

# MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors November 2005



*What's  
new  
about  
the*

# New Covenant?

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COVENANTS, CAUSES, AND CLARITY

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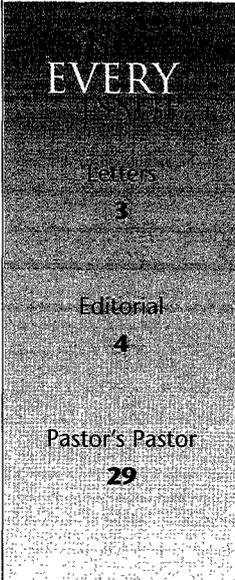
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## OUR READERS RESPOND...

**Earth's Altered Geology and Geography**

The June 2005 *Ministry's* article "In the beginning God. . ." on the creation-evolution dialogue among Seventh-day Adventists, came fresh on the heels of an experience that demonstrates these concerns on the local church level.

In a light moment, before adjourning a recent church business meeting, the subject of CBS's 60 Minutes feature on the discovery of the fossilized remains of miniature humans who were living on the Indonesian island of Flores just a few thousand years ago, came up. It may be that my members' prior knowledge of my studied interest in matters of science and the Bible prompted their queries (the underlying question of some might have been "how are we to understand this?").

My congregation knows from my testimony of God's leading in my life, that while I am not a professional scientist, I have a degree in science with an emphasis in anthropology. I told them that I had begun to prepare a study on the subject—(The title: "The Hobbits—Children of a Lesser God?"). I made several observations that were helpful in my understanding of this remarkable discovery, the essence of which follows:

The Bible reveals that many of the first-generation descendants of Noah apostatized, consulted among themselves and conspired to build a large tower as an act of idolatrous, self-exaltation. As a result of the confusion that God in-

jected into their work, they abandoned it, broke down into small groups and scattered abroad throughout the earth (Gen. 11).

Embedded in the genealogy of Genesis 10 is a fascinating bit of information that speaks volumes with regard to earth's altered geology and geography, changed with the Flood (Gen. 6-9). It states: "To Eber (a late contemporary of Noah) were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided. . ." vs. 25. This is significant because according to Genesis 1:9, there was one great continent before the Flood but not so afterwards.

The word *Peleg* seems to imply a dividing of the earth by water because in the ten instances where *peleg* is used as a common noun, it always involves water. In English, we have the words *archipelago* (a sea having, or dividing, many islands/continents) and *pelagic* (relating to or living in the sea). Therefore, the earth was probably divided by water in Peleg's day.

It stands to reason that for God's command for humans and animals to populate the "whole earth" after the Flood to be doable, the sea level must have been lower for a few centuries so that migration paths were open to what are today's islands and continents (Genesis 9:1, 10). With this we have a picture of our ancestors migrating and exploring soon after the Flood. But human movements throughout a devastated earth that continued to be climatically and seismically unstable had

to have been with peril and great difficulty. Many such endeavors, no doubt, resulted in small survivor groups ending up isolated not only geographically but also genetically.

In the case of the Hobbits (*Homo floresiensis*), and I believe as well of the *Homo erectus* and *Neanderthal* types, there is an observable phenomenon that accounts for their peculiarities and perhaps their demise. It's termed Island speciation (see Ernst Mayr's *Populations, Species, and Evolution*, 1970). This process is precipitated by a small group access to a gene pool that has a richer variety among its members. While many scientists are speculating that the Hobbits evolved from a population of *Homo erectus* that reached Flores some 800,000 years ago, and others remain baffled by this discovery, due to the assumed time difference (*Homo erectus*—1.7 million years ago and the Hobbits—as recent as 13,000 years ago), Ernst Mayr notes several factors that facilitate rapid speciation (change) consistent with a post-Flood chronology: small populations, isolations, open niches (low predation and low competition).

These conditions can result in dwarfing or downsizing, as was the case with the Hobbits because of the limited food supply on the island. When a population remains low, it experiences a higher rate of genetic loss. If this continues generationally, each new individual is less and less diverse, thus less able to adapt or cope with changing conditions.

*continued on page 30*

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# What a relationship! What a God!

Several years before I became a minister, a pastor in New York City called me with a problem. Two of his members were getting married. That was the good news. The bad news—the couple did not have a marriage license, and the wedding was to take place within 36 hours. No license, no marriage. Period.

Unfortunately, the office which issued the needed documents was closed the next day. But the pastor knew that some officials would be in the building. The pastor had a friend, who had a friend, who knew one of the officials.

“Would you be willing to go to the license office,” he asked me, “and try to get a license since I have other commitments which I cannot change?” Though one more “friend” removed, I was the only hope. After several hours of waiting and making appeals to the appropriate officials, the couple and I walked away with the needed document. The wedding took place and the couple went off, I hope, to marital bliss.

In most of the world, in order for a marriage to take place, some form of a legal document is issued. Such documents, however, do not give the couple a good marriage. In all the years my wife, Ruth, and I have been married, I don’t ever recall looking at the marriage certificate to remind me we are married. I don’t think she looks at it for that purpose either. Can you imagine a person saying to the spouse, “Look at what you signed? We’re married and don’t you forget it.”

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER



Documents may define a relationship but do not assure a good one. Nations often sign treaties, but treaties do not guarantee peace. Trust must exist between the parties.

Businesses enter into relationships defined by a contract. But, as the saying goes, some contracts are not worth the paper on which they are written.

Pastors and congregations may have a specific understanding of their relationship, but if a spirit of trust does not exist, then the understanding has no value.

What defines a good relationship? Specifically, how do we define our relationship with God? I am suggesting there are biblical and theological concepts which help us to understand and appreciate how to have good relationships. David, in Psalm 51, and other passages, can teach us about relationships. Let’s look at some of these concepts:

**Accountability and Responsibility:** The Psalmist David was an experienced sinner. Nevertheless, he readily acknowledged his sins to God. In Ps. 32:5 (NIV) he writes:

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.*

At times accountability can be very painful, but it is essential in a healthy relationship. Certainly we cannot have a healthy relationship with God unless we are accountable. This means we do not hide behind that often worthless phrase “If I have done something...” Such a phrase hides the fact that we *have* done something. David does not hide but acknowledges accountability to God.

**Trust:** Those in a relationship have to trust each other. David not only acknowledges his sins, he trusts God to deal with those sins. He uses such expressions as “Cleanse me...” (Ps. 51:7, NIV); “Create in me...” (Ps. 51:10, NIV), showing that he trusts God to deal with the consequences of what he has done.

**Good energy:** Individuals in positive relationships have good energy between them. Good energy? This means there is a good connection and that it is a living relationship, and each has an active interest in the other. God’s interest in us starts even before we know it. David writes,

*From my mother’s womb you have been my God. (Ps. 22:10b, NIV)*

How then do we summarize our relationship with God? We sin; God provides the forgiveness. We cause pain; God provides the healing. We bring a sinful heart; God provides a new heart.

What a relationship! What a God! ■

# What's new about the new covenant?

## Covenants, causes, and clarity

Kwabena Donkor



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**W**hat is the essential nature of the old and new covenants as presented in Scripture? Both theological clarity and a meaningful spiritual experience demand that we clarify the issues surrounding this question. The point has been forcefully made in *Ministry* magazine (February 2004), and the appeal and effort made there for clarity on the subject of covenants is commendable for its timeliness and candidness. This article attempts to contribute to the ongoing clarification of the relationship between the old and new covenants.

In my view, whether we look at the old and new covenants from the perspective of change, transition, or development, the notion of *causality* commends itself as a good instrument to bring clarity to whatever distinctions may be at play with the covenants. The approach I adopt here is a simple one. After a brief explanation of Aristotelian *causes*, I will compare and contrast the scriptural material on the old and new covenants on the basis of these causes.

### Aristotle and the four causes for the covenants

We do not have to agree with Aristotle to recognize the formal, analytical value of his notion of *causes*. Commonly, the word *cause* refers to an event that happens prior to an effect. For Aristotle, the word *cause* meant the need for an *explanation*. He figured that since in all processes

of change entities take on a new form, we can ask certain questions about that change. Indeed, we can ask four basic questions about almost anything; (1) What is it? (2) What is it made of? (3) By what is it made? and (4) For what end is it made?

The responses to these questions correspond to Aristotle's *four causes*, namely (1) the *formal cause*, (2) the *material cause*, (3) the *efficient cause*, and (4) the *final cause*. It is customary to illustrate the four causes with human art as follows: (1) a statue (2) of marble (3) by a sculptor (4) for a decoration.

Applying the four causes to *covenants* to clarify their relationship, we may ask the following questions of the old and new covenants: (1) *formal cause*: what is it? (2) *material cause*: what is it made of? (3) *efficient cause*: by what/who is it made? (4) *final cause*: for what purpose is it made?

Since it is generally agreed that some kind of change occurred in the movement from the old covenant to the new covenant, it is hoped that posing these questions in the light of both covenants will lead to clarity by focusing the exact loci of change and/or continuity.

### 1. The old and new covenants' formal cause: What is it?

Asking about the formal cause of the covenants involves us in an obvious, yet significant, tautology. The old and new covenants are *covenants* and may be distinguished, for example, from *contracts*.

Old and new covenants belong to the same genus. At this level of analysis there is no difference between the old and new covenants. The semantic range of *berit* (covenant) brings under its purview the initial promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 and its subsequent restatements to him, as well as its development in the Mosaic (Ex. 19:4-6; Deut. 26:16-19) and Davidic covenants (2 Sam. 7:16-19; cf 2 Sam. 23:5), the new covenant of Jeremiah (Jer. 31-34), and the everlasting covenants of Isaiah (Isa. 55:3) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 16:60).

In the New Testament, although Paul affirms the continuity of the Abrahamic promise without specifically designating it a *diatheke* (covenant), in Galatians 3:15, 17 he accords the promise the status of a *diatheke*. The significance of understanding the old and new covenants in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament lies in the nature of *diatheke* as *covenant*. It lies in the fact that all of them share in the same essential reality.

## Old/new covenants' material cause: What are they made of?

It is generally agreed that G. E. Mendenhall's classic study of Hittite suzerainty treaties of the Bronze Age (1400-1200 B.C.) throws a lot of light on the biblical idea of covenant. Mendenhall lists six<sup>1</sup> structural elements of Hittite treaty texts that, although they may not all be present in parallel form in any one place in the Old Testament, lie behind the Old Testament understanding of the covenant in a *material* sense.

Therefore, when we ask the question about what the covenants are made of, we are basically addressing these six basic elements of covenant.

Mendenhall identifies these elements as (1) preamble, where a suzerain identifies himself; (2) historical prologue, where the suzerain rehearses his trustworthiness and the call for future obedience; (3) stipulations of obligations of those entering into the covenant; (4) provision for the preservation of a covenant document in the temple and its periodic public reading to make people aware of these obligations; (5) invocation of witnesses; and (6) blessings and curses in the light of obedience and neglect of covenant stipulations respectively.

At this level, we begin to see continuities and discontinuities in the old and new covenants. The preamble and historical prologues speak to the element of *grace* that is widely recognized as present in both the old and new covenants.

Reasoning on the premise of grace for the continuing validity of the Abrahamic promise to New Testament believers, Thomas E. McComiskey notes that "the unity of grace throughout redemptive history is a covenanted unity. It is the promise covenant, the force of which never fails. . . . The unity of grace is expressed in the unending promise covenant. It is a continuing legal entity."<sup>2</sup>

Stipulations in the covenants are by nature, demands, which is what makes sense of the elements of blessings or curses in covenants, depending on one's response to the demands made under the covenant. It is important to keep in

mind that stipulations are an essential and integral part of covenants. Hence to speak of a covenant without stipulations is a contradiction in terms.

However, stipulations are not the basis of the covenant, while they do express the character of life under the covenant. Commenting on the new covenant, McComiskey notes: "Its mode of administration is of incomparably greater glory and grace than the mode of obedience in the old covenant, but it is a *torah* covenant."<sup>3</sup>

The nature of stipulations under the old and new covenants, however, reveals differences and discontinuities between the two. Here we may distinguish general policy stipulations from specific procedural stipulations. It is customary for some scholars to distinguish the following classes of laws in the Old Testament: the moral code (Ten Commandments); the book of covenant (Exod. 21-23); the so-called priestly code (Lev. 1-7); and the holiness code (Lev.17-26).

