Desperately

A person's resistance to sinful or abhorrent behavior while sober becomes less so in a drunken state.

trying to hide his sin, David called Uriah from the battlefield and sent him home to his wife. Uriah wouldn't go. A frustrated David made Uriah drunk and hoped that Uriah's desire for his wife would be stronger than his principles. This also did not work. David arranged for Uriah's death in battle.

The story is not about the evils of wine, but about how far sin and deception can take a person. However, the story does carry a message on drunken-

ness, similar to the one in the case of Lot's daughters. A person's resistance to sinful or abhorrent behavior while sober becomes less so in a drunken state. It's hard dealing with sin while sober; to try to deal with temptation while drunk makes it all the more problematic.

The story of Absalom's plans to kill his brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13) for raping their sister Tamar also deals with wine. Absalom invited Amnon and others for a celebration. Absalom commanded his servants to kill Amnon when his heart was "merry with wine" (verse 28). This they did. It is not clear from the text if Amnon simply had his guard down and did not expect the attack, or if he was drunk and could not resist the attack. Whichever it may be, wine drinking was perceived as necessary to accomplish the evil. As with the experience of Lot's daughters, and with David and Uriah, wine was an integral part of the plan to commit evil.

Now, if our hermeneutic tells us that biblical stories, teachings, and prophecies have local immediate applications, then the Israelites reading or listening to

these stories could not escape the message that drunkenness can lead to behaviors that are condemned by God.

Proverbs

We shall consider four references from Proverbs.

1. Proverbs 20:1: "Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." The text does not indicate how wine becomes a mocker. But we know that when a person is mocked, he or she is belittled and scorned; is given no respect or value; and is even pitiful (in a pejorative sense) in the eyes of the mocker. The mocker treats the mocked with impunity, as someone less than human. Wine does this to those created in God's image and diminishes human personhood. Further, wine arouses brawling and leads one to irresponsible and violent ways.

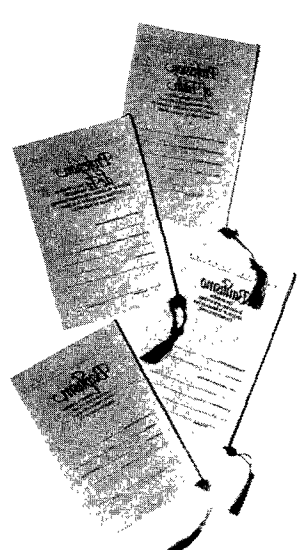
Whether the text is speaking of simple wine drinking or the abuse of wine is not clear. The language, however, seems to suggest condemnation of drunkenness.

2. Proverbs 21:17: "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who

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loves wine and oil will not be rich." This text is an example of Hebrew parallelism, in which the second line repeats the thought of the first line. The issue concerns a lifestyle or a life attitude that places pleasure or sumptuous living before all other considerations. When the love of pleasure (literally mirth) interferes with responsible living, it leads to poverty. The wine and oil are symbols of "things" that are valued above all else. The same thought is expressed more graphically in Proverbs 23:21: "The drunkard [wine] and the glutton [oil?] will come to poverty."

3. Proverbs 23:29-34 speaks of a person who has either gotten drunk or is an alcoholic. That person has woe, sorrow, contentions, complaints, wounds, and redness of eyes. That person sees strange things, utters perverse things, and generally acts the fool that "linger[s] long [*achar* = to stay beyond a due time] at the wine" and "go[es] in search of mixed wine." Clearly such behavior is not for a Christian, for it is demeaning to God. The passage condemns drunkenness, with verse 31 explicitly forbidding drinking: "do not look on the wine when it is red."

4. Proverbs 31:4, 5 admonishes kings and princes not to drink wine or intoxicating drink, for they are charged with providing judgment and leadership to God's people. The text warns that drinking lessens the ability to act in accordance with the law. The "law" here is *chaqaq*, meaning "decrees." Even though what these decrees are is not clearly set forth, the context suggests laws that protect the poor in Israel: the kings and princes (the dispensers of justice) who drink might possibly "pervert the justice of all the afflicted." The Hebrew word translated "afflicted" is *ben oni*. A cognate word, *ana*, means poor, helpless, humble, or lowly. The text, then, is a warning: drinking beclouds the perception of what is right and fair in judicial matters touching the poor.

Thus in Proverbs we have the first texts that possibly condemn wine drinking, and not just drunkenness. If this is true, here is evidence of a progression in Israel's attitude concerning wine. This progression continues in the prophetic section of the Old Testament. There the warnings are against drinking, not just becoming drunk. What caused this progression of thought? Did the Israelites

come to the conclusion that it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to control the use of wine, and, therefore, it was better to avoid it altogether? Or did God, perceiving this weakness, cause the writer of Proverbs to pen these statements?

The Prophets

We shall approach the prophetic books in a chronological order. We begin with Amos, a book of judgment. Chapter 1 speaks of judgment that will

fall on Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, and Ammon. Chapter 2 begins with judgment on Moab, and then devotes most of what follows to judgment on Israel. Each section describes both the judgments and the specific sins that caused them.

Before spelling out the judgment on Israel, God recounts His goodness to them: "It was I who destroyed the Amorite before them. . . . Also it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the

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Amorite. I raised up some of your sons as prophets, and some of your young men as Nazirites. . . . But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, 'Do not prophesy!'" (Amos 2:9-11)

Here we have the story of a people who, even though led and protected by God in the past, are now telling Him by their actions (giving wine to the Nazirites) and words (telling the prophets not to prophesy) that they will thwart

His attempts to lead them. God gave them Nazirites. Why is not stated, but two previous and one subsequent Nazirite—Samuel, Samson, John the Baptist—were sent by God to lead His people in some way. Each Nazirite was "holy to the Lord" all the days of his "separation," and was required to take specific vows (see Num. 6). One vow was to abstain from all grape products, including wine. Why God issued this prohibition is not told, but suffice it to

say that God had a purpose and that both God and the Nazirite considered the vow to be sacred. The Israelites of Amos' day knew all of this, and they knew that the Nazirites were people especially devoted to Jehovah. In giving wine to the Nazirites, Israel was mocking not only God but also the Nazirites and their vows. In effect Israel was saying to God, "We don't care about You or Your people, and if You continue to raise up these people we will defile them, showing our utter contempt for You and them."

Here wine drinking was not used to commit an evil deed, but the drinking itself was perceived as evil, for it was being forced on the Nazirites in direct violation of their vow to God. However, forcing the Nazirite to drink was only *one* among various ways by which Israel displayed its contempt for God and His people. They also did this by "sell[ing] the righteous for silver," by "pervert[ing] the way of the humble," by "a man and his father go[ing] in to the same girl," and by "command[ing] the prophets saying "Do not prophesy" (Amos 2:6, 7, 12). Is there a cause and effect relationship here? Earlier we saw that wine drinking coupled with gluttony, both literally (Deut. 21) and figuratively (Isa. 22), led to sexual perversions (Gen. 9, 19; Isa. 28), and an unresponsiveness to God's word and His calls for repentance. Does drinking lead to these other sins or is it a symptom of a deeper attitudinal problem (cf. comments on Hab. 2)?

We come now to Isaiah's time. Israel's lack of sensibility to the Lord's workings in their midst was accompanied by a lusting after wine. The result was disastrous: "Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge. . . . [The] people shall be brought down, each man shall be humbled" (Isa. 5:13, 15).

By the time we come to Isaiah 22 the situation had worsened. We see a people who neither turned to God for their defense nor listened to His call for repentance: "And in that day the Lord God of hosts called for weeping and for mourning, for baldness and for girding with sackcloth. But instead, [there was] joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating meat and drinking wine: 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!'" (Isa. 22:12, 13).

The people had abandoned all hopes of escape from the armies of Sennacherib. Yet they refused to go into mourning,

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even though God wanted them to do so. Instead, there was eating and drinking. Note again: the text is dealing not with drinking wine but with Israel's disregard of God's word and the seriousness of the times. "Drinking wine" and "eating meat" are symbolic of a scorn toward the Lord's call for weeping and mourning (and fasting?) for sins.

