

MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors September 2004



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CREATION
ACCOUNT
LITERAL?

EVERY
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MINISTRY

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YOUR MAGAZINE PROVIDES GOOD INSIGHT INTO THE TEACHINGS OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS RESPECTFUL OF THE FACT THAT NOT ALL WILL BE IN AGREEMENT WITH THESE TEACHINGS.

As someone who deeply appreciates the ministry and friendship of Dwight Nelson, I am somewhat reluctant to submit this response to his article "Requiem and Resurrection for a Fallen Brother." The article, as expected, was well-written. On the whole, it was biblical and in keeping with the Christian principles of love and forgiveness. It was, however, surprisingly unbalanced. Surely Dwight is not ready to put the serial pedophile back into the children's Sabbath School room, or the adulterous pastor back into the position of marriage counselor! Christian fellowship? Yes, of course! Christian leadership? Dwight seems to say, unequivocally and universally, "yes."

Dwight cites the example of Peter. Fair enough. Let us remember that Peter had repented and "wept bitterly." Note carefully the order: repentance, then reinstatement. Too, it should be noted that reinstatement into leadership is not guaranteed. Consider Moses on the border of Canaan: public sin, public punishment, no reinstatement. "To whom much has been committed, the more will be required." Leaders possess great responsibilities, and thus, at times, receive severer punishment.

It may not sound "accepting," but my position is that ministers or leaders

who have engaged in adultery, fornication, or other types of egregious sexual sins should be permanently barred from "official" denominational ministry.

Again, my friendship with and respect for Dwight make this letter difficult to write. Perhaps he could write the "other side of the coin" with equal passion and articulation—an article entitled "Repentance and Restitution: The Conversion of a Fallen Brother." Until that happens, we are left with one side of a two-sided coin, a logical and ecclesiastical impossibility.

—David Asscherick, pastor, Troy, Michigan.

It has been my pleasure to be receiving *Ministry* for the past several years. Your openness to articles by pastors and ministers of other faiths is a refreshing change. I receive so many denominational-specific magazines pushing their own agenda. Some of these border the insulting. As a board certified health care chaplain, I try to remain open to learning about all religious teachings. It is impossible to work with the sick in a secular hospital without being at least aware of the teachings of all religions. Your magazine provides good insight into the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At the same time, it is respectful of the fact that not all will be

in agreement with these teachings. I particularly enjoyed David Zucker's article, "Bless Me: An Opportunity Missed?" (March 2004) and Praban Saputro's article "Presenting Jesus to Muslims: A Suggested Approach" (July 2004).

—Rev. T. Patrick Bradley, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

I want to express my appreciation for the article in the May 2004 issue entitled "Traction or Distraction" by Lloyd Wyman. What a powerful and timely article! So powerful that I plan to share it with all of our pastors at our fall pastors' meeting. May each of us in the ministry be found faithful to our calling.

—John Loor, Jr., president, Montana Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Thank you so much for sending *Ministry*. It is the only magazine I read from cover to cover.

In your letter section of May 2004, F. A. Hertwig from Missouri asked a question. I would like to respond from Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child."

This is a promise, the promise being the training children receive will be with them all of their lives. What they do with the training depends on their decisions. However, the training remains. ■

—Chris Slye, Hillsboro, Texas.

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.

Horizontal humility

A new generation from diverse backgrounds and complex situations challenges the church's traditional way of preaching."

This straightforward description of the thorny realities that confront us as preachers is the opening sentence of a significant article in this issue of *Ministry* by Gerhard Van Wyk and Rudolph Meyer, "Preaching Beyond Modernism," part 2 (see page 12). While their basic concern is not new, what they bring to this observation is thought-provoking and enlightening.

Behind their thinking is the fact that ministers face a powerful new and perplexing tide of worldview. Thus, pastors are quite easily seduced into experimenting with schemes and strategies to entice people into church and keep them securely seated in the pews! Good as they may be, many of these schemes have a way of developing into shallow, gimmicky fixes that demean the dignity and high calling of bona fide Christian ministry, worship, and preaching.

When it comes to possible gimmickry, some novel way of preaching is often uppermost in our minds. We urgently want to be relevant and meaningful—worthy objectives, to say the least—but in our attempts to become so, our preaching can lose its spiritual authenticity, biblical depth, and even its God-given reason for existing.

In our desire to mold our preaching according to contemporary need—also the worthiest of motivations—we tend to concentrate on altering the content and style of preaching, as if that were all that is necessary to remedy the problem. Important as content and style are, however, there is more, and this is where the insights of Van Wyk and Meyer are helpful.

They call for a new kind of pastoral

WILLMORE D. EVA



humility, in which the preacher no longer projects himself as *the* final authority, and the members of the listening congregation as essentially inferior in their grasp of what the preacher may haughtily have proclaimed.

Van Wyk and Meyer are looking for a fundamental attitudinal shift amongst us, a re-evaluated understanding of who the minister is—or sees himself or herself to be in relation to those who hear Christian preaching.

The problem among us is that there is a significant school of preaching thought, hubristic "pulpitery" as a manifestation of legitimate confidence and the distinct spinoff of some sort of divine unction. As people have reacted more and more against this overbearing attitude, some of us, in turn, have responded by moving too far in the opposite direction. This is not what this call for humility is all about.

It is, instead, a call for us to take more of a horizontal posture among our people and among people in general. We are called to stand alongside them. While this call is also not new in itself, it can by all means do with some serious attention and adaptation here and now. Deep in ourselves, we have to know that our authority is not something we own

or create, or even that the church itself owns. We have our authority, thank God, only from Jesus Christ Himself, through the witness of the Spirit.

One of the best illustrations of this "standing alongside" approach may be found in that fabulously suggestive story of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian financial officer (Acts 8). At the direction of the Holy Spirit, Philip goes "down" from Jerusalem to Gaza. He positions himself close to this man's chariot entourage (verse 29). He then runs right up to the chariot, and listening to what the man is reading, he asks the Ethiopian if he is understanding it. On the backdrop of this horizontal man-to-man approach, the way is opened for a heart-to-heart encounter; and it doesn't take long for the man to actually ask for baptism.

Van Wyk and Meyer, of course, approach their subject from the point of view of the realities that underlie the modernist/postmodernist debate, *both* of which present potentially serious dangers to authentic Christian faith and preaching.

Without question one of the most serious of these dangers is the way the largely unquestioned knowledge-oriented modernist approach has a way of puffing up (1 Cor. 8:1, KJV) those who believe that through biblical research (mere "exegesis" from a liberal or conservative point of view) has led them to possess "the truth." So they come to feel justified and duty-bound to pompously condemn and dismiss everything at variance with their research.

It is this attitude and its kin that, with good reason, Van Wyk and Meyer are calling us away from, as we confirm our person-to-person ministry and our identity in Jesus Christ and in the verities of the faith once delivered to the saints. ■

Is the Genesis Creation account literal?

Norman R. Gulley



Norman R. Gulley, Ph.D., is research professor of systematic theology, Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Much of the Christian world no longer believes Genesis 1 and 2 as a literal account of creation. Since Darwin, natural processes are thought to explain the origin of life,¹ and Christian scholars have attempted to accommodate science by interpreting the Genesis record in the light of the current scientific worldview.² So, for example, the latest *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) views the Genesis Creation account as symbolic.

Carl Henry said, "The Bible does not require belief in six literal 24-hour creation days on the basis of Genesis 1-2,"³ and Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest believe "The most probable conclusion is that the six consecutive creative acts were separated by long periods of time."⁴

Prior to Darwin, some theologians referred to Creation days as literal because of the literal Sabbath,⁵ or referred to the Sabbath in Creation week,⁶ or supported the literal days as described in the biblical account of the Creation.⁷ In 1998 Robert Reymond presented seven hermeneutical principles for interpreting the days in Genesis 1 and 2:

(1) The preponderate meaning of a term should be maintained unless contextual considerations suggest otherwise. The Hebrew word for day, *yôm* in the singular, dual, or plural, occurs 2,225 times in the Old Testament, and the overwhelming majority designate a

24-hour period. No contextual demand is present in Genesis 1 to do otherwise.

(2) The recurring phrase "evening and morning" (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) occurs in 37 verses outside of Genesis (e.g., Exod. 18:13; 27:21) and always designates a 24-hour period.

(3) The ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd) used with *yôm* (same texts as above) occur hundreds of times in the Old Testament (e.g., Exod. 12:15; 24:16; Lev. 12:3) and always designate a 24-hour period.

(4) The creation of the sun "to rule the day" and the moon "to rule the night" (Gen. 1:16-18) on the fourth day suggests literal 24-hour days for days 4-7, and nothing in the text suggests that days 1-3 were different.

(5) Scripture best interprets Scripture, where a less clear passage is interpreted by a clearer passage or passages. The fourth commandment of Exodus 20:11 (cf. Exod. 31:15-17) reflects the Genesis account of Creation, assuming the fact that the biblical Creation days were literal.

(6) Days plural (Hebrew *yāmîm*) occurs 608 times in the Old Testaments and always designates 24-hour periods.

(7) If Moses intended to mean day-age, instead of a 24-hour period, he would have used the Hebrew term '*ôlām*.'

Opposing worldviews

What effect might theistic evolution have upon our understanding of the goodness or love of God? In 1991 scientist David Hull of Northwestern University evaluated the evolutionary process as "rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain, and horror. . . . The God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural history . . . is not a loving God who cares about His productions. He is . . . careless, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray."⁹

It should be kept in mind that Darwin's *Origin of Species* is, at least in part, a worldview conceived to explain evil in nature,¹⁰ whereas God created the universe through Christ (Col. 1:15, 16; Heb. 1:1, 2), who later revealed God as love (John 14:9b; 17:23), and both were as selfless and loving in creation as they are in salvation (John 3:16; Heb. 13:8).

In stark contrast Satan is self-centered (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-18). It was he who launched a war against God in heaven (Rev.

Day 1 Light and Dark
 Day 2 Sky and Sea
 Day 3 Land
 (Plants)

Day 4 Luminaries
 Day 5 Birds and Fish
 Day 6 Animals and Humanity
 (Plants for food)

Day 7 Sabbath

12:3-8) and on earth, which affected the natural world (Gen. 3:1-19). Christ called Satan the “prince of this world” (John 12:30-32), and Paul called him the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4, NKJV). Thus evil in this world (moral and natural) must be credited to him, for “God is love” (1 John 4:7-16), and His love defeated Satan at the Cross (Rev. 12:9-13; John 12:31, 32). Theistic evolutionists, those who believe God used evolution to create, do not discern the radical difference between these two worldviews.

Why would God use an unjust “survival of the fittest” method to create when justice is the foundation of His throne (Ps. 89:14)? Why would God, who asks that “all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40) do the opposite in the torturous processes of mega-time? How is such a model possible in view of His divine providence in history (Rom. 11:36; 8:28-30)? Why would God use death to create humans in His image (Gen. 1:26, 27) when He is love? If He used death to create, then why did He warn Adam of the evil of death (Gen. 2:17) and expose the depths of that evil through dying to save humans from the penalty of death (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23)? If death is the last enemy to be destroyed at the end of the controversy (1 Cor. 15:26), then how could God use it to create before and after the beginning of the controversy?

Because a “particular doctrine of God is a prerequisite for evolution’s success,”¹¹ theistic evolutionists unwittingly promote a view of God that is helpful to the mission of the controversy. This doctrine distorts the Bible’s overall view of God being a loving Creator.

Distorted truth about God

If God chose to create through the

natural evolutionary process, in which the horrors of torture and death over billions of years were necessary to create humans, this would be the longest and cruelest holocaust ever. At least Calvary was a holocaust that others brought upon Christ, but this would be a holocaust that He brought upon the animal kingdom.

One must look at all biblical truths in the light of the revelation of God at Calvary. The revelation at Calvary was made in history. It had witnesses. As such it provides empirical (historical) evidence of how loving God is, even asking His Father to forgive those who heaped cruelty upon Him (Luke 23:34). Assuming that this same Christ, by utilizing a systematized way of creating life, heaped cruelty on animals, not for part of a day, but for billions of years, is not a historical datum, but a metaphysical assumption that Calvary can rightly question.

The fact that the onlooking universe shouted for joy at the creation of this world (Job 38:4-7) is inexplicable if Christ involved animal suffering for billions of years. Christ called creation “very good” (Gen. 1:31), and that’s worth singing about. After Christ’s ascension, beings in heaven worshiped God as worthy and deserving of glory because He created all things (Rev. 4:10, 11). That would be impossible if He created through eons of cruelty.

Christ’s warning to Adam about the tree of knowledge of good and evil, stating that eating its fruit would bring death (Gen. 2:17), indicates that death was not yet a present reality. Here evil and death are associated with disobedience to the Creator. When Christ re-creates the earth, there will be no more curse (Rev. 22:3). Clearly curses and death are linked to disobedience and have nothing to do with Christ’s

method of creation.