Given the placement of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17) in the declaration of the covenant (Ex.19), they are understood as *the* stipulations of the covenant relationship,<sup>4</sup> which have continuing validity for both the old and new covenants. We may broadly characterize the moral code as *policy* and the rest of the laws as *procedures*.

Even though some aspects of the procedural laws may have come to an end with respect to specific application, the principles behind them may still be valid. This point will become clearer as we discuss the efficient cause of the covenants.

When it comes to the status of blessings under the old and new covenants, each aspect of the promise in the Abrahamic covenant can be shown, scripturally, to have eternal validity and continuity both temporally and spiritually.<sup>5</sup> For example, the promise of offspring to Abraham runs through Isaac to the scion (offshoot) of David, who Jeremiah saw in the fulfillment of the "righteous Branch" (Jer. 33:20, 21), and Isaiah developed in the servant concept (Isa. 41-53). Paul makes explicit Christological application of these concepts to the new covenant

(Rom. 4:13-18; 9:6-8; Gal. 3:7, 23-29), and Peter (Acts 3:25, 26).

## Old/new covenants' efficient cause: By what are they made?

At this point of our study, we are asking of both the old and the new covenants, what makes them do well when it comes to what they are supposed to do? What makes them tick?

Without getting ahead of ourselves to consider the final cause of covenants, we know from Mendenhall's discussion that at their root, covenants seek to promote a healthy relationship between a lord and his vassal. In biblical covenants we have in view God-human relations.

How did the old covenant facilitate this relation? What administrative aspects of the old covenant, if any, endure in the new covenant? How may we evaluate the relative efficacy of both covenants?

We have seen that the principal difference between the old and new covenants lies neither in the preamble and prologue (both covenants are based on grace), nor in the blessings that are promised (they both have continuing temporal and spiritual validity). The distinction between the old and new covenants *with regard to their efficacy* must be sought in the area of stipulations.

To promote healthy covenant life, the old covenant had as its instruments laws (both policy and procedural), priests, and sacrifices. Under the complex administration of these instruments, the spiritual and temporal health of the covenant relationship was to be preserved based on the free motivation and response of the individual in obedience. *The complex administration of these instruments was the efficient cause of the old covenant.*

It is of critical importance to keep in correct perspective the place and "ministry of law" in the administration of the old covenant. As Dyrness correctly observes, "the law shows the people what conduct accords with its place as God's particular possession. The giving of the law initially with the covenant is a revelation before it is an instruction. . . . Israel does not keep the law in order

to become God's people, but because they already are."<sup>6</sup>

The old covenant, however, has given way to the new. It is a better covenant (Heb. 8:6); it is new, making the old obsolete (Heb. 8:13).

But what is new? Does the newness consist in doing away with law *per se*? If so, then it ceases to be a biblical covenant. Does the newness consist in the abrogation of the moral law, the Ten Commandments? Certainly not (Rom. 7:12, 14).

Does the newness consist in the annulment of procedural laws? Yes, such as ritual and levirate marriage laws, but definitely not the aspects of those laws, such as dietary laws, that in *principle* are consistent with the preservation of a healthy spiritual and temporal covenantal relation between God and human (final cause).

So what is the efficient cause of the new covenant in promoting a newer, better, and ultimate temporal and spiritual covenantal health between God and the human being? What is new and better and ultimate about the new covenant is *the new provision for the obedience of God's people*.

"The newness manifests itself in the perfect realization of God's original plan;"<sup>7</sup> that is, the obedience that preserves the covenant relation. In this connection, it is important to keep in mind that the new covenant was given against the background of the peoples' failure to obey under the old covenant (Jer. 31:32-33).

But how is the *new provision for obedience* administered? Again, McComiskey is helpful: "The administration of obedience is effected by the placing of the law within the heart and by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit."<sup>8</sup> *The role of the Spirit in the heart is the essential efficient cause of the new covenant*. The Spirit now gives the enablement necessary for obedience; He internalizes, universalizes and immediately mediates the knowledge and obedience of God (Jer. 31:33, 34).

First Peter 1:2 is instructive. Peter writes concerning believers that they are "chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience

to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood." The same point receives pivotal emphasis in Paul's theology (Rom. 8:1-4 (RSV); 2 Cor. 3:4-18).

### Old/new covenants' final cause: For what purpose are they made?

In this final stage in our analysis we wish to understand why God extends blessings to humans through His grace, and within the framework of stipulations. We are looking for the underlying reason for everything we have discussed so far.

Is there any difference on this point between the old and new covenants? It is significant that on this issue both covenants share the same goal, namely, God's express desire to have an intimate relationship with humans. This goal is recognized as the *heart and soul* of the covenant.<sup>9</sup>

Earlier the promise was that God would be a God to Abraham's offspring (Gen. 17:7, 8; Exod. 29:45), but in other occurrences the element *you will be My people* is added (Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:28). The significance of the commonality of the final cause for both covenants underlines the point

made earlier about the eternal and universal nature of biblical covenants.

### Conclusion

Our analysis of the old and new covenants from the perspective of Aristotle's causes reveals the following: First, both covenants are more similar than usually thought. Second, the critical difference between them is not fundamentally in their juridical demands; rather, the difference is in the administration of essentially similar demands under the aegis of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant.

Finally, this analysis helps us to see the role of stipulations as subservient to the overriding goal of covenants without denying their validity. ■

1 See William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 114, 115.

2 Thomas E. McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 141, 142.

3 *Ibid.*, 165.

4 Dyrness, 131.

5 McComiskey, 15-93.

6 Dyrness, 130.

7 McComiskey, 168.

8 *Ibid.*, 162.

9 *Ibid.*, 57.

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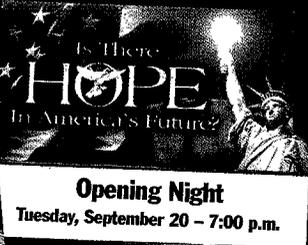




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# The inexplicable unexplained: another look at evil

Clifford Goldstein



Clifford Goldstein is the editor of *The Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, published by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

In 1927, Thornton Wilder wrote *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, a book about a bridge that broke and killed five Peruvians in July 1714. The story centers around a Franciscan priest, Father Juniper, who—convinced that nothing in God’s universe happens by accident—determined to study the lives of the five to show the providence and wisdom of God, even amid tragedy.

“It seemed to Brother Juniper that it was high time for theology to take its place among the exact sciences and he long intended putting it there.”<sup>1</sup>

Father Juniper was doing what theologians for centuries have done, and that is to try and establish a theodicy, to show the justice and goodness of God despite evil and suffering. To borrow the words from Alexander Pope, he was seeking to “vindicate the ways of God to man”<sup>2</sup> or (from John Milton) to “assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to man.”<sup>3</sup> Scripture, too, touches on the theme, such as when David asks the Lord for forgiveness in order that “you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge” (Ps. 51:4).

The great controversy motif is, meanwhile, also a theodicy. “Evil must be permitted to come to maturity,” wrote Ellen White. “For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages Satan must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the im-

mutability of His law might forever be placed beyond all question.”<sup>4</sup>

Central to my understanding of theodicy, of the vindication of the character of God despite human suffering, is the idea that all our questions about evil will be answered with the kind of certainty and finality found in algebra or geometry. I always believed we would get definitive answers that would explain, with perfect logic and clarity, every instance of evil anyone ever faced.

Now, though, I’m not so sure. Maybe all these things won’t be answered because, given the nature of evil itself, they *can’t* be. Maybe we’ve been looking for explanations about what is, essentially, inexplicable.

## To explain is to justify

What incited this shift in thinking was a line in Susan Neiman’s *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*. Though the section itself was about Karl Marx, and the line (“A theodicy justifies the happiness of the powerful and the suffering of the powerless”<sup>5</sup>) was in the context of economics and class warfare, the sentiment immediately made me think of Ellen White’s statements: “It is impossible to so explain the origin of sin as to give a reason for its existence. . . . Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it, is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin.”<sup>6</sup>

Though her words deal with the *origin* of sin and evil, doesn’t the principle still apply? Can evil be excused any more than can sin, the foundation of evil? Would not explaining evil, like sin, be to excuse or justify it?

Imagine this: A woman gets to heaven. After an explanation has been given for all the evil she suffered, she replies, “Oh, Jesus, yes, now I know why my 16-year-old daughter was raped and murdered before my eyes. It makes perfect sense. Thank You so much for explaining it all!”

Or someone else, “Oh, yes, Lord, now I understand why my whole family was machined gunned in the war. How sensible and clear! I wouldn’t have had it any other way now that I know why.”

That’s obscene. Yet what other choice exists if we assume, as I always did, that a reason and rationale must be behind all evil? If everything is to be answered, then everything must be answerable, explicable, even justifiable.

Did God arrange for three thousand specific individuals to be together in order to die on September 11? Either He did, and it was all

part of His providence, or there was no rationale, reason, or justification for the tragedy. The second alternative seems easier to accept, and more plausible, than the first.

Does this position imply, then, that God doesn't have an explanation for all evil? Yes. If something is, by definition, inexplicable, then it can't be explained, period. If God can explain it, then it's not inexplicable—and are we limiting God by the assertion that the inexplicable can't exist in His universe? Omnipotence doesn't mean the ability to do what's logically impossible, and if something is by nature inexplicable, then even God can't explain it.

### Theodicy

Fair enough, but does God not give that woman whose daughter was raped, or the person whose family was machine gunned, or the one who lost a spouse in 9/11 answers? Are they just left with nothing? What kind of theodicy is that?

The key is found (I believe) in the definition of "theodicy." Theodicy means the justification of *God*, not the justification of *evil*, a crucial distinction. Sin and evil won't be justified; God will, and central to that explanation is the Cross. Only under the overwhelming reality of Christ crucified, of the Creator in human flesh suffering with suffering humanity, can we begin to understand how God could stand vindicated in the eyes of all the universe, including the part that has suffered so greatly from sin and evil.

Ellen White, in the context of the great controversy ended, gets to the heart of the answer: "Never will it be forgotten that He whose power created and upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space, the Beloved of God, the Majesty of heaven, He whom cherub and shining seraph delighted to adore—humbled himself to uplift fallen man; that He bore the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father's face, till the woes of a lost world broke His heart and crushed out His life on Calvary's cross. That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe."<sup>7</sup>

Notice, "the woes of a lost world" crushed out the life of the "Maker of all worlds." Isaiah, talking about the Cross, says that Jesus bore "our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4). The Hebrew word translated "griefs" (*holi*) is "sickness, disease," while the word translated "sorrow" (*makov*) is "pain, physical pain, mental pain." Whose pain, whose sickness, disease, and woe did He bear at the Cross? The whole world's, of course. Thus, what we know only as individuals, our *own* pain, our *own* sickness, our *own* woe, He carried in Himself corporately.

These implications are crucial to theodicy. One of the notes to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* reads, "My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside."<sup>8</sup> In other words, human pain is within a closed circle, known only to each individual sufferer. No one can feel anyone else's pain; we know only our own, and never anyone else's.

## ALL THINGS WORKING FOR GOOD DOESN'T MEAN THAT ALL THINGS ARE GOOD. DOES IT?

The woman whose daughter was raped, the person whose family was machine gunned (not to mention the daughter or the family), or the three thousand killed in 9/11—all of them suffered no more than an individual could suffer. Though we're stunned by the sheer numbers in calamities, each victim's pain is uniquely his or her own, as if only he or she died. More so, each one's pain is always hemmed in by the limits of individual humanity.

At the Cross, though, the woes of a lost and fallen world, the sickness, disease, pain, and suffering—all of it!—fell *at once* on the Christ, which meant that He has suffered more than any single human being ever has or could. Who can accuse God of indifference to, or being

distant from, our pain when He knows it more acutely than any of us because He has experienced it more than all of us?

