

Ministry



International Journal for Pastors

March 1998

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Ministry

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Pastoring small churches

Just a quick note to express appreciation for the emphasis in the September 1997 *Ministry*. In our day we have put such an emphasis on bigness that a congregation is a failure if it does not grow at an astronomical rate. Not only SDAs but the whole spectrum of the "evangelical" church in this country needs the message of your issue. Although some people like to be lost in the crowd of the large congregation, in reality it is clear that the members of such congregations do not receive the spiritual nurture which they need, no matter how large a staff the congregation may have. The Scriptures put very little emphasis on large numbers but actually seem to tell us to think small. For example, it refers to the little flock, and so on, as a reminder that we are not to expect large numbers all the time. Contrary to the widespread belief in this country, a large congregation is not the sign of a successful one or of one that necessarily enjoys God's blessings more than the small one.—John D. Miller, Fairmont, Minnesota.

November 1997 issue

Thanks very much for this issue of *Ministry*. I appreciated the tribute to Elder Spangler and the lovely cover featuring my friend.

The article by Richard Rice ("Speaking Up Without Wearing Down") was also excellent. I can't remember ever reading something on that subject before. We can all profit by the encouragement. God bless you in your special ministry.—Richard A. Hansen, Poland, Maine.

Receiving the Word

Thank you for publishing two reviews of *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle*, one quite favorable and the other less so (December 1997).

Thank you as well for the explanation in "*Ministry*: Official Word of the Church?" (January 1998). I respect and appreciate the "broader character and purpose" of *Ministry's* editorial role. Please accept my gratitude for your excellent work as well as my hope that it will long continue.—David R. Larson, D.Min., Ph.D., Loma Linda, California.

- Thank you for the wonderful articles in *Ministry* magazine. My husband was called to be a volunteer minister at the beginning of 1996, and the articles have proved to be a real blessing to him in his ministry. May God bless you in your important work.—Monica D. Nash, Barossa Valley region, South Australia.
- I am wife and mother of two pastors, and I have found a lot of good material in your publication. We tip our hats to you for your generosity in sending the publication without charge to pastors outside of your denomination. Thank you.—Mrs. Dale Erickson, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

- I just want to express my appreciation for your magazine that arrives each second month. I find in it many issues that are both challenging to my way of thinking and encouraging because they deal with issues with which I am currently grappling. I do greatly appreciate the fact that you as a Church movement, different from ours, are gracious enough to take the very best things that you are writing for your own ministry and make them available to us right across Christendom.

Thank you for your Christian love and grace toward us and that we are able to acknowledge that we are all working together in the one vineyard for the same Lord and all of us want to bring in glory to His name.

Again, thank you for the gracious gift. May God continue to bless your endeavors.

—Paul Bonython, Senior Pastor, Adelaide Crusade Centre Inc., South Australia.

Journeying through personal grief

For a number of years I have been receiving a complementary copy of *Ministry*. I sincerely appreciate the splendid articles in every issue.

The very personal "Journeying Through Personal Grief" of Dr. Darold Bigger (November 1997) touches the depths of the soul. Profound, seemingly honest, seasoned with mingled hope, despair, struggle and faith, his tremendous sharing is inspirational and gives new insights for my ministry to those who suffer.

We are beggars to whom God gives not crusts and crumbs but banquets on tables He sets Himself. I am most grateful to have been fed again in His mercy by the food, rich and satisfying, from *Ministry*. Thanks be to God.—Pastor Lawrence G. Beebe, Effingham, Illinois.

The pastor after a moral crisis

In reading Elder Roger Nixon's article (August 1997), I notice that his scriptural qualifications for pastors are very loosely stated. He uses the term "the spouse of one"—one what?

The qualifications for elders, pastors, and conference presidents are as follows: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. One of the first qualifications of a pastor is that he must be the husband of *one wife*.

In the Church Manual 1995, edition 15, page 812, paragraph 2, it states that reconciliation between husband and wife is the first move. If that can be done, there would be a chance the pastor could be eligible after a period of time to go back into the ministry. If, on the other hand, he and his wife divorce, that would be the end of his ministry.

This article is only talking about pastors having moral falls! It would be

Continued on p. 29

Free Subscription

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



Is there in all this world a more complex and diverse work than that of the contemporary pastor? I'm sure there is, but I'd still contend that the pastoral role,

especially in certain settings, vies with the most demanding professions of earth. Attempting to fulfill the demands of all that is expected of one, the pastor can easily find his or her energy and attention dissipated, drawn off to concentrate on that formidable multitude of foci. In all of this the pivotal role of ministry is easily obscured. But what is this pivotal focus?

Near the end of his gospel, John gives his reason for writing as he has: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31, NIV). "That you may believe." This is the essential role of ministry—communicating, living, serving in such a way as to awaken genuine faith in Jesus Himself. And bringing life through that name.

In framing this statement, John has in mind all he has written in his gospel. But it is fascinating to notice that the statement directly follows the story of Thomas and the specific difficulty he had in believing something for which he had no physical evidence. "He said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it'" (John 20:25, NIV). We could say that Thomas had good reason not to believe. All that had happened to him and all that had not, gathered to assault a formerly strong confidence. Watershed events had transpired that seemed to give the lie to all in which he had invested himself. Nothing anyone could say could make much difference. Thomas was not only skeptical; he was cynical and disillusioned. Above all, he was internally shattered, and he was angry. I think he wanted to believe, but all told, he could

The heart of the pastor's task

W I L L E V A

not and so he would not. And in so many ways Thomas is archetypical of twentieth-century humanity.

Thomas muddled through another week of anguish (verse 26) and then a fabulous gift was given to him. It was the gift of faith, the gift of a transforming trust that came to him in the face of his misgivings. Perhaps because it seemed he had little else he could do, Thomas had continued to keep company with his fellow ministers. Apparently his questions

It is the
*essential task and privilege
of the minister of Christ to
take hold, as it were, of the
fingers of struggling human
beings and bring them over to
the outstretched, crucified
hand of the living Christ.*

had continued, and so I think the immense struggle within himself had lingered.

It was through locked doors that Jesus finally got to Thomas and the others. Jesus "stood among them," greeted them, and then turned to Thomas. "Put your finger

here," He said. "See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (verse 27). Here is the greatest invitation a human being could ever be given. With it there is the implicit summons for Thomas to see for himself. To "see" despite his cynical stubbornness and his distrustful ultimatum. He was asked by Jesus to take his own finger and his own hand, to "see," to "stop doubting and believe." Jesus' invitation is to do exactly what Thomas said he would have to do before he could believe the most significant thing a human being could possibly believe.

There are at least three convincing miracles here for Thomas. Jesus being alive at all is the first and most obvious. Jesus coming into the room through closed doors is another. The third is not so obvious. It is that Jesus had heard and felt the weight of Thomas' bewilderment, sorrow, and cynicism when a week before Thomas had laid down his doubt-ridden conditions of faith. Though Jesus had not been present when Thomas spoke, He knew all about these sentiments in Thomas, and I believe He calculated the moment when He could best come to Thomas and the most effective way to bring this man to faith. It is this sort of providential timing, this kind of personal revelation, that is the only thing that can break through the encrustations of uncertainty and cynicism that are so much a part of our generation.

There is yet another miracle, which is that Thomas does what Jesus invites and there follows his great cry of recognition and faith: "My Lord and my God!" (verse 28).

Again, to bring our fellow humans to this kind of recognition is the heart of the ministerial mission. This is our primary pursuit, the fundamental reason for our being who we are—to offer, as best we can by the grace of God, opportunities such as this one. Simply to bring human beings to touch the hands of Jesus.

Take another look at the cover of this issue. I am especially pleased with it.

Continued on p. 27

A TRYST WITH THOMAS

If I had walked into that room late Sunday night, I'd have reacted in the same way. All he had done was step out—just for a few moments.



*Dwight Nelson, D.Min.,
is pastor of the Pioneer
Memorial Church,
Andrews University,
Berrien Springs,
Michigan.*

Who could blame him, after spending that entire fearful day sequestered in the crowded, stuffy upper room? Nervous bodies, sweating bodies. With the pungent odor of fear hanging heavy in the air, I'd have left too. With a pounding head. And so, he had to get away.

But he came back, after gulping in the fresh night air on a lonely walk through the shadows of the back alleyways. Heartbroken, confused, afraid, embittered, and lonely over the death of his Master, he came tiptoeing back up the creaky stairs to the upper room, still crammed with men scared witless that the police who had arrested their Leader last Thursday night would soon be pounding down the door for them this Sunday night.