That’s why Scripture says Adam introduced sin and death to the world (Rom. 5:12). It was Adam and not His Creator who brought death into the world. It was Christ who came to die to put death to death and liberate a fallen race (Rom. 4:25). It was the one act of the first Adam that caused this death-condemnation, and the one act of the Second Adam’s death that provided salvation (Rom. 5:18).

Christ did not use death to create humans in Eden. Instead, the record is that He died to save humans at Calvary. Given a cosmic controversy in which Satan hates Christ and has engaged in a process of disinformation about God (Hebrew word *rekullah* of Ezek. 28:15, 16),¹² it makes sense that a natural method of creation through horror is something he (Satan) would promote, for it effectively destroys the drawing power of Calvary. Creation through horror is compatible with Satan’s hatred against Christ at the Cross and not compatible with a loving Creator-Redeemer who dies for others rather than inflicting death upon them.

What a nonliteral creation does to the Sabbath

In Genesis 1 there is a correspondence between days 1-3 and days 4-6, where the first three days give the areas *formed* by *Elohiym*, the all-powerful God, and the last three days give the areas *filled* by Him. This can be charted as follows (see box above).

The climax is not the creation of humans, as it is in theistic evolutionary theory, but the gift of the Sabbath. For the narrative ends with the Sabbath in 2:1 (it should be remembered, of course, that chapter divisions came into being long after the time of writing). Karl Barth says the Sabbath “is in reality the coronation of His work” for “not man but the divine rest on the seventh day is the crown of creation.”¹³

God’s blessing (Hebrew, *bārak*) was given only to the seventh day. It was set apart from the other six, and in

this way it was made holy.

The word Sabbath is derived from the Hebrew word *šb̄t*, meaning to “cease” or “desist” from a previous activity. On day six, Christ judged creation as “very good” (Gen. 1:31), and hence complete (Gen. 2:3). For “in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He abstained from work and rested” (Exod. 31:17, NIV). Therefore His “works were finished from the foundation of the world” (Heb. 4:3, NKJV). Clearly the work of Creation was finished on the sixth day of creation week, contrary to an ongoing evolutionary process.

Moreover, the Genesis Creation record differentiates between God as *Elohiym* (transcendent, omnipotent), who creates (*bārā*) by speaking things into existence in Genesis 1: 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, from the added name *Yahweh* (imminent, covenant) God who forms (*yašar*) humans in Genesis 2:21, 22. *Yahweh Elohiym* is only introduced in Genesis 2:4, where He is always *Yahweh Elohiym* (11 times). Here is God-up-close creating humans in a distinct way to His creation of all the rest of created reality in Genesis 1, and in contrast to theistic evolution where humans are the product of random mutation. To say God intervened in the process isn’t evolution, nor does the process agree with Genesis 1, 2.

In Scripture the Sabbath is a celebration of the finished works of Christ, in Creation (Gen. 2:1-3, Exod. 20:8-11), in the Red Sea deliverance (Deut. 5:15), and on Crucifixion Friday (John 19:30). Christ created Adam on Creation Friday, and on Crucifixion Friday He became the Second Adam for the world in His death (Luke 23:44-24:6).

Crucifixion Friday, like Creation Friday, was a beginning for the race. The Sabbath celebrates (1) Christ’s finished creation for Adam and Eve, (2) Christ’s finished deliverance for a nation, and (3) Christ’s finished sacrifice for a world. The first finished work of Christ is as literal as the other two finished works.

Those who deny a literal seven-day Creation week, attempting to found the Sabbath in the Sabbath-keeping practice of Christ, overlook the fact that the preincarnate Christ, who gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Sinai, inscribed the following revelation in stone (Exod. 24:12): “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exod. 20:11, NIV).

God created all things through Christ (Heb. 1:1, 2). Christ as “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28) made the Sabbath for all humans (Mark 2:27). In keeping the Sabbath during His life on earth, Christ endorsed the six-day Creation account. In His death, Christ’s followers “rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment” (Luke 23:56b, NIV; cf. Exod. 20:8-11).

So it is not possible to justly ground Sabbath keeping only in Christ’s incarnational practice and teaching without reference to the Creation week, because He began His practice of Sabbath keeping at the end of Creation week and presents the Genesis Creation account as literal history in His preincarnate teaching—because He was there. No wonder the incarnate Christ speaks of the creation of Adam and Eve as a literal fact (Matt. 19:4, 5).

Further evidence for the literal Genesis Creation account

The whole book of Genesis is structured by the word “generations” (*tôledôt*), so the statement, “these are the generations of the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 2:4) is as literal as “these are the generations of Noah” (Gen. 6:9) or as literal as God’s promise to establish His covenant with Abraham, “and thy seed after thee in their generations” (Gen. 17:7).

Scripture presents Creation as one of the mighty acts of God. The phrase

continued on page 23

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Sexual misconduct in ministry: victims and wounds

When the unimaginable becomes a part of our imagination, when we start thinking the unthinkable, that's when the impossible becomes possible. This is so for both good and evil, victory and defeat. Adultery is seldom an event without history. Some imagining, flirting, or pornography, some thinking or dreaming of illicit relations prepares the way. "As the man thinketh in his heart, so he is." Who we are in secret comes eventually to the light of day in the moment of temptation or hardship, and when it does, it may leave an indelible mark.

This essay has proven to be the most trying and the most amazing one for me to write so far. It is disarming and yet compelling for us to see that, urged by our love we are obliged, even bound, to survey the path of ministers' adulterous affairs. The sight is devastating, not easy to behold. Yet without this disciplined, objective, and impartial assessment we will be unfit to respond effectively to our situations in redemptive, compassionate ways.

So this is not the time for the ostrich game or for rash judgmental attitudes. If we do not look into the face of this side of ourselves, we will not see that God is still on His throne, still our Creator, still our Father, the only One able to still our repentant souls and heal our wounded relationships.

There are no winners; there are only victims in an adulterous affair. Yet it is fair and morally responsible to give priority to the most innocent bystanders caught in the wreckage.

Unlike some,¹ I believe the Bible considers the offended spouses and the children as the primary victims of adultery (Mal. 2:13-16; 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 13:4). Yet one important caution: *The issues in sexual infidelity are extremely complex.*

For the sake of clarity and brevity we

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are constrained here to assume certain limited scenarios. But we all know that each case is unique and that exact apportioning of responsibility (short of sincere confession) is a daunting task. Yet we (the church) are truly called to rescue, and God wants us to be graceful and adroit, lest we underestimate the wounds or kill our wounded, wherever they may be along the path of any particular case of ministerial adultery.

Impact of adultery on the minister's spouse

1. *The jolt.* It may all begin as a normal humdrum day. The kids are in school, the husband gone to the church office. A trusted friend, or somebody else, comes for a visit or makes a telephone call. Whoever comes to the minister's wife, or whatever diplomacy or skill they may use in their approach, there is no smooth way of saying "Your husband is cheating on you." The news of actual adultery is as bad as death, especially when it comes unsuspected,² even if the husband himself is the one who has to make the confession to his wife. (I am here using the words "wife" and "husband" simply because traditionally it is male ministers, rather than female, who have been involved in adulterous affairs and thus the wife who is most often caught in the fallout.)

2. *The loss of innocence.* Marriage is a powerful covenant. Its uniting power

on spouses is immense. The beginning of life together is in many ways a new start: a new release from the past, new trust, new chance at chastity, new freedom to grow. In other words, a new chance at innocence. And when all of this is gambled away, the marital innocence dies. This can be manifested in several ways.

Guilt. Frequently, the cheated spouse assumes responsibility for the failure of her marriage. She was not good enough to prevent the tragedy. The load of shared guilt may become unbearable, and she doubts herself as the innocent wife of an adulterous husband.³

Shame. After years of identifying with the successes and failures of her husband, the spouse cannot escape the sense of shame. And as a pastor's wife, these feelings of shame are all the more acute because such things are almost inevitably so public in her case.⁴

3. *Loneliness.* Many spouses of professionals feel lonely, but few situations can compare with the sense of desertion in the case of pastor's adultery. Even close friends disappear from the radar screen. It is not always because people do not care; "often they do not know what to say," confided one survivor of her pastor husband's unfaithfulness.

4. *Lost identity.* A more basic question facing the grieving spouse is "Who am I?" For so long she was Mrs. Pastor. Her self-concept, her dress and appearance, her place in society, her very life revolved around *their* ministry. Thus her natural reflexes will lead her to defend the pastor⁵ and to blame herself or the other woman. In losing her husband, she often feels she has become nobody and has nothing. She is denied involvement in ministries where she received her approval, and scores of people who depend on her support are forsaken due to no fault of hers. She is losing not only a breadwinner, but the father of

her children, a roommate, a soul mate.

5. *Duped.* As the story unfolds and the mask falls off, the wife is faced with awful new surprises. She discovers to what extent she has been duped, how much duplicity and deceit has lain at the heart of their marital relationship.⁶ She feels foolish. She was so willing to give her husband the space he needed, to respect his professional secrets, his goings out and comings in! "In order not to spend all her time jealous, curious, or angry, a pastor's wife has to give her husband to his work—almost to the point of not caring."⁷ But where is the line between trust and naiveté? Love does cover multitude of sins, but how could her love be so blind as to be unable to recognize and prevent this much clandestine evil?

6. *Set aside.* Now that the evil had happened, Heather Bryce remembers: "The 'other women'—ex-friends, Christians—do not seem to need to say they are sorry or to ask forgiveness, and that leaves an empty sense of loss. Counselors told me not to get in touch with any of them, and so forgiveness had to be only from me and not returned. The support we have received has been primarily for my husband. Many, many letters to both of us encourage me to forgive him, and assure him that good has come from his past ministry. Many times the help I get is in the form of 'Have you lost any weight? How are you treating him now?'"⁸ I admit to being surprised at the paucity of literature which focuses on the spouse of an unfaithful pastor. Why is that?

Impact on the other husband

If the literature is scarce when it comes to the betrayed pastor's wife, the husband of the "other woman" is virtually forgotten. And this is so in spite of the fact that similar *shame, guilt, loss of identity, self-respect, rejection, and betrayal* hit this man.

In the case of King David, the thing God was convincing him of was not only the lustfulness and impurity of what he had done with Bathsheba but the callous wrong he had inflicted on another man, the owner of the "one

sheep" (2 Sam. 12:1-4).⁹

In the first place, adultery, as seen from the perspective of the betrayed man in David's situation, is transgression against the commandment, "Thou shall not murder." But even if David had not taken the physical life of Uriah, he would have killed the "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) divinely designed unity to which a husband and wife abandon themselves.

Moreover, it is also in a very real sense stealing—stealing another person's husband or wife or father or mother, stealing another's most intimate happiness, breaking up (or certainly severely jeopardizing) another person's home. And yes, God appears to take the most active interest in this, the victim's side of sexual infidelity. He is concerned with the rights of the defrauded ones.

Paul declares, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgresses, and wrongs his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things" (1 Thess. 4:3-6). In Hebrews 13:4, Paul adds: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous."

"When a person has attained his desires and what looks like a new happiness in a second marriage, it is easy to forget the price that has had to be paid for it, not paid by him but by somebody else. Somebody else has paid the price of losing his life-companion; somebody else has shed tears far into the night; somebody else has been robbed of his happiness; somebody else has had his home broken up; somebody else has been left lonely, struggling along on his own; children have been left without a father or mother. It is easy to forget the terrible wrongs another has suffered as we enjoy our new love. But God does not forget."¹⁰

Impact on children

Here they are, innocent and unsus-

pecting. Huddled behind their mother and father, their tower of force, their models, their image of who God is, their example of how life is lived. It is probably the mother who will have to break the news to the children, to face their many complex and confused reactions of an intensity never yet experienced.

1. Their father left *them*. They feel like they are not worth keeping at any price.

2. Public humiliation assails *their* lives. The whispers behind their backs, the gossip, the looks of pity make them want to disappear from the very community where they were nurtured. This all the more if the pastor is required to make a public confession.

3. *Inability to trust themselves and others grips their minds.* They wonder if they have "inherited" their father's tendency to unfaithfulness.

4. *Sexual development may also be affected.* "A child's dawning awareness of an attitude towards sexuality is, in large part, dependent on what he or she observes in the home."¹¹

5. *Children's religious experience will most likely suffer as well.* There remains often a deep sense of resentment toward the church, religion, and God, who seem to have been proven impotent to protect their father from falling into temptation.¹²

6. *Children are never too young or too old to be affected by the sexual infidelity of their parents.* At about three years of age my son overheard a conversation with a neighbor whose husband had run away with her friend. As she and her little boy Mark pushed their grocery cart down the aisle, my son asked thoughtfully: "Daddy, where is Mark's dad?" "Oh, he went big bye-bye." An expression of concern came over his face. "Daddy, will you go big bye-bye someday?" I looked him straight in the eyes and said emphatically: "No, my son, *never*." He stretched up his little arms and gave me a choking hug for what seemed a long time.