Albert Camus (of all people!) wrote, "Christ came to solve two problems, evil and death, which are precisely the problems that preoccupy the rebel. His solution consisted, first, in experiencing them. The god-man suffers, too—with patience. Evil and death can no longer be entirely imputed to Him since He suffers and dies."<sup>9</sup> Camus got it almost right. "[S]ince He suffers and dies *worse than any human being could ever suffer or die*" would have been the better answer.

### The Job slant

A key element is found in the book of Job. Remember the ending? God didn't give Job a long explanation about why his property was destroyed, or why his children were killed, or why his body erupted in boils. Instead, the Lord gave Job a glimpse of Himself as Creator ("Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . Canst thou bind the

sweet influences of the Pleiades? . . . Hast thou given the horse strength?"), and that revelation was enough for Job, even amid such personal calamity, to exclaim, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

In contrast, after the Second Coming, we will have not just a glimpse but a clear view of God (1 Cor. 13:12), and we will see Him as Creator—and Redeemer. Hovering above every human tragedy will be the eternal reality of Jesus, "the Maker of all worlds," having suffered Himself corporately what we know only as individuals. Perhaps in light of the Cross, which puts everything in a new perspective, we won't ache for answers as we do now. Maybe the love of God will be so apparent and overwhelming

when seen through an unobstructed view of Calvary that His goodness and mercy will be thoroughly understood even when every instance of evil isn't.

But what about such texts as "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28)? Or, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12)? Or what about these lines: "All the perplexities of life's experience will then be made plain. Where to us have appeared only confusion and disappointment, broken purposes and thwarted plans, will be seen a grand, overruling, victorious purpose, a divine harmony."<sup>10</sup>

What are we saying? That all evil will be explained, or justified? Sure, God can bring good out of evil, and behind all the bitterness and suffering God is working out His plans—in the most just and merciful way possible—to end the era of sin. But these promises are not the same as asserting that every evil will be explained, or that there was a good and rational reason for every evil. All things working for good doesn't mean that all things are good; it means only that God can bring good out of all things.

To know as we are known doesn't mean to know the unknowable; to see a "grand, overruling victorious purpose" isn't the same as having every incident of pain and suffering and injustice thoroughly parsed and explicated. We can expect to see one day the overriding goodness of God revealed through His solution to sin and evil. That isn't the same as having the purpose, reason, and rationale for every instance of that sin and evil explained as if somehow they were crucial components of God's overarching plan. In some cases, such as the Cross, they might be; but that isn't the same as saying that, in all cases, they must be.

The one who coined the word *theodicy*, Gottfried Leibniz, once described the earth as "the best of all possible worlds" (a notion that left him open to the vicious mocking of Voltaire). Leibniz, though, was close. Instead, he should have written that this is the "best of all possible *fallen* worlds" in that, despite the ravages of

the Fall, God has done all that was possible to end sin and suffering in a just and merciful way. And the heart of that solution is the Cross.

### Conclusion

How often I would ask, in the face of one tragedy or another, *Why, God? What possible reason exists for this? What purpose is served?* But now I have found it liberating to realize that, perhaps, I was asking the wrong questions. Maybe I was looking for what can't be found; there is no explanation for the inexplicable. And, I might add, it's a great relief to stop looking for it too.

Also, how often in the face of calamity people try to justify horror. *My child's sickness has made me more compassionate, or God allowed my wife to die in order to make me spend more time on my knees . . . and so forth.* Positive things can result from tragedy, but how cost-effective is having a child get sick, or even die, in order to make a parent more compassionate or to pray more? Somehow, I don't think God works that way.

All I can do with evil, which so often makes no sense, is go back to the Cross, which tells me—even in the face of unrequited tragedy—that God loves the world. And there, clinging to that cross, and all that it represents, I get the

courage and faith to trust God despite things that, like Job, make us cry out in an anguish made worse when we seek explanations for what is, in the end, inexplicable.

Father Juniper, after years of delving into the lives of the dead, came up with no rational explanation for the tragedy. He could see no purpose served by those five deaths on the bridge of San Luis Rey. For his trouble, the priest was hauled before the Inquisition, which condemned him to death. As he sat in jail, waiting to be burnt at the stake, he tried "to seek in his own life the pattern that escaped him in the five others"<sup>11</sup> and found nothing. ■

- 1 Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1998), 7.
- 2 Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man and Other Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 46.
- 3 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: W W Norton Company, 1975), 9.
- 4 Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943), 499.
- 5 Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 105.
- 6 White, 492, 493.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 651.
- 8 T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1967), cf. 412, 54.
- 9 Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (Tr. Anthony Bonner) (New York: Knopf, 1956), 32.
- 10 White, *Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 305.
- 11 Wilder, 1, 116.

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# The way that we love

Ever since Jesus answered the question, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:25-37) with a story, Christians have been challenged to reexamine the ways we treat each other, as well as how we treat others who live in our communities.

I don't have to remind you that in Jesus' time there was no such thing as a "good Samaritan." The very idea that Jesus would elevate a Samaritan to hero status (over a priest and a Levite, no less) was a scandalous notion for those who heard Christ's parable for the first time.

And in the centuries since that story was told, few of us find it challenging to do the right thing to people who are like us. The challenge for most of us is to respect those who are unlike us. Yet Jesus' mandate is unequivocal: "Love your enemies and pray for them who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:44, 45, NRSV). The passage concludes with this clear imperative: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (verse 48).

Evidently perfection, as Christ defined it, has something to do with how well we love others--even those we think undeserving of our love.

Not long ago in a sermon I quoted Tony Campolo, in which he had to admit that often when people think of evangelical Christians they use words like, "bigot," "homophobe," "male chauvinist," and "reactionary." While the words typically used to describe Jesus are, "caring," "understanding," "forgiving," "kind," "empathetic."

After the service, as I greeted the worshippers, a woman asked me, "What do we say to them, then? What do we do?"

STEVEN CHAVEZ



"What do we say to whom?" I asked.

"To homosexuals," she replied. "What do we say to them?"

I answered with a couple questions of my own: "What would Jesus say? What would Jesus do?"

The disciples one day, noticing a blind man, asked Jesus what they thought was a profound and enlightened question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2, NIV).

Isn't that typical? In a world where there's so much evil, in our futile attempts to make sense of it all, one of our first impulses is to try to lay blame, to make someone responsible for the situation.

Jesus' response was both a rebuke and a challenge to that type of blame-gaming. He said simply, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned . . . this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3, NIV).

Let's be honest: we have little or no control over much of what goes on in society. The lack of morals and values, the senseless violence, the mindless entertainment, the outrageous hedonism and materialism, all indicate a society in decline.

Yet nothing can prevent us from displaying God's love to the people with

whom our lives intersect. Jesus' mandate to His disciples in the upper room was never more necessary than it is now: "I give you new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34, 35, NRSV). We aren't called to *change* one another, we're called simply to *love* one another.

The Samaritan was a neighbor to the traveler on the Jericho Road because he helped someone who most certainly would not have helped him if the situation had been reversed. He was a neighbor because he took risks that not even the priest and Levite were willing to take. He was a neighbor because he helped a fellow human being without regard to age, ethnicity, religious preference, sexual orientation, or lifestyle.

"Christ is waiting with longing desire for a manifestation of Himself in His church," wrote a provocative Christian writer. "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come and claim them as His own" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69).

Christ's character is reflected in our understanding of the Bible's teachings. But it is primarily revealed in the way we demonstrate His unconditional love to our neighbors, however we define the word. ■

*Steven Chavez is managing editor of the Adventist Review.*

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# Integrity: an action, not an option

Teena M. Stewart



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“S orry I’m unable to take your call right now, but if you leave your name and number after the beep, I’ll get back to you as soon as I can.” The pastor’s cheerful telephone voice chaffed Bob, one of the church members, like sandpaper.

“Sure you will!” Bob said, slamming the phone into the receiver. It was the third time he had tried to connect with the pastor, and the two previous messages had gone unreturned, despite what the pastor’s message promised.

Bob no longer had faith in his pastor’s promises, and he would make certain to tell everyone else exactly what he thought of him.

D. L. Moody<sup>1</sup> once said, “Character is what you are in the dark.” Christians are charged with the responsibility of being the light of the world even when we think people are not watching. Integrity should shine like a steady, dependable inner light, illuminating all we do.

Little incidents, such as failing to return a phone call or breaking a promise we haven’t viewed as a promise, are often insignificant to us, but they say volumes about our integrity, or lack thereof. Integrity in ministry includes being responsible, being gracious and understanding, and being good stewards.

## Being responsible

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 is an illuminating example of the essential nature of integrity. A master assigned each of

three servants the responsibility of minding some of his resources while he was away. Two of the servants invested these resources to make more, while the third chose to bury his “talent.” When the master returned, he commended the first two for their integrity. “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”

The most obvious verity in this story is that we should use the gifts God has given us to serve Him. Doing this increases their value.

But the parable exposes at least one other verity, and it has to do with the responsibility and honesty that come with being in charge. It holds leaders accountable. In her book *Jesus CEO*, Laurie Beth Jones<sup>2</sup> tells of a professional woman who taught her fellow employees to assume everyone they met felt only goodwill towards them. Though many would say this woman was naive and asking for trouble, her habit of assuming the best of people immediately put people’s intentions in a positive light.

In a sense God assumed only the best in us when He temporarily left the room and put us in charge. He expects us to behave in exactly the same way as we would if He were physically standing with us. He desires to see this good behavior in even the most insignificant areas of service. Perhaps the example of the lesser talent the master distributed to the servant in this story actually represents the seemingly light matters we oversee.

In Jesus’ day, it was customary to show in some way that you earnestly meant to keep a promise. Jesus may have noticed that people were misusing this system by looking for loopholes. He challenged his followers to “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no,’ ‘no’” (Matt. 5:33), reasoning that if someone truly had integrity, their word was good enough. People trust or mistrust us partially on our reputation for following through. If we habitually promise to do something and then don’t deliver, our character comes into question and people will eventually stop trusting us.

Some believe that a promise is a promise only when they use the specific words *I promise*. But Jesus’ lesson teaches that even if we don’t use the words *I promise*, we still need to follow through when we say we will do something; otherwise, we are breaking a promise.

A few individuals have found creative ways to skirt around giving an answer when asked to respond or act on something. They rationalize that if they don’t say they will do something, they can’t be blamed for breaking a commitment.

# Available?

**A**s a health care provider I travel occasionally to different cities for seminars. Many times I will stay in a hotel and call the local church to request information about the morning worship services. I dread this process because it is so hard to get in contact with anyone at many of the churches. I do crave fellowship during the hours of the worship day.

Recently I had a sad experience. After calling six churches that evening, all I was able to get was answering machines in which I left messages to call my room. No one returned my call that evening! The next morning I called each church a few more times with no results. Ok! I had to keep calling. As I phoned over and over only one of the other five churches answered—and by now it was mid-morning. They gave the information I needed, and I proceeded to the church.

That day turned out to be a very great experience because not only was the worship experience an inspiration,

but the family took me home for the noon meal and an afternoon of spirit-filled conversation. Since then that family and I have become very close.

However, the lack of communication with the availability of today's technology is, in my opinion, unacceptable. After discussing this problem with other church members and a retired pastor and his wife, we all seem to agree that the pastor and/or a willing leader should be accessible 24/7. Church member emergencies, people drawn by the Holy Spirit to desire fellowship, and, of course, the weary traveler like me, need to have contact with God's local representative—the church.

Here are some suggestions that may help:

1. The church and/or the pastor should have a cellular telephone on 24/7 (with a live person answering!) dedicated for incoming calls, such as:
  - a. Church member emergencies
  - b. Church business
  - c. New contacts
  - d. Travelers/visitors

2. Each church should have a web site with the basic information about the church including:
  - a. Telephone contact information
  - b. Map including directions
  - c. A picture of the church and the pastor
3. The telephone book should include:
  - a. Telephone contact information
  - b. Internet address
  - c. Street address

For the pastor who needs a rest or is on vacation, there are many retired, dedicated members who would feel it a privilege to serve their Lord by answering the cell phone.

There are more people than you think wishing to fellowship with your church. Let's be there for them.

May the Lord bless you by being more available for His sheep!

