

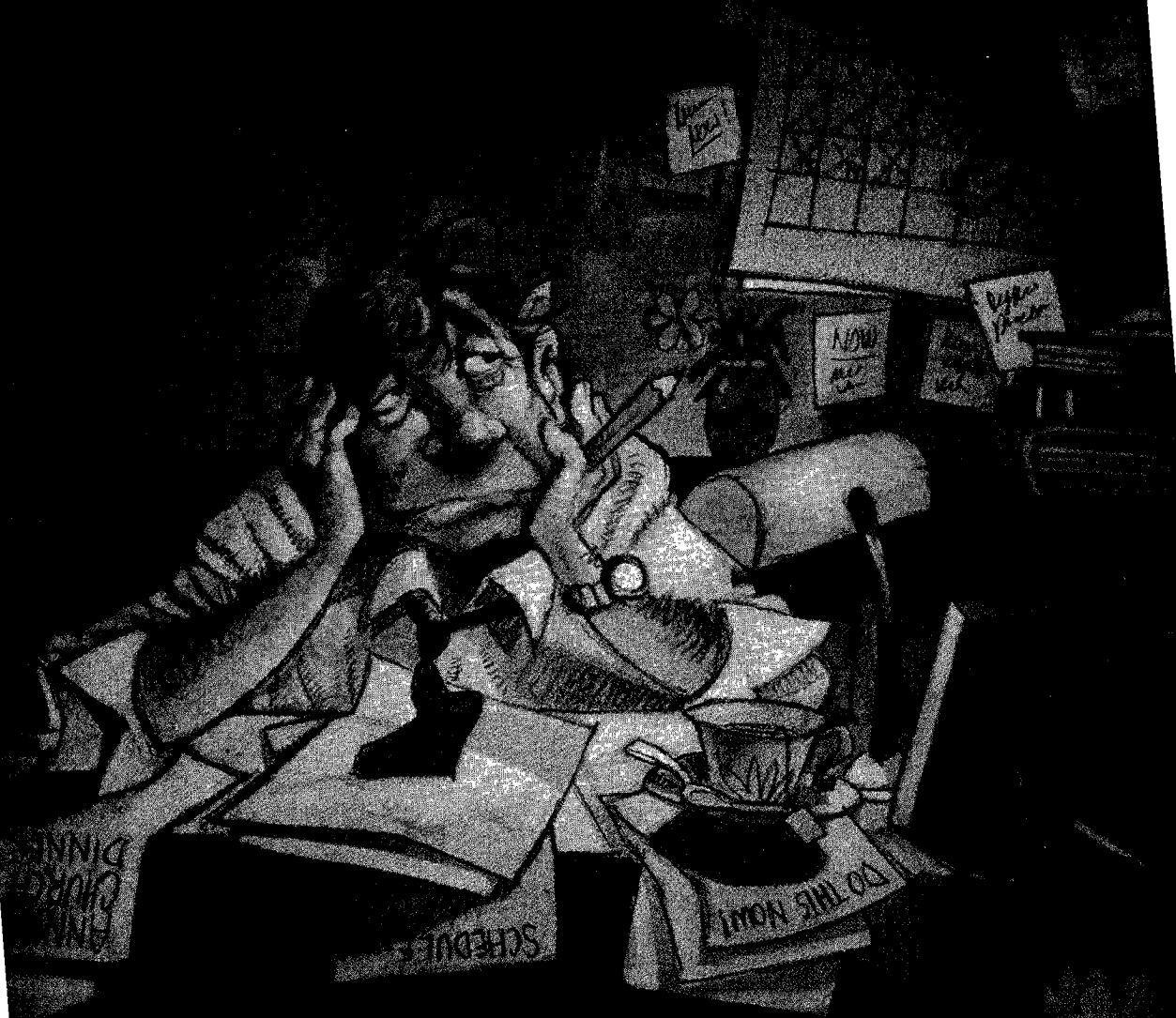
MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors

April 2003



Celebrating 75 Years of
Ministry Magazine



TAMING THE TYRANNY OF TOO MUCH

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I WISH THERE WERE MORE RECOGNITION OF THE SERIOUS CHALLENGE OF FINDING THE TRUTH FOR TODAY IN OUR MARVELOUS BIBLE, RATHER THAN HARANGUING ON HOW INFALLIBLE IT IS . . .

It is not often that I feel the urge to write to "The Editor," but after reading Rex Edwards' "Spiritual Leadership or Baptized Secularism" in the September issue of *Ministry*, I feel compelled to do just that.

I suppose what has persuaded me to do this is twofold:

1. First, the choice of "three well-known general patterns of leadership in the church." As you might know, the autocratic, democratic, *laissez-faire* divide originated at the University of Iowa in 1938. Subsequent research demonstrated that the demarcations are not so precise and the field of study into identifying leader behaviors has continued. Any modern introductory management text will demonstrate developed thought in this regard. For example, "Contemporary trends in management have brought in a new order of cooperation, partnership, and consensus which is challenging the very basis upon which management exists—its right to manage, to control corporate destiny" (Bartol, *et al*, 2001, 404).

As this short quotation illustrates, contemporary thought has moved on from the 1938 model used by Edwards.

2. Second, I am really surprised that an article can be based on scholarship material that is so clearly dated. I note

references to Crossland, 1955; Engstrom, 1976; Tead, 1945; Smith, 1936; Stott, 1971; Parkard, 1962; Blackwood, 1949; and Haiman, 1950. I fear we are reading a scholarship frozen in time. Surely there are contemporaneous authors who would bring the argument to life without having to dredge up dinosaurs?

If this had been a paper written by one of my students, it would receive a passing grade for intent, but fail overall due to the clear gaps in contemporary literature support. Indeed, I would find some difficulty with some of the philosophy expressed, but that may reflect my own view of "democracy" in the church.

It is not clear that *Ministry* has an editorial policy that requires peer review prior to acceptance and publication. Perhaps something like this would avoid the acceptance of an article that is so clearly dated in its theoretical underpinning.

Please be assured of my support for your journal. In my faculty, each copy is circulated to all my staff as I believe that while we may teach the intricacies of business, we are all part of the wider ministry of the church.

—Keith Howson, Faculty of Business and Information Technology, Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

I am weary of people trying to lift up the Bible by making claims that are so easily reduced to nothing by simply reading the Bible. I'm referring to Ms. Davidson's article in your January *Ministry* magazine.

Infallible? It only takes one error or contradiction to erase that claim: Comparing Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9 is all it takes. The list of such examples (this is old stuff) is very, very long.

One hundred percent dependable in revealing God's will? Reading Exodus 31:14, 15, and 35:2 is enough to take care of that. Surely no thinking person today would believe that that is the will of God for us. Jesus would never have said that. Or 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35. Sure, there are some churches that still cling to that, but few would argue that that is God's will today.

I wish there were more recognition of the serious challenge of finding the truth for today in our marvelous Bible, rather than haranguing on how infallible it is to people who so quickly find it is not. By recognizing the challenge of distilling the truth in the Bible through Wesley's "holy conferencing," we might all be more apt to find God's will instead of arguing about whether the Bible is what we worship, or the God of Jesus Christ. ■

—Paul E. Robinson, Grand Island, New York.

Free Subscription

If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that 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 our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

There's room for us all

There's room for us all . . . " When applied to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is that assertion too inclusive, too unsuspecting of the subtleties of "creeping compromise"? Or does it voice a legitimate call for respect and interpersonal forbearance?

How far may we take such a declaration when it comes to the cultural, theological, and behavioral diversity within our ranks. The question becomes loaded when placed in the light of the various challenges from outside the Church that molest our faith and identity, and then manifest themselves within. These challenges intensify the struggle between opening up, progressing, and adapting on one hand, versus conserving, preserving, and safeguarding what we have on the other.

Seminal questions underlie these concerns: What is mainstream to the soul of the Adventist faith, and what is tributary? What is aortic to our spiritual organism, and what is capillary? When is something that confronts our faith worth a fight to the death, and when is such a fight "much ado about nothing"? *Ministry* must, by its nature, grapple with such issues. So, how disparate can a magazine like this be while still possessing a true, healthy, cohesive editorial philosophy or theology?

This particular *Ministry* issue illustrates this dilemma, for it presents at least one article that may be seen to lean to the left and one that leans to the right. Is the magazine big enough for such diversity? Or, more pointedly, is the Church?

Here are a few thoughts that briefly address some of the dynamics behind the question of how much room should be left for this or that view (or person) in our world faith community:

1. As much as we might wish to make it seem otherwise, the lion's share of our detachments from one another

WILL EVA



seldom find ultimate viability in the cognitive, objective disagreements with one another over particular issues. Rather, our deep-seated divisions gain momentum from the interpersonal disrespect and finger-pointing that accompany our objective disagreements. This negativity is *always* out of place and finds its impetus outside the pale of Christian love and respect.

In other words, the weight of our desire to limit someone's room in the Church comes primarily from the negative relational dynamics that we experience; both those we send out to others, and those we receive from them. Thus, in Christ, we must first concentrate on reforming the way we view and relate to one another, even before we try to set one another straight elsewhere. On this hangs the whole law and the prophets.

2. We need to decide for ourselves what is biblically mainstream and what is tradition-born and tributary to our faith. This is a crucial and highly Christian task. Just as significantly, we need to decide how, in Christ, we will relate to those whom we see to be contaminating the mainstream and those who merely seem to be tainting a tributary. This is what Paul did so magnificently in passages such as Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

3. We cannot afford to forget, too,

that we need one another. I need my brother's (sister's) challenge to my thinking, and my sister (brother) needs mine. While God communicates His thoughts to individuals, in the end He always makes what He has said pass through the maturing, cleansing fires of His earthly community.

4. Then there is the reality of the essential loyalty of the person with whom I differ. People can say things that seem dangerous to me, and later they may prove not to be. Jesus Himself was good at introducing such "provocations." For that reason many accorded Him only the room He was assigned on a Roman gibbet!

So, where, after all, are a man's or woman's essential loyalties? There are just about always reliable indicators present in the words and demeanor of a person that indicate the basic loyalty quotient they possess. It is very significant to note that a person's elemental loyalty to God has a great deal to do with the value and viability of the views they advocate.

After all, the unity among us that really matters, always contains a dynamic Spiritual (with a capital "S") substance that should hold pre-eminence over the debated cognitive issues themselves. The cognitive themes are, of course, very important, but nothing of real value is ever merely cognitive.

These few thoughts are by no means exhaustive, and we cannot afford to casually say, "Sure there's room for us all." *But* all things considered, we can indeed say it more than we do, and we can truly believe it and mean it, and benefit from it.