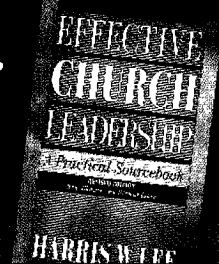
Impact on the "other woman"

It is hard to know who receives more blame for adultery, the pastor's wife for not being the woman he needs, or the "other woman" for being a woman he

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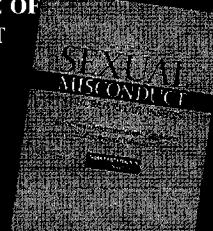
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should not need. The bias either way seems to be in favor of the pastor.

We will let Pamela Cooper-White share the view of several women scholars. "I argue, however, that such intimate relating is *always* an unethical boundary violation and that it is *always* the pastor's responsibility to maintain the appropriate boundaries. As with rape, a pastor's sexual and romantic involvement with a parishioner is not primarily a matter of sex or sexuality but of power and control. For this reason I call it *pastoral sexual abuse* rather than 'pastor-parishioner relations' or, worse, a matter of private activity between consenting adults (which is almost always how the perpetrator will describe it) . . . there can be no authentic consent in a relationship involving unequal power."¹³

The minister carries ultimate spiritual authority. He is often physically stronger and more imposing. He may be the "other" woman's employer, teacher, mentor, or counselor.

While we must always keep these factors in mind, and recognize that the pastor's responsibility is greater, an undeniable fact remains true: *Short of rape or malicious abuse, we are accomplices in sexual infidelity whenever we trespass the boundaries of others or allow anyone to violate our boundary of intimacy.* Whatever the circumstances, the "other woman" faces several issues.

1. *The issue of stealing another woman's husband.* All of the ensuing consequences of this act will come to haunt her. In the case of divorce and the marriage of the pastor and the "other woman," one wonders if the woman ever stops to think that the legitimate wife of her present "husband" is living alone in lodgings, "going out to work to support herself, doing without companionship once precious to her—all because she stole the husband and thereby broke up the home."¹⁴ This knowledge has to affect her negatively in one way or another.

2. *She is not just a victim, she is an accomplice too.* However vulnerable she may have been, however powerful the pastor's impact on her, however bad her previous marriage, or abusive her hus-

band, her "solution" to problems has now multiplied the number of victims for which there is no complete resolution.

Hession adds, "One wonders if she has ever humbled herself before God to confess the wrong she has done to the betrayed wife as a sin against God, whether she has ever been to confess it and crave her forgiveness and ask what can be done to put it right."¹⁵

3. *Her sense of self is greatly damaged.* She may feel ashamed, guilty, and stupid for letting herself be used as an object of pleasure. Her sense of self-worth, of trust and safety, are nearly destroyed. Her loss of idealism and hope are almost gone.¹⁶

4. *Some women have serious physical and psychological difficulties.* Stress and anxiety resulting from threats by the pastor if she blows the whistle, produced anxiety disorders, sleeplessness, and a variety of other serious health problems are results of the adulterous action.¹⁷

5. *Finally, there also are serious spiritual problems.* Such a woman may well have a feeling of being betrayed by God, the church, and by Christian friends who so avidly defend the "name" of the church and the reputation of their pastor that they would not listen to her side of the story even prior to the sexual act.¹⁸

Impact on the pastor

Innocence is the quality or state of being characterized by purity and integrity, and by freedom from guile and cunning. Innocent lives enjoy profound serenity even under the most trying circumstances, the most alluring temptations, and the most glaring injustices. In spite of being sold as a slave, of resisting sexual advances of his mistress, and in spite of the consequent wrongful imprisonment, Joseph in the dungeon "had the peace that comes from conscious innocence."¹⁹

The devastating effects of a lost innocence have the greatest impact on the pastor caught in sexual infidelity. This loss affects all aspects of life and being.

1. *Loss of personal innocence* comes as a shock. Before the event of sexual

intimacy, nothing seemed to signal such a profound change of self-image. The popular *Playboy* literature and its pervasive viewpoint is awash with false claims that free sex can be safe sex, and that casual intimacy is nothing more than a fabulous form of entertainment with no negative side effects.

The truth is that profound changes do occur in one's internal relation to himself. Sexual intimacy introduces us into the *inner sanctum* of another person, where all dimensions of the two personalities converge. No other experience does this quite as completely.

♦ Sexual intimacy involves a total self-giving to the other. And since we have but one totality of self, multiple self-giving splinters our sense of integrity into fragments.

♦ This experience of the shredding of self is caused also because each other partner connects to us differently and lays claims upon us in unique ways. We are no more our own in the way we were formerly.

♦ Besides this, so much duplicity and deceit lie beneath every adulterous affair.

♦ A profound shame bursts out (even if it's repressed) when the individual faces up to this new compromised self; when the members of the family do not know how to relate; when friends act strangely; even when (or especially when) speaking to God feels contrived or audacious.

2. *Loss of marital innocence* is another surprise. The union with our wife, the support she has always given, the plans and dreams we shared are now off limits to us. We feel unworthy of this. We have nothing to hold on to.

♦ To begin with we have "lost any reason to be trusted."²⁰

♦ While before we consoled, protected, or rescued the family from trouble, we now cannot provide assistance, not daring nor knowing how to seek or receive the help we need.

♦ There remains precious little of our status as a husband or head of the family. We lose our job, income, and position of honor. "I felt emasculated," confessed a client to me.

♦ Only God can forgive completely. "My wife forgave me, I know full well. And I will always feel forgiven. But that is not innocence. Not yet."

3. *With loss of professional innocence* a pastor's downfall is complete. Such pastors may see themselves as the cause of more sufferings than could ever have been imagined.

♦ "Even though the pastor is human (with all the temptations and vulnerabilities of other humans), by his or her vocation pastors have chosen to live on a higher plane and strive for a higher calling. This includes [taking responsibility for] the welfare of the church members and for the good name of the church in the community. Thus the effect of sexual misconduct by the pastor is catastrophic to the persons involved and devastating to the church and the faith of the community. It may take a lifetime of trauma treatment for those involved. It may take a generation of disillusionment before the faith of the community is regained."²¹

♦ But the hardest by far is to face God, the most wounded and the most innocent victim of all. David was right when he said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4).

It is against the backdrop of God's *inestimable generosity* that David snatched the only wife Uriah had. It is against God's *express command* that he acted by snubbing His divine authority.

In the words of Matthew Henry, "The devil, by aggravating the exception, endeavoured to invalidate the concession. The divine law cannot be reproached unless it first be misrepresented."²² David knew that he *lied to God directly*: "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6).

♦ Hardest of all is to face the Chief Shepherd when as undershepherds we have acted as thieves and adulterers. So hard that all our instincts, reason, feelings, experiences, and many friends shout to us to "hide behind a fig leaf! Go to another place of labor!"

But where can we hide? Where indeed? Where can we go, if not to Him? It is now the time to offer the sac-

rifice acceptable to God. Not a fig leaf. He will reject that. He will see through it!

Rather a "broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). Sin, especially this sin, cannot be simply painted over, masked, straightened out, redressed. *Nothing short of the intervention of the Creator God can restore us back to innocence.* "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit" (Ps. 51:10-12, RSV).

We will take up this question in the final part of this series (in the upcoming November issue of *Ministry*). ■

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Preaching beyond modernism (part 2)

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This is the second and final article in a two-part series. The first part appeared in the July issue of Ministry.

A new generation from diverse backgrounds and complex situations challenges the church's traditional preaching. Both liberal and fundamentalist preaching are problematic. The former does not maintain the gospel as final authority, and the latter tends to disregard the gospel and the context of the people's contexts.

Both have fallen prey to analyzing isolated texts and solitary people without their context. Both have deteriorated into Descartes' subject-object split, in which subjectivism prescribes objects in a rationalistic way. Such preaching has reduced life to narrow rationalistic and mechanistic understandings.

The central question now is, How can today's preacher "relate God's unchanging Word to our ever-changing world" while refusing "to sacrifice truth to 'relevance'?" Here are some pointers.

A networking approach

First, sermon construction needs to adopt a networking approach² and reject the atomism of modernism that takes into account only partial aspects and not the whole. The Bible, the Holy Spirit, the preacher, and the whole congregation are brought together in the creative "construction" of sermons.

Networking looks at the congregation not as a "sounding board" to ensure the success of sermons but as God's people who want to experience His message. The congregation is not uninformed listeners in need of admonition and repentance, but it is part of what the Reformers called God's universal priesthood, equipped and quite capable of declaring God's praises (1 Peter 2:9).

Though the congregation may have just a "common-sense understanding" of the Bible, they do have an experiential feeling of the biblical message that can enliven the meanings of the text. They know both God's Word and God's world, and this knowing is not accomplished so much in a so-called learned, scientific way, but in a biblical way—a relational experience of knowing.

Preachers can never tell and interpret the stories of all the members of the congregation. Their stories cannot be cemented into one grand determining narrative that unifies and represents all knowledge.³ Preaching beyond modernism needs to see people in terms of a node, a meeting point in a network, a "fabric of relations," requiring preaching to be open to a multiplicity of discourses.

By this we are not saying that sermons should be replaced with a kind of "chaotic preaching" in which everybody speaks whenever they wish. What we are saying is that preachers need to play a more challenging but also a more humble role.

They should strive toward becoming methodological guides that provide directive "pointers." They are to inspire and enable people to discover for themselves the full richness of God's Word. They are to guide their congregations in different ways, showing the different possibilities and implications and thus "encourage people to find these riches for themselves."⁴

Preachers are like geologists. With their scientific tools, they can point to where gold ore may be found. They guide the miners, leaving the extracting task to them. Likewise, preachers can guide the members to dig for the "gold" themselves; without that experience, little lasting understanding occurs, and they cannot fully rejoice in the experience and say, "we found it!"

Preachers communicate to serve the people of the congregation, not to manipulate them. Their authority is not their own, but that of Jesus, internalized. They are not rulers

or dictators. They are only privileged servants.

They do not throw the "absolute truths" they have discovered onto the people. Their sermon prepares the stage where the Holy Spirit can create an encounter between Himself, the Word of God, and the congregation; this is where the Spirit speaks His own words to the congregation within their context.

Such preaching is centered neither in the preacher as the expert nor in the likes or dislikes of a "sweet-toothed" congregation, but within the dynamic movement of a network.

In the network model, the preaching event is not characterized by a sound, well-prepared and motivated sermon that was constructed in the exclusive privacy of the preacher's study. It is rather characterized as a creative moment in which the people and the preacher listen to God's Word together and in which they share their findings and celebrate their awe and wonder in the dynamic movement of the sermon.

To create this internal collaboration, preachers need to be "inviters"—inviting people to become joint constructors of the sermon. The preacher's language, style, manner of preparing the sermon, and the study of the Bible should lure people into the Bible, inviting them to "come and see" for themselves (John 1:46).

Preachers are to invite people into the very "delivering movement" of the sermon itself. We are not preaching to people, but *together with* them. Jesus did not treat people as spectators but invited them into His sermons, enabling them to see, hear, and experience what was happening. They became a part of the great stories of God: they were the sowers, the lost coins, the prodigal sons and daughters.

People learn through personal participation. Webber says the new approach to knowing is no more only an "analysis" and a "linear sequence," but it is "the primacy of [authentic] experience"; "knowledge through

immersed participation."⁵

How can this networking be achieved?

To begin with, the sermon should be constructed not merely within the preacher's study, but "within" the workspace, home, and "play place" of the people.

Some preachers emphasize the importance of a sermon resource group,⁶ also acting as a feedback group, not only supplying good intellectual information from the Bible and their perspectives and needs but also conveying the congregation's feelings about the suggested sermon topics. This could be more enriching for sermon preparation, because preachers will know whether their preaching was understood or not, and what emotional and intellectual contents were invoked by it.

The toolmaker versus the conduit metaphor

Preachers with a modernistic approach have pursued the Shannon-Weaver communication model and have largely fallen prey to the conduit metaphor by "sending" their messages, as it were, through a conduit or a confined channel. In terms of this metaphor, people are regarded simply as "reasonable beings," and consequently, they are seen to come to a full understanding almost exclusively through intellectual processes.

Under this outlook, any nonrational influences are distorting "noises" or "equivocations," representing interferences in the intended message. For example, when a baby cries during the sermon, it is regarded as noise having no part in God's message for that morning.

Thus the sermon tends to become a "still" picture, colorless, in black and white. The movement of the wind, the smell of the roses, and the laughter or cry of children are left out of this "frozen" photo, and there are no subtle spiritual emphases of different "colors" that inspire creative awe and wonder.

Of course, preaching cannot by

any means afford to belittle rational, intellectual knowledge or the intuitive process. But preachers need to recognize that knowledge, words, and concepts are not the same as "reality." Knowledge is an intellectual "representation" and therefore a mental abstraction of reality. The map itself is never the territory.

Research has indicated that religious malfunctioning is more closely bound up with deficient emotional contents than with inadequate intellectual contents. This is often seen where a congregation is in protest against a preacher's repetition of intellectual content, while emotional content is always experienced as "new," as each moment of joy or sadness has something unique and significantly different about it.