---

*Steven A King, DC  
Health care provider and member/leader for a church in California*

This approach can, and often does, cause frustration and confusion, leading people to either misinterpret their silence for a "yes," and later be disappointed, or to interpret the lack of answer as callousness and insensitivity. It is better to say "no" and change your mind, later following through, than to say "yes" because it is what someone wants to hear, and then let them down.

## Being gracious

A church created a new "hospitality host" position in addition to their regular greeters. Hosts were assigned the job of greeting and directing individuals to specific locations. They did not hand out printed programs as did the regular greeters. The associate pastor stationed the new hosts at various places in the foyer, but a month after implementing the new position, he noted that hosts remained unused and unnoticed by at-

tendees. They were standing around with little to do. The pastor decided to phase out the position and asked the ministry director to contact the hospitality hosts and see if they would consider becoming regular greeters. Things went relatively well until she called a man whom we'll call Henry; he was one of the senior church members. Henry seethed, telling her exactly what he thought about the revisions to the new system. She hung up the phone reeling from the tongue-lashing. Her first response was to think that Henry was old and set in his ways. After the ministry director had time to ponder the conversation, she understood why Henry reacted as he did. Henry used a walker even while being a hospitality host. To be a greeter, he would have to precariously balance, hand on walker, while handing out programs. She called Henry back and offered him a new position as seminar table host. It involved

helping people sign up for classes. He could either sit or stand behind the table. He was skeptical but agreed to try. Before long it was obvious that he loved his new position as table host, cheerfully giving out information while using the table for balance.

Leadership and criticism go hand in hand, so expect to be criticized. Those with integrity learn to sift through criticisms to find truth. They apply that truth and make needed improvements.

## Being a good steward

"Jesus told His disciples, 'There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer'' (Luke 16:1, 2).

Overseeing our resources and the resources of others is called steward-

ship, and good stewardship exhibits integrity. It starts with the basics such as fiscal stewardship. Responsible stewards avoid using their organization's resources for personal use (think copy machines, paper goods, and office supplies). They carefully monitor how they spend company money and follow company policy regarding expenditures. This may include filling out paperwork to get approval *before* spending, even if they hate paperwork and systems, and writing off business expenses and lunches only when the expenses and lunches are directly related to their business. Responsible stewards also check to see what resources are available before spending, and they research the best prices to save their organization money.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Eccl. 9:10). Stewardship also encompasses time management. Good

stewards are productive and concentrate energy and attentions on fruit-producing endeavors. They prioritize activities and responsibilities, focusing on the most important ones first. They evaluate the effectiveness of their labors, restructuring when necessary. They recognize that flexibility, rather than rigidity, can help them get the job done and are willing to try plan B when plan A isn't working. They aim for perfection but avoid perfectionism (one of the biggest time wasters), adopting a "good enough" philosophy instead of frittering away the hours trying to fine-tune.

### Conclusion

Those of us who serve as ministers are being watched. It comes with the responsibility. If we continually strive for higher marks, we will be less prone to disappoint those who look up to us. God placed us in leadership positions because He felt He could entrust us with responsibility. When we do our best, we reflect the integrity

of the most spotless and irreproachable leader of all, Jesus Christ.

Little things like returning phone calls and meeting deadlines may seem insignificant, but every action we take or fail to take affects someone else and makes an impression on them. As someone once wisely said, "Christianity is often more 'caught' than 'taught.'"

You can't turn integrity on or off at will. You either have it, or you don't. It isn't an option. It's more of an action that reveals who you are by what you do. How do you handle even the smallest matters, even when people aren't watching? ■

1 William R. Moody, *D. L. Moody* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1930), 503  
2 Lon Beth Jones, *Jesus, CEO Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 268.

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# Hudson Taylor: the man God shaped for China

Ed Gallagher

**2005** marks the 100th anniversary of the death of Hudson Taylor, missionary to China and one of the most influential carriers of the Gospel since the days of the apostles.

If the call to mission depended on human judgment, Hudson Taylor would never have made it.

As a boy in Yorkshire, England, Hudson's health was so delicate that his parents sent him to school for only two years. When he was a young adult, a missionary returning from China took one look at him and exclaimed, "Why, you would never do for China."<sup>1</sup> People meeting him for the first time found it hard to believe that this slender, quiet, unassuming man could possibly be an international missionary leader.

Fortunately, Taylor did not view his calling as a human one. "It is God who has called me." When Taylor arrived in China in the 1850s, there was one Protestant Christian for every one million people. Fifty years later, estimates place the ratio as one Protestant Christian for every two thousand people. Not all of this is attributable to Taylor's influence, of course—but a good portion of it is. By 1900, the organization Taylor founded was responsible for eight hundred missionaries in China, one-third of the entire Protestant force. The effort had become multinational, involving financial support and missionaries from the Brit-

ish Isles, the European continent, North America, and the South Pacific.

Taylor took on the challenge of preaching Christ to one-quarter of the world's population and saw the power of the Holy Spirit move in a way rarely witnessed since the days of the first-century Christians.

## The discipline of trial

No part of Taylor's success came easily. If a dominant thread appears in his personal history, it is *struggle*. Consider the location of his ministry and its time period. There were places in China characterized by beauty, peacefulness, and a richness of culture, but the nation generally was beset by local wars and international tensions. Extortion, pillaging, and torture were common. In some places women were little more than property to be beaten into submission. Diseases were rampant, and medical care, primitive. Summer heat could be oppressive, while winter cold seeped misery into houses that could not be warmed.

Opium addiction, slavery, poverty, and famine proliferated. Travel was erratic and dangerous, and foreign visitors such as Taylor and his missionaries were typically forbidden, feared, or hated. For Taylor, sorrow over the misery that surrounded him was compounded by organizational challenges. The England-based society that sponsored him in the early years had worthy intentions, but it came into debt and grew unreliable in its support.

At the same time, rapidly changing conditions clashed with the difficulty of international communication. Mail by ship between England and China took months for delivery and months again for response. Even then, the home committee in the early years was inclined to delay its response. These circumstances "cost him many a wakeful night as well as many a prayer."<sup>2</sup>

Then there was the deepest struggle—in the heart, mind, and body of Hudson Taylor. Like his Lord, he became a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He was introspective, often lonely, frequently ill, and sometimes depressed.<sup>3</sup>

His wife Maria died when she was 33. Four of their eight children died before reaching age 10. He endured extended separations from his other children and from his second wife, Jennie. Often he was incapacitated with illness or injury. As an elderly man, he absorbed the news that under the Boxer Rebellion, 58 of his missionaries had been killed, along with 21 of their children and 30,000 Chinese Christians.<sup>4</sup> And less than a year before his own demise at age 73, his beloved Jennie died.



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## The shape of character

What shaped the character of this man whom history lists with names like Carey, Judson, Moffat, Livingstone, and Schweitzer as leading the missionary endeavor in modern times?

As a child, Hudson expressed a desire for China—probably reflecting what he heard from his father about the need for the gospel in that land. But by age 17 he became rebellious and unbelieving. “He found it very weary work to try to keep up the outward forms of Christian life.”<sup>5</sup> His sister Amelia—age 13—decided to pray for him three times a day until he was really converted. Then his mother went on a trip. At home, Hudson wandered into his father’s library, where his eyes fell on a gospel tract.

“There will be a story at the commencement and a sermon or moral at the close,” he said to himself. “I will take the former and leave the latter for those who like it.” At that same time, his mother, 70 or 80 miles away, was secluded in prayer. She resolved not to cease until her pleas for her boy’s salvation were answered. As Taylor himself tells it, “Hour after hour that dear mother pleaded, until at length she could pray no longer, but was constrained to praise God for that which His Spirit taught her had already been accomplished, the conversion of her only son.”<sup>6</sup>

In his father’s study, Hudson was fascinated with a phrase in the tract—“the finished work of Christ.” “What was finished?” he asked himself. And then it struck him. Finished was *redemption* for the world and for himself. “And with this dawned the joyful conviction,” he wrote years later, “as light was flashed into my soul by the Holy Spirit, that there was nothing in the world to be done but to fall down on one’s knees and, accepting this Saviour and His salvation, praise Him for evermore.”<sup>7</sup>

Two weeks later his mother returned. As he met her at the door, he said he had some glad news. “I know, my boy,” she responded. She had already received the news from a higher source. “It would be strange indeed,” concluded Taylor, “if I were not a believer in the power of prayer.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus prayer empowered Hudson Taylor. “The Power of Prayer” is the title of

the first chapter of his autobiography.<sup>9</sup> We can read barely a page of his life story without being reminded that prayer was the lifeblood of his ministry and the medium that poured heaven’s grace into horrendous circumstances. His testimony is unequivocal: We “move man by God through prayer alone.”<sup>10</sup>

## The discipline of sacrifice

For Taylor, the practice of prayer walked hand in hand with the discipline of sacrifice. Shortly after his conversion, he realized a certain call to go to China. So, while other 18-year-olds were focused on their own enjoyment, Hudson devoted himself to learn a language of China—with no teacher but only the Gospel of Luke in the Mandarin dialect.

# TAYLOR’S STORY REPRESENTS REAL-LIFE VICTORY FASHIONED IN THE DUST AND TURMOIL OF DAILY DEMANDS.

At 19, he worked as a medical assistant and tithed his meager income, whittling his list of essentials to the minimum. He rented a room, 12 by 12 feet, in a wretched place called “Drainside,” named for a ditch running through it into which refuse was dumped. There he looked out for the people among whom he lived. “The less I spent on myself,” he said, “and the more I gave to others, the fuller of happiness and blessing did my soul become.”<sup>11</sup>

No doubt it was the Holy Spirit who impressed him that simplicity must be learned in order to survive the challenge of China. At one period of his service in China he shared a room above an incense shop in a crowded quarter, a room into which he had to climb through an opening in the floor. His bed was a few boards, his table the lid of a box supported on two stacks of books, and the other furniture nothing more than a couple of bamboo stools and a bamboo easy chair.

Time after time, the sacrifice of life itself seemed imminent. Descriptions like this tell

the story: “The man who first seized Mr. Burdon soon afterward left him for me, and became my principal tormentor; for I was neither so tall nor so strong as my friend, and was therefore less able to resist him. He all but knocked me down again and again, seized me by the hair, took hold of my collar so as to almost choke me, and grasped my arms and shoulders, making them black and blue. . . .

“Once or twice a quarrel arose as to how we should be dealt with; the more mild of our conductors saying that we ought to be taken to the magistrate’s office, but others wishing to kill us at once without appeal to any authority. Our minds were kept in perfect peace; and when thrown together on one of these occasions, we reminded each other

that the apostles rejoiced that they were counted *worthy* to suffer in the cause of Christ. . . . Oh, the long, weary streets that we were dragged through! I thought they would never end.”<sup>12</sup>

## A revolution in missionary method

When Hudson Taylor arrived in China he was a misfit with the missionary establishment. He was shabbily dressed, poorly supported, unordained, and associated with no particular denomination.

In keeping with his independent thinking, Taylor adopted a philosophy of mission service that was radical then, and to some might be radical now. He believed that the “foreign air” imparted by missionaries seriously hindered the progress of Truth.

“And why should such a foreign aspect be given to Christianity? The Word of God does not require it; nor, I conceive, could sound reason justify it. It is not the denationalization but the Christianization of this people that we seek.

We wish to see Chinese Christians raised up—men and women truly Christian, but withal truly Chinese in every sense of the word. We wish to see churches of such believers presided over by pastors and officers of their own countrymen, worshipping God in the land of their fathers, in their own tongue, and in edifices of a thoroughly native style of architecture. . . . Let us in everything not sinful become Chinese, that we may by all means 'save some.' "13

Painstakingly and against frequent discouragement, Taylor learned the major Chinese dialects. With a new organization that he founded—The China Inland Mission—he made a significant decision to focus on the interior provinces, where few foreigners ventured. He welcomed large numbers of women into his teams, including single women—an action that startled many in the missionary establishment.

Medical work became his primary entering wedge. Medicine was not an end in itself, but a method by which contact for Christ could be made—and one that could dramatically turn the tide of opposition.<sup>14</sup> Gospel literature accompanied treatment; preaching was interspersed with care. This two-pronged approach proved its worth over and over again.