Articles that appear in this issue of *Ministry* offer us an opportunity to see how much room there really is in the Church, or at least how much each of us actually thinks there is. ■

Taming the tyranny of too much

H. Peter Swanson



H. Peter Swanson, Ph.D., is assistant professor of pastoral care, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

What is expected of a pastor? One pioneering piece of research¹ identified 1,200 descriptions of what pastors are supposed to be and do. That's far too much, even for those who may consider themselves to be super pastors. The fact remains that the average pastor works under heavy pressure; from preaching to counseling, from worship coordination to conflict resolution, from church growth to financial management.

Two years ago the Czech-Slovak Union authorized the author to study their pastors' work/time patterns. The study included 259 pastoral respondents and selected lay persons from different churches, thus providing two different perspectives.

The results showed that the average Adventist pastor worked 65 hours a week, with some squeezing in as many as 85.² These long hours are consistent with findings from different parts of the world and from various denominations.³

Such long hours take their toll on the pastor's family; health; social, spiritual, personal, and professional growth. What is needed is a careful, intentional budgeting of time and work priorities.

Work has a way of becoming tyrannical in our lives. The Creator did not intend that work should run our lives; instead, we should master our work, and make it an instrument

of effective service. In other words, we should take charge of our work.

Our study probed five strategic concerns: (1) What is the role of the pastor? (2) Which are the most important pastoral tasks? (3) How should pastors allocate their time? (4) How may pastors improve their efficiency? and (5) How can we implement a reasonable workload for pastors?

What is the role of the pastor?

Our study defined parish ministry as consisting of five major roles. Each role, in turn, was defined in terms of a number of particular tasks.

1. *Preaching*—includes sermon preparation, preaching, worship planning, leading in worship, and planning the sermonic year.

2. *Administration*—deals with committees, communication with the congregation (such as church-bulletin preparation and telephone ministry), strategic planning, and church finances.

3. *Pastoral care*—has to do with counseling, visiting the sick, home visitation, attending to the congregation's social life, and caring for aspects of reproof and admonition in the congregation.

4. *Teaching*—includes teaching and training, small-group studies, Bible classes, youth ministry, and personal devotions.

5. *Evangelism*—takes care of Bible studies with interested people, lay evangelism, reclaiming missing members, community welfare, and public evangelism.

Pastors must not expect to accomplish all these tasks by themselves. Instead, they should lead out in a shared ministry by helping church members identify and exercise their spiritual gifts and assume responsibilities for some of these tasks.

Of the pastoral tasks, it is important to ask, Which five are the most important?

Which are the most important pastoral tasks?

Our study revealed some predictable and some surprising findings.

First, both pastors and lay members identified the devotional life of the pastor as the most important of all pastoral tasks. Although this "task" is not listed above, this prioritization should not come as a surprise, as church members first of all look to pastors as spiritual leaders of the community.

Second, both pastors and lay persons agreed that training the congregation for service is crucial for the life of the church. Where there is active lay training and participation, the workload of the pastor is considerably eased, and many other advantages are experienced.

Third, pastors and laity considered lay participation in evangelism as pivotal to pastoral effectiveness. This is heartening because church members want the very thing that will lighten the pastoral load and at the same time ensure effective church growth.

Fourth, and somewhat surprisingly, while pastors placed sermon preparation on the list of most important tasks, the lay members chose ministry to children and youth as a higher priority. This indicates the congregational concern for the spiritual welfare of its younger constituency, and sends an important message to pastors.

Fifth, while pastors saw visioning and strategic planning as of high importance, the lay person placed a high priority on visiting the sick and the infirm. What this says is significant: Pastors tended to spend more time in their study, but people wanted them to be in their midst, leading and nurturing the flock.

So how shall the minister divide the workweek among these and the other important pastoral tasks?

How should pastors allocate their time?

Determining how much time pastors should allocate to various pastoral tasks is a delicate balancing act. We will note how much time pastors allotted to some of the key tasks that come under the five priorities outlined above.

Devotions. Although this was considered the most important of pastoral tasks, the time spent by pastors for personal devotion and study varied from one hour or less per week to 12 to 20 hours. The average was about 5.4 hours per week.

In matters of relationship to our Lord, it is impossible to prescribe for

others the precise number of hours that should be spent in spiritual devotion. But our ministry is powerless and our efficiency is poor if we do not set aside regular and intentional periods for personal prayer and devotional study.

Training laity. The average time spent by the 259 pastoral respondents in lay training is 4.2 hours per week. Beyond imparting essential knowledge, these pastors helped members identify their spiritual gifts, inspired them to action, and supported their efforts to fulfill their responsibilities.

Church-growth involvement. Our pastoral respondents spent an average of 2.8 hours per week in actual work with lay members in various ministries related to church growth. Congregations where such pastor-member shared ministry exists have shown consistent increase in membership and a reduction in pastoral workload.

Sermon preparation. Time spent in sermon preparation ranged from 1 to 20 hours. Does this mean that pastors who spend fewer hours in sermon preparation are more experienced and adept than those who spend 20 hours? Or could it be that some pastors do not really take sermon preparation seriously?

A simple but challenging homiletical rule says that for each minute one plans to spend in the pulpit, one should spend an hour in preparation. Following that rule could improve the quality of our preaching and shorten excessively long sermons. Either way, under no circumstances should the quality of a sermon be compromised—no member wants to see that.

Ministry to the young. This is very important to lay leaders, yet our study revealed that our pastors spent an average of only 1.8 hours per week in children's ministry. The amount of time spent here is perhaps influenced by the number of young people in the church, and/or by the effectiveness of the lay persons who minister to the youth. However, to the congregants, direct pastoral involvement in

the lives of children and young adults seems indispensable.

Strategic planning. Of all the administrative responsibilities of the pastor, the most important is creating a vision in the congregation of what God calls them to be and to do, and working with them to turn that vision into reality. Our survey revealed that pastors spend an average of 1.8 hours per week in this area of responsibility.

Visiting the infirm. Visiting the sick is to follow the example of Jesus. The pastors we surveyed spent about 3.8 hours per week visiting the sick, disabled, bereaved, and homebound. In congregations with a preponderance of elderly or infirm members, this task may take up more time.

We have now looked at how much time our respondents spent in caring for the *most important* pastoral tasks. Now, consider the time they spent in attending to tasks they themselves rated *least important*.

Church bulletin. Both clergy and laity rated as least important the ever-recurring obligation to publish a weekly bulletin and compose a periodic newsletter. Yet most pastors reported spending about 1.2 hours each week on this task. The value of communicating to members via the printed page seems obvious. But the pastor's involvement and time commitment to this activity should normally be kept to a minimum.

Church finances. Pastors and laity agreed that overseeing church finances and involving themselves in fund-raising efforts are tasks that are best served by others. Nevertheless, our study showed that pastors spent an hour or more each week on these activities.

Not all denominations or congregations would agree that their pastors should be excused from fund-raising. And when major projects such as building programs take center stage, extraordinary promotion and involvement by the pastor are doubtless beneficial. However, it seems that if these responsibilities can be adequately cared for by other capable persons,

the pastor's time may be invested in other pressing matters.

Helping the needy. The way we treat the hungry, naked, and incarcerated really matters to Jesus (Matt. 25:45). However, both ministers and members placed this work nearly last in importance, though the respondents did spend about 1.2 hours per week on these activities.

It is possible that ministers who work in impoverished, inner-city parishes may have more direct involvement with the suffering than was reported by pastors in this study, many of whom came from more privileged middle-class congregations.⁴

Phone calls. Fourth from the bottom of the list, according to our study, is the administrative work of making and answering phone calls, doing church correspondence, and following up on requests from parishioners. Time spent ranged from one-half hour to 15 hours, with an average of about 4.5 hours per week. A good volunteer

secretary can ease the load here, although some calls and letters are perhaps unavoidable.

Church social events. Ministers are expected to participate in church-related social events. Although accepted by many as a pastoral obligation, this task was rated as 20th in importance, but it absorbed about 2.3 hours of the ministers' time each week.

Our study indicated that a pastor needs about 75 hours a week to accomplish all the key tasks at the reported rate-of-time consumption! But is it reasonable to expect a 75-hour workweek, or even a 60-hour week for pastors? Such an expectation is nothing less than submission to the tyranny of trying to do too much.

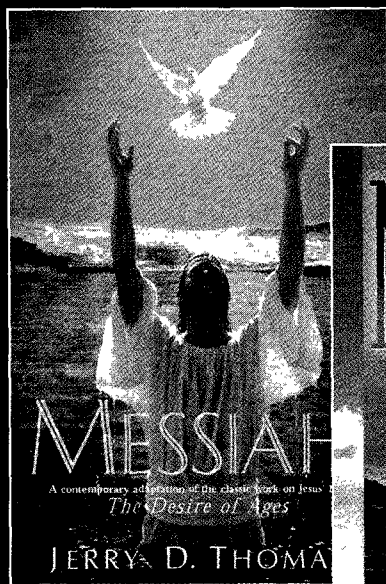
So the 75-hour expectation should send an alarm to churches and church administrators: The pastoral task cannot be done without an active clergy-lay shared ministry. That, perhaps, is the central lesson we learned from our study.

How to improve pastoral efficiency

Our study also focused on pastoral efficiency. Some ministers are excessively perfectionistic while others habitually lag behind in quality task performance. To measure the quality of clergy performance, we asked ministerial supervisors to identify the most effective versus the least effective pastors in their conferences. We then looked for differences between these two groups. We also compared ministers who baptized 50 or more persons into church membership during a three-year period with those who baptized 10 or fewer in the same period.

The findings were fascinating. Pastors' self-ratings of their task proficiency were almost the same as the ranking by ministerial supervisors.

Further, we asked lay leaders to rate the quality of their pastors' work, and their rating was not significantly different from the other ratings.⁵



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While many factors influence effectiveness and productivity in ministry,⁶ it is clear that those whose work quality is above average are recognized as superior to those whose work quality is below average. This means that slipshod, substandard work is not acceptable. Whatever the reason, ministers whose performance is below average must take remedial action, such as further education or in-service training to rectify their deficits.

Our findings also show that while large congregations may be able to have specialist pastors to deal with preaching, evangelism, pastoral care, finances, family ministry, etc., our churches usually need a top-notch generalist who, with the help of trained laity, can minister to the varied needs of a congregation.

Each congregation has its particular challenges and evolving areas of focused attention. While expansion of Christian education may be a top priority one year, other aspects of outreach may place very different demands upon pastoral expertise in subsequent years. Good generalists must be intentionally selective about where to invest their energies, and thus avoid becoming overloaded simply because they are capable of doing many things well.

Though we may not achieve outstanding proficiency in all five pastoral roles, we may certainly strive toward mastery of each aspect of ministry. Pastors can monitor their

own ministry by keeping periodic checks. Clergy spouses and children can often act as valuable critics.

The parish itself is the best source of assistance in our understanding of our own effectiveness. Insights from thoughtful church members will provide a healthy balance to our own regular evaluations of how well we are progressing toward our personal and congregational objectives.