And so I suppose I'd have reacted the same way that Thomas did when, at last, late that evening—he returned. He knocked. Silence inside. He knocked again. More silence. Leaning up to the crack in the door, he hissed his identity. Still more silence. In frustration he raised his voice from stage whisper to shout! And now the heavy wooden bar slid across the inside of the door. A crack of orange light like a CAT scan slice spilled onto his agitated face. "Open up!" The door flew open, a hand pulled him in, and—with a slam—door and bar were in place again.

The room broke into bedlam. Everybody started yelling at Thomas at once. Pounding him on the back, tugging at his beard, holding his bewildered face in their hands as they laughed and cried the stunning news of what had happened just moments ago. "While you were out, Thomas..." Jesus had been there! In a daze Thomas shook his head. But ten other heads nodded in unison. "It's true, Thomas. He's alive!"

The hurt of the skeptic

I can hardly blame Thomas as he broke away from their near hysterical joy. Look into his dark eyes. We ministers know very well what we see. We see what we have felt often enough—angered hurt, wounded pride, and the pain of rejection, perhaps even a touch of doubt.

Because Thomas understood that Jesus could have waited until he was back in the room, couldn't He have? Of course. And did not he, Thomas, love Him as much as the others? Did he not follow Him as faithfully as they? If Jesus were really alive, then He could have waited until Thomas was back. Unless He loved the others more...? Unless perhaps He'd known Thomas' struggling heart and purposely left him out of such a revelation...?

Such a notion was simply too painful for Thomas. Which left him but one remaining response. To cover his pain, he wrapped himself in the levelheaded, cool-thinking, quick-calculating reserve of a skeptic.

It's that way with nearly every skeptic, isn't it? In their book, *How to Respond to a Skeptic*, Lewis Drummond and Paul Baxter have sought to psychoanalyze the mind-set of a skeptic. They reviewed the lives of some of history's most well-known skeptics and identified a common thread, a unifying catalyst that seems to explain skepticism. Drummond and Baxter have concluded that the primary catalyst for a skeptic's original doubts and formative questionings can usually be traced to a significant negative experience. Something, somewhere, went wrong. A hope was dashed. A heart was hurt. A love was rejected. And out of it, a skeptic was born.

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize recipient, unabashedly declares it so. In his book *Night*, he openly hints that his surviving witness of the Holocaust in the Buchenwald and Auschwitz death camps stripped away his childhood faith as a Jew. It was God, he came to believe, who hung on the gallows and died in the Holocaust. Out of personal pain, skepticism is often created.

It would be interesting to find the source of our skepticism, to trace it back to the original cause. Where would it take us? For Thomas, as for so many others, it was a skepticism born of a wounded pride and a sense of rejection.

"But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe' " (John 20:24, 25, NRSV).

What else shall a wounded pride do? What else can rationalism, born of that wounding, demand? Staring into ten jubilant faces, the skeptic draws his own private line in the sand.

It would be interesting to find the source of our skepticism, to trace it back to the original cause. Where would it take us? For Thomas, as for so many others, it was a skepticism born of a wounded pride and a sense of rejection.

where the untestable rapidly becomes the untenable. Science has taught us well: If you can't prove it—don't press it.

In an anonymous letter to the editor in the *Atlanta Journal*, a writer, living in the so-called "Bible Belt," attacked creationism: "What is distressing is that such absurd beliefs persist as we near the 21st century. It may be viewed, however, if looked at it objectively, as a twitch in the death throes of an outdated and nearly defunct theology . . . It is unfortunate, but man has always tended to mysticize everything he does not understand. Until the susceptibility is weeded out through further evolutionary advance this medieval idiocy will hang around our necks like an albatross. But be sure, the day will come when the doors of the last church will close forever. The last Bible will be shipped off to some museum where it will gather dust along with the implements of other medicine men and shamans who, for a time, controlled men's minds. Some future archeologists may look through this silly book and be amused that his ancestors were so gullible."¹

This sort of skepticism has become fashionable. Once the hallmark of infidelity, skepticism is now the shining star of intelligence. In some circles the more cynical the mind, the more evident its obvious intellectual prowess.

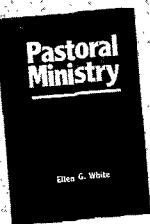
But Thomas's "seeing is believing," if taken to its logical conclusions, makes belief in the American Declaration of Independence (for example) a most uncritical kind of faith, does it not? After all, you and I have no way of verifying its authenticity. I've never seen Thomas Jefferson. I have no way of knowing with absolute certainty that July 4, 1776, happened the way history and tradition say it did (actually some historians even argue that the date of its signing wasn't exactly on the 4th).

Oh, sure, I've stood in line at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., to gaze for a few fleeting moments on the yellowed document purported to be the original Declaration of Independence. And yes, I saw what is claimed to be Thomas Jefferson's signature on it. But how do I know that the document is real? Or that the signature was really Jefferson's? Couldn't the whole thing be a sinister concoction? Thomas's "seeing is believing" means I can't

Awhile back I was visiting with a physician. Though not a Christian, he's a religious man. He knew I was a pastor, and so our conversation turned to religion. We talked of death, because both our professions have their share of that reality. And when I asked him what he believed about death and its beyond, he replied: "How can we know? For we have never been there. For me life beyond death simply means my life will be lived on in the lives of my children and grandchildren. That is the meaning of life after death for me."

For Thomas, it had all been similarly reduced. How can we know, if we haven't been there. So he said, "I shall not believe it until I behold it, feel it, touch it!" Period.

Skepticism has changed little over the millennia. You and I are not so different from Thomas—and maybe my physician friend. This is because we all live in a world



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believe in Thomas Jefferson either, since I've never seen him. All I can do is believe the testimony of those who were there that day in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. All I have is the testimony that has been handed down from generation to generation, testimony that I really can't verify is accurate.

Which means that skepticism is a choice: Whom shall I believe? If you believe in only what you see, then you are left with no history at all.

The heart of the skeptic

And so this Easter I declare that I believe in Thomas—Thomas Jefferson, yes. And even Thomas, the skeptic, who seven days later became a believer in the only way a skeptic can ever come to believe.

They were all there, Thomas included, in the same upper room a week after the resurrection. The upstairs doors still barred, the second-story windows still shuttered. And they were still scared, their bodies still nervously sweating, the room still stuffy. And it was night again. When suddenly He appeared. At first without a word. He simply appeared. Out of nowhere, standing there among them. Dressed in His humble Galilean garb, the mantle draping over His head and across His bare chest. Somebody gasped. They all whirled around toward the center of the room. And Jesus spoke, "Peace be with you" (John 20:26).

Before anyone could breathe a response, Jesus slowly turned and stepped toward ashen-faced, wide-eyed, gaping Thomas.

And here is born the greatest truth in all the world for every struggling skeptic who hasn't quite given up yet. A truth born when Jesus quotes the seven-day-old words of Thomas. "Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe'" (John 20:27). Touch Me, Thomas, go ahead and touch Me if you must. Now, Jesus has not been seen by the other ten since the week before. Hence, no one has been able to report to Him the misgivings of Thomas. Which means that during Thomas's darkest hours of doubt, Jesus has been with him, though Thomas had not known it. *Proof enough that the resurrected Christ is Companion of the skeptic, as well as the believer.* Thomas thought he was all alone in his suffering.

But he was wrong. The risen Jesus had been with him through it all.

"Put your finger here." But Thomas never did. Not that night. For in his heart he had all the evidence he needed that the risen Christ had been with him, unseen, invisible, all along. The reality he had rejected had been standing beside him, *even when he didn't believe.* All that was left for the doubting one was the cry from bended knee, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). For how can you not help but embrace the God who was still your companion when you chose not to believe?

The hope of the empiricist

And so the heart of the skeptic turns from hurt to hope—so much hope, in fact, that Thomas would one day die for his risen Master, a spear thrust through his back.