Consequently, the verbal contents are quickly forgotten after a sermon, but the feelings that it aroused are vividly remembered.

Van Niekerk prefers the "toolmaker's" metaphor rather than the conduit approach. The toolmaker's metaphor presents preachers with a multitude of communicative tools and signs serving as units of communicative transferences.⁷ These tools may be concepts and words but also cultural signs, directive "pointers," feelings, awe, and hope; they all function as commentaries on texts and assist the congregation to grasp and come closer to "understand" God's messages.

Humans obtain knowledge not only through intellectual stimulation but also through feelings, strivings, and impressions. We "know" by way of intellectual, willful, and emotional interaction. It is no wonder that literary critics warn us against the excessive emphasis on the intellectual dimension. Intellectual words may wound listeners through emotional dryness and emptiness.

Our view of the Scriptures

Another effective tool that enables us to go beyond the perils of the modernistic pulpit is to be sure of our view

of the Scriptures. The fundamentalist orientation often takes a mechanistic and literal lexicographical view of the Scripture. It can lead preachers away from the biblical message and the context of people.

On the opposite side, the liberal view of Scriptures, particularly the historical critical method, has fallen prey to Descartes' subject-object split, where the subject determines the object logically beforehand. This method, with its analytical approach, taking parts without the whole, and its eclectic approach, picking only the privileged parts, is in fact more critical than historical. It has silenced the living voice of the gospel.

Webber insightfully says that while the liberals tear the Bible to shreds with criticism, the conservatives try to put the pieces back together with rational arguments.⁸ Both these extreme approaches can lead to the end of authentic preaching.

The Bible is a book with more than words; it spells out God's actions and even far more, God's redeeming actions. The Bible, however, is more than mere activism; the Bible portrays God's redeeming love. Preachers should attach real "authority" to the Scriptures. The Bible as "God's Word" has far more depth regarding meaning and contents than any exegetical and hermeneutical tool can ever fathom. The Scripture's meaning and messages will always transcend our methods and our best interpretations.

Preaching beyond modernism means the end of final atomistic explanations. The Bible cannot be reduced to a book of objective knowledge apart from subjective experience. Academics, preachers, teachers, and the laity, from their own perspectives, by way of different hermeneutical tools, have unique and diverse interpretations of the Scriptures that may not always be totally "correct."

These varied interpreters, however, may indicate different journeys toward meaning; as directive "pointers" they do not imitate and copy each other but complement the

movement toward the messages of God. This may stimulate our intellect, emotion, and will, and supply us with a variety of spiritual emphases and perspectives for the preaching event.

The creative use of language

Another pointer in our consideration of preaching beyond modernism is concerned with the creative use of language.

One of the greatest challenges facing preaching is to formulate sermons in a dynamic "open" language. Influenced by the natural sciences, some preachers tend to think that they can describe reality in an absolute and objective way.⁹ Language is then seen as a "system of signs with a 'large overarching, communal vocabulary' that is governed by rules and words that have fixed meanings."¹⁰ Such language seeks to evade the ceaseless "play" of language.

By using correctly defined literal words from the dictionary, those who follow this view seem to believe that things can be stated in an absolute way. Words are then regarded not as signs or traces but, erroneously, as conveying final meanings. Such a use of language tends to make it static and predictable, to the point of meaninglessness.

When we move beyond modernism, we realize that language is "a system of signs which is in constant play, and meaning is a product of this play of differentiations."¹¹ This view, however, does not mean that the understanding of a text is a haphazard affair, or that any interpretation is correct. The approach to language beyond modernism is about not the meaning of language but what language does; it signifies and conveys "meaning" to people in a dynamic way.

Ignoring the metaphoric richness of the Bible has led preachers to minimize the symbolic forms of communication and has caused loss of understanding.

Metaphors are "pictures" assisting us to see the unknown in terms of the known in a challenging way. This

"open" system allows preachers to create a whole textual world that can become a reality within the specific context of every individual in the congregation. Metaphors are not only ways of communication but also ways to "know" the hidden.

Metaphors identify and describe things in a unique way; they are genuinely creative and present something in a way that cannot adequately be said in another way; they do not represent things in a merely ornamental manner, for the show only, but are an embodiment of new insights, revealing and unchaining "truths."

Metaphorical language makes it possible for us to speak about God and the greatness of His kingdom.¹² It is important for preachers to realize that metaphors not only illustrate and explain difficult "truths" but also create room for emotional modes and the dire needs of those who are there to hear.

Metaphors "interpret" the emotional and intellectual modes present in the texts in such a way as to carry the congregation into the meaning. In the process, they carry not only rational meaning but also awe and wonder that is so much needed in preaching today.

Preaching styles

The final pointer about preaching beyond modernism concerns style. Sermon styles are not sanctioned by heaven. They are instruments of communication, and they all have limitations as well as possibilities for preaching. It is, however, imperative for the preacher's sermon style to have the capacity to open up unlimited potential for dialogue and encounters between people and preachers, and most importantly, with God and His Word.

Because of the strong storytelling character of the Bible, the narrative approach can be helpful. We constantly live by stories, those we hear and the ones we tell. Narrative preaching is not a modern superficial

continued on page 29

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Ministering in the midst of competing worldviews

Trevor O'Reggio



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Our society finds itself awash in the sea of secularism, drifting amid waves of meaninglessness. Permanent, trustworthy intellectual and spiritual moorings seem a thing of the past. Relativity has replaced constancy and certainty, and change seems to be the only constant. In an ever increasing number of minds, God is reduced to nothing. He is no longer a personal, all-powerful transcendent being, but a mere influence.

The eternal verities that once undergirded our society are now cast aside as outdated myths and legends that have nothing to say to us. Consequently, people are increasingly in search of themselves. But having cast aside divinely revealed truth, the search has become fruitless.

Loneliness stalks the population and is most present and persistent in our cities, where the population is densest. Husbands and wives may live together for years, apparently unable to fulfill the need for companionship in one another.

A naturalistic worldview has replaced the theistic. The famous American astronomer Carl Sagan asserts, "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be."¹

Humans are now considered as mere complex machines whose personalities may be explained in terms of the interaction of chemical and physical properties. History is

seen to be a series of purposeless events, or just cycles of action with no definable destiny.

Right and wrong are no longer grounded in the personal character of an unchanging God. Truth is simply what humans think, feel, and perceive.

Secular humanism is now the preferred religion. It is the prevailing and the underlying orientation governing what is taught in many of the schools and universities of our time. While this humanism affirms principles deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it vehemently denies the verity of the Source of these ideas. Its embrace of a broad, conflicting pluralistic spectrum of outlooks allows for all points of view. But then those embracing such contradictions are naturally forced to ask themselves how they should integrate the confusing, contradictory world of ideas that result. Obviously all contradictions cannot be reconciled. It is no wonder the modern human suffers from a kind of permanent spiritual schizophrenia.

Sweep of secular worldviews

The Secular Human Manifesto audaciously asserts, "We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of survival and fulfillment of the human race. As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity. Nature may indeed be broader and deeper than we now know; any new discoveries, however, will but enlarge our knowledge of the natural. . . . But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves."²

Another pervasive philosophy or outlook on the rise is the New Age perspective. Together with naturalism, it is influencing and displacing traditional religion. Stanley Krippner, a scientist in the Dream laboratory of Maimonides Medical Center in New York, writes: "The New Age . . . is a mindset whose time has come. Most who believed parapsychic events were either fact or a distinct possibility were convinced by personal experience, not by research. For some reason, today many people are having experiences that they interpret as paranormal. . . . More and more people are having [convincing, influential experiences through] meditation,

hypnosis, and psychedelic drugs. More and more people are paying attention to sleep and dreams. All these experiences provide fertile ground for paranormal events."³

The New Age worldview is here. In spite of advances in technology and science and the pervasiveness of Naturalism on our society, humans now thirst for the supernatural and the paranormal. There is a desire for an altered state of consciousness.

The New Age philosophy declares that everything and everyone has the "god essence" within them. All that is needed is a change of consciousness to awaken that inborn divinity.

New Age theories have infiltrated the major fields of learning, entertainment, and even sports. In the field of psychology and psychiatry we find Aldous Huxley, Stanislaw Graf, John Lilly, and Timothy Leary. In sociology and cultural history we have George Leonard and Theodore Roszak.

William Irwin Thompson's books *Passages About Earth* and *At the Edge of History* are laced with New Age theory. In anthropology we have Carlos Castaneda's books *The Teachings of Don Juan*, *A Separate Reality*, and *Journey to Ixtlan*.

In the health field, especially in holistic medicine, New Age theories now dominate. In the movie industry the work of Stephen Spielberg in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and George Lucas's *Star Wars* series are just a few examples of New Age philosophy.

One of the most colorful and enduring movie stars of our time, Shirley MacLaine, is an ardent proponent of New Age doctrine. Her books, *Out on a Limb*, *Dancing in the Light*, and *It's All in the Play* have sold millions of copies, testifying to the public's appetite for New Age philosophy.

Speaking relevantly to a secular world

As a Seventh-day Adventist minister I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the contemporary challenge to speak with credibility, relevance, and effectiveness to a person who may have

been affected by just one of the two orientations we have briefly exposed so far.

I find myself tending to speak only to people of my own worldview. I know I have a responsibility to engage others, but sometimes I don't know how to communicate so that what I say has the kind of impact I want.

In my own struggle to speak meaningfully to the secular mind and be relevant in an age of skepticism, I am putting forth a number of proposals as a starting point: (1) My message must be timeless and universal; (2) I must speak to people's deepest needs everywhere; (3) I must answer the ultimate questions that everyone struggles with; (4) I must present God as the fulfillment of the deep void of the human heart and the only One who can bring stability, peace, security, and love into human life; (5) I must point out that the continuing pervasiveness of war, riots, racism, poverty, and other forms of evil in our world is proof enough of the failure of what is merely human; (6) My life must be exemplary. I must live out Christ's ministry, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and speaking hope to the hopeless; and (7) I must commit myself to the moral education especially of the young so that they can carry on the legacy of truth to the next generation.

Wrestling with ultimate questions

People of all ages have wrestled with the "ultimate questions": Where did I come from? (origin); what am I doing here? (purpose); and where am I going? (destiny). Since the dawn of time, philosophers and teachers have tried to answer these questions, and sometimes their answers touch on various aspects of the truth, but they still prove limited, inadequate, and insufficient.

People are still searching for meaning, purpose, and destiny. Every generation approaches this quest in a different way, but the quest is always absorbing. This is where my ministry

becomes especially relevant.

First, if I have been called to provide some satisfying answers to these questions, I must fulfill that calling. If I have been called to provide answers to these questions in the lives of the people, I can begin by picturing a humanity created in the image of a loving God who is transcendent, all powerful, omnipotent, yet ever present and deeply caring. This will go far in satisfying many in their desire to know their origin.

If I can effectively portray the fact that we were all created for the glory of such a God, and that He has a plan for each life, including theirs, and that He is coming back for them, perhaps that will help to answer their questions of purpose and destiny.

In whatever form and fashion I do it, I know that I must do it in order to be relevant and meaningful in the faith I share with the world in which I find myself and do my ministry.

Second, I must commit myself to be God's witness in this world. Sproul said it best: "Our job is to make the invisible reign of Jesus visible. The world is shrouded in darkness. Nothing is visible in the dark. No wonder that we are called to be the light of the world. Every single one of us has a mission. We have all been sent to bear witness to Christ. That means simply that we are all missionaries."⁴

As Harvey Cox said so eloquently in his book, *The Secular City*, the "church is not a building, a budget, a program, an organization. It is a people in motion, an 'eventful movement' in which barriers are being struck down and a radically new community beyond the divisiveness of inherited labels and stereotypes is emerging . . . the real job of . . . churches . . . is to discern God's reconciliation is breaking in and identify themselves with this action."⁵

As Jesus came to us in the flesh, so we must exhibit a special kind of incarnation ministry to the world. We must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, comfort

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The stripping process: broken down for breakthrough



It was a frigid, snowy Saturday morning eight years ago when we pulled up for the first time in front of my new church. The entire metropolitan area had just been hit with its worst snowstorm in decades.

Sprawled across our beds at a suburban Holiday Inn watching the weather report the afternoon before, our family wondered whether the streets would be clear enough to make it to the church where we were scheduled to be introduced the next morning. We were excited and apprehensive at the same time—normal feelings for ministerial families anticipating the first day.

A month or so earlier, my wife Brenda and I had decided to accept the invitation to take the pulpit of the Miracle Temple church in Baltimore, Maryland. We had spent almost six years in our present congregation and felt that it was the right time to move. The peace we had felt was uncanny as we contemplated and accepted this call. It was unlike other times when we were considering a change. There was the sense of a yet undefined destiny.