The most virulent attack against wine drinking (and intoxicating drink) in Isaiah is found in chapter 28, verse 7: "But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, they are swallowed up by wine, they are out of the way through intoxicating drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment."

Not just the people of Israel, but their spiritual leaders also have come under the sway of drinking. God communicated His truths, His will, His grace and forgiveness to His people through the priests and prophets. Neither the prophets ("they err in vision") nor the priests ("they stumble in judgment") were able to perform their ministries properly because of drinking. The implication is clear: wine and intoxicating drink becloud the mind to the point where it is difficult or impossible to hear God's voice (cf. Lev. 10:9, 10).

Isaiah 28 is a broadside against those who abuse wine. But that's not all: there is evidence that drinking in any amount is condemned, for wine is mentioned in conjunction with "intoxicating drink" (*shekar* = beer). As William Shea points out, *yayin* may not be universally condemned in the Old Testament, but *shekar* certainly is.⁵ One reason that *shekar* as beer is universally condemned but *yayin* is not is that one is the direct product of an intent to produce an alcoholic beverage, while the other is not. As made from grain, *shekar* can only arise if one deliberately sets out to make beer. But grape juice can naturally ferment whether one wants it to or not.

Wine in the New Testament

The Greek term for wine is *oinos*. Whether it stands for fermented or unfermented grape juice is again a modern question. Standard New Testament lexicons and dictionaries take for granted that *oinos* means fermented grape juice.⁶ In most cases the context demands this translation. Another Greek word,

gleukos, meaning new wine, sweet wine, or grape juice, appears only once in the New Testament (Acts 2:13), where the apostles are accused of being drunk. We must assume, then, that, at least for Luke, *gleukos* was a drink that caused drunkenness.

All the New Testament texts, except one, that use *oinos* or speak of drunkenness in a pejorative sense do so in the form of teachings. Three are from Jesus and the rest are from Paul. We will begin with the teachings of Jesus.

Gospels

In Matthew 24 Jesus speaks of the need to be ready for His second coming (see verse 44). The "faithful and wise servant" (verse 45) will be found performing the duties assigned by the master. This servant is called "blessed" (verse 46). The "evil servant" is impatient and restless at what he thinks is his master's delay and "begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards" (verses 48, 49). That servant will be "cut in two" (verse 51), and his portion will be with the hypocrites.

This theme of two types of people that will be found when the Lord returns is repeated five times in the immediate context (24:40, 41; 45-51; 25:1-13; 14-30; 32-46). One group will be ready for the Lord's return. The other group will not be ready.

The unready servant is described as being violent to his fellows and as eating and drinking with the drunkards. Yet violence and eating and drinking with drunkards are not the *cause*, but a *sign*, of his unreadiness. While condemning the irresponsible behavior of the evil servant, Jesus states that his greater sin is hypocrisy (Matt. 24:51). Such a teaching is also found in the parables of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), the talents (verses 14-30), and the sheep and the goats (verses 31-46). Therefore, the drunkenness mentioned in Matthew 24:49-51 seems to describe a people who profess to be part of God's people, but live a life contrary to His will.

What is interesting is that Jesus chose drunkenness to illustrate His message—just like the Old Testament prophets. Thus in this passage there is at least a tacit condemnation of drunkenness.

Our next text is perhaps the most difficult in the Gospels touching this issue. In Luke, Jesus defends John the Baptist: "John . . . came neither eating

First, there is no evidence that Jesus ever drank fermented grape juice.

bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (Luke 7:33, 34).

First, there is no evidence that Jesus ever drank fermented grape juice. The only accusation that He did come from His enemies. When exegeting an ancient document, to take at face value an accusation about someone from that person's avowed enemies is gullibility at best and poor scholarship at worst.

Second, Jesus' words must be understood in their context. Jesus argues that John did not seek for his ministry the approval of the religious leaders in Jerusalem, and they, therefore, dismissed him and his message. John's insistence on preaching in the wilderness, the harshness of his message (cf. Matt. 3:7-12), and his somewhat unorthodox eating habits and dress caused them to conclude that he must be possessed. Jesus had already declared an affinity to John (cf. Matt. 21:23-27) that made Him suspect to the religious leaders. He too refused to seek for His ministry the sanction of the religious leaders. He associated with fishermen, prostitutes, tax collectors, and other "profligates." Hence guilt by association: Jesus, "a friend of tax collectors and sinners," must be sharing their lifestyle of gluttony and drunkenness.

Jesus' response to such charges cannot be taken to mean a condoning of drinking.

The writings of Paul

The apostle Paul mentions wine and/or drunkenness 10 times in his Epistles, all of which are didactic. Seven passages

condemn drunkenness not only because it is wrong (Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18) but also because of the impact it has on relationship with God (Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10; 11:21). The other three passages are somewhat problematic and need to be looked at more carefully.

Paul counsels Timothy that deacons are not to be "addicted" to much wine (1 Tim. 3:8). He writes to Titus that the older women are not to be "enslaved" to

much wine (Titus 2:3). By themselves these texts may suggest that drinking wine is acceptable within limits. When these texts are compared with Paul's advice to Timothy to use a little wine for his frequent infirmities (1 Tim. 5:23), one is left with the impression that wine drinking is acceptable as long as it does not lead to addiction. It must be remembered that in the other seven passages in which Paul talks about *oinos* it is drunkenness that is condemned, not wine drink-

ing per se. Consistency demands that we cannot make *oinos* fermented in one passage and unfermented in another just to fit our preconceived notions. *Oinos* is *oinos*.

How, then, should we understand Paul's counsel to Timothy and Titus? Other passages come to our help. Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 6:19: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16, 17). What is it about wine drinking that glorifies God? The power of this text is that it shifts the burden of proof onto wine drinkers!

Consider further the metaphor of the temple. Nothing unclean or common was allowed to come into the Temple. Only that which was clean and sanctified was permitted in the Temple, be it sacrifice or priest. If that understanding is applied to these Corinthian passages, the conclusion is inescapable: God expects us to care for our bodies. Drinking can hardly do that!

Does drinking wine in moderation defile our bodies? The scientific data (which is too numerous to cite) confirms that it does. The most important consideration for Christians is that the drinking of alcoholic beverages, even in moderation, disrupts our ability to think clearly. Now, since it is only through our minds that we can know the will of God in our lives, then it behooves us to abstain from anything that would becloud those lines of communication.

This conclusion, however, is in apparent conflict with Paul, for Paul is telling Timothy to take a little wine. Is Paul approving the defilement of the temple of God? How do we solve this dilemma?

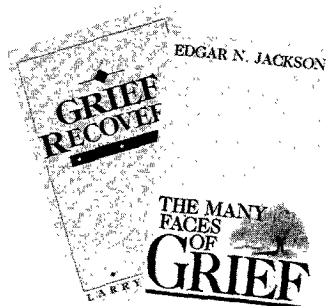
For an answer we must go back to Paul's time. In the first century when modern scientific medicine was nonexistent, the ancients must have through experience understood wine to have some healing powers that other remedies did not have. Such use of wine was acceptable to Paul. Some will dismiss this answer as being too simplistic. Others will think that the answer is ignoring or twisting the evidence. However, as a Bible student and as a person who believes that the Bible does not contradict itself, this for me is the only satisfactory solution.

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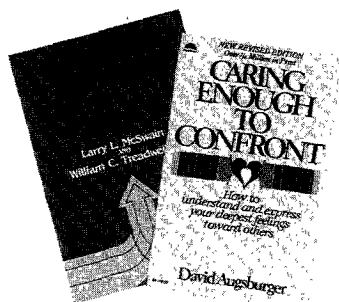
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Conclusion

Out of our consideration of the biblical texts, we may draw some tentative conclusions.