On a mountaintop south of Madras, India, I stood on the spot where legend declares that the doubting disciple died a conquering martyr for Christ. Mt. St. Thomas indeed. The blood of a once-upon-a-time cynic spilled crimson upon what was

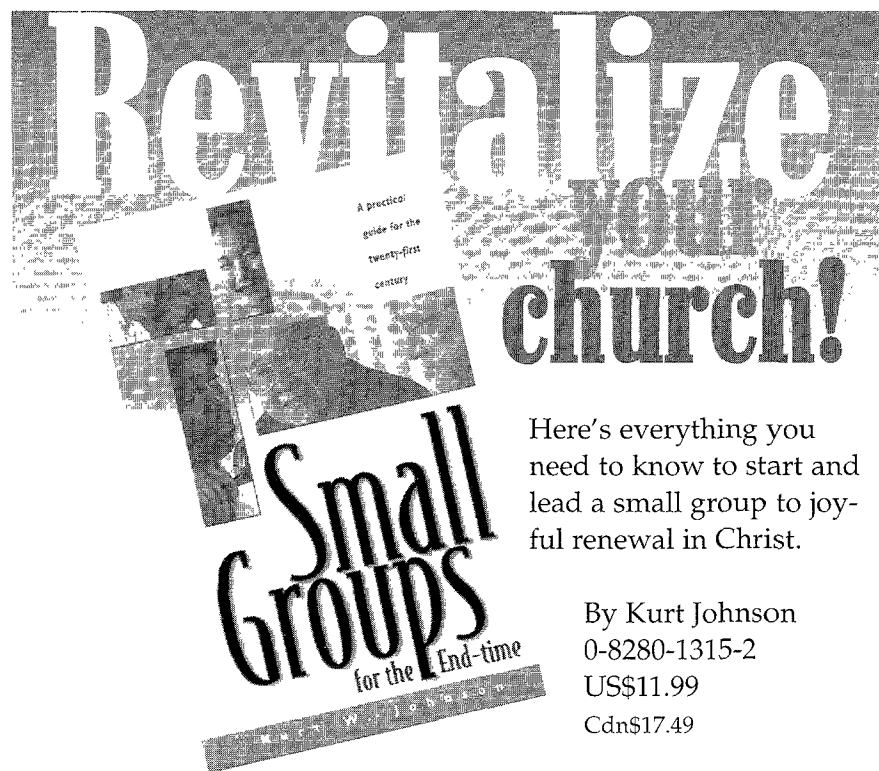
for him a foreign soil. And that blood became a witness for the living Christ.

Nobody dies for a conjecture. Thomas died for the Companion who had never abandoned him, even at the time his faith was darkest. He died for the Companion who was wise and patient and skillful enough to lead him, despite his struggles, to one of the greatest statements of faith in all time, "My Lord and my God."

So, if such a doubter can believe, then hope exists for us too. And in seasons to come, when we bury our dead—our parishioners, our parents, our spouses, our children, our strangers, our friends—let us look into each other's tear-brimmed eyes and covenant to believe in the Christ of Thomas, who declared, "Because I live, you also will live. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 14:19; 20:29).

I have not seen. But because Thomas believed, I, too, have come to believe. Therein lies the Easter hope of the skeptic. ■

¹ Lewis A. Drummond and Paul R. Baxter, quoted in *How to Respond to a Skeptic* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 50.



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GOOD NEWS FROM THE GRAVE

Thirty-nine members of the Heaven's Gate cult, led by "Bo" and "Peep," gladly took their own lives so that they could travel to an approaching spacecraft hidden in the tail of comet Hale-Bopp.



Hyveth Williams is senior pastor of the Campus Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Loma Linda, California.

How eerie to watch videos of those people happily embracing death. Their suitcases were neatly packed, their mansion was immaculately prepared, and they were dressed in their heaven's gate uniforms with brand new shoes on their feet as they drank the poisonous cocktail in preparation to bravely go where no one had gone before.

Or so they thought.

Contrary to their expectations, however, they did not go up. Instead, they went down into the insatiable gaping hole in the ground we call the grave, and there they will be with the unnumbered dead until the day of reckoning. Meanwhile, those left behind must deal with the reality of the grave, whose sole purpose seems to be to steal our loved ones.

The dark gaping hole

From my earliest childhood, when I watched my beloved great-great-grandmother swallowed up in another one of those enormous gaping dark holes, I associated the grave with sadness and depression. After all, nothing significant has ever come out of the grave. Great scientific discoveries have been made in all kinds of

places, under all sorts of circumstances, but never in the grave. The great battles of history have been fought on land and sea, in air and space, but never in the grave. No great speeches, pronouncements from poets or presidents, from orators or ordinary people have been made from the grave, which seemed to me the most loathsome place on earth. But thanks be to God in Christ Jesus who gave me a new attitude and understanding so I can bring good news from no other place but the grave.

And that good news is found in Matthew 28:1-7, a narrative that begins after the crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

The discovery

It was about 6:00 p.m. on that historic Sabbath of sorrow and woe. The sun was setting, and the first day of the week was beginning. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, along with several women (according to the other gospel writers), anxiously returned to see the sepulcher where Jesus had been buried because they wanted to complete the task of anointing His body, which they hadn't finished because the Sabbath began.

HYVETH WILLIAMS

Verse 2 says that there was an incredible earthquake. The earth trembled with sorrow at the death of Christ, but on that morning it leapt for joy at His resurrection in an unprecedented earthquake. The world was shaken by this incredible miracle of Christ coming to life after He had voluntarily laid it down to pay for our sin. Then the angel came and rolled away the great stone. The Roman guards who witnessed the angel's work shook with fear and had fallen like dead men. When the women arrived at the grave, they were frightened out of their wits until the angel gave them the first piece of good news from that empty grave: "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. You have come looking for the dead body of a good man, but I want to tell you that you are about to experience the miracle of your living Lord" (verse 5).

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid." In the Greek language this is a subjunctive prohibition, and there are two types. One is a friendly persuasion against embarking on a course of action one has

never taken before. The other is an imperative—an urgent command to stop an action already started.

So here's the picture: The women were shaking in fear when the angel said, "You have already started to be afraid, but stop! Stop trembling! Stop being afraid! The soldiers are the ones who should be afraid because they are the enemies of our Lord, but you are His friends. So stop being afraid!"

Today, this side of the crucifixion, we are given this same message of good news, even though it comes from the gaping mouth of an empty grave, and that is: "Do not fear!"

Do not fear? Our entire social order rests on fear. Oswald Chambers once said that the first civilization was founded by Cain, a murderer, and the whole basis of civilized life ever since has been a vast, complicated, gilded-over system of murder and fear.

Look how we live. We are prisoners in our own homes. Locksmiths and the makers of alarm systems thrive because we are afraid. We are afraid in our homes, and we are afraid in our cars. We are afraid

everywhere of someone or something. Some people are afraid of failure, so they don't try hard enough; others are afraid of dying and scared to death of living.

So this has to be the greatest news, that an angel sent by God commands us to "stop being afraid," even though we have already started. Even though fear has become such a part of our language that when someone simply asks us to accompany them to the store and we can't go, we normally preface our response with "I'm afraid I cannot accompany you."

Fear is the enemy of faith. Our God lives and watches over us, and if He is for us, who can prevail against us? Neither height nor depth, nothing past or present or future, no angel, no principality or power, no demon or person, no force or opposition, no sickness or death, and especially no grave! For one day our God will come triumphantly through the clouds of heaven and He will cry out, "Oh, death where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory?"

Continued on p. 27

Strengthen your ministry

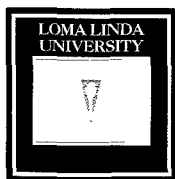
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“CHRIST IS RISEN, INDEED!”

In the early hostile years of the nascent church, believers used to greet each other with these opening words: “Christ is risen.” And the response was, “He is risen indeed.”



Gardner C. Taylor is senior pastor emeritus of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ, Brooklyn, New York.

Thus, that joyful, triumphant greeting and response was heard in the crowded streets of Corinth; it echoed along the white marble Arcadian way that ran down from the theater to the harbor in Ephesus; it was uttered in the midst of the gathered throng on the Temple Hill at Jerusalem and was spoken along the caravan trade routes and from passing ships, at the crossroads of the desert, and among the servants in Caesar's household.

“Christ is risen.”

“He is risen indeed.”

Kingdom of the dead

The resurrection tidings are far and away the most astonishing news to ever break across the tired, old face of this earth. No book ever had a climax of such triumph as that one recorded in all four gospels, which is why that greeting and response became the identifying salutation of the Christian community and why those words set men and women singing at their tasks, why they gave meaning to daily living, and why they opened long vistas of vast possibilities to those sinking beneath life's ever-heavier load. Those words brought courage to the suffering, and in the early Christian centuries many suffered greatly for their faith. Those simple words

sustained the martyr in his ordeal and assigned spiritual purpose to the final mysteries of life and love.