How can we implement a reasonable workload?

One thing our study showed is that pastors are under extreme pressure. They have too much to do, and to do all that effectively, is a difficult, if not an impossible, order. This tyranny of too much to do may be a monster of our own making. It can also be created by the composite demands that others impose upon us. Either way, the tyrant must be tamed!

How can we accomplish the expected tasks of the pastor and yet keep the pastoral workload reasonable? Our study helped us develop four steps.

Step 1. Decide an upper limit of hours per week that you are able and willing to work, *after* providing adequate time for family, health, and other personal obligations. For some this may be a 60-hour week. For others a 50- or 40-hour week may be more realistic.

Reduce that number of hours per week by about 10 percent to determine a work commitment that is respectful of your resolve to live a balanced life, while it also allows you the flexibility to deal with unexpected emergencies.

Step 2. Divide your work time among the five pastoral roles. As you estimate the amount of time that you will allocate to each role, consider how each of the pastoral tasks that are associated with that role will share in the time budget. Make sure you train and organize lay persons to care for many of the pastoral tasks.

This Teach/Evangelize/Establish sequence could be repeated in subse-

quent years. Of course, changes in the needs and goals of the congregation might call for different ways of budgeting the pastor's time.

Step 3. Map out what you plan to do and when you plan to complete each task. A countdown checklist is important when certain deadlines must be met. If you design and follow a regular schedule, you will ensure that the time you have budgeted for different priorities is actually invested as planned. Remember that a schedule is simply an aid to make intelligent and timely decisions to reach your goal in an efficient and purposeful way.

Step 4. Put your plan to work. Make needed adjustments as you go along to ensure that your strategic objectives are met. Also ensure that the mission of the congregation is far more important than the methods.

No matter how revered or well-established a particular practice may be, if it does not contribute to the life and goals of the parish, its relevance must be reviewed. By eliminating nonessentials we dismiss distractions and focus our best efforts where they are most needed.

Be rigorously selective about the new and urgent items that clamor for a place on our "to do" lists. Saying "No" to activities that are inconsistent with the main thrust of our mission is a sacred duty. By deliberately deselecting the unessential, and intently focusing upon the truly important tasks, we can maximize our effectiveness and manage our time. Prioritization and time management are servants to help us to be more effective pastors. ■

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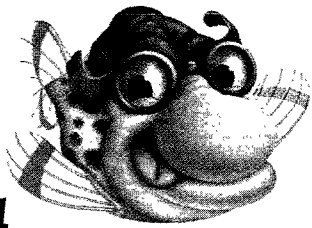
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- 1 D. S. Schuller, M. P. Strommen, and M. L. Brekke, *Ministry in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).
- 2 Unpublished Pastoral Tasks Survey conducted by the author in May 2001 on behalf of the conference.
- 3 H. Peter Swanson, "Pastoral Effectiveness: A Study of Differences Among Comparison Groups of Seventh-day Adventist Clergy," Ph.D. Dissertation (1999), 41, 58.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 10, 290.
- 5 See *ibid.*, 263-265.
- 6 *Ibid.* 22-61, 78-91.

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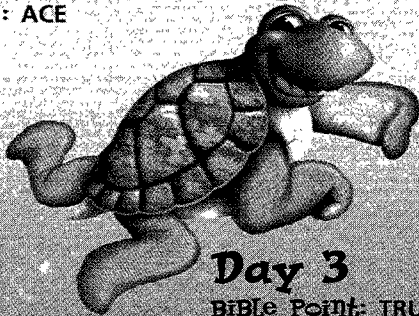
Day 1

Bible Point: BELIEVE IN GOD

Bible Story: ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF
BAAL (1 KINGS 18:16-39)

Key Verse: "BUT YOU ARE THE ONLY TRUE
GOD" (JEREMIAH 10:10)

Bible Memory Buddy: ACE



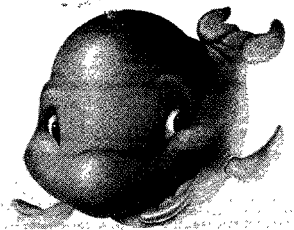
Day 3

Bible Point: TRUST GOD

Bible Story: JESUS CALMS A STORM (MATTHEW 8:23-27)

Key Verse: "TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART.
DO NOT DEPEND ON YOUR OWN UNDER-
STANDING" (PROVERBS 3:5)

Bible Memory Buddy: TANK



Day 2

Bible Point: OBEY GOD

Bible Story: JONAH (JONAH 1:1-3:10)

Key Verse: "HERE IS WHAT IT MEANS TO LOVE
GOD. IT MEANS THAT WE OBEY HIS
COMMANDS" (1 JOHN 5:3)

Bible Memory Buddy: SQUIRT

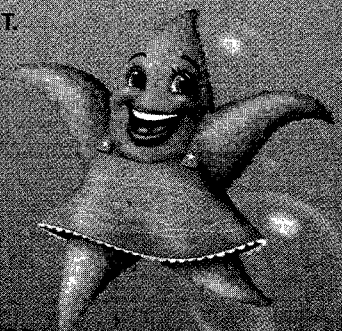


Day 4

Bible Point: LOVE GOD

Bible Story: JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION
(LUKE 23:26-24:50)

Key Verse: "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL
YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND
WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH. LOVE YOUR
NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." (MATTHEW 22:37-39)



Day 5

Bible Point: SHARE GOD

Bible Story: JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES
(LUKE 24:36-49)

Key Verse: "WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH, I
WILL BIND ON HEAVEN. AND WHATEVER YOU
BIND ON EARTH, I WILL BIND ON HEAVEN." (MATTHEW 18:18-20)

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What's with Adventist theology?

Roland R. Hegstad



Roland R. Hegstad is the editor of *Perspective Digest*, and a former editor of *Liberty*.

Why does a word that points upward send so many Christians plunging downward? Why the squabbles over issues of alleged "conservatism" or "liberalism"? Is it possible for us to avoid theological paranoia and heresy hunts without at the same time compromising truth or sacrificing fellowship?

Ministry magazine, long on my reading list, regularly runs articles on theology. Conceded: Often these articles major on distinctive Adventist doctrine; but occasionally they seek to give readers a close-up view of God—who He is, what He is, and how He relates to humanity. Truth be told, even attaining real knowledge of the whos and whats and whys is a daunting task. In fact, an unattainable task, if one buys Barth's definition of God as the "utterly other."

Go to the dictionary, look up *theologian*, and you'll find that a theologian is one who is learned in theology! That's like saying that a theoretician is one who is learned in theory! I asked my seven-year-old granddaughter to tell me what a theologian is or does. Her answer: "I think a theologian. . . . I think a theologian. . . . I think. . . . I don't know."

To get on with definitions: "Theology is the study of the nature of God and religious truth, rational inquiry into religious questions" (which questions, as all theologians know, are often themselves irrational).

Another equally unhelpful definition: "A course of specialized religious study usually at a college or a seminary."

Now, I can be helpful to you in the search for a meaningful definition because I went to a seminary. I found the Adventist Theological Seminary to be a challenging long step up from my college courses. I went there in the midst of a fresh and humbling encounter with Christ. And such an encounter, I submit, is the prerequisite to any theological study worthy of the name. You can study Shakespeare without a momentous encounter with his work, though a knowledge (as distinguished from information) of Medieval and Modern English is a requisite. And, admittedly, in both disciplines some intelligence does help.

Station identification

I assume that about now your questions are: Where is this writer going? Just what does he intend to accomplish? So before going further, let's pause for station identification.

Here's what I'm after, 1, 2, 3:

1. I want us to come to the subject of theology and its oftentimes divisive impact with a prayer and/or at least a chuckle, neither of which can easily coexist with rancor, contentiousness, anger, virulence, wrath, irascibility, and any of the other vicissitudes that plague scholars who (even in the Adventist Church) spend too long in the rarified atmosphere of academia's assumed verities.

Let's look upon one another with compassion. Let's not join the critics who play a game in which they seek to fit theologians into grouchy little categories ranging from conservative on the right to liberal on the left. Depending on the critic's orientation or intention, *conservative* may mean either someone "faithful-to-Scripture-and-Adventist-verities," or "a stuck-in-a-rut-legalist." *Liberal* may be used to describe someone who's "theologically astute, forward-looking, open, and in tune with reality," or someone who's "a standard-scoffing, pseudo-intellectual possessing a dubious loyalty to Scripture." Sadly, the victims of the negative applications of these epitaphs may themselves lash back, usually with veiled emotions and in coded language (because it's not wise or pastoral to let the laity know we're fighting).

In all this, I'm glad to tell you that the majority of theologians I've come to know are both scholarly and gracious. They love to

share insights into God's love of sinners. They respond to internecine differences with prayers and chuckles, each of which has its place in defusing volatile charges and enhancing relationships.

2. I want us to feel friendly toward theology, which has its focus on a very friendly God, who is much happier when we approach Him with a smile rather than a frown. Shame on stodginess, stuffiness, and ill-humor! The Jesus who came down to demonstrate what the Father is like took children on His knee and smiled at them, laughed with them, and won their hearts.

3. I want you to finish this article with (a) an enhanced respect for theology and theologians; (b) a more peacemaking attitude toward differing theological views (within limits); and (c) my name still on your Christian list. In pursuing these objectives, I'll introduce you to two evangelical theologians who have achieved what some have not.

Meet the scholars

I met the two evangelicals thanks to a *Christianity Today* review.¹ Their names: Alan P. F. Sell and Michael Jinkins. Both have credentials: professors in seminaries, authors of theology texts. Both are influential in shaping, or at least reflecting, evangelical thought. Sell is a British Reformed scholar; Jinkins, a "moderate Reformed theologian," as reviewer Roger E. Olson describes him.

Sell is one who "strives to bridge the differences between competing theologies," but he "is not interested in heresy hunts or watering Christian belief down to the lowest common denominator."

What impressed me most about the two, however, was that though they differ on points of theology important to them, they do so without rancor. Olson sees them rooted in a warmhearted and peace-loving Christianity that holds to the motto, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

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The two men, says Olson, subscribe to the Apostles' Creed, which serves "as a guiding norm [under Scripture] for their theological reflections. As their books show, they avoid condemning Christians who hold differing views on secondary matters of belief." (I've sometimes wondered whether "non-essentials" or "secondary matters" reflect concepts alive and well in Adventism.)

Both Sell and Jinkins communicate theology devotionally and practically. Says Sell: "It is a cardinal principle of good theology that it should build upon what God has seen fit to make known to us, and not upon what He has not. . . . My anchor is God's revelation in Christ."

I liked Jinkins' paradox: "God's power is most visible in the helpless and broken figure of Jesus of Nazareth hanging and dying on the cross."