First, wine drinking is not a major issue in the Scriptures. Although wine appears throughout the Old Testament, only a few passages say anything about its use. In the majority of cases wine is simply a part of the scenery of the Old Testament, often mentioned along with "oil" and "bread." Wine is often used in a symbolic sense.

Second, one of the major themes of Scripture is God's repeated attempts to win back His people from sin, rebellion, and death. Given this, and in light of the stories recounted here, it is apparent that wine drinking, and especially drunkenness, is not only not helpful but absolutely harmful to that endeavor of God. Those who argue that the Bible does not condemn the use of wine will look in vain for any teaching, story, or text that extols the virtues of wine. Granted, there are passages that speak, both literally and symbolically, of God's people using wine in celebrations over their enemies (Eccl. 9:7; Isa. 55:1; Joel 2:19, 24; Amos 9:14; Zech. 9:17; 10:7) and in religious celebrations (Gen. 14:18; Deut. 12:17; 14:23, 26; 1 Chron. 12:40; Prov. 3:10; Isa. 55:1; 65:8; Jer. 31:12). Perhaps such celebration use of wine had some corporately understood cultural (and religious?) symbolism among the Israelites that we are not aware of. But to use these texts as proof that the Bible does not condemn the use of wine is unwarranted. One needs only to review the scriptural record of grief, trouble, and woe that the use of wine brought to individuals and families. Further, the Bible mentions wine both symbolically and literally more frequently in the context of judgment than in the context of celebrations. Now, to argue from numbers is weak, inconclusive, and unscholarly. However, those who point to texts that speak of wine in celebrations must also take cognizance of texts that place wine in a judgment context.

Third, a question of intent. This article is not intended as a weapon against any person in the church struggling with the use or abuse of alcohol. This is not my intent! Some would perhaps want these conclusions to be stronger in condemning the use of wine and alcoholic beverages. I can only say that I cannot make the texts say some-

thing simply because that is what I want them to say.

However, I hope this article says something not only about us, but about God as well. If we believe God is the Creator of all things, including our bodies, then it follows that He knows what is best for both our bodies and our minds. Science has made us aware that alcohol causes changes in the central nervous system affecting both the mind and the body. God already knew that. And in an age when we need to be especially clear in our thinking, particularly in religious issues, should we not avoid anything that would interfere with thinking?

Finally, an even more practical application. Our primary purpose on earth is to praise and glorify God and to allow ourselves to be His ministers of reconciliation. That ministry reaches out to those both inside and outside the kingdom of God. It seems that the best way of engaging in that ministry is to do it free of alcohol or other drugs, giving heed to the counsel of the Apostle Peter: "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:13-15). ■

¹ William L. Holiday, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 134; Don F. Neufeld, gen. ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Commentary*, 10 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1960), vol. 8, pp. 1176, 1177; Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (1960), p. 1149; William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978), p. 483.

² The list of such attempts is long. Among Seventh-day Adventists the most recent attempt was by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1989), pp. 66-69.

³ All biblical texts in this article are from The New King James Version.

⁴ Heinrich Seeseman, "Oinos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), vol. 5, pp. 162-166.

⁵ William Shea, "Alcohol and the Bible" (unpublished paper, Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Md.).

⁶ Horn, p. 1149; Seeseman, pp. 66-69; Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1885), p. 442.

Drinking destroys

- A British study asked lawyers, social workers, doctors, and health visitors to list possible explanations for violence within a family. Doctors and lawyers put alcohol at the top of the list. Social workers ranked it as the number two problem. Health visitors listed it as the third major cause.
- Norwegian researchers analyzed trends in alcohol consumption since World War II and compared those figures with the incidents of violent death during the same time. Their finds: "a significant correlation between changes in alcohol consumption and rates of violent death."
- Nine out of ten manslaughter and murder cases during one year in one Danish community involved alcohol. Forty-three percent of violent assault cases treated at hospitals in the same community during the same time were also related to alcohol use.
- A U.S. Department of Justice survey estimates that nearly one third of the nation's 523,000 state-prison inmates drank heavily before committing such crimes as rapes, burglaries, and assaults.¹
- 400,000 Americans die because of drink each year.
- 76 million Americans—about 43 percent of the adult population of the United States—have been exposed to alcoholism in their families.
- Some estimates place roughly half of the average Soviet family's food budget going toward alcohol consumption, despite limited economic resources.
- According to medical authorities, at least 40 percent of the [former] U.S.S.R.'s 287 million inhabitants are alcoholic or experience severe health and social problems as a result of drinking. As many as 60 percent of factory workers are considered to have severe drinking problems.²

¹ *Dispatch International* (The International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency [ICPA], 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD, 20904, USA), p. 1.

² *Alcohol Facts* (I.C.P.A.), p. 1.

Small group ministry

Craig Dossman

A New Testament blueprint for the church.



Adapted from the new book From House to House: A New Testament Model for Church Growth Through Small Groups, published by the Review and Herald. Craig A. Dossman pastors the Tenth Street Seventh-day Adventist Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Assembling a bicycle requires one to observe the instructions enclosed. When not following directions, I've wasted many hours in frustration and futility. Such is the price of doing it "my way."

How often the church has made the same mistake! Rather than following the New Testament model for growth, we devise our own solutions only to find ourselves worse off. It seems that centuries of hard lessons would compel us to heed God's plan in the book of Acts, implemented with great success in the first century. One need not be a rocket scientist to recognize how rapid church growth is possible, even in the midst of persecution. Amazingly, the early believers were successful in hard times—while we remain lukewarm in good times.

I've often wondered if only the rebirth of persecution will get us back on track. If this is the tool God must use to wake us up and refocus our vision on the gospel, then I must exclaim, "Lord, send a double portion of persecution!" Whatever it takes to shake God's people out of their spiritual spectatorship would be a blessing.

Back to our roots

Our challenge is to bridge the gap between the early church and the contemporary church before we go the way of the dinosaur. To share the evangelistic success of the early believers, we need to study their organizational model

as revealed in the book of Acts. We see there a Spirit-led movement rapidly growing through the agency of prayer and fellowship. After adding 3,000 souls at Pentecost, the church continued her evangelistic thrust without the benefit of buildings, organizational charts, or overhead transparencies. All they had was a fellowship of simple folk who had an encounter with Divinity and a desire to tell the world that Jesus Christ is Lord. They took this message to the streets of Jerusalem, and with holy boldness proclaimed the Word of God.

The movement was both Christ-centered and people-centered, seeking to fulfill the potential of all members. The collective body of believers felt a sense of belonging to one another and to God. They found joy and strength in fellowship. At the same time they found true meaning in life by serving one another and the outcasts of society.

In their worship, early Christians gathered under trees and along the seashore. Many met publicly in the open markets. Even in the midst of impromptu gatherings, the Spirit of God rested upon them. The preaching and praying of the early church became so effective that it became a threat to the Jewish religious establishment. Many Christians were banned from the Temple and imprisoned because of the controversy that surrounded their presence.

The comforts of home

The church also became too much for the Roman government to handle. Emperor Nero banned all believers from

meeting in public places. He declared Christianity illegal. Violators who were caught were punished.

Rather than hampering the church, Nero's edict became the catalyst for greater growth. Since believers could no longer proclaim their message in the streets, they took it to people's homes. And what happened? The church grew as never before. Persecution became the torch that carried the message from house to house. While Nero was busy burning Christians in public, the Christians were even busier in private proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

Nero didn't know that the benefits of Christian faith were far greater than the suffering he inflicted upon believers. He didn't understand that the love and care they received from one another far surpassed the power of his death threats. In the context of home fellowship, the Christian church was fortified and established. The body of Christ offered a refuge for those ostracized from their own families. Whatever a member might need materially was satisfied by the fellowship's mutual assistance charity. The small group structure was conducive to solving problems, mending broken hearts, singing songs to encourage one another, offering prayer, proclaiming truth to visitors, and leading sinners to Christ.