Always, human beings have hoped that maybe, just maybe, life is lord of death, and Love will not lose its own. It has been a hope almost too good to be true. The Egyptian monarchs building their pyramids and putting the utensils of home in graves expressed a wistful hope that this life is not all. The American Indians speaking of a happy hunting ground were giving voice to a universal longing. Everywhere people have hoped that maybe this short, pathetic, little life is not all. With such shadowy notions built on a hope too good to be true, no wonder Achilles, speaking to Odysseus, cries out, “Don't speak to me of death! I would sooner be a hireling servant of the poorest peasant than the ruler of all the Kingdoms of the dead!”

Death seems such a western sky, with darkness over our heads. It seems so final, so separative. The hope that we can withstand its assault is so weak that even when the good news of Resurrection broke forth, humanity could hardly believe it. The arguments, most of them old hat, still rage.

A popular book years ago was Hugh Schonfeld's *The Passover Plot*. Based on knowledge of pharmacy and entombment

G A R D N E R C . T A Y L O R

methods in first-century Palestine, it tries to explain away the Resurrection: Jesus rigged his "execution," and things went wrong, according to this theory. But the book does not explain how a botched plan like that could have turned a disciple out of a skilled and objective scholar, a man of the world like Paul who surely would have heard what really happened from the smart young fellows in Jerusalem.

This is just another version of the time-worn theory that the disciples stole the body of Jesus. In order to substantiate Christ's Messianic claims, the theory states, His friends performed a fraud on all of the authorities and on all of history by splicing away the body of Jesus and reburying it. The one trouble with this theory is that great courage and boldness are given to men who were scared to be present at Jesus' trial before He was even convicted. They were absent at Calvary because of grief and fear. If the disciples stole the body of Jesus, we need to know what drug it was that could make frightened men so brave. Every army ought to have it, and every girl laboring with a shy lad ought to know what it was! Further, are we to believe that these disciples would have suddenly changed from men afraid to stand up for what might be true into men willing to die for what they knew better than anyone else was *not* true?

That Sunday morning

We will never know, perhaps, the exact sequence of events on that resurrection morning. There are differences of detail in the various accounts, but all agree that something happened on that Sunday. Matthew says, for instance, that one angel descended, rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. Luke says that two men in shining raiment stood by the empty tomb. Was it one or two? Matthew and Luke's accounts differ, but both agree that something stupendous happened in the cemetery.

There are superficial discrepancies in the accounts. Mark says that there was one heavenly figure at the tomb when Mary and the other Mary got there, and Mark says that he was a young angel. Interesting comment, for where God lives, aging is not. This one attendant at the grave spoke and said, "You seek Jesus. He is not here." John, treating

the same subject, says there were two angels and one asked the question, "Why weepest thou?"—a strange question, since a cemetery is a place where the strongest men weep and the stoutest heart quakes and cracks. The accounts are not exact, but that does not destroy the event. The Warren Commission and Attorney General Garrison disagree on details, but neither denies that John F. Kennedy died in Dallas.

The Resurrection is not an addendum, a postscript; it is the heart of the gospel. Something happened that changed frightened men into fearless ones. Friday they were fleeing danger; a few days later they were running into danger with the Word of Life, laughing where before they had been cursing. One day they had barred the doors in a paralysis of terror; the next they have taken to the highway, heralds of their risen Lord.

Like Moses marching through the walled waters at the Red Sea, so Christ came forth on Sunday morning to march through death's swollen river and lead all the ransomed in his train. As the purpling sky grows light, He puts one foot on the fallen power of death and another foot on the open and empty grave, lifts the keys of authority above his head, and shouts until the heavens laugh and the farthest planet sings the music of the spheres. He cries with captivity captive, the old prison imprisoned, with death's death. He cries, "I am he that

liveth, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, . . . and have the keys of death and hell."

Jesus, the Fairest of the Sons of men, on Friday was buried in a cemetery. On Sunday the angels say "Not here." Over and over you have given the Mother Earth some frail clay, a once live and laughing presence, but then a still and cold body, then the hope, "Not here."

Thanks be to God. When I walk in a cemetery and think of those I have loved and lost, I hear a voice, "Not here." Midst tombs and sadness I remember how those I loved panted out their last, but "Not here." No more bondage to the savagery of death. "Not here." No more frightened helpless submission to the triumphs of disease and hell. Not here! No more frightened fugitives from an everlasting Captivity, "Not here."

Hear the first preachers of the Resurrection, the angels, as they lift trumpet voice, "Not here. He is risen." The next time you are called upon to follow some beloved but lifeless form and stand at a grave whose dust is forever sanctified, may you hear the angels' trumpet, "Not here." Somewhere else where storm clouds never rise, but "Not here." Somewhere else where the day never dies and the song never stills, but "Not here."

Why?

Because "Christ is risen."

"He is risen indeed." ■

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Recently one of us held a strategic-planning seminar for leaders of a major U. S. denomination. At the end, the denomination's president stood and expressed appreciation but said, "You are from the corporate world, and you just don't understand that your ideas will not work in a church."

End of conversation and of any prospect for constructive change.

The leader's response was not uncommon. Church executives often tell business leaders that because of the differences between them, the principles of business do not apply to spiritual entities.

But what are these differences, and do they change the fundamental way in which human management is to be applied? Do the differences justify dismissing as *not applicable* skills and tools by which management operates? Should leaders in religious organizations ignore well-documented management literature and successful organizational practices developed in other sectors of human society?

Our observations and experience say No. Although there are distinct differences between faith organizations and other entities, the manner in which human beings manage and direct their function has universal applications.

Skills must be learned

Authorities commonly agree that managerial skills are essential if any organization, corporate or religious, is to demonstrate superior performance. Administrative training does not negate, nor work in opposition to, the gifts of the Spirit described in the New Testament. One may be a recipient of the Spirit gift of administration (1 Cor. 12:5) yet benefit from formal training in management and administrative techniques. Divine appointment and divine guidance are

Church management: How is it different? What brings success?

PAUL CONE AND
LAWRENCE DOWNING

certainly to be desired by leaders, but a divine call does not negate the need for modern management skills and techniques.

Appointment to a position does not automatically endow competency. Nor is observing the administrative practice of one's superior an assurance of success. In addition, the extent and rapidity of change requires new approaches, knowledge, skills, and tools. Professionals find that they need regular retraining to cope with advancing technology and information. Keeping up with the changes in communication and information systems taxes the most astute mind. All of us need to update our knowledge and skills in order to achieve and maintain superior performance. We believe that such performance is possible in all types of organizations, even those that operate in hostile environments. *Skilled leaders make that difference!*

There are many definitions and lists of characteristics for successful leaders in all organizations. We use the following universal critical factors: vision, resources, skills, and performance standards. Each is important. One alone is not enough

for successful leadership and administration.

Do secular and spiritual organizations have management factors in common?

In management development programs for a single company or a single industry, the response we often hear is similar to what we hear from religious leaders: The proposed management principles will not work in their company or industry. Theirs is different. Yet it's not uncommon for someone from the same industry to speak up when someone says this and say that their company has successfully used the method for years!

We have found that all decision-making steps and management-process functions are essentially the same for all types of organizations, in the private and public sectors. We base our findings on the following:

1. Literature search of the major management books and articles through 1992.
2. Management practices: executive programs (25 executives per year) from all types of organizations—domestic and international at Claremont Graduate School and University of Southern California.
3. Management consulting and CPA practices with a variety of clients including universities, business, government, hospitals, medical groups, churches, and other profit and not-for-profit organizations.

4. Own experience: as executives and board members in business, service, profit, non-profit, and government organizations.

These management functions and successful practices can be learned through quality standard educational degree programs and through executive training programs, but applications should be adapted to organization types, especially in distinctly differing environments.

Church administrator—minister or business professional?

Hospitals and medical groups today tend to employ professional administrators from business rather than from medicine. Although there may be some problems with this model, the management skills are considered more necessary to medical management than an extensive medical background. More physicians are taking MBA degrees and becoming hospital and medical group administrators. We believe that for the purposes of church management, the generalist degree has advantage over that offered by a program specifically designed for church administration. Several factors influenced this position.

Not only would it be very expensive to start and sustain a Master of Church Administration (MCA) in a seminary, but there is a reason why placing church administrator participants in a general cross-industry program is more desirable. Participants in MBA programs come from all types of organizations. They provide a breadth of expertise that enhances the learning experience. When a variety of participants are in class, there is high probability that some of them already utilize managerial approaches and tools that church administrators initially might reject as having little or no application to their organizations.

Serious consideration should be given to adding experienced and successful church administrators to existing MBA and executive program teaching teams. This opportunity will be a valuable learning experience that will enhance church administrators' skills and provide others a glimpse into the church environment and its management needs.