Of paradox and elephants

I'm comfortable with paradox and mystery. Some time ago in *Perspective Digest*, which I edit, I expressed my conviction that God is fundamentally holy, and from that essence springs love and justice and all His other attributes. A writer challenged me to explain why I saw the holiness of God to be elemental and didn't hold to the traditional Adventist view that God is fundamentally love.

I had already mentioned that the cherubim about the throne of God sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy," rather than "Love, Love, Love." But I didn't argue the point further. Why? Because I don't recall that Jesus, who came to show us the Father, ever delivered a systematic theology of His Father's essence. I also didn't argue further

because God is infinitely more than I am capable of imagining, let alone describing, especially when I remember the descriptions the three blind men gave about what an elephant is like, after each of them felt it once.

How often theological endeavor is like those blind men when they pontificate about the nature of God. Which reminds me that on several early trips to a theologically sophisticated Adventist community somewhere, the litmus test of my orthodoxy, among several interrogators, depended on my answer to the question: "Where do you stand on the nature of Christ?" My answer: "I hold that the ultimate blasphemy of which Christians are capable is to divide the church over the nature of One who prayed, 'Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name . . . so that they may be one as we are one'" (John 17:11). *Beware of those who, in one way or another, profess to have the ultimate answers when it comes to the mysteries buried in the very nature of the infinite!*

As Sell says, "If we do not begin from the holy love of God made known to us in Christ, we shall find ourselves in difficulties when we come to fill out our understanding of God." Both theologians, Olson observes, "apply the Christocentric approach even to the doctrine of God's nature, attributes, and character."

Things are changing

I find it interesting that Sell, a Reformed theologian with unassailable Calvinist credentials, affirms "freedom of will and repudiates divine determinism." Both theologians, says Olson, "express significant dissatisfac-

tion with post-Calvin Reformed thinking that goes beyond what Scripture and early Christian tradition had to say about God's sovereignty."

Here's one example from Sell: "There is no New Testament justification for the view that God from eternity predestined some to damnation. Christians do not know, worship, and serve a God of sheer arbitrariness. God's omnipotence . . . is not sheer unconditioned might. Nor is it such as to violate the freedom He has given us. . . . He will go to a Cross before He will remove that which makes us human."

At this point I hope you're contemplating this contemporary Calvinist's viewpoint and determining not to tag persons by the church company they keep! Things are changing out there in the evangelical world, as well as in the Adventist world. No, neither Adventist theologians nor I would endorse all the theology of either Sell or Jinkins. But I hope you—along with my theologian colleagues—will respect them as men of God.

Of creeds and caveats

In a past issue of *Perspective Digest* I suggested that the pacifist position taken by several groups in wartime should be extended to cover internecine conflicts over theology. In support of this view, I pointed to inspired counsel that had guided me as editor of *Liberty*. I believe my suggestion to be in harmony with the attitude of most, if not all, Adventist theologians.

What to do, then, with theological concepts circulating that are not to be found among the 27 doctrines listed in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*?² We might begin by examining the book's introduction, which emphasizes the noncreedal nature of that volume. A sampling:

"We have written this book with the guidance of a clear directive continually reminding us that 'if you search the Scriptures to vindicate

your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, but accept the light given. . . ." (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* [Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1900], 112).³

Good counsel! But don't miss this: "We have not written this book to serve as a creed—a statement of beliefs set in theological concrete. Adventists have but one creed: 'The Bible, and the Bible alone.'"⁴

I know these caveats well: At the request of the book's editor, Robert Spangler, I wrote the first draft of the introduction. Understand me: I subscribe to the 27 doctrines listed, but I surely would reword at least one of them—No. 21, titled "Christian Behavior," which spends ten pages on everything from fresh air, rest, and

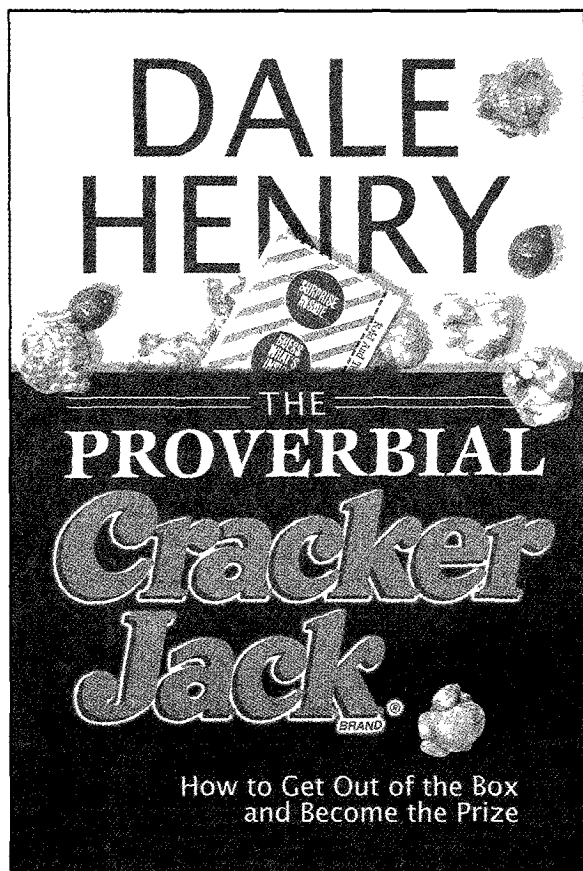
nutrition, to how to dress—all good, mind you; but in contrast here is the sum total expressed about our responsibility to minister to humanity: "A major reason Christians live as they do is to save lost men and women. Said Paul: 'I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:33, NIV; cf. Matt. 20:28).'"⁵ Yes, the chapter "The Remnant and Its Mission" says we are to call people out of apostasy and prepare them for Christ's return,⁶ but that's about all it says!

In terms of volume at least, such matters claim an emphasis far beyond that of the essential issue of Christian ministry in the world. In my estimation, in two critical areas the book majors on minors (gracefully, to be sure) while missing the greater dimensions of witness. I, for one, would revise chapter 21 to include examples from Scripture of how Christ represented the love of the Father through

His ministry to humanity.

Why my sensitivity on the book's priorities? Because I have a painful confession to make. I was a certified pagan when God reached out to me. My grandmother had died soon after I graduated from high school. I went to a gracious Adventist aunt and asked two questions: "What happens when you die? and Is there really a God?" That wise aunt didn't give me the answers; instead she suggested I go to Walla Walla College for "just one year" to find the answers.

At the time I was headed for Linfield College, a well-regarded school near Portland, Oregon, where I lived. My great ambition was to be a sports editor, and Linfield had offered me a scholarship, a journalism grant, and the sports editorship of the college paper for my freshman year. Troubles in our home and, as I now recognize, the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, led me, at the last moment, to head for Walla Walla,



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with none of the inducements held out by Linfield.

What a shock to find that WWC did not have even a sports page in the college paper, the *Collegian*; and that the cafeteria didn't serve T-bone steaks and fried chicken. (If I'd have sampled their twin abominations Nuteena and Proteena, before registering, I'd likely have gone home.) My interrogator was gracious but thorough. I was told all the things I couldn't do if permitted to enroll—go to movies, dances, etc. I agreed. "Just one more thing," he said: "You'll have to take off your ring." My class ring! I would have been sent home had I not agreed to do so. Home, that is, without learning about God and death and salvation.

Is it any wonder that later, after baptism, a change in my major, and graduation, I (and far too many fellow evangelists) largely left the preaching of Christ to the "other churches" while majoring on Adventist distinctives? Is it any wonder that I raised up a church convinced of Adventist doctrine but largely bereft of the spirit of Christ?

I thank God that after agonizing nights of prayer and heart searching,

my life, evangelistic emphasis, and, thank God, my church, began to change. It was then, however, that I questioned whether, indeed, God had called me to the ministry, took a leave of absence, and with my wife and three-month-old son headed for the Adventist seminary.

As in my case, few theologians come without baggage. A too strict or too lenient home; an overemphasis on nonessentials; parents rebellious against church standards. Write your own script. I've told you of my introduction to an Adventist campus hoping that you'll understand why I'm sensitized by what I perceive to be *Seventh-day Adventists Believe's* majoring on minors in a chapter that should reflect Christ's concern and love for burdened humanity.

I desire to bring the same understanding I seek to my theologian friends. Their sensitivities to theological aberrations often have roots in early experiences such as mine. . . . But enough. I pray that we all will battle with ourselves so that our experiences—weaknesses, temptations, fears—will come to condition not only in our theology but also in our relationship with fellow Adventists

and others who differ with us. Which is a good place to ask, Are there limits to beliefs one can accommodate?

How much should we accommodate?

I've just said I'd like to see a couple of the 27 doctrines worked over a bit. When I was editor of *Liberty*, I suggested we should add a 28th doctrine: Religious Liberty. (Stay with me. In suggesting this, I'm not going to take you for a ride on my hobbyhorse!)

A few centuries ago, the good monk Beza described religious liberty as "the right of every person to go to hell in his own way!" But Beza aside, what attitude should the church take toward theologians or members who would alter the doctrines listed in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*? In asking this question, keep in mind that the introduction to the first edition pointed out that the book was not endorsed by a vote of the General Conference in session and thus contents can be changed, either to better word its expressions or to accommodate new light, as God may give it. But we're still left with the question: Are there limits to beliefs one can—or should not—accommodate?

As already affirmed, I, along with Sell and Jenkins, endorse the adage "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." But this always needs some clarification. When confronted by new theological concepts, I often recall Ellen White's 1890 statements: "We have only the glimmerings of the rays of the light that is yet to come to us."⁷⁷ Why did our forefathers not receive more?—"Their clouded, deficient comprehension made it impossible."⁷⁸

These kinds of statements compel me to give new concepts a fair hearing. *No new light will ever push the fundamentals of our faith into obscurity.* Rather it will enhance them, as is happening with our concept of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment.

Yes, there are aberrant viewpoints that must be met, some of which owe

their vitality to the theological tools brought to the study of Scripture. Foremost among them is the historical-critical method, with presuppositions about Scripture that weren't birthed in a manger.

Much of the tension between Adventist theologians today emanates from disagreement over which of these tools should or should not be utilized. At stake is the integrity of Scripture, which is the product of a holy partnership between God and humanity. While in all these matters many crucial elements are at stake, I nevertheless do not buy the proposition sometimes advanced, that using some theological research "tools" intrinsic to historical criticism, means that one must adopt all its tainted premises.

Occasionally we read of a colleague who leaves our church because of such things. I think of one, a personal friend and seminary professor, who resigned and joined another denomination, an honorable decision, though one I regret. Still, that is to be preferred over those who undermine the church from pastoral or teaching posts while professing loyalty to it. Others have sought to create their own little empires from which they seek to undermine the church—usually by sabotaging church leadership.