No stance was more controversial than that of adopting Chinese dress and hairstyle. This Taylor did, not merely for missionary excursions, but as a way of life—though at first he was practically alone in his convictions about this. The benefit was immediate. This foreigner was now less frightening to those he was trying to reach, and he would even be invited into private homes.

### Victory through trust

Clearly, the highest value for Taylor was that of trust in God, who can always be counted on. *Ebenezer* ("Hitherto hath the Lord helped us") and *Jehovah Jireh* ("The Lord will provide") became his watchwords.

Through his entire ministry, Taylor's trust was tested in regard to financial support. Inspired by George Müller, he decided to avoid debt like the plague, and to make no appeal for funds except to God Himself. He was not averse to de-

scribing a need, but he resolutely let God inspire the giving—and saw the blessing, with unexpected finances coming when most needed. "Money wrongly placed and money given from wrong motives are both to be greatly dreaded," he said. "Depend upon it, God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies."<sup>15</sup> One time he noted, "We have twenty-five cents—and all the promises of God."<sup>16</sup>

Trust found its test also in his own spiritual development. To his mother he confided in his adulthood, "I cannot tell you how I am buffeted sometimes by temptation. I never knew how bad a heart I had. Often I am tempted to think that one so full of sin cannot be a child of God at all; but I try to throw it back, and rejoice all the more in the preciousness of Jesus, and in the riches of that grace that has made us 'accepted in the beloved.' "<sup>17</sup>

At the lowest point a few years before his death, he received the news of martyrdom among missionaries and converts. His response is a profound testimony: "I cannot read, I cannot think; I cannot even pray; but I can trust."<sup>18</sup>

Taylor's triumph was never a theoretical victory poised half a mile above the earth but always a real-life victory fashioned in the dust and turmoil of daily demands. "Pray for me," he wrote on one occasion. "I sometimes feel a sense of responsibility that is quite oppressive—the only light-bearer among so many. But this is wrong. It is Jesus who is to shine in me."<sup>19</sup> ■

<sup>1</sup>Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *J Hudson Taylor: A Biography* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 24.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, *A Biography*, 73.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>4</sup>Roger Steer, in *Christian History* XV (1996) 4-18, 31; and Taylor, *A Biography*, 351, 352.

<sup>5</sup>Taylor, *A Biography*, 5.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 6, 7.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>9</sup>J Hudson Taylor, *Hudson Taylor* (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House Publishers, n.d.)

<sup>10</sup>Taylor, *A Biography*, 29.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>12</sup>Taylor, *Hudson Taylor*, 89, 70.

<sup>13</sup>Taylor, *A Biography*, 71.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 88, 89, 283.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 212.

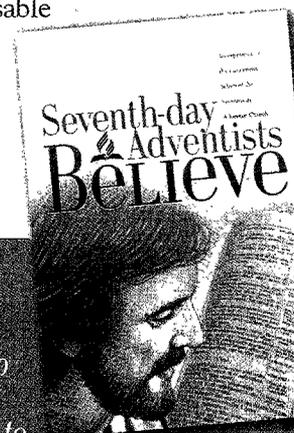
<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

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# Doing theology in mission

## Part I

Jon L. Dybdahl



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**M**ission and theology go together. True theology should move us to mission, and mission rightly practiced should lead to theology. However, while Paul undoubtedly had a theology before his Gentile mission, his theology, as reflected in the epistles, undoubtedly arose out of his mission commission and his experience of proclaiming the gospel. His entire written theology and a large part of his proclaimed theology were birthed by his gospel proclamation.

The risen Christ's final words to His disciples are about mission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19, RSV). Later, the same Christ revealed Himself to Paul, who says that this appearance came "in order that I [Paul] might preach him among the Gentiles" (Gal. 1:16). The disciples and Paul were called by Christ to pursue a mission, not to create a theology. In the process of doing mission, they were led to do theology. Their theologies were explanations of the gospel to the particular context they addressed in their evangelism. The basic facts of the gospel were the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. How these facts were proclaimed depended on the culture of the hearers. All theology arises out of such a context.<sup>1</sup>

For us, the same process should happen. We have the gospel core (Scripture), and we go on mission to share that with others. For this sharing to take place, we must hear their beliefs (i.e., context) and speak in a way that makes the gos-

pel understandable. Context interacts with the gospel (Scripture) in the process of mission, and the result is theology.

A problem comes when proponents of a theology developed in one context begin to think their particular theology is supra-cultural and is normative for other contexts. A person or group is so enamored with their way of framing the gospel that they begin to believe that all should explain things as *they* do. They absolutize their theology and consider it timeless. Such actions impede mission completion. While it is helpful to learn the content of Luther's and Wesley's theology, it is—in most cases—of more value to learn how they *did* theology and follow that process in our current mission.

The study of theology should at its core include learning to practice the theological process. Past theologies can furnish examples and be instructive but are not necessarily normative for today. Adventist theology has arisen in a particular context in the process of following a mission. That was right and proper. This has produced, I would argue, a very good theology. But I believe that we have (rightly) made a major readjustment in our mission. This readjustment in mission means we face a new context and thus require new theologies. I am not suggesting we forfeit core scriptural beliefs or abandon Bible principles. What I do believe is that explanations of and reasons for belief must be re-examined. Our theological framework should be thought through as well as the emphasis and priority we give certain elements of our belief. Basic assumptions may need overhaul.

In 1990, when then Adventist church President Neal Wilson began to talk about a global strategy initiative, which later became Global Mission, I think few realized what it all meant.<sup>2</sup> I suggest it was a major turning point. It signaled a refocusing of Adventist mission. This strategy moved away from past initiatives, which had emphasized numbers of baptisms, and began to talk about planting churches among million-population segments where there was presently no church. It authorized the formation of study centers to further evangelism among the various non-Christian world religions. It set up a new structure to ensure these goals. Through God's grace and the support of the church, this initiative has had a far-reaching impact.

This new mission is in the process of giving rise to a revised theology. A prime example is the new statement of belief, "Growing in Christ," voted at the recent church session at St. Louis. The impetus for this new statement arose directly

from a mission issues committee set up to deal with the theological questions arising out of the pursuance of global mission. This process must continue. We must pursue with even more zeal our God-ordained mission and with vision do theology as we go.

What I propose in this article are some insights that can help us do this task of mission and theology more efficiently so that God can be glorified and the mission fulfilled. I suggest, first of all, the viewpoint/worldview or consciousness that should undergird and will foster this endeavor. Secondly, I propose that we consider very seriously the new context in which we find ourselves, the new mode with which we need to pursue our mission, and the new identity all of this may imply.

### Developing a missiological consciousness

In order to rightly proceed with the task of doing theology in the context of our refocused mission, we need to understand a basic outlook that underlies that endeavor.<sup>3</sup>

A convenient way to understand this issue is to define worldview and consciousness. According to anthropologist/missiologist Paul Hiebert, "a world view provides people with their basic assumptions about reality."<sup>4</sup> Such assumptions are usually unconscious or only vaguely understood. In the course of time other words with similar meaning have come into use. One of these is "consciousness." Missiologist Harvie Conn uses this word to refer to an aspect of worldview that relates to the human understanding of religion and the role of God and science.<sup>5</sup> By "consciousness" Conn and this writer understand that the term refers to a view of life and God, and in particular the way we see ourselves, others, and God (or the Bible) functioning. Consciousness by this definition is not some New-Age idea about "higher consciousness," but a term describing the foundational concepts and attitudes that shape our lives and especially our views of God and belief. Let me briefly describe five types of consciousness.

Each consciousness has elements of truth in it. Often people move from one

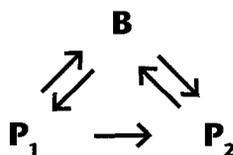
consciousness to another in the order I describe them, but this is not always so. Many times people understand intellectually a certain type of consciousness but do not practice it, while some choose to live deliberately or unknowingly using a different type of consciousness. Consciousness level is not related to intelligence and may or may not indicate spirituality.

**Self-consciousness.** In self-consciousness, the world centers on me. This could also be called *ego consciousness*. I recognize myself, and though eventually I recognize others, they are useful only as they help or serve me. Children begin here, and, unfortunately, without proper training and a knowledge of God, many continue living at this consciousness long after childhood. This stage can be diagrammed simply as

**P<sub>1</sub>**

P (for person) stands alone and is the basic determiner of understanding. Although quite self-centered, this consciousness is important to self-identity and is psychologically a key part of life.

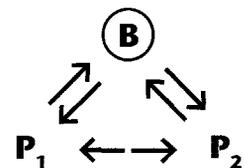
**Other consciousness.** When a person seriously takes into account other people, other consciousness arrives. The "other" could also include God as He reveals himself in the Bible. Ideally for a Christian these two go together. A person recognizes God's love and authority and learns that they should love other persons. This act of taking God and other people seriously is a change of consciousness. Other consciousness (for a Christian) can be diagrammed in this way:



To the P<sub>1</sub> (person standing alone) have been added P<sub>2</sub> (other persons) and B (the Bible, God's Word). The Bible is pictured as above because it is an authority to be followed. P<sub>1</sub> assumes the Bible speaks more or less directly to him/her (and other people as well), and they are to obey. The person is told to love the

other and share God's Word. They assume that they can pass on God's Word directly to others. They (P<sub>1</sub>) also assume that when others (P<sub>2</sub>) listen to the Bible, they (P<sub>2</sub>) hear from it exactly what they (P<sub>1</sub>) have themselves heard. The one-way arrows signify mainly one-way, non-dialogic communication.

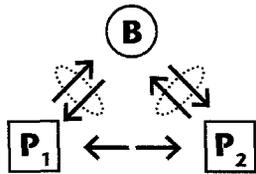
**Historical consciousness.** Historical consciousness comes with Christian education, either informal or formal. People discover that the Bible was written in a different language from their own, at a different historical time, and within a different cultural context. Missionaries, teachers, and pastors share historical consciousness with believers as a means of helping them apply the Bible and answer their questions about its content. Historical consciousness deals with issues such as why most Christians today are not obligated to dress as Jesus and the apostles did and to greet one another with a "holy kiss" (1 Thess. 5:26). Historical consciousness can be diagrammed like this:



The circle around B (Bible) means that it is now seen to be in a particular cultural/historical context. The two-way arrows between P<sub>1</sub>/P<sub>2</sub> and the Bible signify dialogue. While the Bible still is authority, it must now be interpreted. Both P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> dialogue with it, seeking to find reasons and principles behind specific instruction. P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub>, however, still understand themselves as being without cultural baggage. P<sub>1</sub> assumes that if P<sub>2</sub> is honest, he or she will see the same thing in the Bible as P<sub>1</sub> does.

**Theological consciousness.** The fourth consciousness, theological consciousness, recognizes that P<sub>1</sub> is also living, experiencing, and seeing within a culture. This means that the very way she/he looks at the Bible is affected by their background, language, nationality, and history. The movement to live at theological consciousness is difficult because the human heart naturally sees

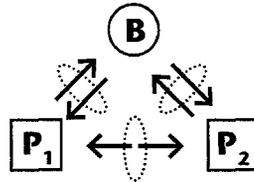
its own understanding as valid, clear, and unbiased. While it is easy to see others as culturally conditioned, to see oneself that way demands special grace! Theological consciousness can be diagrammed as such:



The boxes around both  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  signify that  $P_1$  recognizes that their culture affects the interpretation of what the Bible says. The ellipses through which the two-way dialogue arrows pass represent filters.  $P_1$  recognizes that they view Scripture through a filter. Culture is the filter. Note, however, that both  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  have squares around them. Their cultures are assumed to be similar. Because they are both human, the cultural differences between them are not seen as significant.

**Missiological consciousness.** The final kind of consciousness builds on the earlier consciousness types. The term *missiological consciousness* is used because in this step  $P_1$  recognizes that  $P_2$  is truly different, and the same dialogue and same filter that are in place between  $P_1$  and the Bible should be between  $P_1$

and  $P_2$ —regardless of whether  $P_2$  is a nonbeliever or a fellow believer. Cultural difference is as important (or even perhaps more important) for true communication between  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  as belief difference. Missiological consciousness can be diagrammed thus:



The same dialogue arrows and filters that were used in biblical interpretation are now in place between  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ . The Bible maintains its authority. Both  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  have equal access to the Bible. After seeking to discover God's will in Scripture, while recognizing their own biases, they are now prepared to communicate as equals. They understand clearly that their vision of truth and reality has been affected by who they are.