Because successful ministers are not automatically good administrators, we recommend that select ministers be given the opportunity to learn

additional administrative knowledge and skills. Investment in their administrative development will return many times over through more effective and efficient administration.

For example, we know of church organizations where only about ten cents per dollar given is directed to the primary mission—the rest (90 percent) is used in overhead and to administer church business. One could not envision informed donors nor quality volunteers who will continue enthusiastic support should knowledge of these conditions be known. Skilled management ideally will set a course to turn these figures around. This action will improve organizational performance and increase confidence among the supporting members.

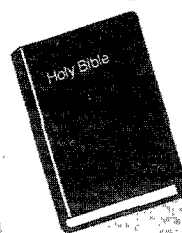
In short, we present two basic recommendations that we believe would greatly strengthen church administration. First, that minister administrative leaders be given opportunity to attend cross-industry executive programs to further develop executive skills and successful practices. Second, that ministers with administrative potential and interest be encouraged to attend nearby MBA programs to learn management skills, processes, and successful team operation.

However well-intentioned a denominational leader might have been in his rejection of the application of corporate principles for church administration, all our years in this field have convinced us that good management skill can benefit churches as much as they do businesses. ■

Paul R. Cone, Ph.D., has recently retired from the position of associate dean for the graduate business school, University of Southern California.

Lawrence G. Downing, D.Min., is pastor of the White Memorial Church in Los Angeles, California.

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DYING THE BIG DEATHS

A deacon in the church I pastored was nicknamed by his colleagues at the newspaper as “Dr. Death” because his job was to update biographical files on 500 prominent people just in case one should suddenly die and the newspaper had to quickly produce an obituary.



William Self is pastor of the Johns Creek Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Georgia.

Just imagine how sobering, humbling, indeed, *mortalizing* it would be for the mighty Master of the Universe-type personality Tom Wolfe depicted in his novel, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, to face this mild-mannered reporter one morning and hear him say, “I’m here to update your obituary.”

Occasionally, Dr. Death pays me a visit to update my file, more (I suspect) to rattle my cage than anything else. But it causes me to muse—like an eighth-grader in English composition or a freshman journalism student in his or her first assignment—on how I would write my own obit. I always thought it would read something like, “Bill Self, Warrior Prince for the Forces of Good, was borne from his pulpit on his shield today. Heavens darkened. Lightning flashed. Thunder rolled. And, in the study of Judge Paul Pressler, the black curtain that separated the leader of the Forces of Evil within the Southern Baptist Convention from the real world, was rent from top to bottom.”

But not long ago I stood in that pulpit and told the congregation that I’d tried to shepherd and serve for 26 years that I was simply quitting. The *stress* of the job had become too much. I had updated my own obituary, and I didn’t like the way it would read.

Walk-on-water syndrome

Not Bill Self, the fire-breathing preacher who a month earlier delivered a sermon from that same pulpit to 350 ministers from a cross section of mainstream Protestant churches urging them to die “big deaths,” not the little ones Carl Sandburg referred to in his poem. I talked about nails and crosses and crowns of thorns. I wove into that the symbolism of Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea*, the lonely, wise old fisherman who conquers the magnificent marlin only to have it chewed to pieces by sharks before he could get it to shore. As for me, I said, I want to be measured, not by artificial standards and statistics, but, like Santiago, by my tenacity, my faithfulness to the task, by the way my boat put back to sea, ever proclaiming that I’d rather go down fighting the sharks than be nibbled to death by minnows.

Unfortunately, I think that, instead of putting that sturdy old boat to sea in the face of strong adversity, I subconsciously had navigated myself into the age-old “walk-on-water” syndrome that has been the undoing of many a preacher. Simply defined, the “walk-on-water” syndrome is the notion that, because you’re a preacher, you can accomplish anything.

WILLIAM L. SELF

These inflated expectations come from two sources: from members of your congregation and from yourself. No matter what their origin, I have learned that these expectations are totally unrealistic.

The stress factor

There are some who will write their own version of my obituary: that "after losing the race for the Southern Baptist Convention presidency in the 1978 watershed election that tipped the balance of control to the fundamentalists in the convention, Self became obsessed with the imminent split in the convention and lost control of his congregation at home."

No doubt my sense of frustration and hopelessness took its toll. But what I saw when I updated my obituary was not a symptom of positions I'd taken on convention-related themes but something else entirely. And it was this: The Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention administers health and medical insurance programs for both fundamentalist and moderate pastors in our convention. The

board reported in mid-1990 that, aside from maternity benefits, the greatest identifiable portions of the \$64.2 million paid in medical claims during 1989 were for stress-related illnesses. Most of the medicines ordered through the prescription drug program were for stress-related problems like high blood pressure and ulcers. The number one diagnosis in the total cost of hospital claims was for psychosis. Psychoses ranked tenth in the number of hospital admissions by specific groupings of causes. John Dudley, the administrator of the program, said that we paid more for stress-related illnesses in 1989 than for new babies.

When I updated my obituary, what I saw was not just a Baptist problem. In Atlanta, I have two good friends who are rabbis. They report the same stress-inducing pressures among their peers. The pastor of a nearby church of another denomination told me that, because of his own experiences, he conducted an informal survey of pastors of some of the largest churches in the country and found them all suffering from stress-related

health problems or family distress.

I know of no single source of quantitative data on the subject, but all we have to do is look around and see that preachers and rabbis and priests are leaving their ministries to become teachers in colleges or seminaries, 9-to-5 chaplains for corporations, or bureaucrats in denominational jobs. They start selling real estate or, like me, head up a small corporation. Before some can quit, the stress erupts into headlines. We seem to hear more and more stories of clergymen jumping into bed with the wrong people, pastors running off with members of their congregations, or counseling sessions that end up as trysts.

Sure, some of these things are attributable to basic immorality, dereliction, stupidity, or hyperactive glands. Look deeper, however, and you will find a lot of it to be directly attributable to stress.

Great expectations

From time to time during a ministry, a pastor must decide whether to preach prophetically or "run for Congress," kissing

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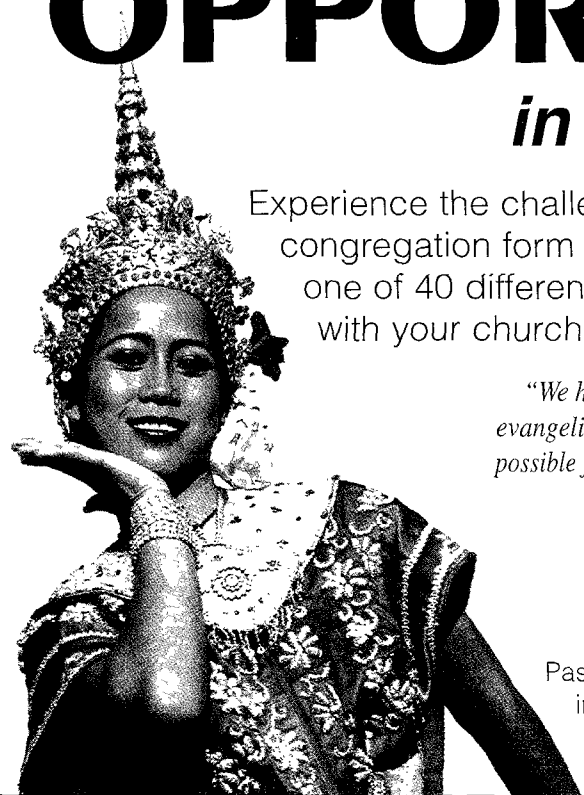
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all the babies in the congregation, shaking all the important hands, saying all the right things. That decision alone is a constant source of stress.

There are always those in a church who believe a pastor is nothing more than a hired hand, a signature to go on wedding certificates, a talking puppet that is wound up to preach, and played for the amusement of the faithful. Others have a romanticized vision of the pastor they grew up with, complete with warm and fuzzy reminiscences. Older people want a pastor who can comfort them, hold their hands, and empathize with them as they face the fears and uncertainties of growing old. Younger people want a star. In between are those who want their pastor to be a corporate guru who can run the church like an IBM executive and raise more money than the Republican National Committee.

Like the major stress that affects most families, most churches today are experiencing serious financial difficulties. Although we like to believe that people tithe or contribute to their church because of their religious or moral commitments, we know that many give because of economic or other incentives. As a pastor, you are forced to haggle and pinch pennies with would-be CEOs in your congregation. Then you look at their pledge cards for tithes and offerings to help you plan the next year's budget and see that some of those who disagreed with a decision you've made say they plan to give "zero" to their church in the coming year.