Even here, however, we must not respond by attacking character or impugning motives. We must go about God's business, leaving Him to act in His good time and in His own way. Rarely must further action be taken. One thing is sure: *Truth is not best defended by denouncing error, and especially not by denouncing those who are in error.* ■

- 1 Robert E. Olson, "Theology for the Rest of Us," in *Christianity Today*, April 22, 2002.
- 2 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988).
- 3 *Ibid.*, vii.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*, 289.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 168.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 1:401.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 403.

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Can the church be "relevant" and thrive? (part 1)

Jay Gallimore



Jay Gallimore is president of the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Lansing, Michigan.

We cannot help but notice the mega-churches around us. They have highly visible ministries, so well executed that everything about them seems to breathe success. Then we observe our own churches, many small and struggling, and we cannot help wondering what's wrong.

In some respects, we are unnecessarily hard on ourselves. When we are, the view we take of our Church tends to be one-sided, so that we ignore the undeniable strengths with which God has gifted the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide. We too easily forget God's great providence in our past, and especially in the present.

So before we rush to make hasty comparisons with other churches, we need to count the blessings that have made us what we are, and assess the larger picture of God's favor in the Church we serve.

Evidence of God's presence

Flying international flags, as a mega-church does in my neighborhood, does not in itself make an enterprise international. The truth is that such flags may belie a longing to have the global ministry that Seventh-day Adventists already have. Our humble beginnings would never have predicted the phenomenal global growth with which God has blessed us. Each year the number of

Seventh-day Adventists compared to the world population increases, and the growth of the Church is not just in terms of membership per se.

It's good and it's encouraging to consider the breadth and depth of the Adventist world presence. Our global educational system, with the flaws we know it has, is nevertheless a class act. What other church has the kind of health ministry ours has? Then there is ADRA with its far-flung ministry, along with thousands of local Community Service centers around the world. There is an impressive infrastructure of youth camps across North America and elsewhere. And while many Christian groups have successful evangelistic outcomes, there is no one who succeeds at public evangelism globally as we do. Our beautiful churches dot the land. Our camp meetings are places where thousands gather for spiritual refreshment.

What about the impact of the publishing ministry of our Church? The magazine you are reading is a minimal fraction of the literature—books, journals, pamphlets, periodicals—circulating the earth in all kinds of languages. And then there's Adventist World Radio and all kinds of other broadcast ministries, both denominational and lay operatives, along with an exploding Internet presence. And the list could go on. Are the approaches and growth strategies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as ineffective as some may sincerely perceive them to be?

Yet some may say, "Look at North America. While our membership is growing in ethnic communities, our growth in the mainstream is very slow, and in 'middle class' communities these mega-churches are succeeding. If we don't do something, we are going to lose a great deal of talent and support that are badly needed to move the world Church."

Do our changes hurt or help?

Without question, these are urgent concerns, but will our creative energy be spent on change that hurts or helps? Do we opt for change believing that change alone will bring results? Do we really know what the Church should or will be like when we are done changing it? Have we carefully considered the will of God Himself? Or are we just telling Him what results we want? Have we actually studied how the Bible and the gift of the writings we hold dear actually define success?

For the last ten or fifteen years some Adventist congregations have been experimenting with the growth methods of some of the mega-churches. Out of this has come "celebration worship," which many have believed would transform a time-warped Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some of these well-intended ventures have proved disappointing and damaging.

In one high-profile case, the senior pastor of a 1,000-member Adventist congregation left the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and joined with those who have traditionally denounced the Adventist Church and its faith. One of the leading elders of this congregation started another congregation that worshiped on Sunday.

The Church went through further confusion and sadness, especially when two new pastors were dismissed over doctrinal issues. As a result, the congregation went through several splits. Decline in attendance and membership followed until the remaining members could no longer keep up the payments on their large new facility.

Certain attitudes, values, and theological premises are characteristic of these movements. They may be described this way: "Adventist congregations should not be afraid to replicate the methods and worship forms of other successful churches. Success is largely defined as a big attendance with an impressive panoply of exciting upfront programming. Many lifestyle values are seen to be eighteenth-century holdovers. Love-and-acceptance is the almost exclusive theme, virtually eclipsing many other substantive matters. The justifying grace of God in the human heart is emphasized to the neglect of His sanctifying work in human lives. It is threatening to people to be too specific about actual issues of right and wrong. Above all, the church is to be friendly. Thus doctrine should be downplayed, especially if it is distinctive and may lead those we want to

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reach to feel uncomfortable or excluded. Baptism does not need to include the constraints of belonging to a particular church. The organized or corporate Church must not be permitted to discourage or prevent such a ministry from flourishing."

In all of this, serious questions confront me. Here are some of them:

Doesn't making disciples include training born-again Christians how to follow Jesus? Can we reconcile a theology that separates baptism from the body of Christ? Is the Sabbath being marginalized in the name of relevancy or convenience, and is it to become just another day off? How biblical is much of this teaching? How wise is it, considering the big picture? Does such an approach make disciples of Jesus or disciples of the minister or the church? Inasmuch as cults are built around one strong personality, is there a heightened possibility that cultic characteristics will imperceptibly dominate in some situations?

True worship

Once some churches have evolved into a cold, meaningless formalism, they become susceptible to adopting outlooks and practices that would otherwise not even be considered. In the name of being relevant or mean-

ingful, dubious methods and practices are sometimes given an opportunity to flourish.

The congregation's singing is done with little or no enthusiasm. Scripture reading is mumbled through. Heartfelt praise and thanksgiving are scarce to nonexistent. The sound of fervent prayer is replaced with all but memorized rote repetitions. Spirit-filled, biblical preaching is replaced by light, anecdotal entertainment or empty monologing. The greatest passion is seen in nominating committees, conference constituencies, and at the time of pastoral changes. Reverence is lost either in an imposed silence or a disrespectful noise because faith in an awesome God has been lost. There is little eagerness for worship to be carried out with excellence before a glorious God.

Our simple worship should be fervent and earnest. The praying, praising, preaching, speaking, singing, and giving should be our very best. Our faith needs to grasp the reality that we are in the heavenly temple, in the presence of God with 10,000 angels. Our worship should be full of power because the saints come to praise God for His latest acts and to tell others about His mercy and goodness.

True faith always creates a burden

for souls that translates into soul-winning. All week we may live in the light and life of God so we can effectively talk to a dark and dying world. When this is going on, worship becomes the affirmation of the fact that Christ lives among us corporately because He lives in us personally. We and our churches need more than a revival, more than an emotional rush. We need a reformation, a great eschatological awakening.

If anything, the three angels' messages are more potent today than when first proclaimed. Truth has lost none of its energy. Yet, when we have not put away the rebellion in our hearts to the will of God; when some cast doubt on the message, even in the pulpit; when we turn God's church into some sort of social club; when we play fast and loose with the Scripture—then we will turn the worship of God into something He cannot accept.

We worship to please Him, not to entertain us.

Drama

"Relevancy" as a priority can take churches into strange places. No one, of course, wants anything to do with irrelevance, but in the name of being relevant many of the great Reformation churches have all but made their peace with far-reaching aspects of evolutionary theory, and with at least some of the outcomes of higher critical presupposition about the Bible. This capitulation has deeply affected the theological verities of much in contemporary Western Christianity.

Perhaps the most influential effect has been the slow replacement of biblical authority with mere philosophical rationalism, and lowest-common-denominator consensus. Thus any definitive moral voice (especially when it comes to some of our most pressing issues) has been reduced to a muffled whisper or to silence in moments of ethical crisis.

In this vacuum, strange worship is being introduced and experimented



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with. In some charismatic churches people mimic the strutting chickens and barking/howling dogs. They get "drunk with the spirit" and have to be taken home in taxis.

But it is not only these extremes that offer strange fire on the altars of worship. Some of the independent, nondenominational mega-congregations have become renowned for their drama, which is to the point of rivaling professional theater. It appears sometimes as if this entertainment aspect of the worship offered, has become (along with the use of some forms of music) an end in itself.

The apostles were not into drama. They didn't need to be. This doesn't mean there is something wrong with a well-conceived and presented skit, but when drama becomes the main communicator of the gospel and the focus of worship, it is alien.

Some sincerely argue that drama is more effective for the gospel than preaching and teaching, and tragically, that may indeed be true when comparing poor preaching to well-conceived and presented drama. But while Jesus certainly used story and parable, He didn't use drama because there was power in His teaching and the Spirit of God was upon Him.

It is worth noting that the medium of drama is not new. One only has to stand in the ruins of the magnificent theater at Caesarea to realize that this was a serious and highly popular medium in Jesus' day. He could easily have built an attractive drama team. He could have packaged truth in that medium so powerfully that people's emotions would have been like putty in His hands. But He didn't. Instead, He used simple but clear means of communication. He depended on the Spirit of Truth to change and impress hearts. Interestingly, large numbers of those who followed Him were young people through whom He launched His Church.

Contrary to some opinions, theology does drive our methodology. Is there a shift in our convictions? Change is often well entrenched

before someone notices that confession and practice are no longer synonymous. Can we use the methods and sounds of rock to prepare a people to meet their God?

We confess a holy and an awesome faith. That is why the Church must be into truth, not limited to entertainment; it must be into repentance, not manipulation; into building the whole of the person, not only his or her emotional being. We must not underestimate God's power to use simple means. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."

Have we redefined success by redefining worship? Are we moving from a God-centered worship to a person-centered worship? A God-centered worship demands faithfulness in every part of the person. Being kind to people and being sensibly modest in dress are all part of the same New Testament call to Christlikeness. The world is not at all reticent in telling us what to wear and how to act. We will never make a Christlike lifestyle comfy with our carnal hearts.

Too many shallow articles, books, and sermons with their usual thrust of "Don't be a legalist. Don't be unkind. Don't be judgmental" have been poured on us. While this concern is basic to what Jesus cautioned against in the community in which He lived, He also calls the believer to holiness and wholeness. We must know for sure that we are saved by faith alone, but we must also be sure we know that we are saved by a faith that works, and that we are certainly not saved by faithlessness.

Pentecost brought results. It did so for a reason. The apostles' greatest joy was not in learning the latest attendance figures, but in hearing that their converts were faithful.

Much can be said for being creative and relevant. Of course we can learn from other churches and organizations. But in order to thrive, that learning must be accountable to the Bible and all the light God has given the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When our ideas and approaches are

sired and shepherded by God's Word, there will be a real, progressive movement in the church.

Much in the movement to accommodate this philosophy and that person is an admission that the power of biblical Christianity is absent. Conversely, any satisfaction with cold formalism is an admission that we are in a deep sleep, our lamps burning low, and our flasks empty of the special oil of the Spirit. The results of both are going to be disastrous.

When the apostles preached, the sword of the gospel cut and saved across all cultures. The Holy Spirit's arrival in Pentecostal power made their witness effective. That's what they tarried in Jerusalem to obtain.