Remember that the type of consciousness exhibited by a person has little or nothing to do with intellect or commitment. Many who operate at other consciousness or historical consciousness are more committed to God than some believers who live at theological consciousness or missiological consciousness. Types of consciousness deal only with

understanding and mode of action. However, people at theological consciousness and missiological consciousness will usually be more effective as cross-cultural missionaries and evangelists than those who manifest other consciousness or historical consciousness.

### Consciousness change

How does change of consciousness level take place? Level of consciousness does *not* mean spiritual condition or intelligence. It has simply to do with understanding—and hopefully action—in one area of life. It is important, however, because Christians have been given the mandate to share God's message with the whole world. Other-consciousness people can effectively share with their own culture but can be disastrous as cross-cultural missionaries. Consciousness is also crucial to unity and understanding in a world church. The more developed the consciousness level (provided earlier consciousness lessons are not forgotten!), the more biblically and lovingly Christians can relate to both fellow believers and unbelievers of other cultures.

The movement from self-consciousness to other-consciousness comes through conversion. Persons living for self come to recognize themselves as children of God, with Jesus as Lord. Evangelism facilitates this change. Some people, who are under the authority of the wrong "other" (false gods/religions), also need a conversion from that false god to the true one.

The movement from other consciousness to historical consciousness usually comes through religious education. Some educated people already understand this step at their conversion from self-consciousness. They come to other-consciousness and historical consciousness at roughly the same time. However, the majority of people develop an understanding of historical consciousness and at least practice it to some degree as a result of study. In-depth religious education and especially theological education usually assume and/or teach historical consciousness.

The movement from historical consciousness to theological consciousness

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and missiological consciousness is problematic. Theological consciousness and missiological consciousness require a clear recognition that one's own way of seeing things is incomplete and biased by culture. Some things I may see well, but on other issues even "uneducated

that is theological consciousness. The realization that those with different cultural perspectives have valuable original insights and must be taken seriously can lead to greater self-understanding.

I still vividly remember how Asian friends and colleagues taught me how to

## NEW CONTEXT, NEW MODE, NEW IDENTITY. NOW THAT'S A CHALLENGE!

people" may have insights that have escaped me. More than likely that realization will call into question some of my cherished viewpoints. Throughout this process of discovery, people are moved out of their comfort zone. It is one thing to admit in historical consciousness that the Bible is culturally contextualized, but it comes a lot closer to home when, in theological consciousness and missiological consciousness, I see the same in myself! Could parts of the Bible that I have ignored because of my culture actually teach important concepts I have been missing? These ideas are not easy to come to terms with! They require not simply a change of consciousness but a humility of heart that is a gift of God.

For a number of years I worked at the Institute of World Mission, helping prepare Seventh-day Adventist missionaries for cross-cultural service. Although it is not stated as such, we have a threefold aim for our intensive training. First, we examine and affirm the call to mission. Second, we confirm and strengthen basic Christian commitment (other consciousness). Third, we attempt to move people to theological consciousness and missiological consciousness. Most who come to us (and in fact a majority in the church) operate at historical consciousness.

How do we go about bringing this change in understanding? We have found that teaching sensitivity to and communication with another culture—missiological consciousness—often leads to the "aha" experience of self-understanding

deal with differences. My direct western approach was not effective in Asia. My understanding was that the key issue was honesty, which, to my western way of thinking, implied directness. They schooled me to see that love and harmony were central and that indirectness was a much better way. Honesty did not necessarily mean directness and confrontation. I saw not only what they did in a new light, but I saw my own culture in a changed way. I even became convinced that in most cases their method worked better and was more biblical than mine.

Realizing my missionary bias, I nonetheless believe that one of the best ways to come to theological consciousness and missiological consciousness is to actually live in another culture. Being forced to learn a new language and incarnate oneself into another setting gives a kind of shock treatment that can be conducive to the revolution in this thinking. ■

*Part 2 in the January issue*

<sup>1</sup>Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 49-53.

<sup>2</sup>"World Report," *Adventist Review*, January 11, 1990, 22.

<sup>3</sup>The rest of this section is based heavily on Jon Dybbah's "Culture and Biblical Understanding," in *Women in Ministry*, ed. N. Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998), 418-22 and 426-28.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1976), 371.

Sharvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 46-50, 88.

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# Ministry lessons from war

Bruce Manners



Bruce Manners is senior pastor of the Avondale College Church, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

When rifleman Burton Eccles came under fire during World War I, he reported heavy casualties and a bombardment punctuated by “the cries of wounded men.” According to Eccles, “Four men had their heads blown off. Then—thank the Lord—our artillery [answered].” Eccles survived.<sup>1</sup> Serving at the front line brought with it the constant threat of death and a sharpening of focus on life and the sometimes harsh and hard realities of faith.

Eccles’s story is one account from Richard Schweitzer’s recent study of Christian faith among English and United States soldiers during World War I, *The Cross and the Trenches*. It’s a welcome addition to understanding human response to war. His work also brings lessons for ministry that are remarkably current and important for us, considering the role and influence of chaplains in the front lines today.

## A complex calling

Ministry is a complex calling; it often demands that practitioners take on a variety of roles that may appear to be outside ministry. During the war, chaplains were expected to provide religion *and* recreation, which created some confusion. Anglican chaplain Geoffrey Gordon explained: “Mr. God or M[onsieur] Cinema—for which does the chaplain stand? Does the soldier think of his Padre in the main as the representative of God, or chiefly as the

provider of canteens, cinemas and creature comforts?”

Gordon admitted that if a chaplain maintained only a spiritual role, he would come into contact with a limited number of men. To know the battalion as a whole, he would have to “throw himself into a number of minor activities, and run the risk of getting but rarely on to a higher spiritual level.”<sup>2</sup> A chaplain “has to be the comrade of all, friend of the weary, helper of the weak, and light-bringer in the dark hour,” wrote Lauchlan MacLean Watt. Watt catalogued what other duties the chaplains were called on to perform: from running errands, censoring letters, and serving as stretcher bearers or hospital orderlies. They spoke to senior officers as equals on some matters, and often acted as mediators between officers and enlisted men. They also wrote letters to the families of those killed.<sup>3</sup>

But they also had to be careful that their spiritual role was not diminished. Roman Catholic chaplain G. L. Smith recognized that a “good chaplain” worked for the welfare of his men in whatever way he could, including their recreations and their comforts. “But this is not his principle duty, and if there is any conflict between the claims of these different interests he must attend first to the spiritual.” Charles Doudney, an Anglican chaplain, agreed: “Certainly we do try to help in the writing of letters and in concerts and the games, but this is apart from our real work, which is to deliver the message of the other world.”<sup>4</sup>

Developing priorities is essential for effective ministry.

## Present truth

Christianity has always had a message for the times. The challenge of preaching is to make the Christian message attractive and meaningful to listeners in their time and place. When Edward Flottman heard the preaching of a “soldier priest,” Lieutenant Blackman, who later became a chaplain, he wrote, “His sermons simply radiate with . . . Christian thought such as attracts the young man of today.”<sup>5</sup> Blackman made the Christian message real.

E. S. Curr, however, had a different report of a service after his battalion’s “first calamity in the Somme battle.” Some 150 soldiers turned up to a hastily called voluntary religious service. The troops had been through a “shattering experience” and knew they’d go back for a “second dose.”

Though not “habitual churchgoers,” these soldiers wanted to be “assured that all was well with their mates, and reassured that all would be well with them in what lay ahead.” Curr saw this

as “a chance in a million for a Clergyman” to give a simple service: “an attempt at a hymn, a brief straight talk, and all would have gone away glad.” Instead, he witnessed a “strange Service” mainly memorable for the “ineptitude of the Chaplain,” who “blathered” on for nearly 20 minutes about the various meanings of some Greek word or another. Curr and his mates “walked away feeling irritated and cheated.” He said: “It was as if we had gone to a Church, opened the door, stepped inside, and found it bare and empty—there was nothing there.”<sup>6</sup>

### Community

Though ministers may perform a different role to others within our church(es) and our communities, we’re fellow pilgrims. As such, only as we journey with others can we be better ministers for them. During World War I, any chaplain who stayed away from the front lines in relatively safe zones was perceived as “an inauthentic coward, an unworthy messenger of God.”

G. A. Studdert Kennedy offered this advice to a newly arrived chaplain, Theodore Hardy: “The Devil tries to get at you by telling you that you could really do no good in the line, and that you were more use alive than dead. It was the Devil and a lie—the more Padres died in battle doing Christ-like deeds, the better for the Church.” Hardy later won a Victoria Cross, Britain’s highest honour for valor in the face of fire. He wrote that serving in the line was the “key to the whole thing. Work in the front line and [the soldiers] will listen to you. If you stay back, you are wasting your time. Men will forgive anything but a lack of courage.”<sup>7</sup>

J. R. Skirth reported a different attitude shown while waiting for an “alfresco Holy Communion service.” A German plane appeared overhead followed by the sound of incoming artillery rounds. “[During the shelling] those two priests, dressed in the cloth which advertised their faith, had fled at the first inklings of personal danger to themselves! They, God’s agents on earth, of the church into which I . . . had been baptised and confirmed, had considered the safety of their skins more important than the spiritual health of my soul. . . . At the very approach of danger, their

faith was so slender, their trust in God so feeble they scuffled away like rabbits into their burrows!”<sup>8</sup>

Chaplain Evers demonstrated an authentic approach to ministry when he spent an hour and a half before a battle encouraging the men to put their lives into God’s keeping before “we [underscore “we”] went over the top at 3:10 a.m.”<sup>9</sup> Effective ministry is preformed not only in preparing people for the battle but in being at their side while they fight their battle, whatever that may be.

### Faith that works

As witnessed in the immediate aftermath of terrorist attacks on the United States and the temporary increase in church attendance, tragedy can cause a religious response, but it tends to be short lasting. A faith that lasts is based on more than emotional response. The strongest faith has the head and the heart working in tandem.

There was an expectation during World War I of a revival among the troops, particularly those serving in the front lines. Some chaplains attempted to take advantage of the situation and encouraged revivals—more negatively called “wind-up religion”—but they were unsuccessful. It’s true there was often “a temporary emotional flight to religion that usually occurred on the eve of battle or during bombardments.” John L. Golob wrote that under shell fire, soldiers “who had never thought of prayers, got to wondering why they had never before thought of God and said a sneaking sort of prayer to Him.”<sup>10</sup>

Some soldiers did find religion while fighting at the front,<sup>11</sup> but it appears that, overall, those who had faith maintained it if they survived the war, while those who had no faith continued to lack it. The war increased fear but not lasting faith.

Change most often occurred among those who had a casual or lapsed faith, which intensified on the eve of battle or during periods of danger. Some of these soldiers carried their revived faith into the postwar world.<sup>12</sup>

Credibility was also lost when chaplains assumed too much. The belief that God is on “our side” is a case in point. This belief appears to be widespread.

When Ernest Heckroth, an American enlisted man, came across a belt buckle engraved with *Gott mit uns* (“God with us” in German), he found the thought disorienting because he had assumed that God “was with us,”<sup>13</sup> (“us” being, of course, the Americans).

A. J. Abraham summed up well the problem with this belief, and the problem the chaplains faced: “[The chaplain] would ask God to look after us and biff the enemy, while only a few miles away an equally worthy, or unworthy, German priest was no doubt asking God to do for them all the things that our man was requesting for us. . . . Surely we were putting God in an impossible situation.”<sup>14</sup>

That doesn’t mean prayers from either side were wrong, but they must come out of an understanding that God is bigger than our personal desire and national aspirations. Leaps in logic lead to loss of credibility.

When emotions are raw and running high, promoting a credible faith is as important as it is in the everyday. And it proves to be more lasting.