We are faced with more stressful issues. It has only been in recent years that pastors have had to deal with issues such as AIDS, abortion, and homosexuality. We not only have to deal with those things on the personal level when they affect members of our congregations; we're also expected to make public pronouncements that push the right buttons.

All of this is stirred in the same cauldron, brewing with the poison gasses of the theological controversies and the controversies of political control from the varying factions. These definitely were affecting me as a pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention. But they are no different from the pressures that clergy in every other Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish congregations are experiencing.

Pastors must make stressful decisions. With 40 to 60 hospitals scattered throughout an urban area like Atlanta, Georgia, it takes about two hours, in normal traffic, to make one bedside visit. What happens when a single secretary with no close circle of friends lies dying alone in one hospital and the wife of a prominent member of the congregation enters another hospital for a few days of tests and requests a visit from the pastor? What do you do when you're expected at a dinner party thrown by a prominent contributor when a parent who has just learned a child will be born with Down's syndrome walks into your office? In both instances, you know where you *ought* to be; you also know where you'd *better* be.

A more realistic view

Pastors deal with these strains every day and, after awhile, they start to wear us down. While young, we think we can leap over tall buildings with a single bound and walk on water too. And many times we do it until we get old and start breaking apart.

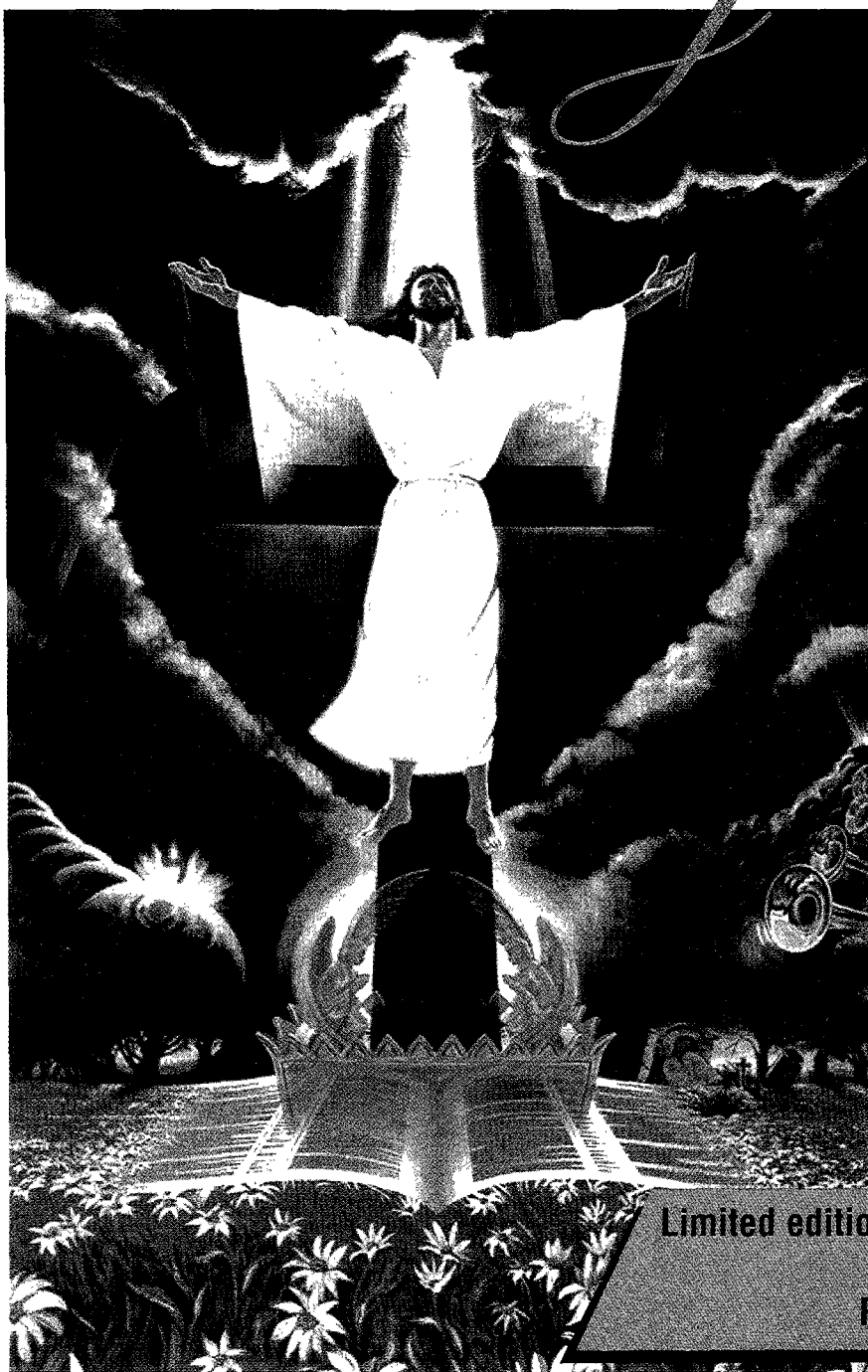
As pastors, we handle holy things, but we are not *that* holy. We say holy words, but we are not divine. Jesus, whom we live to emulate, was Holy and was Divine. But not even He, during His walk on earth, satisfied everyone He met.

The solution, on the one hand, is to get congregations to take a more realistic view of the clergy. In a dispute, the congregation is quick enough to point out that a preacher is only human. But, day to day, it demands more.

After awhile, the tiny scars from the small battles meld together into bigger and bigger scars, forming a patchwork of uncertainty and, yes, anger. The countless squabbles leave in their wake debris and carnage. The time comes when all that just has to be cleaned out and swept aside so the church can go on with its mission.

I suppose what this all means is that, from time to time, we have to update our own files and make revisions of how we want our obituaries to read. Dr. Death isn't going to do it for us. And, not too long ago, I made my decision on what I *didn't* want mine to say: "Today Bill Self sank like a rock, beat up, burned out, angry and depressed, no good to himself, no good to the people he loved." ■

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NET '98

THE NEXT MILLENNIUM SEMINAR

NET '98 officially began its journey on November 15, 1997, with the "UniteIgnite" satellite rally uplinked to the North American continent from Pioneer Memorial Church (PMC) at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.



*Russell Burrill is
director of the North
American Division
Evangelism Institute,
Berrien Springs,
Michigan.*

Responses from congregations across the continent assure a heightened sense of spiritual expectancy for what God can and will do with NET '98. Scheduled to begin on October 9, 1998, with PMC again hosting, NET '98 will again be the greatest single Adventist evangelistic thrust. Dwight K. Nelson, PMC pastor, will be the main presenter, and his emphasis will be on building relationships.

Finding a forever friendship

The NET '98 series will present "The Next Millennium Seminar: Finding a Forever Friendship With God." With that theme as the focus, Dwight Nelson will present the Adventist message from a relational perspective, helping people discover a fresh and meaningful "forever friendship" with the Saviour. Each night's presentation of the great truths and prophecies of Scripture will seek to implement the appeal of *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415: "It is the dark-

ness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men [and women] are losing their knowledge of His character. . . . At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. . . . The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love."

Accepting this relational summons, NET '98 will seek to be sensitive to Generation X by interfacing with the prevailing hunger of this generation for meaningful relationships. The university setting and the choice of Pastor Nelson as the speaker are a deliberate attempt to appeal and be sensitive to Generation X. Nelson, pastor of the University church for 15 years, understands the needs of this generation and preaches each week to thousands of young people. He knows GenXers and speaks to their hearts.

While NET '98 will be user-friendly for

R U S S E L L B U R R I L L

the young, it is designed to appeal to people of all ages and will present truth to change lives. It will be the most expansive single effort that Adventists have yet initiated to share the good news of Jesus with every man, woman, and child on earth!

Start building relationships now

Because of the relational emphasis of NET '98, church members are encouraged to begin the process of building relationships with unchurched people now. This series will not succeed if churches simply rely on traditional handbill and TV advertising. These are helpful and needed, but in addition NET '98 needs churches to form relationships with community people before NET '98 begins. Satellite meetings are reaping events. One can only reap what one sows. It is time to start building friendships now in preparation for NET '98.

However, we cannot build relationships with people merely for the purpose of leading them into church membership. Instead, God commands us to move out into the world, establishing relationships with people as we demonstrate God's love for them. One of the by-products of such sharing is that many will come to faith in Christ because they have seen Christ's love in action—God's people reflecting the real gospel in their lives. That's why friendship evangelism is a key preparatory event for NET '98.