There were no sleeping pew members with this type of ministry. Everyone was a part of the action! There weren't any big "I's" and little "you's" in the early church." Believers experienced genuine fellowship amid persecution. The government sharply defined the church by pushing believers together. So it was that instead of being a curse to the cause of Christ, Nero became a blessing for the advancement of the gospel.

The curse of Constantine

"If you can't beat them, join them," the saying goes. This became reality when Emperor Constantine proclaimed himself a believer. Good news? Not really. The church moved from homes into brick buildings that looked more like mausoleums than places of fellowship. Constantine built elaborate buildings. Churches once intimate became institutionalized. Policy took precedence over people, and meetings became more important than ministry.

Instead of the church being a place where loneliness ended, it became the

place where loneliness began. In the home church environment, people were expected to participate, but in the large congregational atmosphere, the flock scattered. In small group structures people could speak and share the Word with boldness, but this became impossible in large gatherings. The whole church became swallowed up with the arrival of bricks and mortar, and so began the slow death of the vibrant church. It did not take long before all preaching or public speaking was centered in the pulpit. Choirs took over the simple singing of the fellowship, while members learned the great Christian art of spectatorship. Before long they also learned how to be bumps on the church log.

When the church switched from living rooms to buildings and a professional staff, it lost momentum. The Christian army now became little more than a sophisticated cheering section for the newly established clergy. The clergy took the Scriptures from the people, not allowing them to read the Word for themselves. All eyes became directed to the pulpit, and all instruction came from

the "lone ranger" of the gospel. Such a worship environment caused spiritual crib death for new babes joining the church. No structure existed to nourish their growth. Local congregations became weak and cold. The church plunged into the Dark Ages.

Nonpreachers were considered "laymen," a concept not found in the Bible. With the Scriptures out of the hands of common people, preachers exerted theological authority unchallenged by members. Without the Word of God to spur them along, members assumed a passive role in ministry. Whereas the church in earlier times had enjoyed skyrocketing growth, she now became entrenched in a hole she dug herself.

Reformers to the rescue

Out of this atmosphere of doom and gloom, the Protestant Reformers came on the scene. Individuals like Martin Luther and John Calvin challenged the church to restore true worship in harmony with the Bible. They proclaimed the gospel of God's grace accepted by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Reformation restored the theo-

Suggested commitments required

1. *Priority.*
Every person attends each week unless prevented by illness or another significant reason.
2. *Punctuality.*
The group begins and ends on time.
3. *Confidentiality.*
Secrets shared are kept private, since betrayed confidentiality is the fastest way to destroy unity, relationships, and ministry.
4. *Affirmation.*
A person who discloses something personal needs emotional and spiritual support.
5. *Prayer.*
Prayer is offered regularly for the group and for each member by name. Prayer partners are formed for daily prayer over the phone.
6. *Bible Study.*
Every person is involved in a systematic series of Bible studies with a friend.
7. *Love.*
Following Christ's pattern, love will be shared with all alike, unconditionally.
8. *Order.*
A basic order of events is established for the meetings, including material to be studied.
9. *Outreach.*
Each member is involved in personal witnessing.

logical truth about faith and the priesthood of all believers but failed in dealing with the structures that had weakened the proclamation of the faith. But through the ministry of John Wesley and others, believers began returning to the New Testament model of small groups. Small bands of believers flourished throughout England. The impact of this Methodist small group activity spread to America, and later became a vital element of the Adventist movement.

Ellen White emphasized the importance of small groups with this striking statement: "The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort is a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members but for unbelievers also."¹

Small groups today

A recent Gallup survey disclosed that

70 percent of Americans regard most churches and synagogues as ineffective in helping people find meaning in life.² Pollster George H. Gallup, Jr., suggests that the ongoing vitality of American religious congregations depends in large measure on their effectiveness in responding to the following spiritual and emotional needs identified in that survey:

1. To believe life is meaningful,
2. To have a sense of community and deeper relationships,
3. To be appreciated and respected,
4. To be listened to and heard,
5. To feel that one is growing in the faith,
6. To have practical help in developing a mature faith.

In view of the tepid, culture-soaked style of church life in our generation, it is no wonder that 7 out of 10 Americans express disillusionment with the traditional church. Many will never return to their religious roots. American churches have two choices: to remain as they are and continue to lose influence, or to institute changes.

Consider again that list of needs identified in the Gallup survey. Fulfilling them is crucial to the future of Christianity in North America. Traditional churches have not and cannot meet the challenge. Their structures insulate and isolate believers from edifying one another and properly utilizing spiritual gifts. But did you notice how the home fellowship concept of the early church does satisfy every one of those needs?

As we get back to basics and finish God's work, there will be a revival of the small group concept begun in the early church. Pursuing this must be the greatest priority of the church today.

Setting up small groups

If you share my convictions and would like to have small group ministries in your church, here are some suggestions:

First, attend a training session. Then, observe members already involved in some type of small group ministry and solicit their support. Next, with the consent of church leadership, much prayer, and thorough planning, organize a small pilot group. You will need to decide whether the group will be open or closed. In an open group, visitors are always welcome to observe and join. In a closed group membership is by invitation only.

Set a date to begin, and also the length of time the group will commit to keep meeting. Agree on a set of commitments (see shaded box). Then move ahead.

When you are ready to expand, preach a series of sermons on small group ministries and membership involvement. Communicate via the church newsletter and pastoral letters. Hold special training seminars and weekend workshops. Show videos and provide selected books that deal with lay involvement in ministry. Regularly bring together your small group leaders for encouragement, fellowship, equipping, evaluating, and supervision.

Implementing new group leadership will be a continual concern. Some leaders drop out and need to be replaced. Additional ones are required as new members join the fellowship.

Tragedy of traditional pastoring

Since our theology determines how we plan the mission of the church, we should ensure that our thinking is based on biblical principles. Christ is the head and builder of the church, and we must let Him set the pattern. Ultimately, church growth is not what we do, but rather what God by His Spirit does through us.

God does not want people in our churches to lament as the psalmist did: "No one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life" (Ps. 142:4, NIV). How many of our church members cry this in one form or another because the professional pastor is the only one pastoring?

The traditional model of pastoring is outdated and irrelevant. The biblical alternative is small group ministry. ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 115.

² As reported by the *Houston Chronicle*, Aug. 29, 1992.

Recommended reading

Miguel Angel Cerna, *The Power of Small Groups in the Church*, 1991. Available from the Nowalk SDA Spanish Church, P.O. Box 1857, Nowalk, CA 90651.

Paul Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, Bridge Publishing, Inc., South Plainfield, New Jersey, 1981.

Craig A. Dossman, *From House to House: A New Testament Model for Church Growth Through Small Groups*, Review and Herald Pub. Assn., Hagerstown, Maryland, 1993.

Kurt Johnson, *Small Group Outreach*, Review and Herald Publishing Assn., Hagerstown, Maryland, 1991.

Ralph W. Neighbour, *Building Bridges, Opening Hearts*, Touch Outreach Ministries, P.O. Box 19888, Houston, TX 77224, U.S.A.

Melvin J. Steinbron, *Can the Pastor Do It Alone?* Regal Books, Ventura, California, 1987.

James R. Tozer and Daniel W. Pawle, "Small Groups: How One Church Does It," *Leadership*, vol. 4, No. 4, Fall 1980, pp. 58-66.

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See page 10.**



When your reputation is held hostage

James A. Cress

H

ave you ever been held hostage by slander, surmisings, suspicions, misunderstandings, or circumstances beyond your control?

Whether it is the extreme ordeal of an untrue accusation of murder, as was faced by an Australian pastoral couple in the eighties, or linkage in the public view with the mindless actions of cultic or fringe groups, or unjust conclusions and judgments about your motives by parishioners or church administrators, the impact is the same. Your good name, your reputation, is held hostage to what "they believe."

How should you react, especially when you know that you are innocent of the charges, and that the actions that have been judged so wrong by others came from good intentions and benevolent motives? Here are some suggestions that should help you develop an appropriate response.