The truth thrives by solid biblical preaching that calls people to change.

It thrives when it gushes glorious worship to its Creator and Redeemer.

It thrives when it lifts up a Christ who justifies and sanctifies.

It thrives when it is fearless in the face of sin.

It thrives when it pours unselfish love into a hurting world.

It thrives when it embraces the pains and sorrows of the downtrodden of our society.

It thrives when spiritual values are more important than politics.

It thrives when virtue in its members is more important than crowds in its pews.

It thrives when it seeks first the kingdom of heaven, no matter what.

It thrives when it pours rivers of grace and energy into saving the lives of sinners.

It thrives when it moves more by faith than by money.

Jesus opened and closed His ministry with "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Between repentance and eternal life stands the first angel's call to worship (Rev. 14:6, 7).

We thrive when we give that call to all the world, pure and undiluted. ■

NOTE: The second part of this two-part article will appear in the June issue of *Ministry*.

God the Holy Spirit: His divine personhood and ministry

Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief #5: "God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond, He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth."—The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual.

Many sincere anti-Trinitarians understand the Holy Spirit to be an operative conductor of God's energy, or an impersonal electrical current connecting us to the throne of God, or a celestial Internet facility seeking to provide a linkage by which God may communicate with human beings. While the Holy Spirit certainly is a great "channel" of communication, overwhelming biblical evidence suggests that this channel is not an impersonal force, but a personal Being; in fact, the fully divine Third Person of the Godhead.

While anti-Trinitarians deny both the personality and deity of the Spirit, Trinitarians confess the full deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit. Seventh-day Adventists, committed to the biblical witness, hold that the Trinitarian position is convincingly biblical.

The biblical witness to the full deity of the Spirit

The Bible supplies three important lines of witness to the divine nature of the Spirit.

The *first* arises out of the numerous passages where the Holy Spirit is referred to in a triadic manner. That is to say, the Spirit is mentioned in equal sta-

WOODROW W. WHIDDEN



tus with the Father and the Son, the three constituting the Godhead.

The best-known biblical passage in this connection is Christ's gospel commission where the risen Lord commands His followers to baptize believers "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). A second well-known instance of such a triadic, coordinate association of the Spirit with the Father and the Son, is 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Both these passages strongly suggest that the Spirit is a Being of coordinate essence and equality with the Father and the Son.

The *second* line of evidence comes from the book of Acts and the story of Ananias and Sapphira. The story deals with this couple who privately went back on the sacred vows they had made to God. When they laid their offerings at the feet of Peter and claimed that it was the whole of their pledge when it was only a part, they were struck dead. Peter gave a succinct explanation for their end: You have "lied to the Holy Spirit." This is followed with the significant revelation that they had "not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3, 4). The most obvious implication is that the Holy Spirit is God.

The *third* line of evidence is found in the many passages that describe the

work of the Spirit as that unique to God. The clearest example of this is in 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11.

"God has revealed them [the things God has prepared for those who love Him (verse 9)] to us through His Spirit" (verse 10). And how is it that the Spirit is privy to such knowledge? "The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (verses 10, 11).

What the passage suggests is this: If one wants to know the "things of man," one must obtain such information from one who is human. However, what is true on a human level, is even more true on the divine: "Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (verse 11). Only a divine being can truly know what is in the mind and heart of another divine being.

As on a human level, so it is on the divine. If one really wants to know the things of God, he or she must connect with God (the Holy Spirit), who alone can reveal the "things" of God (verse 12).

Furthermore, the Bible describes the Holy Spirit as active in the works of creation, conversion, and inspiration—all activities associated with prerogatives that are uniquely those of divinity.

The full deity of the Spirit

As with the deity of the Son, so with the theological implications of the deity of the Spirit. They both arise out of issues related to God's intention to redeem humanity from the ravages of sin and death.

Most certainly, if only One who was equal in nature and character to the Father could offer an efficacious sacrifice for sin, then by the same token, only One (the Spirit) who was fully divine

could effectively communicate the efficacy of this sacrifice to those for whom the sacrifice was made (1 Cor. 2:7-12).

We need to ponder a number of other closely related implications that arise from the saving power and work of the Holy Spirit's full deity.

1. Only the Holy Spirit of God could bring the converting and convicting power of God's love to fallen humanity. Only One who has been eternally bound up with the heart of self-sacrificing love in the Father and the Son could fully communicate such love to fallen human beings.

2. Only the Holy Spirit, who fully shares the adopting heart of God, filled with love for His children, can impart to estranged human beings "the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15, 16).

3. Only One who has worked with the Son in creation would be equipped to effect re-creation in souls ravaged by the destructive forces of Satan and sin (Rom. 8:10, 11). This re-creative function of the Spirit is closely connected with the work of bearing spiritual fruit. Thus, only a divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who works with Christ the Vine (John 15:1-11), is competent to produce in God's people the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23).

Furthermore, the "fruit of the Spirit" takes on clearer meaning when it becomes apparent that all these fruits (joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, etc.) are but manifestations of the one, all-encompassing "fruit" of love (see Gal. 5:22-24).

4. Only the Holy Spirit, who sustained Christ through the horrors of Gethsemane and Calvary, can effectually comfort us through our dark valleys and frightful nights of the soul.

5. Only the Spirit, who fully knows the heart of our great High-Priestly Intercessor, can fully represent the comforts and effectually impart the blessings of Christ's constant intercessions on our behalf before the Father of love.

6. Only the Spirit, who inspired the prayers of Jesus, can effectually help us

in our weaknesses: "For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26, 27).

7. Only One who can be fully in tune with the heart of Jesus' incarnate ministry, and yet at the same time be able to be everywhere at once (the omnipresence of God, itself a divine attribute), could ably represent the personal, redeeming presence of Christ to the entire world.

The personhood of the Spirit

Scripture suggests that the Holy Spirit possesses some of the most emphatic characteristics of a personal Being. He can be lied to (see above; Acts 5:3, 4) and grieved (Eph. 4:30). My computer has numerous characteristics of personality, but try as I might, I cannot lie to it or grieve it! These are things that we can do only to another person.

In John 14-16, the Holy Spirit is repeatedly referred to with personal pronouns (He, Him, who, whom, Helper). Some have objected that the Greek word for "spirit" (*pneuma*) is in the impersonal neuter gender. But it is quite telling that John often employs the Greek word *ekeinos* (translated "he") to refer to the neuter Spirit, and this word is in the very personal masculine gender. It is this grammatical fact that has led the majority of translators to render the other personal pronouns called for in these chapters as "He" rather than "it" or "that one."

Furthermore, these chapters in John ascribe other activities to the Spirit that are highly personal or interpersonal: teaching (John 14:26), bearing witness (John 15:26; cf. Rom. 8:16), convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8); guiding into truth, speaking, hearing, telling (verse 13), glorifying God, taking, and telling (verse 14).

Why is this issue so critical?

We need to sense more deeply than

we have the power in the statement that the Spirit of Christ is the manifestation of the personal, redeeming presence of Christ to us and in us.

Consider an example. For those of us who are not mechanically inclined, written directions have not proven to be as helpful as the personal guidance and encouragement of another person who really knows mechanics. I recall my brother, Ivan, and I in our childhood days, and how both of us shared a passion for model planes and ships. Every chance we had, we would haunt hobby shops looking for the latest scale-model replicas of the great military aircraft and naval vessels of the day. I loved putting them together, but I did not have the mechanical skill. Ivan, however, was blessed with a steady hand and wonderful mechanical insight.

When I simply went by the printed directions, I didn't make much progress. I usually botched the job badly. However, when Ivan was with me giving guidance, encouragement, and an occasional steady hand on the trickiest jobs, I was able to produce some fine models.

In spiritual matters, the Holy Spirit is like that—a profoundly sensitive, powerful, and helpful Person who guides, directs, and gives us a steady hand. His business is molding us into wonderful creatures of transforming grace. And among the most important means of grace that He imparts to God's people is the inspired Word of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21), the ability to understand and apply the Word's precious truths to ourselves (2 Peter 1:20, 21; John 17:17; 1 Peter 1:22, 23), and the granting of spiritual gifts for the edifying of Christ's body, the church (Eph. 4:4-16; 1 Cor. 12-14; Romans 12:3-8).

When the Spirit's work in inspiring and applying the Word and imparting spiritual gifts to us is seen in intensely personal terms, the effectual presence of the Third Person of the Godhead greatly forestalls any notion of spiritual manipulation that impersonal views of the Spirit so often engender.

The interpretation of the Bible, the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, and the manifestations of the fruits of the Spirit

(Gal. 5:16, 22-26) cannot be impersonally imposed on the body of Christ. Spiritual manipulations, such as paying for the privilege of holding a particular church office, performing legalistic observances to gain the favor of God, or politicizing one's own theological opinion to enhance one's ecclesiastical standing, are greatly hindered when the people of God realize their dependence upon the powerful, yet gently personal ministry of the Spirit. When He comes as the "flame of love" divine, there is not much room left for such maneuvering.

Seventh-day Adventists are not surprised that Paul's most compelling testimony regarding the dynamics of personal salvation (Rom. 1:16, 17; 8:4) reaches its climax in Romans 8:5-28. Here, using the language of intense personal interaction, the apostle reminds us that if the "Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in" us (verse 11), then we will be "led by the Spirit of God" (verse 14), while the "Spirit

Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God . . . and joint heirs with Christ" (verses 16, 17).

Paul ends this great passage with the thought that we know that "the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. He who searches the heart knows what the mind of the Spirit is because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (verses 26, 27). Could the great apostolic exponent of salvation express the work of the Holy Spirit in more personal terms?

Practical and personal applications

When we are called upon to serve, witness, and do mighty acts for God, it is the power of the personal Spirit that is present to guide, strengthen, and provide courage, vision, and wisdom. Thus only the Holy Spirit, the divine Comforter, can truly heal the sicknesses of the human soul and ordain our wit-

ness to and service in the world.

Is not a lover's personal presence at the very heart of the power of love? I most vividly recall the joy of communicating, via electronic means, with my fiancée when we were temporarily separated by seemingly interminable miles and days. But blessed as these electronic means were, they proved to be absolutely unsatisfactory. It was clear that nothing could substitute for the experience of the two of us actually being together personally! If during those days the only hope we had possessed of expressing and experiencing love had been by the medium of email or by telephone, I would have been "of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19)!

Thank God, the Holy Spirit is the effective, personal presence of the Bridegroom with His bride. ■

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Gilbert Valentine, Ph.D., is the vice president of Mission College in Thailand.

How could a biblical teaching be true in one country and not in another? How could one Adventist book committee have approved a manuscript and published it as gospel truth, while at the same time another committee at headquarters rejected it because it contained “some fundamental errors”?

The year was 1895 and the issue so vital that it elicited some of Mrs. White’s strongest warnings to the Church about how it should respond to new light and not adopt the ways of the papacy.