Many churches in the past have relied primarily on the handbill to bring "strangers" who would make decisions to be a part of God's church. God has blessed, and many of these "strangers" have joined the family of God and are no more strangers. This will also happen in NET '98, but the program envisions people coming to meetings because they have been invited by friends. In other words, those who attend will have actually become friends with existing Christians before the satellite meetings begin.

Friendship evangelism

Everyone has friends both inside and outside of the church. These may be relatives, neighbors, work associates, people with common interests, and many others. Friendship evangelism encourages church members to enhance existing relationships

as well as to develop new ones. How can one share Christ's love through existing relationships? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Share Christ's love by meeting a need in the life of the person with whom you are seeking to enhance your relationship.
2. Strengthen that relationship by inviting the person to share a meal with you, either at your home or at a restaurant.
3. Invite other members to join you for the sharing of food, thus acquainting the person with other Christians.

Because of the relational emphasis of NET '98, church members are encouraged to begin the process of building relationships with unchurched people now. This series will not succeed if churches simply rely on traditional handbill and TV advertising.

-
4. Share common interests and activities.
 5. Watch for the providential openings that the Holy Spirit creates for you to share Christ's love with your friend.
 6. As your friend reveals an interest in spiritual things, don't be shy about sharing with them what Jesus means to you. You don't have to give a Bible study to tell in a simple way the great friend you have found in Jesus.

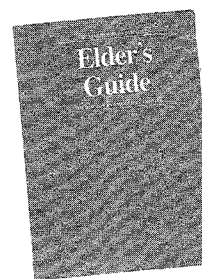
It is Christ's methods that will give real success in reaching people. Jesus mixed with people so that they could see He desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, met them at the point of their need, and won their confidence. Then He said to them, "Follow me."

This approach takes time and patience, but it is Christ's model of evangelism.¹

Prayer warriors

NET '98 hopes to enlist 100,000 prayer warriors in North America and one million in the world.² The motto for this prayer initiative is "Forward on Our Knees." Only as NET '98 preparation and execution are bathed in prayer is its success ensured. NET '98 envisions an enlarged prayer plan: In addition to challenging church members to pray regularly, it seeks to take prayer from the church into the community. It envisions many church members moving out into their communities, going door to door, seeking prayer requests, praying for those needs, and building relationships with these community people.

A cadre of prayer warriors is needed in every church that is involved in NET '98. These people will meet together every Sabbath to pray for NET '98. In addition, they will assemble monthly for a one-hour NET '98 prayer time. Some will choose a block or street and pray for those who live in each home. Then they will knock on the doors and elicit prayer requests. They will return regularly to discover how God is answering their prayers. As the people see needs being



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fulfilled by multiple answers to prayer, relationships will build. The Adventist church needs to be known in each area as the church that prays for the community. Even in the prayer-warrior program, it is the goal of NET '98 to build relationships with unchurched people in the community.

Discover Bible Schools

As relationships develop and spiritual interest is awakened, new friends can be enrolled in the local Discover Bible School.³ The lessons provide a way to share Bible truths in a nonthreatening way. As they proceed through the lessons, their spiritual interest will be enhanced. They will then be prime prospects to be invited to NET '98 meetings to discover a "forever friendship with God."

NET '98 calls for strong lay involvement in the preparation phase, but this phase is not the only time when lay people will play a pivotal role in the series. NET '98 is asking each participating church to enlist a corps of key lay people to help out in conducting the meetings. This involvement includes the

traditional roles of greeters, ushers, and helpers for the children's program but also seeks to recruit a number of individuals to serve as lay counselors.⁴

Lay counselors

These specially recruited lay counselors will assist the pastor in the visitation and follow-up of the NET '98 meetings. They will enable the local church to accomplish the NET '98 objective of strengthening and building relationships. NET '98 envisions every interested friend who attends being assigned to a lay counselor. The lay counselors will work to build relationships with these friends throughout the NET '98 seminar. If the friend comes forward to accept Christ, the lay counselor will come forward with the friend to lead them to Jesus. When a friend's decision is to be baptized, the lay counselor will be available to lead the person through this decision both at the meeting place and in home visitation.

Adventism is a lay movement, with laity involvement needed in evangelism—not just to pass out handbills and give invitations but

to be engaged in the whole process. The pastor alone will not be able to give the time needed to build solid relationships with all the people who attend NET '98. The pastor will need to enlist lay people to accomplish this task. In the past, Adventist evangelism has relied on the visiting evangelist or pastor to do this work. NET '98 is different. Because its relational aspect needs to be demonstrated as well as taught, a host of people are needed to make it successful.

Four exciting reasons

NET '98 is exciting for four reasons: (1) it envisions laity and clergy working together; (2) it foresees a mighty prayer movement; (3) it seeks to proclaim the Adventist message through a relational paradigm. Our prophetic approach will definitely be presented but examined through relational eyes; (4) it attempts to be particularly sensitive to the needs of Generation X through the use of the relational message and a short, crisp, one-hour program.

NET '98 is the most exciting event in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It will be downlinked on nearly every continent. From Africa to Asia, to the South Pacific, to Europe, India and Russia, to all the Americas, and possibly even China, God's message of finding a forever friendship with God will be proclaimed. If your church has not already decided to be a part of this extraordinary event, why not call your conference coordinator right now and have your church listed as one of the sites. Remember, you need to begin now, because NET '98 is a reaping event and needs much preparation. Your success October 9 through November 14, 1998, will be determined by the amount of preparation you invest in the months leading up to NET '98. ■

¹ Recommended tools to help church members in friendship evangelism are *Making Friends for God*, by Mark Finley (Hart Research Institute, 1-800-487-4278) and *Friendship Evangelism Seminar*, by Monte Sahlin (AdventSource, 1-800-328-0525).

² The prayer-warrior plan is detailed in the NET '98 Pastor's Manual, part 1, available from your conference coordinator.

³ Contact the *Voice of Prophecy* at 1-800-487-4278 for details on setting up your own local church Discover Bible School.

⁴ Job descriptions are available in the NET '98 Pastor's Manual, part 2.

NEW DISCOVERIES AT PHILISTINE EKRON

During the past two decades, archaeological excavations have vividly illuminated the Philistine culture, perhaps more than any other ancient culture of biblical times.



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To date excavations conducted at Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron have produced distinct architecture and other artifacts that portray the advanced nature of Philistine life.

Origins

According to the Bible, the Philistines originated from the islands and coast lands of the Aegean Sea, possibly from Crete. Ezekiel 25:15, 16 (NKJV) portrays the Philistines in poetic parallel with the *Cherethites* (or Cretens), while Jeremiah 47:4 and Amos 9:7 associate them with Caphtor, which can be identified with the area of Crete. Egyptian campaign records seem to confirm this in their mention of the arrival of the “Sea Peoples” who included Tjeker, Denten, Sharduna, and Weshesh, who are mentioned by Pharaohs Merneptah and Ramses III.¹ Among these other groups of “Sea Peoples” the *prst* (Peleset) or Philistines are mentioned for the first time during the eighth year of Ramses III (1176 B.C.). We know from the Egyptian records of Ramses III that significant land and sea battles took place between these groups and the Egyptians. Whether the Philistines were relocated to the Canaanite coastal areas by the Egyptians after their defeat or whether they

settled there on their own accord is still debated; archaeological evidence shows their first widespread settlement during the early twelfth century B.C. The Bible refers to five major cities as Philistine: Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza (Jer. 25:20; Amos 1:8; Zeph. 2:4), and Gath (Josh. 11:22; 1 Sam. 5:8; Amos 6:2).

Recent discoveries at Ekron

At Tel Miqne-Ekron, 13 excavations were conducted between 1981 and 1996, jointly led by Seymour Gitin of the W. F. Albright Institute in Jerusalem and Trude Dothan of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, together with 22 sponsoring and supporting institutions. The 85-acre site is located southeast of modern Tel Aviv on the southern coastal plain.

The first stages of Philistine occupation following the destruction of the Canaanite city indicate a large “hearth” room with marked affinities to similar hearth rooms in the Aegean.² In 1994, just north of this area a heavy concentration of a specific type of pottery was found in the initial level of occupation. This pottery is related to forms and styles found throughout mainland Greece, Crete, Cyprus, Syria, and Turkey. It

influenced the Philistine bichrome pottery of subsequent occupation levels. Its local manufacture has been confirmed through Neutron Activation Analysis and the large number of pottery manufacturing kilns found. These significant aspects provide crucial connections between Philistine culture and the Aegean world.³

In the early tenth century B.C., Ekron was completely destroyed and abandoned in the wave of destruction that swept over Philistia.⁴ Although excavators remain uncertain whether the destruction was caused by the Israelites under David or the Egyptians under Siamun, David could in fact have been responsible. Following this destruction a small settlement was reestablished on the site, but it was a mere reflection of the great fortified city that had preceded it. The 10-acre occupation was restricted to the northern acropolis and was constructed on a series of monumental stone platforms. The occupation of this smaller site extended, according to the ceramic sequence, to the eighth century B.C.