Prior to the call we had not even heard of the church. We had accepted it sight unseen (not always the wisest thing to do). The conference president had kept emphasizing that the church had great potential. Being somewhat of a cynic, I felt that when a president describes a church as having “great potential,” that was an “alarm bell” signaling an unambiguous message: Don’t go! Yet we had come.

We knew that Miracle Temple was a much smaller congregation than we had led in our previous pastorates, but we accepted it anyhow, knowing that in a couple of years they would move me to a larger congregation. At least that’s how I explained it to my colleagues who were as “size” conscious as I was.

As our family drove into Baltimore in

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our aging but trusty minivan, we followed the directions the lay elder had given us the night before, and soon enough, we turned onto the street and into the neighborhood the church was located in. To say I was shocked by what I saw would be a gross understatement.

I can’t believe this

Baltimore is a city of row houses. They are essentially townhome-type structures connected together and stretching along unending city blocks. In the city’s heyday, these types of homes had been the “crown jewels” in the housing stock of Baltimore. And in many areas of the city today, young urban professionals are moving in and snatching up row homes in textbook cases of gentrification.

The section of the city where the church was located, however, didn’t have to worry about young urban professionals or anybody else coming into their neighborhood. The housing structures still appeared solid but were in massive disrepair. Many of the homes were boarded up, and the graffiti artists had done their work on them.

As we drove up on the church, two or three deacons were out front struggling to clear a pathway through the snow to the building. At least they didn’t have to shovel the parking lot, because there wasn’t one! We found parking half a

block up the street next to a snow bank. With some effort, we managed to get out of the van and made our way down the block to the church.

The building itself was a two-story red brick structure occupying the corner of Lombard and Fulton streets. The cornerstone announced proudly that the building had been built in 1866, one year after the conclusion of the American Civil War. The Miracle Temple congregation had purchased it from a Brethren congregation and had occupied it for a little over 20 years.

We were greeted warmly by the hard-working men out front and ushered in. It took a couple of minutes for the deacons to realize that I was the new pastor. While their warmth touched me, I was overwhelmed by my initial take of the place. The building was relatively clean, but one definitely felt its age. It was obvious that attempts had been made to improve things, but it still felt dark and dingy.

The bedroom-sized lobby was uninviting with well-worn red carpet and poor lighting. We were led upstairs to the small second-floor sanctuary. It was decent, but nowhere the size I was used to. Downstairs was the fellowship hall that doubled as classrooms for the children’s Sabbath School classes. There were a couple of other small rooms attached to the back of the church, along with a kitchen.

As the deacons continued the church tour with obvious pride, I was becoming more depressed by the minute. Because of the snow, people were gathering slowly. My wife went with our kids to Sabbath School, where she tried to make the best of what was happening there. I kept looking for the conference president, who was scheduled to meet us to introduce me as the new pastor. I thought of him coming through the door to tell me it was all a

mistake, that in fact it was another church in which I was to be introduced.

The fact is he never came, figuratively or literally. He was, of course, delayed due to the weather. Thus, to add to my by then depressive state, I had to introduce myself to the congregation.

Now, in such a situation, what do you say about yourself? "You are blessed to have me. I am considered, by a couple of people, including my wife, to be one of the most gifted pastors in the church, and how in God's name I came to pastor in this place, simply escapes me." Thankfully, I didn't say it that way, but given my state of mind, or should I say, the wounded state of my ego, I did feel that way.

Ego and pride

Ego and pride are slippery and imperceptible to recognize in oneself. And in ministry, it can be doubly difficult. This is because of the cloak of spirituality that permeates so much of what we do and say. This is especially true when it comes to the matter of "size," or numbers.

Wanting as it may be, success in ministry continues to be defined relative to the great three: buildings, bodies, and bucks. What's the size of your building? How many members and baptisms do you have? And, how much money do you have coming in? Even though there are heated denials, many in ministry would probably admit in their more vulnerable moments that our ministerial self-worth is occasionally tied to this matter of how big and how many . . .

What lies at the core of it all is ambition, which has its own rewards and punishments. Psychologists speak of CEOs as having "encore anxiety," a feeling that every year must be better than the last. Well, pastors have that too, along with the feeling that the next church must be bigger than the last. And when it doesn't happen, one's ministerial pride (clearly an oxymoron) can take a hit.

My "ministerial pride" had not just taken a hit on my first day at Miracle Temple, it was under assault. All around me were the clear, unmistakable signs

that I was in a "go nowhere" situation, in a bad part of the city, with a relatively small congregation, in a building that had seen better days. To top it off, I was upset with God, the conference president, and any other person responsible for putting me "here."

The president felt that it had great potential, that it was promising? For me, right then "promising" was not exactly the word! Someone once wrote, "Whom the gods would curse, they call promising."

After a long day of preaching and meeting the new congregation, and trying my cherubic best not to show my disappointment, the day mercifully ended. Our family made its way back to the hotel, the place from which we had started out earlier in the day with such hope and expectation.

After my wife had put the children in bed, we sat together in the room literally stunned at the "place" in which we found ourselves. My wife tried her usual search for the "silver lining" in it all, but even she found it unusually difficult this time. That night, we got on our knees. She prayed, and I cried.

God and me

The next morning, I knew I had to regain my balance after the "surprises" of the day before. I phoned a few friends for perspective and encouragement. All of them struggled to put a good face on what I described as my "predicament." Throughout the next day, our family searched for housing in preparation for the move to the Baltimore/Washington area.

There was a growing feeling and sense on the inside that God was about to do something in me, and it probably was going to be painful. What I didn't know at the time was that I was about to engage in "hand-to-hand" combat with God, and it was not really going to be about my disappointment with Miracle Temple. This was going to be about God making a preemptive strike in an effort to finally take over for good in my life and ministry, and Miracle Temple was just the vehicle He would use to do it. He was going for the total

disarmament of my pride, ego, and self-confidence. God had tried this before, but I had always rearmed. It was essential that I not do it this time.

God wanted to use me so much that He was willing to take me down to position me for a future that I could only dream about. All the great leaders of the Bible went through painful experiences before they were prepared to be used by God, a "stripping" process if you please, in order to experience sustained "favor" over their lives that would have been impossible prior to the pain.

The "stripping" happened to Moses in the desert, to David in the cave, to Peter in lonely abodes, to Paul on the Damascus road, and to countless others, all in a "place" of God's choosing. For me, it was to be Miracle Temple.

Almost there

Three weeks after my first Sabbath at Miracle Temple, I stood at the window on the second floor of the church-owned row house where my church office was located. Rat droppings were on my desk, the yellowed-stained walls were bare, and the room was cold.

Looking through the window onto streets that a few days earlier had been covered with snow, I could see that only scattered, dirty patches of the "white" stuff remained. In the inner city, snow can sometimes be a blessing in that it covers the grit and grime of the streets. But the snow was gone, and the grit and grime had reclaimed its territory.

Everywhere I looked from my second-floor perch, there was garbage. I felt like the followers of Nehemiah when their task of rebuilding the wall looked hopeless: "The people saw the rubbish, and they were discouraged." I was still deeply discouraged by what I had seen during the last three weeks as I analyzed the church's potential.

The people seemed warm enough and friendly, but I was not sure where "I" could take them. I knew I had to endure here at least a couple of years. So standing at the window, I made up my mind that I would go into a "holding pattern," doing just enough to



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maintain the church until I could get to a more "substantial" congregation.

That attitude went against everything I thought I stood for, and God wasn't about to let me get away with it. In fact, at that moment, I was about to go to a place with God that I had never been before.

Give me a vision

Standing at the window, I actually sensed God speaking to my spirit in such a clear way that it almost scared me. I sensed Him speaking to me about the selfishness of my attitude; my quest to be always on top; the problem of my pride; and my proverbial lack of dependence on Him.

In that brief, horribly serendipitous, insightful moment, I saw some of the "darkness" inside my own heart, and I didn't like what God was showing me. Standing at the window in my rat-and-roach-infested office, I made a request of God that would change my life, taking me on a journey that I, in my wildest dreams, could never have orchestrated.

I prayed a simple prayer that I had never before prayed: "God, please give me a vision for Miracle Temple, and I will give it all I've got."

A peace and calm suddenly came over me. Somehow I knew that everything was going to work out, and that I would be fine.

Eight powerful years . . . and counting

The last eight years have been a whirlwind. God has been teaching me daily, nurturing me in my dependence on Him, and convincing me of the value of rising early in the morning to seek His face. Prayer is a nonnegotiable for me. I have a deepening desire to be more and more with God as He has always wanted to be with me. We're finally on the same page. Yes, of course I still struggle at moments with the "stuff" of the heart, but I'm more aware of it and confess it immediately when it rises up in my spirit.

I watched God do the "stripping" process in my life; having to take me down in order to build me up again—

His way. I fought God, and thankfully, I lost. Just as Jacob and Paul discovered, when you fight with God and lose, you still win. As Paul put it, "When I am weak, then I am strong. His strength is made perfect in my weakness."

My ministry at the Miracle Temple has exploded all my initial expectations. It is a rapidly growing church, filled with people who are passionate about Jesus Christ. After eight years, we have moved off of Fulton and Lombard streets into a new Worship Center and Ministry Complex. By God's grace, Miracle Temple has truly gone on to accomplish a holistic outreach, inreach, and community ministry that confirms its name.

The struggling group of that first Sabbath has moved on to be considered by many to be one of the most innovative and pace-setting congregations in the Adventist Church. God has our church on an incredible journey, and I'm glad to be along for the ride.

After many pastoral years, my passion for ministry on some days is off the "Richter scale." During the last few years I've turned down a number of enticing invitations to some of the largest congregations in the country (something I wouldn't have done a few years ago). I know for sure that I'm where God wants me to be right now. God has placed "favor" over the ministry He has given me.

He has taught me from His Word that to prosper in His favor, three things must occur: (1) I can have no known sin in my life; (2) I must walk in obedience to His Word; and (3) I must walk in humility before Him.

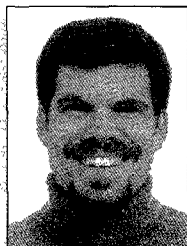
Then there is the powerful vision for this place that He gave me when I asked Him for it in the midst of my early struggles. He continues to give me the wisdom and continuing strength and drive to see it through.

Much like the delightful Delaney sisters who summed things up after surpassing 100 years of life, "I wouldn't take anything for my journey now." ■

Fredrick Russell is pastor of the Miracle Temple Church in Baltimore, Maryland.

The shape of the emerging church: a pastor's view (part 1)

Ryan J. Bell



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Editorial note: This is part 1 of a two-part series. Part 2 will appear in the November issue of Ministry.

A new day is dawning, a fresh wind is blowing. A new vision of what it means to be the church is emerging. Those beginning to see it are on the edge of their seats. The picture of this church is not yet completely in focus, though I suspect that the blurred depiction that is coming into focus these days through the mists of change is closer to the truth than the definitive portrayal we have traditionally struggled to maintain. The edges are fuzzy and open to further exploration.

It is difficult to quantify it, or to be assured of its dimensions. It defies categorization, and is more easily felt or intuitively sensed. It has qualities that reflect the mystery of the God whose church it is.

This new church seeks to be more faithful, not less. In it there is a deep concern for understanding and fearlessly embracing the radical teachings of Jesus. This church is more rooted, less market-driven, and more mission-focused; it is less segregated and fragmented, both racially and generationally. Neither is it a monolithic phenomenon built on reproducible models and manifested in the same way everywhere. On the contrary, the emerging church is a return to the biblical notion of the organic nature of the church. This church

is more of a living body than it is an organized, administratable entity.

This new vision of the church has not emerged in a vacuum. There are cultural factors that have facilitated the phenomenon of its appearance.

The decentralized church

Whether American culture was ever Christian is debatable, but there has been the assumption that Judeo-Christian values have shaped the culture of the West. In recent decades, however, the church has been increasingly marginalized. As postmodernism has come to influence almost every arena, especially in Western cultures, the church—built on the empiricist and rationalistic foundations of modernism—has lost its footing. In many cases we have placed our confidences in the wrong places.¹

So now, rather than holding the central role in the culture, the church has been decentered, removed from its pedestal. We no longer hold the easy place of influence and power.² This transition has been uncomfortable, but in many ways it has been advantageous for us.

The comfort of cultural prominence has made the church soft. Traditionally, the church has always thrived from the margins but faltered when it got too entangled in power. In this sense the challenge postmodernism poses for the church is an opportunity to be more faithful.

The result of this shift is that the church is less clear about its role in relation to a great many of the cultures in which it finds itself. Just as Israel had to reconsider its way of life when carried off into Babylonian exile, so the church today must rethink its role in Western society particularly.

In modernity, the church frequently saw itself as being in partnership with its host culture as both the church and the culture sought to achieve the unchallenged goals of society—commonly known in the United States, for example, as the “American Dream.”

The parlance of the church growth movement was “felt-needs ministry.” The church’s job was to find out what the community needed and then meet those needs. The lingo of this kind of cultural relevance was on every pastor’s lips.

The emerging church does not reject these goals out of hand. After all, who wants to be irrelevant? And certainly Jesus went about

with great effect to meet the needs of thousands of people during His three-year ministry.