Recognize your enemy. Our ultimate enemy, of course, is Satan, who delights in falsehood and misunderstanding and whose purpose is to obscure and hide the truth at every opportunity. But often the immediate enemy appears in visible and tangible forms, promoting misunderstanding. Typically, however, the real enemy is not a person. Your enemy is much more likely the lack of opportunity to explain fully the facts, to analyze adequately all possible options,

or to show how the misunderstood situation came to be.

Some people take time to listen and keep an open mind. Others reject even direct evidence that would correct their previously determined conclusions. What is your challenge? Is it to find time and place to review all the available information? or is it preconceptions and closed minds?

Recognize your allies. Obviously our heavenly Father is the greatest ally of all that is truthful and enlightening. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you speak appropriately the truth in love and to keep your hearers' hearts open to receive that which is accurate and factual.

If you choose to speak, a carefully reasoned recital of facts is preferable to an emotionally charged litany. When dealing with people problems, take extra steps to clarify situations and offer more than the minimum required opportunities for resolving conflict. Pay scrupulous attention to facts. Be prepared to document them. Avoid opinions and assumptions.

Just as the pressure of time can be an enemy to accuracy, so the passing of time can become a great ally. The old expression "time will tell" often proves to be the best solution. As events progress and evidence evolves, truth often becomes clear simply from falsehood's inability to sustain itself in the light.

Remember your options. Even in the midst of a challenging situation,

remember you do have options. Jesus often refused to answer His accusers. Likewise you have the choice of saying nothing. Once uttered, words cannot be retrieved. And no one can force you to discuss a topic on which you choose to remain silent.

Avoid judgmental categorization. Clearly state who you are, but carefully avoid characterizing others. Do not become an information resource or commentator on the actions, motives, beliefs, or thinking of individuals who differ with you or whose behavior may be holding your reputation hostage. Define yourself and your position and let others answer for their own actions or beliefs. Remember that when you "sling mud" you are always losing ground!

Take the long view. Look at things from the perspective of eternity and remember the promise that in all things—even bad things—God works for good for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). In the midst of a crisis, you may reassess your own situation and determine that you must side with truth rather than leave error unchallenged. You may make eternal decisions prompted by the injustice of false accusations against the innocent.

In any event, remember that "this too shall pass." You can keep hope alive by focusing on that glad day when Jesus will return. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus! ■

New parish induction

Churches tend to take for granted the acceptance of a new pastor in the parish and community. As a result, new pastors are sometimes left alone to work their way into the affection of members. Not enough emphasis is given on assisting the bonding process between new pastors and their congregation. Local church elders can help remedy this situation.

The transition of a pastoral family from one parish to another may engender anticipation and enthusiasm on the part of both family and parish. The change can also be delicate and difficult. It is invariably accompanied by some degree of grief.

Transitional trauma

1. *Congregational grief.* In marriage, a loss through divorce may be more devastating than a loss through death, for in divorce the loved one chooses to leave. As a result, one feels rejected, and rejection leads to anger. Likewise, when a pastor chooses to move from one parish to another, the congregation feels some degree of grief, rejection, and anger: "What's wrong with us?" "Why would our pastor want to leave us?" "I got hurt loving the last pastor. I'm not going to love the new one and get hurt again."

If the previous pastor did not choose to leave, but was arbitrarily reassigned by the conference/mission, the congregation may be angry and resent the replacement. If the previous pastor was not appreciated by the members, they may feel distrust of and anger toward all ministers.

Adapted for elders from the new Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual.

People tend to resent and resist change—especially conservative people, and these make up a large portion of most congregations. New pastors invariably represent change. Therefore, the temptation is to resent and resist the new pastor.

2. *Pastoral family grief.* The pastoral family has much more to grieve over than the church family. The family gets uprooted—an experience especially devastating to the spouse and children. They move into a new town and a strange house, with financial and social strains. The children have to start in a new school. The spouse may have to hunt for a new job.

Most serious of all, the pastoral family has had to leave friends. While the congregation may be grieving the loss of one family, the pastoral family is grieving the loss of friends in the previous parish.

All of this adds up to potential problems during pastoral transition.

Smoothing the transition

Some suggestions for smoothing the transition to a new pastorate:

1. *Bury the old.* The old must be set aside before the new can be accepted. The congregation can express its appreciation and verbalize its grief through a well-promoted and -attended farewell for the outgoing pastor. He or she then must sever ties with the old pastorate, no matter how painful.

2. *Don't replace the pastor too soon.* Some may feel that the new pastor must assume responsibilities immediately after the former pastor leaves. Research indicates, however, that it typically takes about three months before a congregation is ready to welcome a new pastor. This interim period gives time for church members to separate themselves emo-

tionally from the former pastoral family. It also provides a unique opportunity for the latent lay leadership of the parish to emerge. Meanwhile, the congregation rediscovers its need to be pastored.

3. *Adapt the church's program to the new pastor's gifts.* No pastor is good at everything. The expected skills are too many and too varied. For example, at one end of the spectrum the pastor is expected to be a scholarly theologian and biblical preacher. This requires a love for books, a preference for the privacy of one's study. At the other end, the pastor is expected to be a counselor, visitor, and promoter. This takes the opposite personality—gregarious and outgoing. No pastor can fill both roles perfectly.

Unless a congregation allows pastors to focus on areas of their strength, they will inevitably spend most of the time in the areas of their weakness, doing things they enjoy the least. This not only makes their work less fulfilling, but deprives the church of the best they have to offer.

4. *Celebrate the new.* Conferences/missions and congregations should make the service of installing a new pastor as significant an event as possible. Just as a wedding is an important symbolic act, publicly establishing a new home, an installation service for a pastor is an important symbolic act publicly establishing a new pastorate.

One difference, though, is that the bride can plan her own wedding, but pastors cannot plan their own installation. Elders and conference/mission officials must take the responsibility. Elders or other congregational leaders should not do it by themselves as pastors are employed and assigned by the conference. The elders should work together with conference leaders in arranging a welcome worthy of the new pastor. ■

When God Becomes a Drug

Father Leo Booth, Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., Los Angeles, 1991, 273 pages, \$18.95, hardcover. Reviewed by Ella M. Ryzewski, editorial assistant, Ministry.

From Bosnia to the Middle East to Waco, religion wears a violent face. Barbarous actions cause thinking persons to question the value of Christianity as well as that of other religions. Some Christians solve the dilemma by sacrificing the heart of the faith, while keeping its form. One such example can be found in this book.

A remarkable aspect of the book is the writer's profession—an Episcopalian vicar. Yet his theology seems incompatible with his position.

But a thoughtful reader will go beyond Leo Booth's personal belief system to understand his main message—religious abuse and fanaticism do exist and can be recognized. He defines the condition as "using God as a fix." The 12-step formula has been suggested for almost every human indulgence; this book offers the plan to the overly religious.

Booth tells how his own childhood experience predisposed him to struggles with alcohol and religious addiction. He describes unbiblical yet dominating church systems that have existed throughout Christian history and have been pushing us in the direction of dysfunctional religion. But the author doesn't adequately define the line between healthy and unhealthy religion, if indeed he believes there is a healthy orthodox religion.

Booth includes interesting case studies and a helpful list of symptoms that should be read by every pastor. But each reader will interpret the symptoms of addictive religion differently. A strict interpretation of some of them would fit Christ into Booth's definition of a religious addict. Conversely, many of the same symptoms could be present in an atheist or anyone with a personality disorder. For example, perfectionism as a dysfunctional answer to low self-esteem is not necessarily a religious disease!

Many threads of truth intertwine in Booth's rope of liberal theology but not enough to keep the author from hanging himself. Booth finds the cornerstone of Christianity—the substitutionary death of Christ—as one reason for religious

dysfunction. A hint of pantheism haunts his suggestions for recovery.