This fascinating, little-known episode throws light on the way Mrs. White’s prophetic ministry guided the Church in its quest for truth. It also provides a helpful historical context in which to understand some of Mrs. White’s bold statements about the Church’s need to adhere to the principle of the Bible being the only rule of doctrine, and at the same time for the Church to be open to the dynamic leading of the Spirit of truth.

A major issue for major men at a major meeting

The background to the story is the famous 1888 General Conference. Prior to the session there had been quiet stirring behind the scenes about how the Church should interpret the reference to “the law” in Galatians 3:24 and its context.

Finally, at the session itself, the debate broke out into the open. Leaders on one side of the dispute were respected and long-time *Review* editor, Uriah Smith, and the General Conference president, George I. Butler. These leaders and their colleagues argued that “the law” in Galatians 3 referred to the shadowy laws and ceremonial regulations concerning the tabernacle, all of which pointed to Christ. They held that when Messiah came these laws were no longer needed, having been fulfilled in Christ. But, they contended, the moral law, the Decalogue—with the Sabbath at its heart—was still a duty for the Christian.

This interpretation had become a major pillar in their whole apologetic for the seventh-day Sabbath. In their view, then, it was a vitally important passage, as was the way they interpreted it.

On the other side were two young ministers, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, who said that Galatians 3:24 included the law of the Ten Commandments, which, like a schoolmaster, led us to Christ.

The Jones and Waggoner interpretation was not new. It had been suggested 20 years before. In 1856 two senior Church leaders, James White and J. H. Waggoner (the father of E. J. Waggoner) had disagreed over the same issue.

J. H. Waggoner had written a book, saying that what Paul was referring to in Galatians 3:24 was the moral law. When the senior Waggoner refused to change that position, James White had the book taken out of circulation. On that occasion, Mrs. White had indicated that J. H. Waggoner’s “moral law” interpretation was not correct.

By 1888 (with both James White and J. H. Waggoner dead), the issue had come up again, and the two young preachers at Minneapolis were suggesting that their interpretation showed the deep spirituality of the law and how it drew Christians to the cross of Christ for forgiveness. By 1888 it had become a moving piece of “present truth.”

The difficulty of embracing new perspectives

The Minneapolis Conference, where the idea was debated between Smith, Butler, E. J. Waggoner, and Jones, demonstrated how difficult it sometimes is for the Church to embrace new understandings.

The spirit of opposition, prejudice, and

suspicion greatly distressed Mrs. White. Some leaders even tried to have the General Conference adopt legislation that would prevent Waggoner and Jones from teaching their interpretation in public or in the Church's college in Battle Creek.

Mrs. White, who had been a part of the 1856 debate, was prepared to adjust her thinking if she could be persuaded from Scripture. Horrified by the attitudes of opposition and resistance, she urged the Church to be more open. As part of this urging, she said an important thing: "That which God gives his servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth 20 years ago but it is God's message for this time."¹

One church leader, for whom the new scriptural insight made the gospel much clearer, was Professor W. W. Prescott. He was the president of Battle Creek College and Education Secretary for the General Conference. He responded to Mrs. White's appeals for openness. His study led him to see bright new vistas of the grace of Christ, permeating the whole structure of Adventist teaching. He became a powerful preacher of righteousness by faith.

Not long after Minneapolis, Mrs. White was asked to go to Australia to help establish the work there. Four years into her Australia tenure, in 1895, the White family requested that Professor Prescott visit Australia to help with the establishment of the new college at Avondale.

A short time after his arrival he was invited to be the chief guest speaker at an evangelistic camp meeting in Melbourne. His preaching was powerful and stirred the congregation. His dignified presentations also drew the better classes of society. Mrs. White was spiritually blessed by the beautiful new way he presented old Adventist truths in a powerful, Christ-centered gospel context. Prescott preaches, she reported, like someone "inspired."²

One of the Professor's most effective sermons was "The Law in Christ," which taught the Sabbath

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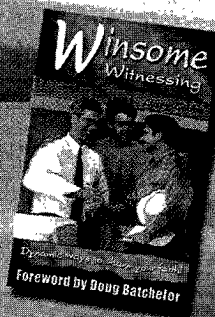
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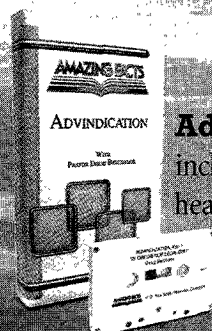


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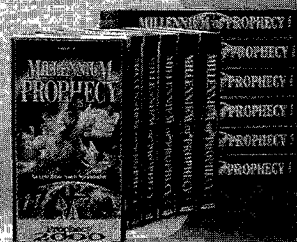
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truth but also expounded on the spirituality of the law and how it points us to Jesus. His theme was based on the new interpretation of Galatians 3:24. Mrs. White and other Church leaders such as A. G. Daniells and W. C. White were excited by this new emphasis on Christ. "It was," said W. C. White, "like a breath of fresh air."³

Some of the Australian leaders suggested that Prescott's material be made into a tract and circulated. Prescott did this, and the Book Committee of the Church publishing house at Warburton approved the manuscript and published it.

Some disputes die hard

Prescott, thinking that the tract might also be helpful in America, sent the manuscript off to the Review and Herald. But two months later he received a surprising reply. The Book Committee at world headquarters would not publish the manuscript because, they said, it contained "some fundamental errors."⁴

Amused, he said the situation was "a trifle peculiar." How can a tract be orthodox in Melbourne but not in Battle Creek? He related how the manuscript had been through the proper processes and how well it had been received by Mrs. White and others.⁵

When Mrs. White heard of this episode, she wrote one of her sharpest testimonies to the General Conference.⁶ She lamented that apparently the old Minneapolis spirit of opposition was still alive almost a decade later. It seemed, she reflected, that the Book Committee in Battle Creek was actually treading "the paths of Rome."

She wrote, "When Professor Prescott's matter was condemned and refused publication, I said to myself, this committee needs the converting power of God. . . . It is not for these men to condemn or control the productions of those whom God is using as his light bearers to the World." Mrs. White advised the committee to read an article recently published in the *Bible Echo* on the infallibility of

the pope and to be warned by it.⁷

"I have not confidence in your book committee," she wrote to Elder Olsen, then the General Conference president. "The plans to obtain control of human minds and ability are as strange fire which is an offense to God."⁸

Comparisons with New Testament situations

A few months later, in May 1896, Prescott was due to leave Australia and return to the General Conference. His itinerary called for him to sail via South Africa where he would visit with Elder S. N. Haskell, a longtime minister whom Mrs. White held in high esteem and for whom she held some affection. But she knew that he sometimes found it difficult to move with the times and that he might be suspicious of Prescott.

Sensing the possibility of such difficulties, she wrote a long covering letter to Elder Haskell, asking him to receive Prescott with openness, in much the way Paul had written in New Testament times to Onesimus in behalf of Philemon. Mrs. White did not want Haskell to react negatively to Prescott's themes the way some had in Battle Creek.

"We would gladly have retained Prescott in Australia," she wrote, "but it would have been selfish. We hope he will do the brethren much good in South Africa and that he will be received warmly. He has the truth in his heart as well as on his lips."⁹

Mrs. White added some strong counsel. "When the Holy Spirit works the human agent, it does not ask us in what way it shall operate. Often it moves in unexpected ways. . . . The Jews refused to receive Christ, because He did not come in accordance with their expectations. The ideas of finite men were held as infallible, because hoary with age."

Then, still stirred over the rejection of Prescott's manuscript by Uriah Smith and his colleagues, she added, "This is the danger to which the church is now exposed." Warning to

her theme and thinking now of the harmful decisions that had been made in Battle Creek, she declared with confrontational prophetic authority, "We see here that the men in authority are not always to be obeyed, even though they may profess to be teachers of Bible doctrine. . . . The God of heaven sometime[s] commissions men to teach that which is regarded as contrary to the established doctrines." Not even a priest or ruler, she declared, has a "right to say you shall not give publicity to your views because I do not believe them."

Such revolutionary counsel does not always make things easy in the task of leading the church. And of course, Ellen White was not in any way advocating an abandonment of the Church's core teachings (although Editor Smith might have been inclined to think so). Neither was Mrs. White suggesting an abandonment of the principle that ministers with new insights and ideas should take counsel with their brethren and submit to the Church as guidance was being sought.

What might seem like a contradiction here is actually a typical creative tension where two critical principles needed to be held together.

What does this episode say?

What Ellen White was clearly suggesting on this occasion was that sometimes our understanding of Scripture and of truth is inadequate, not necessarily wrong. Perhaps it has been poorly expressed and therefore poorly understood. This is sometimes the case, even when it comes close to core gospel values and beliefs.

In the midst of our churchly disputations and debates over which doctrinal positions the Church should adopt (even when dealing with aspects of our distinctive teachings), it is helpful to study out what is the essential core or kernel of our faith, belief, or teaching; that which Mrs. White called the "vital" elements. This helps us to purge the Church of arguments over issues that

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The folly of mixing religious and political vision

Lincoln E. Steed



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The Washington power elite were there. George Bush, Sr., had sent an effusive video message. The personal aide of President Bush was at hand to express the president's regrets for not being there, called away by another matter of importance. We tried to laugh as Dr. Laura Schlesinger attempted to adapt conservative jargon to the event at hand, and bowed our heads as retired member of Congress and pastor of the New Bethel Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., Dr. Walter E. Fauntroy, blessed the event with benisons of inclusion and effusion. This was an "event"—May 21, 2002, to celebrate the coming of age of the *Washington Times*. Missiles might still be descending in far-off Afghanistan, but this was a moment to be savored.

I look at the printed text of the key speech by Dr. "Reverend" Moon, and see its subtitle, "God's Warning to the Present Age, the Period of the Last Days." It was designed to resonate with the politics and patriotism of a nominal-Christian audience.

Moving and gesturing like a prize-fighter, Mr. Moon outlined America's successful battle against godless communism. Then he declared that it is now America's role, as "the second Israel," to lead out in building "the kingdom of Heaven on Earth and in Heaven." While that might sound a little like orthodox Christianity to some, the speaker went further

and declared that "for the sake of America . . . the four founders [of the world's four great religions] centering on Jesus have each chosen 120 of their historically famous disciples in order to establish a unified front." And he announced "their return to earth" to make it all happen. In case we missed what he meant by this, all attendees were given a bound transcript of what purported to be "The report on the seminar in the spirit world," which supposedly took place that same month. It contained much that was curious, but nothing more so than the program participant list: the Master of Ceremonies was Muhammad and the Representative Prayer was offered by Jesus!