The difference is that the emerging church of today wants to be culturally relevant but at the same time to be countercultural in its witness. The church of this new missionary context does not want to meet uncritically the needs of people in society but rather sees its role as being a mission to the culture.

It is through the witness of an alternative culture that the emerging church hopes to call people to a better way of life—life under the loving reign of God. It is also this alternative culture that trains its members how to live by kingdom principles. The church is the place in which we learn how to live, quite literally, as “resident aliens.”³

It is in this contemporary “exile” that we are forced to reevaluate the role of the church in the world. It is also in this exile that we must rehear the gospel.

Rehearing the gospel

The new wind that is blowing through the church is not primarily methodological (though it will no doubt result in doing things differently); it is a renewal, first of all, of theology. It is not emerging out of the old by tinkering or making minor adjustments. It involves a fundamental rethinking of the nature of the church and its place in God’s plan.

As such it is predicated upon a rehearing of the gospel. After all, the gospel is the mother of the church. It is because of the gospel that the church exists, and so a healthy understanding of the church is contingent upon hearing the gospel afresh.

Unfortunately, the gospel we know has been so influenced by modernist philosophical categories that what we actually hear as gospel is sometimes barely discernable. Ask many conservative American Christians today what

the gospel is, and they will most likely give you some version of *Four Spiritual Laws* describing how a person can go to heaven when they die.

No doubt there is truth in what they say, but is this really the central message of Jesus? Is this, as such, the ultimate purpose for which Jesus came to earth?

Dallas Willard says that this reduction of the gospel to “sin management” has diminished the goodness of the news Jesus came to proclaim. It is certainly good news that in Jesus our personal sins are forgiven and taken care of. But if this is the whole story, we are left with a narcissistic obsession with our own survival both now and after death. This is precisely the thing Jesus was trying to avoid when He said that in God’s kingdom, the way to save your life is to lose it.

After Jesus was baptized and then tempted for 40 days, Matthew writes, “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matt. 4:17).*

The other synoptic gospels record a similar start to Jesus’ ministry (Mark 1:14, 15 and Luke 4:43). He came proclaiming an astonishing fact—the kingdom of God had arrived.

But what does that mean? Certainly central to any kingdom is the one who reigns as its king. In essence Jesus announced that God’s reign over the entire world was finally present among them in the sovereignty of Jesus. People were then invited to enter the kingdom and live under God’s loving rule. It is also unmistakably clear that Jesus’ message was eschatological, leading the hearer toward the day when the reign of God will become an ultimate reality.

One thing is certain from the life and teachings of Jesus Himself—the gospel is none other than the good news that every person (whether poor in spirit, whether mourning, or struggling to satisfy a gnawing spiritual hunger) is invited to live under the loving reign of God.

In Acts, chapter 1, Jesus is teaching His disciples about the kingdom of

God. The first deacons of the church preached the good news of the kingdom (Acts 8:12). Luke also wrote that Paul’s message to the churches was the good news of the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). In fact, these are the closing words of Acts: “For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” These words stand as an open invitation for the story of Acts to continue.

When we actually hear the gospel afresh, as the in-breaking of the reign of God upon our world in Jesus Christ, then as a church we reenvision our role in relationship to that good news. As we see this, it becomes clear to us that the gospel is not merely the management of our sin so we can go to heaven one day. Instead we see that our role and the role of the church is to help bring the reign of Christ to reality here and now, and in doing so to tell as many people as possible about the King and His kingdom, so it can be established and *they* can also go to heaven. But, if the good news is deeper and more far-reaching, then it has profound consequences for the church. So, what is the role of the church with respect to the gospel Jesus proclaimed?

Jesus’ parting words to His disciples certainly give us a clue. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

We will develop the implications of this passage to the ministry of the emerging church in the second and final part of this study, which will appear in the November issue. ■

**All Scripture references in this article are from the New International Version.*

1 For a good introduction to the effect of postmodernism upon the church, see Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000); Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

2 See Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997).

3 See Stanley Hauwerwas and Will Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

Genesis Creation

account *continued from page 7*

"God said" for each of the six days of Creation reveals the power of His creative word. For all but one of the days, "God said" is followed by "and it was so," proclaiming the power of His commands. Theistic evolution needs to take God's creative word seriously as well as His written Word that widely supports a literal creation.

The awesome power of God's creative word is further demonstrated by the speed with which His commands were fulfilled, for the Creation days were literal, continuous, contiguous, 24-hour periods of time. The Hebrew word for day, *yôm*, when used with ordinals (2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.) is always a literal day. His commands had instant response. That's why He could say each day the new created reality was "good."

On the sixth day "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31, NIV). We are dealing with a literal record that gives one method God used in creation: He commanded and it was so.

Genesis is only one of five books Moses wrote under God's guidance. Do his other books interpret the Creation week as literal?

All subsequent references of Moses to Creation week are given a literal interpretation. For example, (1) manna fell for six days but none on the seventh day Sabbath (Exod. 16:4-6, 21-23). (2) The Sabbath in the fourth commandment is based on the seventh day that God blessed after six days of Creation (Exod. 20:8-11). (3) The Sabbath is a sign between God and His people, "for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested" (Exod. 31:16, 17). To interpret the Creation record as nonliteral does not make sense in these subsequent references.

Conclusion

The overwhelming evidence in the Genesis Creation record, in the other


books of Moses, and in the entirety of Scripture leads one to conclude that God created during a literal, contiguous period of six days, followed by a literal Sabbath. Any accommodating of the literal Creation week to an evolutionary worldview (theistic evolution) replaces God's Word with the words of humans and concurs with the cosmic controversy at whose heart is the questioning of God's Word and nature (Gen. 3:1-6). Such an accommodation replaces the love of God with a God who created through billions of years of suffering, which portrays Him in a way incompatible with Calvary and removes a literal Sabbath as the climax of Creation.

Any replacement of a literal Creation Sabbath by a day-age Sabbath makes no sense when Christ wrote in the fourth commandment that He created in six days and rested on the seventh day, and asked His followers to keep the seventh day as Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11).

No wonder Christ referred to the creation of Adam and Eve as literal (Matt. 19:4). ■

- 1 Darwin opposed the view that each species has been independently created (69) and that there is an "immutability of species" (317), and presented "the theory of descent with modification through natural selection" (435) *The Origin of Species* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1979, 1st ed., 1859)
- 2 Evolution calls the Genesis Creation account into question. Therefore, many theologians accept Genesis as pre-scientific with no interest in the process of creation which science allegedly provides. For example, Augustus Strong stated, "Evolution does not make the idea of a Creator superfluous, because evolution is only the method of God." *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia, Pa: Judson, 1907), 465, 466
- 3 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, Tex: Word, 1983), 6:226
- 4 Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), vol. 2, 44
- 5 For example, Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed., James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, Pa.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 1:444-452 and Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, includes the 1932 and 1938 vols.), 155.
- 6 For example, Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed., Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1:80, see 1:82
- 7 For example, John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 1:92, John Brown (1772-1787), *Systematic Theology* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002), 170, Heinrich Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans., G. T. Thomson (London: Walsman Trust, 1950, 1st 1861), 199
- 8 Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 393, 394.
- 9 David Hull, "The God of Galapagos," *Nature* 352 (1991): 486.
- 10 See Cornelius G. Hunter, *Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001)
- 11 *Ibid.*, 159
- 12 The Hebrew word *nkallah* means "trading" or "peddling" referring to goods or gossip. Here Satan spreads gossip about God. See Richard M. Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 11 (2000): 1-2:108
- 13 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), vol. 3/1, 223

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An enemy defeated: death and resurrection

Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Faith #25. *The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Rom. 6:23; 1 Tim. 6:15, 16; Eccl. 9:5, 6; Ps. 146:3, 4; John 11:11-14; Col. 3:4; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:1-10.)*

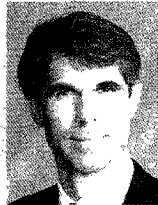
Death haunts human life in every age and every place. The oldest buildings in the world, the colossal pyramids of Giza, are monuments to its poignant power in human consciousness.

The ancient Egyptians were preoccupied with death. It was the central theme in their religion. As soon as a Pharaoh ascended the throne, he started planning his tomb. And the elaborate paintings and exquisite artifacts that filled the royal burial chambers were designed to assist their occupants as they journeyed in the afterlife.

The Pharaohs tried to face death bravely, but the art of other ancient people reveals the sorrow and suffering it always brings. A large room in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens is filled with funerary monuments from ancient Greece. The faces on those stone reliefs are etched with grief. In one scene after another, a figure reaches out to someone dear—a mother, father, brother, child, or friend—but there is no contact. The dead are unresponsive, withdrawn, forever beyond their grasp.

The sad profiles of those ancient mourners, frozen in time, illustrate perfectly the apostle Paul's reference to

RICHARD RICE



those who grieve and have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

Until the advent of modern medicine, death was something everybody knew about firsthand. There wasn't a family of any size who hadn't lost a child and often a parent as well. In nineteenth-century America, someone once told me, a bride and groom who promised to love, honor, and cherish each other "until death do us part," had, on the average, 12 years together until that happened.

Nowadays, of course, things are drastically different, at least in the developed countries of the world. It is not unusual for children to reach adulthood without having lost a single close relative. We may hear about death and read about death, but for many of us it's a vague possibility, not a present reality.

Or is it? The truth is that death is all around us. In the past several months, thousands have perished in Iraq. In the United States last year, more than 43,000 died in traffic accidents. In Africa, the number of AIDS victims reaches into the millions. And all this on the heels of the twentieth century, "the century of death," as many call it, in which up to 120 million people died at the hands of their fellow humans.

In spite of its gruesome visage, people often try to paint a positive picture of death. Some respond with "senti-

mental acquiescence." Death comes to all of us, they purr, but there is no reason to fear it. The end of our existence is as natural as the beginning, and we should approach it with complete peace of mind.

The ancient Stoics looked on death with resignation. If something is bound to happen, don't stress over it, they argued. Accept it with equanimity. "I was not. I was. I am not. I care not," an ancient tombstone read.

In sharp contrast, the poems of William Ernest Henley and Dylan Thomas approach death with something like "desperate defiance." This life may be all we have, they concede, but we should hang on to it tenaciously. Resist death to the bitter end—that's their advice. "Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms but the horror of the shade," exclaimed Henley, "And yet the menace of the years finds and shall find me unafraid." In a similar vein Thomas cried out, "Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

The Christian view of death

None of these attitudes or their variations, ancient or modern, expresses the Christian response to humanity's deepest fear. The Christian perspective on death is more complicated than any of them. On the one hand, there is nothing sentimental in the way Christian faith views death. It looks death squarely in the face and sees exactly what it is. Death is a destroyer, an intruder, an enemy. It was not meant to be, and it is horrifying.

On the other hand, Christian faith looks past death. Death is undeniably powerful, but it is not supremely powerful. There is something, some-one, who is even more powerful. Furthermore, that power has confronted death and gained the victory over it. So, not only is

death defeasible, death has been defeated: its power is broken, and its reign will end. So, even though death is still a part of things in this world, it is on its way out. The last word on human existence belongs not to death but to life. Let's look at each element in this perspective.

Death and sin in the Bible

In its first description of death, the Bible makes a crucial connection between death and sin. There is nothing natural about death. Death is a consequence of sin; it is the fruit of rebelling against God.

As described in the early chapters of Genesis, our first parents were meant to live forever, in perfect harmony with their environment and perfectly loyal to God. As long as they accepted God's sovereignty and faithfully served Him, their joy would know no end. Their obedience, however, was voluntary. Instead of forcing them to do His will, God invited them to do it. He gave them the freedom to accept or reject His love.

Since God was the source of life, they would live as long as they remained connected with Him. If they rejected God, they would lose their connection to life, and eventually they would die.

As the book of Genesis describes it, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die'" (Gen. 2:16, 17, RSV).¹ As these words suggest, death was a natural consequence of sin. It wasn't an arbitrary penalty that God imposed. God wasn't telling Adam what He would do to punish him if he sinned. He was warning him what would happen; in other words, what he was in effect doing to himself.

Centuries later, the apostle Paul makes a similar connection between death and sin. "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

If death is a consequence of sin, and

sin doesn't belong, then death doesn't belong either. It was not part of God's original plan for humanity. According to the Bible, then, death is not our destiny. We are susceptible to death; we are mortal. But we are not meant for death. We were meant to live forever.²

This view of death goes hand in hand with a certain view of life. It means that physical experience is an essential aspect of all our experience. We are fundamentally physical organisms in a physical world. We are not just bodies, of course. But the Bible knows nothing of human experience without a body.

This contradicts some popular views of the future. Many people believe that each person has a physical body and an immortal "soul" or "spirit." The two are connected during our lives, but when death comes, the body dies and the soul or spirit goes on to future experiences.

How the Bible looks at death

The Bible does not support this view, however. It uses the words "soul" and "spirit" quite differently. Consider this important verse in Genesis, as it appears in the most popular English version of the Bible: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7).