Booth believes such doctrines as original sin cause dysfunctional religion. But he passes over obvious problematic traditions. For example, anyone believing in a god who punishes conscious persons eternally for a mere 70 years of sin will have a difficult time enjoying a relationship with that god. Salvation by works also kills a healthy faith, leaving us in a state of guilt and doubt as to our acceptance with God. The cross remains the only answer to this predicament. Yet Booth views Christ's death, not as validating our worth, but as causing more guilt!

Booth does make a contribution by proving the value of presenting doctrines through the lens of God's love. But evangelicals will have a difficult time following Booth's convoluted logic on the gospel. His admitted earlier problem of categorizing certain religious beliefs comes through in his writing.

Other Christian writers have addressed the issue of dysfunctional religion and authoritarianism in a more balanced manner. Those who take the Bible seriously as their guide to salvation will be more comfortable with sources friendlier to their faith such as Paul DeBlassie's book on religious neurosis (see the Recently Noted section).

The author doesn't adequately define the line between healthy and unhealthy religion.

Books for Counseling Persons With Special Problems

Broken Promises: Understanding, Healing, and Preventing Affairs in Christian Marriages, Henry A. Virkler, Word, Inc., Irving, Texas, 1992, 306 pages, \$13.99, hardcover.

Believers are not immune to the epidemic of adultery in our culture. Virkler describes counseling and survival techniques for offenders and the offended and how to avoid compromising situations.

Making the Break, David Partington, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 1992, 112 pages, \$6.95, paper.

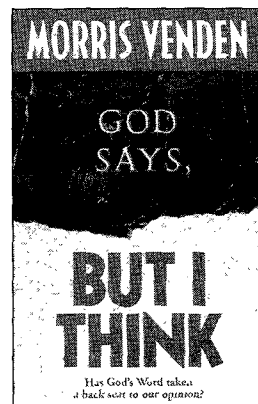
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Legalism and reliance on external observances have caused the faith of many to be little more than superstition.

toward freedom, in overcoming eating disorders, pornography, gambling, drugs, and alcohol. A list of helping agencies is provided.

Sexual Temptation: How Christian Workers Can Win the Battle, Randy Alcorn, *InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove, Illinois, 1989, 32 pages, \$2.99, paper.*

A small book with a big message for those struggling with temptation.

About Choosing the Right Marriage Partner, Channing L. Bete Company, Inc., *South Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1991, 15 pages. Since this booklet is*

usually sold in bulk orders, the price varies. The first book is \$1 plus handling and postage.

This is only one of the helpful scriptographic booklets put out by Channing L. Bete Company. Their informational booklets cover everything from AIDS to ecology and are designed as tools for pastors and other church leaders. Featuring an easy blend of text and graphics, these booklets reach readers of all backgrounds. Call 1-800-628-7733 for a catalog.

Glimpses of Grace: A Family Struggles With Alzheimer's, Rosemary J. Upton, *Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1990, 159 pages, \$7.95, paper.*

This specialty book may be just what you or someone you know needs.

For Want of a Child: A Psychologist and His Wife Explore the Emotional Effects and Challenges of Infertility, James and Mary Elizabeth McGuirk, *The Continuum Publishing Company, New York, 1991, 164 pages, \$17.95, hardcover.*

Not having children in a world where it is expected is painful. An important book for those who suffer infertility, it has a message for pastors, counselors, parents, and friends of the afflicted, as well.

Jesus and the Single Mother, Barbara Rogers-Gardner, *Loyola University*

Press, Chicago, 1990, 145 pages, \$9.95, paper.

This specialty book is written for an audience generally ignored by writers of self-help books. Not just a how-to book, it contains a deeply spiritual message. The author, writing from personal experience, approaches the issue with love and understanding. The volume includes a workbook section to help the reader sort out her feelings and put principles into practice.

All-day Care: Exploring the Options for You and Your Child, Susan M. Zitzman, *Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 1990, 236 pages, \$7.95, paper.*

The author, a widowed single parent, empathizes with parents trying to make the right work and family choices in a complicated world and offers suggestions in making those decisions.

The Mourning After: Help for Postabortion Syndrome, Terry L. Selby, *Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1990, 147 pages, \$7.95, paper.*

Postabortion syndrome (PAS) is now a recognized disorder. Though helpful for sufferers, their families, and friends, the book is directed at those who counsel them.

Problem Drinking: How to Help a Friend, Charles Downs, *Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 1990, 110 pages, \$7.95, paper.*

This volume provides excellent resource material for pastors, is excellent to give members struggling with relationships shaped by alcohol.

When Love Gets Tough: The Nursing Home Dilemma, Doug Manning, *Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1990, 100 pages, \$7.95, paper.*

Manning helps families understand the needs of aging relatives, and guides families through the decision-making process of choosing the best option. He explains how to prepare the elderly person for transition to a nursing home, and deal with feelings on both sides of this difficult choice.

Coping With Life After Your Mate Dies, Donald C. and Rita Crossley Cushenbery, *Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1991, 89 pages, \$6.95, paper.*

This book can be read quickly and easily during a stressful transition pe-

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riod. The authors write from personal experience and have conducted workshops for surviving mates. This helpful book makes a good gift for grieving parishioners.

My Grieving Heart, Joyce Rigsby, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland, 1991, 95 pages, US\$6.95, Cdn\$8.70, paper.

A widow shares her intimate journey through her winter of pain and offers compassion and hope for those who grieve.

Remarried With Children: A Blended Couple's Journey to Harmony, Don and Ladean Houck, Here's Life Publishers, San Bernardino, California, 1991, 215 pages, \$8.99, paper.

Looking through the lenses of their own experience, the authors give guidance to couples considering remarriage when children are directly involved. Their seminars for those in or contemplating such a remarriage have brought encouragement and practical help to many blended families.

Life After Prison, Al Wengerd, Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1984, 48 pages, \$1.95, paper.

This short volume is written by a lay minister who has worked with ex-prisoners ever since he graduated from college. He talks to ex-prisoners personally about being "on the street," "on the job," and "in the family," and about what happens "inside of you."

A Table Before Me: Devotions for Overeaters Who Crave the Power of God, Pauline Ellis Cramer, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Boise, Idaho, 1992, 127 pages, US\$7.95, Cdn\$9.95, paper.

The author shares words of wisdom and inspiration through these daily devotions that helped her change old thought patterns that prevented her from achieving her goals.

Single Parenting, Andy Bustanoby, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1992, 271 pages, US\$9.99, Cdn\$13.50, paper.

Bustanoby, a well-known author and marriage and family therapist, speaks to the special problems of single parents (with and without custody). This volume can help pastors in counseling single

parents about child care, quality time, dating, and other aspects of raising children alone.

Every Time I Say Grace We Fight, Sandra Finley Doran, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland, 1992, 94 pages, US\$7.95, Cdn\$9.95, paper.

This practical volume offers suggestions for fulfilling marriages between persons of different religions and/or beliefs.

Finding Your Place After Divorce: Help and Hope for Women Who Are Starting Again, Carole Sanderson Streeter, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 1992, 161 pages, \$7.99, paper.

The author speaks from her own struggles after divorce. She writes about such concerns as identity, forgiveness, finances, and helping children heal.

Recently Noted

Toxic Christianity: Healing the Religious Neurosis, Paul DeBlasie III, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New

York, 1992, \$17.95, hardcover.

Legalism and reliance on external observances have caused the faith of many to be little more than superstition.

The author, a psychotherapist, not only describes the problem of dysfunctional religion, but provides biblical and spiritual solutions. "Over time, old ways of receiving God and inviting His presence give way to new developments, but in no manner is the canon of Scripture or the orthodoxy of faith ever violated. Jesus becomes more relevant and more eminent in the minds of believers."

A particularly relevant statement by the author: "The ghost of fear must be met straight on without pause or hesitation. In the church, rigidities, narrow-mindedness, and a black-and-white approach to God characterize a fear-ridden mind. This mentality has nothing at all to do with the true nature of God, but has only to do with an ego-centered intent to control God and His people."

What needs to be done, he says, is to listen to God's "voice as it unfolds with truth and sets the human heart free from fear."