We pastors—as chaplains to troops in the final World War—can learn from those who have gone before. I doubt we need convincing of the complexity of ministry or that we need a message that fits our times. But we do need to remember we are fellow pilgrims, and we must have the wisdom that appeals to both the heart and the head. Most importantly we need to help people understand a truth discovered by Harold Jones, a soldier at the front line. He wrote, “Am relying on God to bring me through. He is a [person’s] only hope in this terrible business.” 

1 Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt Among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 37.

2 *Ibid.*, 72.

3 *Ibid.*, 65.

4 *Ibid.*, 72.

5 *Ibid.*, 42.

6 *Ibid.*, 186.

7 *Ibid.*, 167.

8 *Ibid.*, 207.

9 *Ibid.*, 131.

10 *Ibid.*, 187.

11 *Ibid.*, 262.

12 *Ibid.*, 260.

13 *Ibid.*, 203.

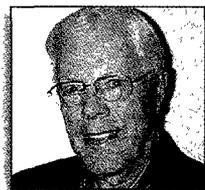
14 *Ibid.*

# Retirement: an unfinished ministry?

**Myrna Tetz and  
Cliff Sorensen**



*Myrna Tetz was involved in editorial work before retirement. She is married to Bob Tetz who pastored churches in Canada and Maryland. They live in Durham, North Carolina.*



*Cliff Sorensen, Ph.D., a retiree, ministered in the area of education including college presidency as well as church leadership. He and his wife, Betty, live in Lynden, Washington.*

**H**is life companion died. As a pastor and wife team, they had ministered together in the local area churches for more than 25 years in addition to several overseas assignments. During her last two years, when her body suffered severe discomfort as a consequence of disease, he lovingly cooked the meals, cleaned the house, and tenderly cared for all her needs. Their children were especially committed to their devoted mother and provided every necessity.

The family was warmly received and cherished by their parishioner friends both in theirs and other countries because of a faithful and unselfish dedication to the ministry of service as they shared, by example, the love of God. As a result of their ministry new churches were established in numerous church areas.

Circumstances required the memorial service to take place some weeks following the passing of the pastor's wife. As is customary, relatives and friends were invited to the memorial service held in the same city where together they had served and blessed so many. A former minister colleague and his wife, also retired, delivered a message of comfort and promise. The sons told of their mother's parenting dedication and of her unusual gift of hospitality, and her talented daughters and grandchildren rendered musical selections dedicating them to this remarkable mother and grandmother.

Although the service was beautiful and comforting, no one from the local denominational

headquarters came to acknowledge the lifetime of ministry and service of this consecrated wife or to express condolences and bring comfort to a grieving pastor and colleague. No sympathy cards, no flowers, no contact. No phone calls, no visits, no letters of support from personnel at the church headquarters during the entire duration of her illness or following her death. Although this pastor's well-being did not depend on sympathy or compassion from his immediate superiors, a wound, even though unintentionally inflicted, results in feelings of exclusion and of the frightening possibility that as a pastor/shepherd *I am no longer of worth, and I no longer matter.*

Recently a pastor and his wife visited several retired pastor-friends and fondly reminisced about their times together at camp meeting, youth camp, and their respective ministries. Then the conversation turned to their relationship with the current personnel at headquarters.

"What do you hear from the leaders of this area?"

"They don't know we exist," the local retired pastor explained. "We don't hear a thing."

"Don't you receive the weekly communication to pastors with news items about what's happening here?" the friends asked.

"No."

"Don't you receive invitations to the pastors' meetings?"

"No."

The retired visiting pastor was tempted to ask, but refrained because the question was already answered, "Don't the local area leaders call and visit you occasionally?"

These answers not only correlated with the conversations of other retirees under similar circumstances but seemed to corroborate and affirm the experience of a pastor who recently retired from the ministry and moved to another locality. He doesn't hear from his current office staff either. Even after writing to them and offering his services as an interim pastor as need might arise (he had been well-loved everywhere he ministered), a very short, curt reply advised him that there was no prospect of their capitalizing on his experience and willingness to become involved. The unfeeling response seemed devoid of even a casual interest.

Denominational leaders are conscientious individuals who never purposefully overlook a valued coworker. But communication had failed on several levels, and the question must be asked and answered, "How can similar tragedies be avoided in the future?"

The challenge of recognizing the importance of retired workers resides in the church environment and also in businesses. For instance, in an article on the front page of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 1, 2005, titled "Older workers not a valued commodity," Pamela Gaynor reported that "When Howard Bruschi decided three years ago to retire as Westinghouse Electric Corp's chief technology officer, the company wasted no time bringing him back as a part-time consultant."

Continuing the report, Gaynor explained that by establishing consulting relationships or creating more novel programs, companies are "coming up with ways to retain older workers, . . . We're going from this notion of the older worker who has outlived his usefulness to the to the other end of the spectrum where they're [starting to be viewed as] extremely valuable."

### Withdrawal syndrome

When pastors retire they often go through a wrenching withdrawal syndrome. One day they experience deep and significant involvement capitalizing on their leadership abilities, they speak publicly on a weekly basis, visit members of the congregation, and have people come to them who are anxious for their counsel and attention. Overnight everything changes—in the twinkling of an

eye they no longer experience the joy of being needed or even feeling valued.

While evaluating this sudden distancing that often occurs following retirement, several questions have surfaced. How could this harmful, hurtful experience be avoided? When people are employed for a lifetime (sometimes fifty years and more) and have given the best years of their lives in service to the church and its members, would not an investment of a continuing relationship pay rich dividends for the church if the following suggestions (and there are others) were initiated?

1. Give retirees invitations to pastors' gatherings, both locally and at denominational headquarters.
2. Place them on the mailing list for weekly updates from the local office.
3. Honor them by an occasional visit from the leaders at the local headquarters.
4. Ask them to have occasional assignments during pastoral gatherings and other public occasions.
5. Feature retired personnel in the local church paper with a tribute to their years of service (rather than featuring them only after they have died!).

6. Assignment, by the local pastor, of these retirees to visit homebound church members.
7. Assign the ministry for retired pastors to a local leader from the office. This would include counseling them regarding their relationship with the local pastor and church. All churches are undoubtedly stronger and better when it practices the Scriptural injunction to do as Christ would do and nurture one another.
8. Organize a group of retired denominational workers as consultants along with leaders from headquarters to discuss ways to incorporate and perhaps retain retired denominational employees in meaningful, productive relationships.

Does it not seem reasonable to assume that ministers and others who retire still have a deep interest and desire to hear about their church and to minister in any way possible, and would they not appreciate some attention from and involvement with former colleagues and leaders? Maybe with some thought and prayer these individuals could be a great asset to the local church and the denominational headquarters. We often talk about being members of a family—if we truly are family, this relationship endures for a lifetime. Never does a time come when not all of God's children are invited to the table.

### Communication directives

Because communication has changed from just a weekly or biweekly letter between family and friends, co-workers and leaders, to short messages via e-mail multitudinous times a month, leadership personnel might also use this method, as well as actual letters, for communication with retirees. The expense involved (staff time and materials) need not overtax the system in order to maintain a mutual and positive relationship with all retired workers.

For example, Pastor Bob McGhee, from Worthington, Ohio, writes an e-mail every day to hundreds of individuals including his friends, family, church leaders, retirees, current members, and former church members from other areas. He describes the church services, the youth activities, those he has visited either by

## One God—One Family

By Cliff Sorensen

Is it not true that we are all members of the family of God? Ephesians 3:15 refers to "the whole family in heaven and on earth." So then, when a person serves the family of God and is ordained as a minister/shepherd, they are recognized as spiritual leaders and take on many of the "father functions" of the family. They bring comfort in times of need, they provide guidance and counsel, they support and uphold in moments of crisis, and yes, they even on occasion must admonish and censure. While retirement will change our function, our calling to ministry does not change. Nor does retirement nullify the need to share the gospel message and bring others to the knowledge of Christ. If the pastor's commission is to serve His family during the entire course of his life, does it not logically follow that there would still remain an ongoing meaningful association and active participation with the local church and denominational office?

phone or in person, and always includes a word of encouragement. One e-mail contained the following: "Pray for (and he gave the name of his friend) at Walla Walla College. My good buddy lost his wife in a car crash last week. Folks, we never know what is going to go on, so stay up and write, call, visit with e-mail, and whatever with everyone that you can and thus make the quality of life better for you and others."

Now there's a challenge for all of us.

When Dan Jackson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Canada, began pastoring in a district where a recently retired pastor lived, he made a deal with him: he would share with him at his home every Wednesday evening following prayer meeting all the information he received from the church headquarters in exchange for a time of relaxation. This continued for three years, and these two men became the best of friends.

#### Unalterable needs

Every retired minister has a set of needs that are unalterable. First, they need to know that someone cares about them, that someone loves them and respects them, and that they are a valued member of a very special family.

Second, they need to know that somewhere, some time, they can still meaningfully contribute to the mission of the church and in some way assist with individual needs.

Third, retired pastors need to have a significant forum where they can continue to share the inspiration they receive from experience and Scripture.

Isaiah 54:2, 3 provides a word-picture of ministry that fits this particular challenge: "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; hold not back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your descendants will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities" (RSV).

Let's enlarge our tents to include a ministry for all retirees. ❏

# PASTOR'S DAY

## Confessions of a retired pastor

**By Robert W. Peters**

*(pseudonym), retired minister of the Church of the Brethren*

#### Confessions (on bad days):

1. I have difficulty adjusting to a gifted, new pastor's style of ministry.
2. I get more upset when attendance is up than when it is down.
3. I feel it is important that I not appear in the pulpit where I preached for so many years, and yet I miss the preaching more than I expected.
4. I still become emotionally stressed when conflicts occur in a congregation I love.
5. I am held in high esteem by the long term members of the church and resent seeing so many new folks who don't have a clue as to who I am.
6. I often find myself analyzing the worship service and leaving the sanctuary unfulfilled.
7. As I sit in worship, I doodle on the margins of the bulletin and keep my head down when I am bothered by certain elements of the worship service.
8. I would like to be designated "Pastor Emeritus," but feel like "Pastor is A Menace" when unholy, critical thoughts run through my mind.
9. I feel guilty when all these mean-spirited thoughts flood my being.
10. I need your prayers and God's forgiveness.

#### Actions (on good days):

1. I can control my actions
2. I pray for a gentler spirit so that my pastor and others may feel the touch of a kindly hand.
3. I affirm my colleague in ministry.
4. I refrain from expressing a personal feeling when and if a criticism is directed toward my pastor.
5. I honor ministerial ethics and refuse to perform weddings, funerals, and other ministerial functions in the congregations in which I've served, unless the pastor asks me.
6. I have an appointed group who hears my lamentations.
7. I try to take seriously my spiritual mentor's suggestions that God calls us to constantly work at learning so that we might be more accepting, with the promise that feelings can change.
8. I will not take flight (yet). I will endeavor to stay for the good of the church, the pastors, and myself.
9. I have gifts that I use in my faith community and in the wider church in spite of my shadow side.
10. I have a word of caution for retiring ministers who are tempted to hang around. Think twice (at least) before you stay.

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology** by Hans K.

*La-Rondelle, 192 pages, published by Andrew University 2005. ISBN 1-883925-48-7.*

Theologian and writer Hans K. LaRondelle has provided a valuable book on covenant theology.

On p. 163 the author gives a "Survey of Development of the Biblical Covenants." The foundation of this list is

the "Creation Covenant" and at the top is the "The Consummated Covenant in the Book of Revelation." In between, nine other covenant periods are listed. Before reading the book it would be helpful to look at this list since it gives an overview of the author's covenant concepts.

Rather than divide the covenants into "Old" and "New," the writer explains that "To obtain a comprehensive view of the harmony and differences between the covenants in both Testaments, we need to acquire a *systematic* theology of all God's covenants before any doctrinal conclusion can be justified" (p. xii).