The word for "breath" here could also be translated "spirit," and the expression "living soul" could also be translated "living being." According to this text, then, the first human life began when God placed breath in a body he had formed from the earth.

When someone dies, according to the Bible, the opposite happens: "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). At death, then, the person as such ceases to exist. Physical, mental, social, spiritual experience—everything that makes us what we are comes to an end. "The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that

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What Only Believers Can Do

As a church, we do many good things which the world is quite capable of providing (and does) for itself.

Nothing wrong with support groups, disaster relief, health programs, community services, or many other areas of outreach. However, there is one thing that no one but a Christian can do; a service that no one else can provide. We can pray to Jesus for them.

If we believe in the power of prayer, why keep it to ourselves. In our church, we are bold for Jesus by door-knocking our local area to pray for neighboring residents.

We say, "Hi. My name is Dave from the Adventist church. Every week we pray for one of the streets in this area. I'm wondering if there are any specific things which we can pray about for you and your family."

We give each person a "Prayer Promise" card, write down their requests, and promise that we will pray for them on Saturday morning.

The rewards are great! Very few people are rude or even stand-offish. Some are amused, but most are genuinely touched that we would consider their requests and thank us for our interest and commitment to praying for them.

— Pastor David Edgren, Australia

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happens under the sun" (Eccl. 9:5, 6).

As the Bible uses the words, then, neither "soul" nor "spirit" refers to something that could exist apart from the body. The "soul" is the person as a whole, the entire being, body included. And the "spirit" is simply the animating influence that comes from God. It does not exist apart from the body; it is what makes the body alive. So, the body is essential to human life.

As the Bible describes it, a human being is not an incarcerated soul but an animated body. A person is a complex, highly integrated being, but not a combination of a material physical form and an immaterial substance. Because we are inherently physical beings, any future beyond death must include physical existence. And that is exactly what the Bible claims. Life after death begins with the resurrection of the body.

The earliest book in the New Testament describes this event in these words: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have died." "For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:13, 14, 16).

These verses tell us three important things about the life to come.

First of all, it is "eschatological." That is, it begins at the end of time. Until Christ calls them to life, God's people wait in the grave, a condition the Bible sometimes refers to as "sleep" (1 Thess. 4:13). Second, the future life is inherently social. It begins for everyone at the same time. We do not enter heaven one by one as our lives end. The dead along with the living meet Christ together in one glorious reunion. And forevermore their lives are linked to another and to him. Third, the power that raises the dead to live forever is the same power that brought Jesus back to life. Christian hope for the future is thus anchored in

the past. It directly depends on our confidence that Jesus came to life from the dead.

Jesus and death

While it is true of everything that Christians believe, the centrality of Christ is nowhere more important than in the hope for life after death.

The apostle Paul puts it this way: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain" (1 Cor. 15:13, 14).

To paraphrase, if Christ came to life from the dead, then we have everything to hope for, and if he didn't, we have nothing to hope for. Everything depends on the resurrection of Jesus. Not only is this true of the life to come, it is true of life here and now.

And this brings us to a fourth element in the future life.

Although life after death does not begin until the return of Christ, the resurrection life begins as soon as we experience the saving power of Christ. For the apostle Paul, our solidarity with Christ in death and resurrection begins with baptism. Our old life comes to an end, and a new life begins.

We see this idea in passages such as Colossians 2:12, 13: "When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses."

"So if you have been raised with Christ," Paul continues, "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory" (3:1-4).

The resurrection has both future and present dimensions.

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Non-investigative judgments

One of those letters arrived last week. Full force vitriol came from the writer's suppositions that I had stolen a sermon outline from him which he had cited from another minister at a seminar he believed I had attended.

Had I actually stolen or not credited the original author, I might deserve the salvo. Evaluation is a fact of life and every preacher anticipates that the audience will evaluate what they preach. At this moment, you are evaluating the worth of your time to finish this article.

However, the facts may differ from our assumed conclusions. Since I reject plagiarism as well as often borrow from others (hopefully with appropriate source credit), I do not opine on the sin of thievery through uncredited source stealing. Rather, I write of rash assumptions about other's behavior.

About 15 years ago I purchased a series of sermon outlines on faith (the referenced outline among them) from Pastor Rick Warren, who had advertised them for sale as pastoral preaching resources. Note! I paid my own money to purchase what the author advertised. Since then I've ordered and advocated other of his materials and seminars.

Regarding the assumed purloined sermon, I bought it and I used it. No, I didn't preach it verbatim. I adapted the outline, contextualized it for my setting, and utilized it consistent with the reason for which I had purchased it. Perhaps my correspondent "borrowed," without paying royalty, the material he believed I had stolen from him. I had not heard his seminar, nor obtained the material I used from him. I presume he obtained it honorably because he wrote that he had acknowledged Warren's authorship and I believe him. I wish he had "heard" my

JAMES A. CRESS



favorable acknowledgment and promotion of Warren's current *Purpose Driven* titles. He sells excellent church growth resources.

But back to my sermon which I had been requested to present, with less than a week's notice, in order to pinch-hit for our injured pastor who was still recuperating from a serious accident. I was also requested to adapt whatever I would preach to acknowledge America's Memorial Day. While neither short notice or need to acknowledge public holidays is a valid excuse for plagiarism had I actually stolen the materials, it was my reason for adapting an excellent outline for which the author had received royalty plus public acknowledgment.

I abhor plagiarism. I apologized in a recent article for not remembering the source of an idea I had jotted down years ago. If I can discover the author, I will acknowledge my benefactor. We each develop and utilize the ideas of others that we stir our thinking. If you advertise to sell architectural blueprints and I purchase them to construct a new house, who is the craftsman? All claims of total originality rarely persuade.

Many great preachers sell their sermons to assist other churches and to make money. Many of them hire full-time researchers to create the messages they preach and the products they sell.

It is neither my intent nor practice to use the material of others without credit. And in this case, with cash to the author.

However, my guilt was judged without seeking my input. The letter might have been accompanied by some research, if not on the facts, at least for the writer's own soul on topics of evil surmising, gossip, prejudging without asking (we could easily have spoken at the church door), plus the futility for body building of jumping to conclusions.

Finally, the missive suggested the ultimate ethical test. Would I have been embarrassed had the original author been present to hear? Indeed, I would have been comfortable if Rick Warren had heard. I think he may have "borrowed back" some of the adaptations I made to his outline. I hope his organization benefited from my purchase or at least that he took his wife to lunch on the royalties. Later this year I expect to see Rick and discuss this with him, even though I already anticipate his response.

Likewise, I hope my correspondent will re-evaluate his complaints concerning a colleague's integrity. Outstanding talents for ministry, teaching, leadership, and organization would serve God's cause even better if they were tempered with consideration for people. Rather than assuming the worst of a person or situation, the writer could have chosen to assume the best. It really is a choice.

By the way, I expressed my gratitude to my correspondent because he gave me an excellent idea for this article on judging others. So I close this article with credit to him plus the same quote I shared in response: "Remember that you cannot read hearts. You do not know the motives which prompted the actions that to you look wrong."¹ ■

1 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1905), 494.

Ministering

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the grieving, bring hope to the despairing, and encourage the faint of heart. Our power and relevancy is not really found merely in well-articulated doctrinal tenets of theoretical faith but in lives lived to the fullest, motivated by love, and poured out in unselfish service for the humanity about us.

Embracing the world, not worldliness

The desire to maintain relevance does not mean a blindly conforming to the world or irresponsibly accommodating the prevailing philosophies of those I'm trying to reach. But I live in this world, and I cannot escape the reality of this.

Our task is to escape not the secular, but secularism. We simply must embrace the world without embracing its worldliness. We must not attempt the absurd task of syncretism, where some Christians have tried to combine Christianity and secularism.

Sproul is correct when he says, "The root concepts of Christianity cannot be unified with the root concepts of secularism. If we seek to breed them the result will be a grotesque hybrid. It will be sterile, like a mule, powerless to reproduce. If we seek to effect a synthesis between radically conflicting world views, we must inevitably submerge one into the other. The result of such bastardization can be neither Christianity nor secularism. If a Christian buys into secularism his world view is no longer Christian. If a secularist buys into Christianity he is no longer a secularist."⁶

Our relevance must be grounded in the changeless and eternal principles of the revelation of God in the Bible, whose climactic revelation is, of course, the Word made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. The special revelation of God as revealed in Scriptures is our primary source.

In one of his classes, theologian Edward Heppenstall once said, "There is a God, but more than that He is a good God, loving, kind, and merciful. Secondly, He has revealed Himself to me." That simple knowledge and experience is to be our ever-burgeoning starting point.

Are we relevant today as preachers in the modern age of secularism? Do we have that capability? Absolutely! Because human beings still need God as they did from the moment time began.

In spite of our repeated denials and the suppression of our spirituality, we have a need that only God can fulfill. No wonder Augustine said "Thou has created us for thyself and our souls shall not find rest until they have found you." People everywhere still want to know a God they can love and trust. God, their Creator, has written this upon the fiber of our being.

My role, then, as a minister and as a preacher is to present the message of a loving God in word and deed in such a way that people will see His reality and their need of Him and come to Him for the fulfillment of that need.

The relationship between relevance and authenticity

Bringing meaning and relevancy to an unbelieving world demands that I live an exemplary life. There must be no cognitive dissonance or superimposition of non-integratable values. There must be no gap between what I say and what I do. As far as possible, my stated and practiced values should be the same. My life should follow the model of Jesus Christ Himself, as closely as possible. My religion must be authentic, believable, and creditable.

A sermon lived is better than one preached. A sermon is never actually proclaimed unless it is accompanied and authenticated by an authentic Christian life. The fact is that such authenticity or personal integrity has easily as much to do with the perceived relevancy of our proclamation

as a logically and theologically sound presentation of the gospel.

In order to accomplish this, I must jealously guard what Gordon McDonald calls "my inner world" in his book, *Ordering Your Private World*. "There is a great need for this especially among those who engage in the Lord's work. I don't want to have that sinkhole syndrome, where everything in the outside looks good but the inner core is empty, devoid of God's presence. I want to come to the point in my life where the development and maintenance of a strong inner world becomes the most important single function of [my] existence."⁷

Anne Morrow Lindbergh in her book, *The Gift from the Sea*, said it beautifully: "I want first of all . . . to be at peace with myself. I want a singleness of eye, a purity of intention, a central core to my life that will enable me to carry out these obligations and activities as well as I can. I want, in fact, to borrow from the language of the saints—to live 'in grace' as much of the time as possible. I am not using this term in a strictly theological sense. By grace I mean an inner harmony. . . . I am seeking perhaps what Socrates asked for in the prayer from the *Phaedrus* when he said, 'May the outward and inward man be at one.' I would like to achieve a state of inner spiritual grace from which I could function and give as I was meant to in the eye of God."⁸

The power of a Christian life well lived will cause even the most determined atheist to consider the possibility that there may be a God after all, even when he or she cannot be swayed by rational arguments. ■

- 1 Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 4.
- 2 <<http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto2.html>>
- 3 Stanley Knppner quoted in W. James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 159.
- 4 R. C. Sproul, *Lifetimes* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), 38.
- 5 Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 226.
- 6 Sproul, 38.
- 7 Gordon McDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1984), 25.
- 8 Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *The Gift from the Sea* (New York: Pantheon, 1955), 23, 24.

Preaching beyond modernism

continued from page 14

kind of storytelling but introduces a movement where, for example, God, people, and evil play dramatic metaphoric roles.

Narrative preaching beyond modernism is important, because people evaluate their lives not in terms of dogmas or confessions, but in terms of biblical and other stories. Because their own stories have become lifeless, people need an "enactment of the narratives of the biblical text" that can provide "an alternative reality . . . the terrible, life-giving reality of God."

Preaching God's Word gives them "models of alternative imagination." Narrative sermons let us encounter new "truths" that the so-called factual sermons cannot.¹³ Biblical dramas that are not overdramatized can challenge people to become partakers of the sermon and the

meaning, and not mere spectators.

Narrative preaching, however, also has its own problems; for example, we can easily superimpose our own stories on God's story as we churn out our own assumed psychological version of the experiences of the people making up the stories of the Bible.

Conclusion: caring for a corpse?

Preaching needs to move beyond modernism not just for functional reasons.

Modernistic sermons have often portrayed a "gospel" and a "God" that is true neither to the Bible nor to the contexts of people's lives.

Conservatively oriented preachers cannot be criticized when they emphasize the preserving of their tradition; if we lose our historical "pointers" and directives, we drift toward an uncertain future and a merciless postmodernism.