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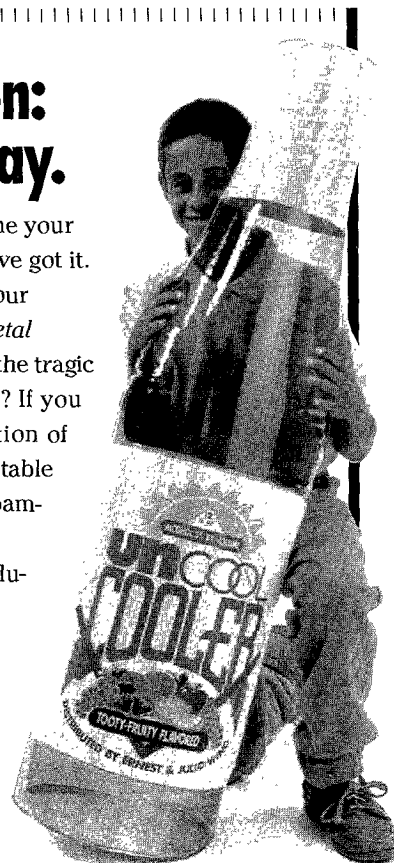
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Pastors beware

From page 5

flattered a bit by such affirmation from attractive women, is all too eager to accommodate them. He may respond "Praise the Lord" upon receiving their gushing appreciation, but he can barely escape a boost to his own ego. Before he realizes it, he may find himself entangled in an emotional web that could lead to sexual involvement. The tragic death of his ministry follows, often with the collapse of his marriage and then his finances. Total devastation, all because of an unwise attachment that may have begun so innocently.

During my two decades of ministry, I've known a number of pastors who succumbed to sexual temptation. Sensing their shame and alienation, I make a practice of trying to reach out to them with the assurance that even though they betrayed their ministry, God still loves them and so do many of their former colleagues. Sometimes they feel comfortable confiding in me about how they fell. They usually insist that the basic attraction wasn't physical, certainly not sexual. "Nothing pornographic," one of them told me, "like a sight-seeing stroll at Miami Beach on a hot summer afternoon." No, the relationship began on a spiritual basis, followed by an emotional attachment. When sex finally came along, it was an unexpected intruder.

I used to think, *Come on, man. Of course there was sexual attraction right from the start. It wasn't Grandma Moses you were having such a wonderful "spiritual" fellowship with.* I questioned the truthfulness of what they were saying.

I don't anymore. Some years ago in my ministry I had a bout with temptation that opened my eyes and humbled me in the dust. It was in connection with the Lord's work, of course. Assigned to a major project, one woman in particular became quite helpful to me. After a while I sensed she had an attraction for me, and I confess that I wasn't exactly turned off by her, either. I can affirm that at no time was there anything sexual going on in my mind—I know what it's like when I'm tempted along those lines. No, my interest was rooted in spiritual concern. This woman had deep needs—

not marriage or emotional problems, but purely spiritual needs—that I felt obliged to address. In trying to help her know Christ in a deeper way, however, a special camaraderie, an emotional bond, formed between us. I considered it merely a brother/sister affection, until I sensed that her interest was becoming romantic.

Then she said flattering things about my commitment to God, my talents, and eventually my physical appearance. On the surface these comments seemed quite innocent and spontaneous. I felt highly uncomfortable and avoided offering similar compliments in return. In fact, I resolutely brushed hers aside. Nevertheless, I must admit that they had an effect on me, providing a boost to my self-image.

I frankly confess that, frightened as I was of this woman's interest in me, I was also intrigued by it. Something inside me said, "I can handle this in Christ's strength. Nothing will happen to me." And thank God, nothing did happen—only because the Holy Spirit gave my conscience a wake-up call.

It's impossible to maintain a genuine prayer life without coming to terms with renegade emotions. The sword of the Spirit pierced through my delusions of safety. I realized that I had to take a decided effort to squelch the attraction, and I did.

My first step was to introduce the problem to my wife. Wives have a wonderful way of enforcing accountability in such situations—have you noticed? Needing further counsel, I contacted a pastor and a church administrator who were friends of mine. They helped me assess the situation objectively and take a stand. Just as important, they multiplied my accountability. After all, I had to face these people and look them in the eye.

Wanting an additional woman's perspective, I sought help from a conference president's wife, a true mother in Israel. Her insights were especially helpful, and I followed them implicitly. One thing she recommended was to go to the store and pick out a thank-you card. She suggested word for word, what to write on it in order to firmly yet tactfully set the friendship in order. Then she told me to photocopy what I wrote and keep it on file. She also asked me to show her the card so she could vouch for me if that became necessary.

Well, following that note and a follow-up explanation, things were better. Now there were clearly defined standards to live up to, and several people holding me accountable. The battle was not over yet, but the corner had been turned.

What have I learned from that experience? For one thing, I used to think that as long as I maintained a sincere prayer life and resolutely avoided sexual thoughts, I would be safe in meeting a woman's spiritual needs. Now I realize that even a purely spiritual discussion can build an invisible but powerful emotional bond. Forget that brother/sister business—I don't trust my emotions from here to the corner without Christ. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

I also came to realize that I have deep-seated insecurities that render me vulnerable to flattery—or even sincere compliments—from a woman. While I still appreciate being appreciated, everything necessary for my self-esteem I can get from the Lord and from my family. My wife and children also give me all the hugs I need. Sisters in Christ get a handshake from me.

I don't question anymore why Jesus had to say those harsh words "Get behind me, Satan!" to one of His friends. He hated to hurt Peter, but the disciple had stepped out of line in tempting Christ to abandon His commitment to the cross. The only way Jesus could protect the integrity of His mission was to stomp upon that sudden satanic assault. Undue flattery, even from a friend, might need a similar response from us to protect our own commitment and integrity.

Finally, I thank God for His holy law. If I loved Him as much as I should, His mercy alone could keep me close to the Good Shepherd during the storms of temptation. Indeed, tender mercy from Calvary is our only hope of salvation and must provide our primary motivation for obedience. Yet there are times when we all may need some thunder and lightning from Mount Sinai to wake us up with the fear of God.

Our heavenly Father offers plenty of mercy and overcoming power to anyone willing to receive them, but He is also a consuming fire to sin and those who refuse to resist it. Brother pastor (and you too, my sister), let's pray that we all remember that.

Letters

From page 2

■ Your publication is sent to me with the injunction to “look over our shoulders, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you cannot use.” I am glad to do this from time to time. With your article on evangelism in Moscow, though, I feel I must go further. The article is quite dreadful in its assumption that you have a right to undermine the faith of the Russian people, who have been served with great sacrifice through the Communist regime. Small wonder that they are resisting this invasion not only by you but by every American sect. You are seeking to undermine the church, and replace it with the American ideal, where everyone is his or her own authority. I beg you to consider whether it is just possible that you are wrong, that our blessed Lord has not abandoned the people of Russia but has brought them to a fuller understanding of the gospel than we have in the affluent, acquisitive, self-seeking West (in which I include England every bit as much as the United States of America).

We have in this House this year three Orthodox students, two from Romania and one from Bulgaria. They are contributing greatly to our understanding of the gospel. I suggest your church may have more to learn from Orthodoxy than it has to give. Why do you not seek to learn from those who have suffered, rather than presuming that you have the monopoly on truth?—Edwin Barnes, principal, St. Stephen’s House, Oxford, U.K.

More on abortion

Congratulations for having the courage and the intellectual honesty to tackle the abortion issue head-on. For too long we as a church have attempted to walk the fence on this pivotal issue, as if we could simply pretend the debate doesn’t exist within our own church as well as in the world. Furthermore, most articles and editorials in our official publications

over the past decade have supported the position that Scripture does not condemn abortion.