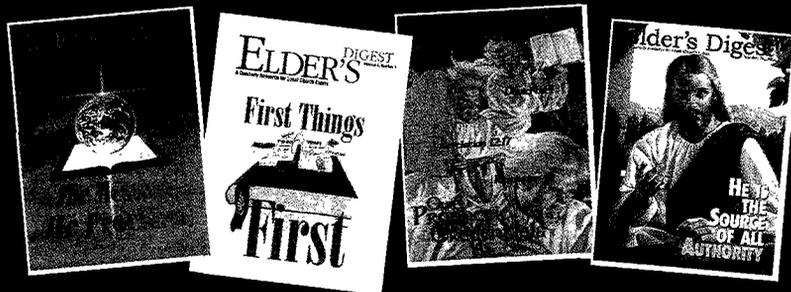
The author discusses several topics that are problematic for some. He deals with the Sabbath (pp. 7ff) by pointing out that the Sabbath is a "creation ordinance" (p. 7). One of his most creative contributions is his chapter "Paul and the New Covenant," (pp. 103ff) in which he addresses topics such as law and grace (pp.104ff). In this chapter and, for that matter in others also, he deals with various biblical passages which challenge us.

In the preface, Willmore D. Eva writes that "...this is an extraordinarily honest book. It goes to the heart of questions about the covenants that many are afraid to ask..." (p. x). I would add that the book is rich reading and because it is well written it is not difficult to digest.

This book has a helpful list of other resources on the topic and a subject index. Most helpful is a nine page Scripture index that is a good resource for those who wish to pursue additional biblical studies on the topic. ■

—Nikolaus Satelmajer, Editor, Ministry

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# Journey of Hope

**F**ormer US President, Bill Clinton, launched his election campaign for the presidency by harking back to his Arkansas hometown, a place called Hope!

For believers, hope is more than our heritage. Hope is more than even our destination. Hope is a journey, a process of moving our lives and the lives of our members from "here" to "there" through Jesus' power.

For this five-year quinquennium, Adventists have adopted, "Journey of Hope" as the overarching theme of our spiritual life and experience with the task-oriented mission objective, "Tell the World," growing out of the church's corporate core values of unity, quality of life, and growth.

More than programming slogans, "Tell the World" and "Journey of Hope" are both messages that every pastor can preach as well as mission methodologies which every member can utilize to hasten Jesus' coming, the Blessed Hope.

During the General Conference Committee's just-completed annual council, seven specific goals were adopted for the world church during the next five years. Imagine what could happen if we adopted the following goals, not just as agenda minutes, but as an integral mission for our congregations and our personal lives:

**Spiritual Growth.** The essential elements of spirituality (Bible study, prayer, fellowship, witnessing, and obedience) begin with our individual commitment to invest more personal time in the Word and in prayerful interaction with our God. When Sharon and I challenged our own congregation to "just ten minutes more" each day in studying the Bible, we saw lives transformed, marriages restored, factions dissolved, plus financial, numerical, and spiritual growth abounding.

**Community Involvement.** If your church were to close its doors, would anyone in your community miss its

JAMES A. CRESS



presence? Who would come pleading for you to re-open? How is your own congregation viewed in your community? People are seeking far more than intellectual information. They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. The greatest argument in favor of the gospel is still a loving and lovable Christian.

**Personal Witness.** We add approximately one million new members annually. What would happen if we blossomed these new members into full discipleship. Can you envision five million members individually committed to introducing one other person to Jesus and then to bringing that individual into fellowship? General Vice President, Lowell Cooper, reminded the committee of the inspired promise, "God will do the work if we will furnish the instruments" (Testimonies to the Church, Vol. 9, pg. 107). I can only furnish myself and my members as instruments.

**City Outreach.** Soon, over half of the world's population will reside in large metropolitan centers. The largest unentered mission fields are the world's largest cities. Multiplied thousands of people transition from rural to urban life every day. What would happen if the church was determined to be there and become meaningful in the lives of individuals who are most spiritually open during such transitions?

**Church Planting.** Growth is more than expanding the membership of our existing congregations. Even more important than adding new believers to your church is the necessity of adding new lighthouses for the world's darkness. The kingdom of evil will be vanquished only as the kingdom of light permeates the gloom of hopelessness. No method is more penetrating than establishing newly-planted churches.

**Media Ministry.** Consider the potential for reaching every soul on earth through the technological advances of radio, television, internet, and printing. Consider the power if all our various methods were united in determination to proclaim a consistent, unified message of hope and assurance.

**Evangelistic experience.** To put shoes on the vision, consider the unique impact if every local congregation hosts one specific, well-planned public evangelistic initiative every year. Open the doors of your churches and you will open the hearts of your members as well as the hearts and minds of those who come to share the joyous reality of hope.

The Adventist church world president, Jan Paulsen, challenged the church to envision a church of praying members, filled with the Spirit, nurtured on God's Word, with all departments, entities, leaders, and individual members unified in single-minded mission to provide opportunity for the entire world to hear and respond to the good news about Jesus Christ.

Our journey begins with the assurance of God's love and purpose and culminates with the return of Jesus. Our journey will thrive only as we individually and corporately open our lives to the Holy Spirit's power and furnish ourselves as the instruments which heaven will use to accomplish the task.

You and I can purpose, preach, and powerfully proclaim this Journey of Hope.

Finally, it would seem likely that the speciation process played out numerous times with different post-Babel migratory groups and to varying degrees. With the passing of time, they would start looking, acting, and living differently than they originally did. This process was no doubt interrupted sometimes as groups reconnected, perhaps contributing to the variation observed in the human family today.

—Kent Knight, Pastor, Hastings District, Hastings, Nebraska

### Against perfectionism?

Re: "The Heart of Historicism" by Hans La Rondelle (Sept 2005)

I see irony in the fact that Seventh-day Adventist perfectionists have been some of the most avid protagonists for the 1888 message while at the same time La Rondelle, on record as one decidedly against perfectionism, is promoting the same 1888 message as "a revival of the apostolic gospel."

In the 1970's I enjoyed La Rondelle's classes. I give him much of the credit for showing me the best sources for the gospel. He stands tall, in my opinion, among Seventh-day Adventist theologians. But I find it hard to believe that he has personally examined the 1888 message. The Minneapolis sermons of Waggoner and Jones are not extant. The only way of deducing their theology of that era is to read their *Signs of the Times* articles, circa 1884-1890. Some of the least of mortals, including myself, have done so and conclude that perfectionism is germane in these writings. That is why perfectionists always speak so highly of them.

I wish a fine systematic theologian like La Rondelle, rather than a church historian, would analyze the articles with some urgency and publish the findings.

—Milton Hook, retired pastor and teacher, Sydney, Australia

### Celebration concept

It just takes an article like "Sharing the Good News with the World" (Ministry, September 2005) to get our local pastors copying Luis Palau's "festival concept."

Haven't we learned our lesson yet from the danger of copying other churches? I cite the duplication of the Pentecostal "celebration concept" of worship at the Celebration Center, California, in 1989. It was touted in our periodicals as a soul winning venture and within a year the Celebration Center boasted a Sabbath morning average attendance of over 1300 members and visitors. The church membership jumped from 460 to 850. But in 2005 the church membership has dropped to 366.

Then there was the excitement of pastors attending conferences at Willow Creek Community Church seeking ways to arrest the slow growth and lack of vitality in their congregations. But the results were devastating, for, by the last of 1997 three churches formed independent churches on the "congregational concept" (even though this was not taught at Willow Creek).

—Ron Thomson, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

### The apple rotten at the core?

The articles in the June *Ministry* dealing with 'fallen pastors' are both interesting and disturbing.

The interest is that there should be a way for 'fallen pastors' to re-enter ministry. Disturbing are the statements that church policies in respect to this issue are routinely ignored. Does this mean the 'apple is rotten at the core?'

In a court of law the guilty do not have any say in determining the consequences of their actions. This holds be they ever so sorry and repentant, as is frequently the situation.

There are fundamental realities which must be considered which most likely underlie the existing church policies regarding moral lapses. Chief among these are:

i. If our wives and children are not safe with pastors who can they be safe with?

ii. The seventh commandment expresses an absolute moral value. You cannot modify an absolute value to accommodate individual violations of it. To attempt to do so calls in question the absolute value. In the primal sin of Eve

and Adam we recognize this reality. We also see the terrible personal cost experienced by the Godhead to maintain the absolute and demonstrate that it cannot be modified to accommodate individual violations of it.

iii. Every moral lapse whether by pastors or members, but especially by pastors, works to 'undermine faith and trust at all levels of church life.' The disastrous effects of this sin have in all too many cases left life-long scars. People may forgive but some instances of 'restoration' make it difficult for injured parties to forget.

iv. Are policies modified because they are ignored by the many? If this is the case we are in trouble. Surely we change policies because we can demonstrate the principles underlying them are faulty?

v. Adultery is not a sin to be treated lightly. Of all sins it has the greatest potential to hurt and destroy. We see this demonstrated in its enormity in the lives of David and Solomon.

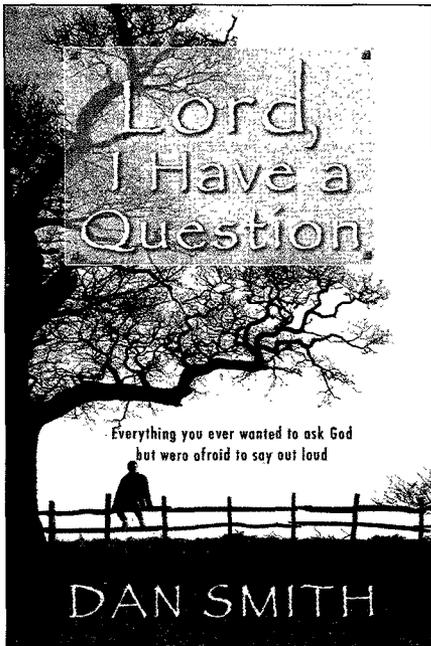
Jesus offered full forgiveness for this and all sins but He never condoned or accommodated Himself to it. Seventh-day Adventists are a people who claim to recognize the binding claims of God's Law of Ten Commandments. Can we in any way suggest in an evil age that violation of the seventh commandment is without serious consequences especially in respect of those mandated to uphold it?

We know there is mercy and forgiveness for moral lapses and Mark Carr's observations in this respect are very commendable. However, to use the detestable word **casuistic**, it is not good, i.e. better for the greater safety of our wives and children and to avoid widespread distrust and discouragement to uphold, maintain and implement existing church policies than to change or accommodate them to meet individual situations? ■

—Patrick Boyle, Watford, England

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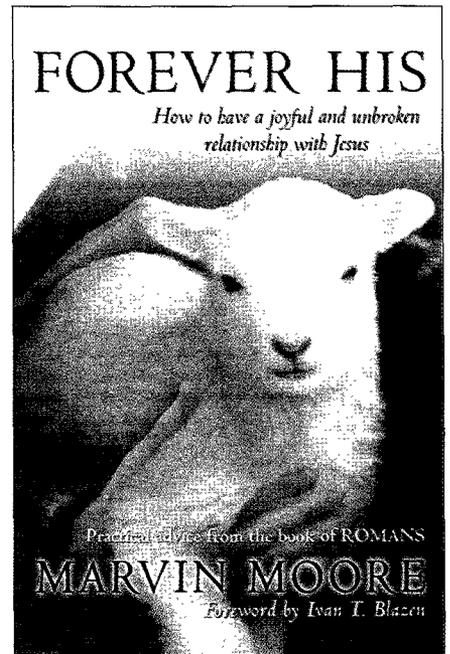
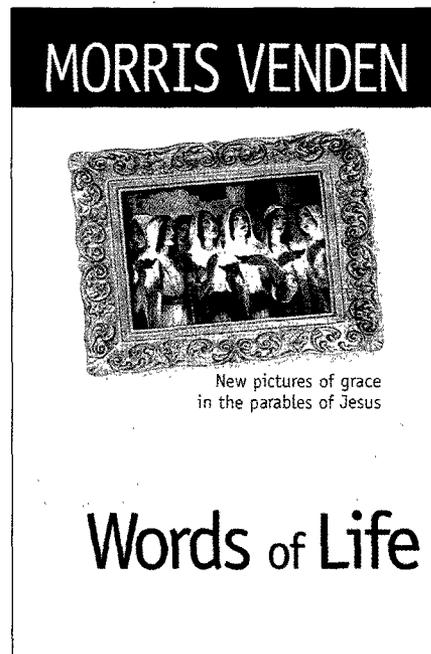
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