Clearly, for all the talk of Christ and Christianity, for all the borrowed figures of speech attaching to national religious identity, this was indeed a communication from the spirit world—spiritism to most Bible-believing people. I cannot help but be reminded of words contained in "The Impending Conflict" chapter of *The Great Controversy*: "As spiritualism more closely imitates the nominal Christianity of the day, it has greater power to deceive and ensnare. Satan himself . . . will appear as an angel of light. . . . And as the spirits will profess faith in the Bible, and manifest respect for the institutions of the church, their work will be accepted as a manifestation of divine power."*

A national apocalyptic

Twenty years ago there was much public ridicule at the establishment of *The Washington Times*. I heard no one laughing last year. What has changed? I think it has something to do with how the message that night was linked to the long-standing but now resurgent sense of national apocalyptic.

In his lecture series on "Prophecy and the Modern World," Arthur Williamson, professor of history at California State University, remarks on how "America became peculiarly the redeemer nation," as the "nation of election fused with apocalyptic expectations." His conclusion, in concert with many observers of history, is that "nowhere else in the world is the notion of the historical redemption of mankind more clearly, more closely, more emphatically, more irretrievably associated with the political community than in the United States."

The persistence of that vision shows up in the stirring "Battle Hymn of the Republic,"

which wonderfully conflates the political struggle to maintain the Union with the national destiny of establishing God's kingdom. It energized westward expansion under the apocalyptic rhetoric of "manifest destiny." It gave Ronald Reagan's condemnation of "the evil empire" a resonance it could have in no other country. It gives a heady fundamentalist edge to post 9/11 "axis of evil" statements. And it is subtext to the rallying cry of Christian conservatives as they struggle to battle secular humanism and redefine the nation.

The lure of dispensationalism

To be sure, the lure of dispensationalism has proven effective in the late twentieth century, and is now dominant in the new millennium. John Darby's once marginal view that the living faithful will be "raptured" away to be with the Lord *before* the tribulation—while the rest of humanity remains behind for a second-

chance millennium before the literal return of Christ—has become mainstream to the American apocalyptic. Hal Lindsay's 1970s *The Late Great Planet Earth* helped catapult the view to prominence. The "Left Behind" series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, which has sold around 60 million copies so far, confirms its following.

Dispensationalists identify with the nation of Israel. They see Old Testament prophecy literally fulfilled in that modern, secular state. And while the sense of national election for America remains central, it actually gains momentum as the Christian nation designed to protect God's ancient people. In a curious way it satisfies a longstanding yearning by many Christians to legitimize themselves by finding a lineage to Israel. In England it emerged in the form of the British Israelites, who attempted to trace themselves to the lost tribes (William Blake's poem

Jerusalem speaks to that assumption); in nineteenth century America the Mormonism of Joseph Smith gained its sense of legitimacy by tracing Israel to the new world and establishing a spiritual continuum.

At last year's Christian Coalition "Road to Victory" conference, Israel was top of the agenda, with generous support for its political security. With the ongoing Palestinian Intifada a bloody backdrop to the U.S.-declared war on terrorism, it becomes difficult to separate U.S. religious apocalyptic from secular world events.

Increasingly at home a culture war is revealing itself as a struggle on all fronts for the national religious identity. Politically active Christian groups have gone beyond the shared Christian revulsion at declining morality. As Francis A. Schaeffer recommended in his seminal 1981 work "A Christian Manifesto," many have resorted to civil disobedience to reclaim America for Christianity. This

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involves not just the widely condemned abortion clinic bombings but the continuing efforts to cross accepted constitutional lines and to reimpose "religion" in the schools, public places, and in the judiciary.

No recent issue has so aroused public religious outrage as a decision issued barely a week before July 4 last year. The Ninth Circuit Federal Court of Appeals in California ruled that recitation of the words of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools constitutes an unacceptable state endorsement of religion. The sense of national election was cut to the quick and president, senate, and Christian patriots howled objection. Most cared little that the words "under God" were a 1954 addition urged by some religious leaders to define us against a cold war godless communism. And, more important, it revealed on the largest stage of public discussion that a somewhat self-serving revision of U.S. history has taken root and revitalized the national apocalyptic.

"We do not believe in the separation of church and state," sneered the woman I met at a Senate CARE Act rally last year. She was one of hundreds representing various Christian social-aid groups there to urge passage of this element of the Faith-Based Initiative. And that in a nutshell is where Christian mainstream political thinking is right now.

It is a view that dismisses the intent of the First Amendment: what Constitutional framer Thomas Jefferson called "the wall of separation" between church and state. Like Chief Justice Rehnquist, they are quick to see it as "an outmoded metaphor." They have conjured up from history a nation established consciously and structurally to advance and protect the Christian faith. But it is a misleading history, made dangerous by its broad appeal.

The situation today should alarm all those who value religious liberty. We hear calls for formal designation as a Christian nation; we see open intentions to move over the constitu-

tional wall; real liberties and rights are rapidly disappearing before an emergency that has a distinctly religious cast; there is suspicion of nonmainstream activist religion as a danger to the public good, and alarms and calamities are threatening on every hand.

As with our world today, I think it self-evident that Israel, even in apostasy, was very religious. After all, there were several hundred priests on Mount Carmel when Elijah raised up truth. And like other times of spiritual confusion, the people had so blended true and false religion that they could not tell the difference. It is obvious from the record in 2 Kings 18 that they still regarded themselves as connected to God. But left to themselves they could have called down

only "strange fire" in the manner of Revelation 13. It remained for Elijah to clear their heads by a clarion call to choose between God or Baal ("How long will you go limping between two opinions?" verse 21).

A "Reverend" Moon might merely bemuse most of us by appropriating the terminology of American Christian apocalyptic. We might flatter ourselves we are not vulnerable to the very lying spirits Revelation predicts will aid in the final deception. But we will have to be very diligent to God's Word indeed to remain immune to the taunts of fellow Christians caught up in the fires of national fulfillment. ■

* Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1911), 588.

Developing truths

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are not in fact as ultimately important to our identity and mission as we think they may be, even as key men such as Uriah Smith and George Butler believed them to be.

Some points may be outer wrapping only, or a shell that protects a core truth that becomes "vital" at a particular stage of the Church's development. For an expectant mother to explain to an enquiring sibling that a new baby is growing snugly in "mommy's tummy" is not wrong. As an explanation of the mystery of the beginnings of life, however, it may soon become quite inadequate when the sibling develops a fuller understanding of the anatomy of pregnancy. And who could deny the importance to the sibling of the arrival of a new brother or sister?

This basic principle helps us to understand how Mrs. White herself was able to grow in her theological understanding. Such was the situation in 1895 when the Church wrestled with itself over the meaning of "the law" in Galatians.

The kinds of distinctions Ellen White made at that time proved helpful in keeping the Church moving, not down the path toward Rome, but toward more light. An attitude of judicious openness was critical. Such an approach is important for us now, and in the future as more theological issues arise, and there is need for further development. ■

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- 1 E. G. White, *Manuscript 8a*, 1888.
 - 2 E. G. White to J. Edson White, Nov. 6, 1895; E. G. White to S. N. Haskell, Nov. 18, 1895.
 - 3 W. C. White to O. A. Olsen, Oct. 24, 1895; W. C. White to A. G. Daniells, Dec. 13, 1895; W. C. White to A. T. Jones, Nov. 21, 1895.
 - 4 General Conference Book Committee minutes, Nov. 13, 1895; W. W. Prescott to F. D. Starr, Jan. 16, 1896. The members of the book committee were U. Smith, G. C. Tenney, M. E. Kellogg, G. W. Caviness, J. Kolvord, F. M. Wilcox, and F. D. Starr. There is a handwritten note on the manuscript in blue pencil in what appears to be Uriah Smith's handwriting alongside the reference to Galatians 3:24.
 - 5 W. W. Prescott to F. D. Starr, Jan. 16, 1895.
 - 6 E. G. White, *Manuscript 148*, 1898. (The date of 1898 is incorrect. External evidence indicates that the letter was actually written October 26, 1896.) See Gilbert M. Valentine, "William Warren Prescott: Seventh-day Adventist Educator." Ph.D. Dissertation, 1982, Andrews University. Vol. 1:212, 213.
 - 7 "Gladstone and the Papacy," *Bible Echo*, July 27, 1896, 225, 226.
 - 8 E. G. White to O. A. Olsen, May 22, 1896.
 - 9 E. G. White to S. N. Haskell. The letter minus its first four pages and its last page is published as "Danger of Rejecting Truth" in *Testimonies to Ministers*, 63-77.

Praying for Lonnie

Daddy, Mommy, are you going to die?" During the sniper attacks that terrorized metropolitan Washington, D.C., last October, more than one parent had to calm the fears of their children with assurance that may have sounded hollow even as they said the words.

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Over the past few months, I've been praying for Lonnie and Jeannie Melashenko, who are just now in final preparations to present a dynamic satellite evangelistic series, *The Voice of Prophecy Speaks*.

This NET 2003 event will be satellite uplinked, April 27–May 24, from Columbia, South Carolina, by the North American Division's Adventist Communication Network (ACN). [Phone 1-800-ACN-1119 for more information or for a special equipment package.]

The Voice of Prophecy's regular listeners, plus thousands of guests who have participated in Discover Bible Schools or been invited by Adventist friends, family, and coworkers, will thrill as Lonnie preaches encouraging, practical, hope-filled messages. You can host some of those thousands at your church.

Why another NET series? Didn't we just host presentations from Orlando, or Cameroon, or Brazil, or Seoul?

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JAMES A. CRESS



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4. Reach the unchurched. Multiplied thousands will first learn the good news and begin preparing now for future baptism. Concentrate on finding nonbelieving, secular people and invite them to participate with your congregation in

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Are you praying with me? Please join me in praying for Lonnie! Record your prayer requests at our Web site, www.ministerialassociation.com and we'll add you to our prayer list.

And while you're praying, begin planning now for YWE/2004 (Year of World Evangelism), a global thrust to impact the world church as every congregation will be encouraged to host at least one soul-saving event for their community.

YWE/2004 preparation event. Over the coming months, you will increasingly hear of dynamic opportunities and methods for reaching millions of new believers during this intensive, yearlong evangelistic emphasis. My colleague, Dr. Peter Prime, will coordinate YWE/2004 planning and information for the General Conference.

You can participate by satellite downlink in a special live video conference, *Reaping God's Harvest*, on April 15, 2003, hosted by Armando Miranda and Ted Wilson, cochairs of the Church's Council on Evangelism and Witness.

At this event, our General Conference president, Jan Paulsen, will extend an urgent call to mission for the world church. Mark Finley and other leading evangelists will share special tips for effective local evangelism plus current reports of what is happening now as pastors and laity unite in projects such as *Go 1 Million* and *Sow 1 Billion*. Don't miss this opportunity to place your church at the forefront of results for YWE/2004.

And while you're praying for Lonnie, will you also pray for me? I'm praying for you! ■



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