Preaching, however, that does not

move to new territories beyond modernism fails to keep our traditions alive. The result is that tradition becomes a museum piece and we the curators of a lifeless system. ■

- 1 John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 192.
- 2 Bernard Lategan, "The Reception of the Reception Theory in South Africa," in *The Reader and Beyond* (Human Science Research Council, 1992), 5.
- 3 Gerhard van Wyk, *Practical Theological Discourse: Modernism and Beyond* (Practical Theology in South Africa, 1999), 14.86.
- 4 Charles Bradford, "The Imperatives of Preaching," *Ministry*, January 1997, 6.
- 5 Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books), 24.
- 6 See H. J. C. Pieterse, *Verwoording en Prediking* (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1985) 131-136, and John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*.
- 7 E. van Niekerk, *Postmodern Theology* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, Package 2 for STH411-T), 13.
- 8 Webber, 45.
- 9 Wille de Koker, *Evangelisatieteorie en -praktijk in die lig van die paradigmasverandering van modernisme na postmodernisme* (Practical Theology in South Africa, 1998), 5.
- 10 Johan Degenaar, *Deconstruction of Language: The Reader and Beyond* (Pretoria: Human Science Research Council, 1992), 188.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 189.
- 12 Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Teologie as kritiese geloofsverantwoording. Teorievorming in die Sistematiese Teologie* (Pretoria: Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing, 1986), 158-168.
- 13 W. Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Stoned Universe* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 9, 11.

An enemy defeated

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The resurrection of Christ thus provides us a basis for living with confidence here and now. When Christ came to life from the dead, He broke the power of death for all of us. Even though death is still a fearful enemy, it has suffered a mortal blow, and its reign will soon come to an end. As John Donne wrote, "Death, thou shalt die."

Death, a defeated enemy

The notion that death is a "conquered enemy" justifies the complex feelings we have in its presence.

First of all, it honors our revulsion as we look death in the eye. In spite of everything that people have said in recent years to demystify death and treat it as a perfectly normal, natural process with nothing for us to fear, our hearts know better.

Death is horrible. It is the antithesis of life. It brings physical, mental, social,

and spiritual existence to an end. It violates everything that God wants for us. It is an intruder and an enemy. Death is the ultimate fear.

But death does not have the last word. We can face it with confidence and hope, because Jesus fought it and defeated it. He died on the cross and rose from the tomb, and in doing so, he broke the power of death.

So, the great enemy has been conquered. Jesus' resurrection gives us the hope of life everlasting, and it gives us the power to live victoriously here and now. We can experience its death-conquering, life-transforming effects day by day as we await the day when

death will be expelled from God's good world once and for all. ■

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- 1 The Hebrew expression behind these words, literally "dying you shall die," does not mean that death would follow sin instantaneously. It means that once sin occurred, death was inevitable. Sooner or later, life was certain to come to an end.
- 2 The expression "conditional immortality" is sometimes applied to this viewpoint. It expresses the conviction that eternal life was possible for human beings not because they possessed "natural immortality," that is, not because they were inherently immortal, but because they were loyal to God. They would receive life as long as they were connected to the Source of life. In other words, their immortality was conditional on their continued relationship to God.

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From panic to purpose: the process and benefits of planning a preaching calendar

Derek J. Morris



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I still remember my panic as a young preacher. With the early part of each week slipping through my fingers like dry sand, I would be staring at a bulletin deadline: the time my sermon title was due. That meant I had a sermon to write, but didn't even know where to begin.

I can remember browsing through religious periodicals, desperately searching for inspiration. At times, I found myself giving the church secretary a generic sermon title like "The Love of God," hoping for enlightenment later in the week!

How can a preacher avoid this weekly panic attack? Here is one practical suggestion: plan an annual preaching calendar. Most ministers will admit that there are benefits to a preaching calendar, but many don't know where to begin. Here's a simple process (tested in the local church) for developing such an annual calendar.

Step #1

Personally select a group of 12-15 members from your congregation to serve on a Sermon Planning Group. Look for individuals representative of the diversity of your congregation (age, gender, ethnicity, and religious heritage). Give this Sermon Planning Group a 30-day assignment. Ask each member to solicit feedback from family members, neighbors, and friends about topics that would interest them in the coming year. Encourage group members

to develop specific recommendations of sermon series that would connect with the individuals that they have contacted. You will be surprised how seriously individuals take hold of this assignment!

Begin this process four months prior to the beginning of your preaching calendar. This allows adequate time to work through the process and still provide some lead time for the worship teams to plan services at the beginning of the preaching calendar.

It is helpful to change the composition of the Sermon Planning Group annually. This provides opportunity for a broad cross-section of the congregation to participate. It also avoids the criticism that a handful of members are controlling the preaching calendar of the church.

Step #2

Bring your Sermon Planning Group together for a brainstorming session. During this session, listen to reports from your Sermon Planning Group members. Take notes. Writing suggestions on a whiteboard or large notepad helps group members to see emerging patterns.

Several individuals may suggest a series of sermons on a similar theme, or on a particular book of the Bible. Decide together the best format and length for each series. Solicit group feedback regarding titles.¹ By the end of this brainstorming session, you should have a collection of sermon series.

Allow a minimum of four hours for this brainstorming session. You may decide to take the Sermon Planning Group to a retreat center for the day or even for a weekend together. Either way, if you spend a minimum of a full day with your Sermon Planning Group, you should be able to complete a rough draft of your preaching calendar. Adequate time spent doing Step #2 will save time later in the process.

Step #3

Solicit feedback from other pastors on your staff or from key lay leaders. While these individuals may not have participated directly in the group work mentioned above, they are sensitive to the needs of the church family.

Give them an opportunity to review the rough draft of the calendar. Encourage them to make suggestions, either adding to, deleting, or modifying the recommendations of

the Sermon Planning Group. During this third step, you may also determine who will be responsible for each preaching assignment.

Step #4

Go to the mountain. This is a time for you to prayerfully reflect on your proposed preaching assignments. Take the revised draft of the preaching calendar with you, along with any notes from the brainstorming session. Consider the flow from one sermon series to another.

As you look at the bigger picture, you will begin to see what needs have not been addressed.² Make additions, deletions, and modifications, fitting into any liturgical or denominational plans you may need to observe. Then, take a calendar and assign a specific weekend for each sermon.

As part of the preaching calendar, include a proposed sermon title, preaching passage, and preaching idea.³

The benefits

Planning a preaching calendar takes time but the benefits far exceed any such cost.

First, as mentioned, having a preaching calendar helps you to avoid the weekly panic attack that comes from last-minute sermon planning. Beginning the sermon preparation process weeks or even months ahead provides incubation time for you to process ideas.

Once your preaching calendar is complete, you can create a file for each sermon. As you find relevant resources or ideas, drop them into the appropriate file. Then, as you begin your sermon preparation, you will not only know your basic direction but you will also have resources to work with.

Second, a carefully planned preaching calendar helps to ensure balance in the spiritual diet of your congregation, and more life in the delivery of the sermon. The apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that, during his extended time of ministry in Ephesus, he had declared to them

SAMPLE SERMON SERIES "Rejoicing in the Lord"

1. "Two Reasons to Rejoice" (Phil. 1:1-11)
2. "Rejoicing in Adversity" (Phil. 1:12-30)
3. "Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory" (Phil. 2:1-11)
4. "Rejoicing Together" (Phil. 2:12-30)
5. "Rejoicing in Jesus" (Phil. 3:1-4:1)
6. "Always Rejoicing" (Phil. 4:2-23)

"the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, NKJV).

A balanced preaching calendar will include both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and will cover the broad themes of the Bible as well as issues of practical concern for everyday Christian living.

The one-sermon pastor who preaches the same sermon every week with a few minor variations bores the congregation and leaves them spiritually malnourished. A lack of prayerful, intentional planning can also result in myopic preaching preoccupied with chasing after immediate concerns while failing to declare the whole counsel of God. This unplanned preaching is often at the bottom of much of the mediocre preaching that we hear about.

Third, a preaching calendar also enables your worship teams to plan ahead. You may not actually begin to write a specific sermon until the first part of the week, but the worship team assigned to that weekend can plan weeks or even months ahead, designing a worship service around your preaching passage and preaching idea. Even though your preaching idea may be modified, the basic theme will remain the same.

Fourth, with advance notice regarding upcoming sermons, your communications team can provide articles for local newspapers and make postings on your church Web site. You can also encourage church members to plan ahead and invite family members,

neighbors, and friends to an upcoming sermon series.

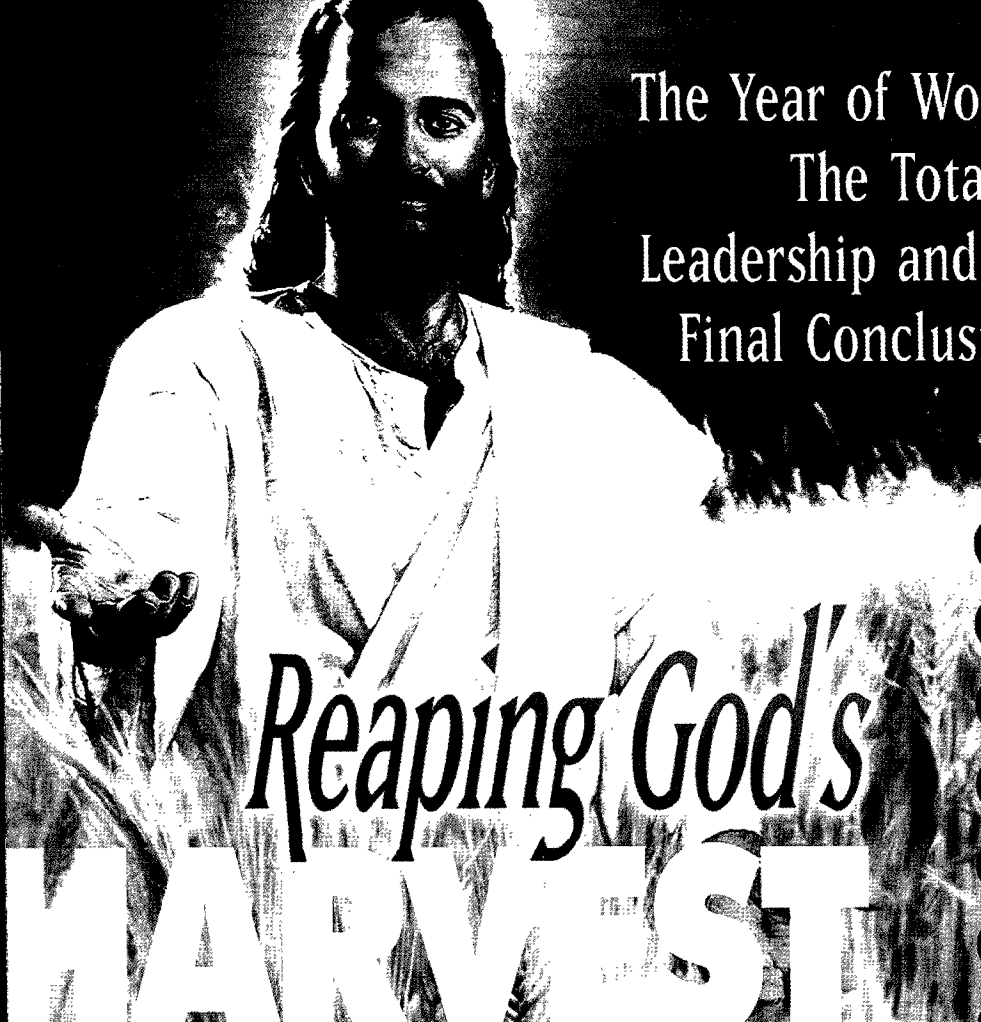
There will inevitably be a few times during the year when your preaching calendar will need to be modified. Events like September 11, 2001, cannot be ignored. Unexpected transitions in the congregation might also necessitate the addition of a sermon not originally scheduled. At times like these, make prayerful adjustments to your preaching calendar. Such changes create a certain amount of disequilibrium, but they are the exception rather than the rule.

Fifth, a carefully planned preaching calendar will give your communications team enough lead time to announce upcoming services and invite people in the community to join your church family for worship. ■

1 My 2002/2003 Sermon Planning Group showed a tremendous amount of creativity. They sensed the need for sermons that connect with everyday life. One four-part series that they suggested was entitled "Christianity in the Marketplace." This sermon series included "Being Christian in the Classroom," "Being Christian in the Care-Giving Professions," "Being Christian in Business," and "Being Christian at Home." For more information on this series, read the article entitled "Start a Sermon Resource Group: Unleashing Your Congregation's Creativity" in the September 2003 issue of *Ministry*.

2 For example, after reviewing the rough draft of my 2002/2003 preaching calendar, I was impressed to follow up an evangelistic series with a three-part series entitled "The Family of God," which included the following topics: "Who Needs Church?" "Why Are There So Many Denominations?" and "Life-Changing Fellowship."

3 For a sample preaching calendar, visit the Calimesa SDA Church Web site at <www.calimesasda.com>. Sermons are also available as audio files or manuscripts.



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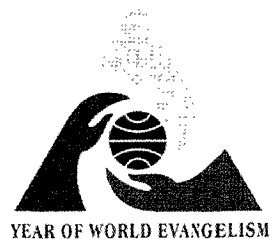
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