Our church has a moral responsibility to uphold God’s law. How can we realistically expect others to take our Sabbath message seriously when we have remained silent on the moral implications of the sixth commandment while millions of unborn children perish in our midst? Is it reasonable to anticipate that the Sabbath commandment, historically the most dispensable of the 10, will someday judge the sixth, arguably the most inviolate of the 10, without somehow having a moral imperative inherent within it? If so, then the morality encompassed by the fourth commandment will be seen to have been compromised by the very church advancing it, unless we courageously stand up now and identify abortion for the evil it is.

As is the case with so many other controversial issues, no amount of scriptural evidence will sway those who refuse to see. There will always be verses difficult to interpret; and preconceived opinions do color our understanding of the Bible. In the end, abortion will be acknowledged to be wrong not because God says it is, but because of the self-authenticating reality of the practice itself. No mother I have ever spoken to has told me that the children she now raises could have been aborted without having resulted in the death of those very children. As Madeline Pecora Nugent wrote in an article dealing with crisis pregnancy counseling: “Abortion appears to restore normalcy and bring relief, but guilt and regret often follow.” This guilt and regret do not stem from an authoritarian proclamation of the evil of the act, but from the act itself. Otherwise, feelings of remorse and guilt would have evaporated back in 1973 when the *Roe v. Wade* decision was announced, striking down abortion restrictions and lending an air of legality to the practice.

Certainly it is not the rightful domain of the church to force anybody to obey. Obedience can result only from a willing heart and mind consenting freely to believe, and to act on that belief. But it is the responsibility of the church to uphold truth and stand

for principle, knowing that many will be offended in the process. For those who have erred, however, we must reassure them of God’s forgiveness.—David Miceli, Spencer, Tennessee.

Movies: where or what?

The article “Movies, Where or What?” (February 1993) left me deeply troubled. What is *Ministry* endeavoring to accomplish? Does *Ministry* really want to encourage wading through hundreds of videos, filled with unspeakable trash in order to find one “good” one? Do we really want pastors sitting down with youth and watching videos filled with a “fair amount of profanity and some violence”? Do we want to promote the kind of confusion that the article presented when kids noted that the film “enhanced their relationship with Christ” and at the same time they were concerned about becoming desensitized to immorality, profanity, and violence? Is it really all right for Christians to choose to watch films filled with just a little bit of violence and profanity or soft porn?

The warning against Adventists going to the theater goes back to the days of live theater. The Spirit of Prophecy simply sees it as a promoter of evil behavior. The same holds true with novels. Novels and the theater were all thrown in together as something to be avoided. I don’t think there is any difference between novel reading and novel watching except that novel watching is a more deceptive and powerful brand of the same poison.

By saying this, I am not saying that a good movie or novel can’t be found. Yet how much time and energy should we expend sorting through the gutter for a lost nickel? One is better off to forget the nickel. If Jesus were here today He, no doubt, would say, “You have heard it said unto you, don’t go to the theater, but I say unto you, don’t watch it at home on your television or VCR, either.” What is wrong with telling people on the basis of Philippians 4:8 that Christians ought not to attend the theater, nor watch the movie novels at home?—Jay Gallimore, president, Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Lansing, Michigan.

Marathon Bible reading

Here's an idea that our members loved and the local media publicized. It highlighted the importance of the Scriptures and cost but little money: reading aloud the entire Bible nonstop in the sanctuary. The marathon session took about 78 hours, with 74 members participating. They chose to read from their own Bible or from the lectern Bible. We set a table in front of the lectern, with a comfortable chair, lamp, microphone, panic button to alert security (for night reading), and tray with water and cups. Besides reading, people also came by to listen.

I highly recommend this project to your congregation.—Edwin E. Evans, Centralia, Illinois.

Relieving phone stress

Here's an idea that has reduced stress and saved time on the phone. After informing the congregation beforehand, I recorded the following message on the answering machine:

"Hello. You've reached the Seventh Day Baptist church. I'm Tom Warner, the pastor, and I may be monitoring calls. If I'm able to, I'll pick up the phone when you identify yourself. Otherwise, please leave your name and number after the tone. Thank you."

Usually I answer when church people call. Keeping up with pastoral responsibilities, however, leaves me unavailable to speak to every stranger who asks for money, or all the salespeople offering things our church doesn't need. So, I let the answering machine handle them.

The message doesn't

promise I'll return calls. If I do, I'll phone back when I have the time—rather than letting them interrupt my sermon preparation or counseling.—Tom Warner, Lakewood, Colorado.

Funeral idea

When meeting with a family to plan a funeral service, I bring a notepad and try to learn as much as possible about the deceased. I ask about hobbies, likes, dislikes, work, and humorous incidents. Not only is this therapeutic for the family, but it also yields rich anecdotes to relate at the funeral. Friends and family love to hear me tell about the time when the deceased disrupted a granddaughter's birthday party by starting a water fight, and to once again listen to the favorite joke or expression of their loved one.

Following those memories, I take the deceased's Bible, and using passages that have been underlined, notes that have been made, or poems that have been kept, I point the friends and relatives to the Saviour. (I am indebted to Halvard Thomsen, a Pacific Union College professor, for recommending the loved one's Bible as a source for the funeral service.)—Marlan Knittel, Bakersfield, California.

Children's journals

We provide small, sturdy notepads for children coming into the sanctuary, along with pencils. The children's names are on the front covers. We always have extra pads for visitors, marked "Visitor" on the front.

The children draw a picture about the sermon, count the number of key

words and Bible texts used, and/or write a note to the pastor about anything they wish to share. The deacons/deaconesses choose children to hand out the pads and to collect them after each service. Each time a pad is used, it is stamped with a happy face, and every child collecting 13 stamps is given a small gift during the storytime. I am always delighted with the creative drawings and generous appreciation the children express each week.

We also provide a special "journal" for adults with names, addresses, and phone numbers of all attending members, with members' birthdays and anniversaries, and with several Bible reading plans for their devotions. It is a loose-leaf binder designed to be kept with their Bible and hymnal for ready reference, with lots of ruled sheets for notes on any sermon, Sabbath school class, or lecture they attend. Entire sermons can be recalled with only a few key words and illustrations.—Bud Beaty, Mickleham, Victoria, Australia.

Degree by mail

Recent years have brought a proliferation of schools claiming to offer college and seminary degrees by mail. Many are diploma mills that require little academic work but for a fee grant degrees all the way through the doctoral level. While many of these schools claim to be accredited, they are not recognized

by a bona fide educational agency. This is not to say that there are not good continuing education programs available through correspondence that offer valid educational experiences, such as those offered through Ministerial Continuing Education (12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904; 301-680-6503).

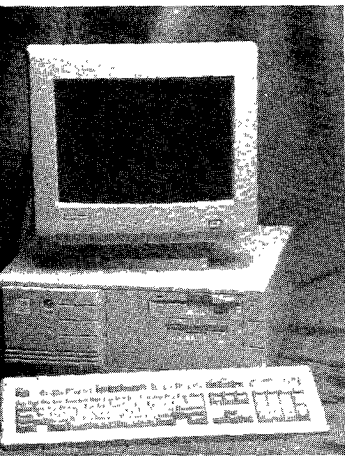
One book to aid the potential student in selecting a suitable program is *Name It and Frame It?* (from the Institute on Religion and Law, Box 552, Ambler, PA 19002; 215-272-4072). Author Steve Levicoff frankly analyzes schools and exposes the false claims of many that offer degrees by mail. He then suggests accredited programs in both the Christian and secular world.

Another helpful book is *Walston and Bear's Guide to Earning Religious Degrees Nontraditionally* (Costedoat and Bear Books, Box 826, Benicia, CA 94510; 707-746-8535). It contains a plethora of information about the many schools purporting to offer degrees by mail.

Either book can be helpful to potential students winding their way through the maze of institutions promoting degrees through a nontraditional approach. Better to invest in the cost of these books *before* investing thousands of dollars in a useless degree that's not worth the paper it's printed on.—John A. Owston, Kingsport, Tennessee.

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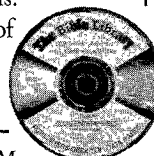
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