Not until the seventh century, when it

became a vassal city-state of the Assyrian Empire, did Ekron expand extensively to encompass more than 85 acres. The Neo-Assyrian kings Sargon II and Sennacherib captured and held it under their imperial jurisdiction. During the time of their successors, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, the city became a highly developed and centralized olive oil production center boasting the largest capacity for olive oil production in the Near East.⁵ Archaeologists have estimated to date 105 olive oil installations at Ekron, producing 1,000 tons of oil annually, requiring over 48,000 storejars.⁶

During the 1994–96 excavations, a Neo-Assyrian type temple of monumental proportions was uncovered, including frontal and side entrances with four-meter-long, single-stone thresholds, thus far unique in Palestine. Hundreds of whole vessels were found in the building, as well as a steellike stone with incised lines and a rosette—an Assyrian royal/cultic symbol. The building also contained a number of Assyrian type cultic vessels and a unique carved elephant

tusk with the figure of a queen and the name of the Egyptian king Merneptah.⁷ In 1995 a 23-centimeter-long, coiled, gold Egyptian cobra, or uraeus, was found, and other Egyptian objects were discovered in other areas. These objects indicate strong Egyptian influence during the final stage of occupation. The warnings of the Hebrew prophets against an alliance with Egypt predicting their destruction and captivity were based on the realities that were soon to take place (Jer. 42:14-19; Ezek. 17:11-24). The influence and domination of Egypt over the Philistine cities in the final years of the seventh century would not save them from the onslaught of Nebuchadnezzar.

The inscription

Also in Ekron, the 1996 excavation made perhaps the most impressive discovery: an inscription in the destruction debris of the sanctuary of the temple complex. Found upside-down, the rectangular limestone block is similar to those used for building purposes at Ekron. Its find spot suggests that it was originally part of the western wall of the sanctuary—perhaps its focal point as a royal dedicatory inscription of the temple. The inscription is complete, containing five lines that are translated by renowned epigrapher, Joseph Naveh, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem:

1. The temple (which) he built 'kys son of Padi, son of
2. Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron,
3. for Ptgyl his lady. May she bless him, and
4. prote[ct] him, and prolong his days, and bless
5. his [I]and.⁸

The most important factor is that it identifies the ancient site of Tel Migne as Ekron—the only confirmation of the name of the site since it was first identified by J. Naveh in 1957.⁹

The city's ruler, identified as *Ikausu*, is also mentioned as the king of Ekron in the Assyrian records of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.¹⁰ Its consonantal spelling is the same as *Achish*, the name of the well-known king(s) of Gath identified in the Bible during the time of David and Solomon (1 Sam. 21; 27; 28; 29; 1 Kings 2:39, 40)¹¹ three and a half centuries earlier. Padi, the

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father of *Ikausu*, is identified as the king of Ekron in the annals of Sennacherib in the context of his third campaign in 701 B.C.¹² The additional forefathers identified in the dedicatory inscription appear here for the first time, yet their significance cannot be overestimated. They indicate a dynastic period of succession that lasted at least from the eighth through most of the seventh century. Moreover, they help to secure a founding date for the temple complex around 650 B.C.¹³

Finally, the mention of *Ptgyh*, the goddess to whom this temple is dedicated, provides an important insight into Philistine cultic and religious practices. The name is of non-Semitic origin, perhaps a Philistine or Indo-European name, and even though unknown to us, she "must have been a deity of considerable power to safeguard the well-being of the dynasty and the city."¹⁴

Her power proved inadequate, however. The commercial activities of this Neo-Assyrian vassal city-state, then under the influence of Egypt, were abruptly cut short by the invasion of Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 603 B.C. A massive destruction level evidenced by tumbled columns, hundreds of smashed storage vessels, and collapsed upper floors of the monumental temple and throughout the site attest to the destructive force of the invading Babylonians. Other Philistine cities such as Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Timna also suffered similar destructions at the hands of the Babylonians. Unable to regain momentum, and with its cultural core lost, Philistine culture, too, collapsed; its people, either dispersed or deported, were quickly assimilated into the surrounding cultures.¹⁵

Today only their remains are left to speak. Traces of what once was a flourishing culture continue to provide clues to the now distant past. It was an era where great men like David and Goliath lived and fought. It was a nation of people whom God used to test Israel. Today the words of the prophet Zephaniah continue to echo over the silent mounds of ruins: "For Gaza shall be deserted, and Ashkelon shall become a desolation; Ashdod's people shall be driven out at noon, and Ekron shall be uprooted. Woe to you inhabitants of the seacoast, you nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the

Philistines; and I will destroy you till no inhabitant is left" (Zeph. 2:4, 5, RSV). ■

¹ T. Dothan, "What We Know about the Philistines," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8/4 (1982), 30-35; N. K. Sanders, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean 1250-1150 B.C.*, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

² T. Dothan and M. Dothan, *People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 242-245.

³ T. Dothan, "Tel Mique-Ekron: The Aegean Affinities of the Sea Peoples' [Philistines'] Settlement in Canaan in Iron I," in *Recent Excavations in Israel: A View to the West*, Archaeological Institute of America Colloquia and Conference Papers 1 (Dubuque, Iowa: Archaeological Institute of America, 1995), 41-59.

⁴ Dothan and Dothan, 252.

⁵ S. Gitin, "Ekron of the Philistines: The Rise and Fall of a 7th Century BCE Neo-Assyrian Vassal City-State," *Orient-Express* (1994) 20-22.

⁶ D. Eitam, "Tel Mique-Ekron-Survey of Oil Presses: 1985-1986," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 1986, 72-74. See also, S. Gitin, "Ekron of the Philistines," Part II: "Olive Suppliers to the World," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16/2 (1990) 32-42, 59.

⁷ On Merneptah's presence in Canaan, see M. G. Hasel, "Israel in the Merneptah Stela" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 296 (1994) 45-61.

⁸ S. Gitin, T. Dothan, and J. Naveh, "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription From Ekron," *Israel Exploration Journal*, 47/1-2 (1997): 1-16.

⁹ J. Naveh, "Khirbet al-Muqanna—Ekron," *Israel Exploration Journal* 8 (1958): 87-100, 165-170.

¹⁰ A. L. Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 291, 294.

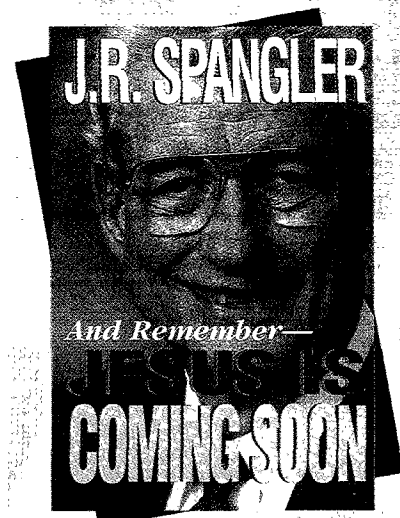
¹¹ The name in the dedicatory inscription has the identical spelling of the Old Testament *Achish*. This puts to rest some earlier theories that found a Trojan origin of this name as Anchises. The translators suggest that the name derived from *Akhayus* or Achaeon, meaning "Greek." This has important implications for the origin of the Philistines. Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh, "Royal Dedicatory Inscription," 11. Cf. D. L. Christensen, "Achish," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 55, 56.

¹² Oppenheim, 287.

¹³ Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh, 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵ Gitin, 22; Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh, 3; For another view on the process of acculturation, see B. Stone, "The Philistines and Acculturation: Culture, Change, and Ethnic Continuity in the Iron Age," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 298 (1995) 7-32.



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BEHIND MISSION COMPOUND WALLS

The reality of mission service vividly hit me that first Sabbath I sat down in the institutional church on the compound where I was to serve 8,000 miles from home.



Bruce Norman, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of New Testament and Christian theology at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

As I viewed the congregation—composed of students and workers from over fifteen different countries—my first thought was, *How can I possibly hope to teach these international students when I have been trained to teach in a culture so distant and different from theirs?*

That experience highlighted one of the most challenging issues facing Adventism: how to get along with each other in spite of our national and cultural differences. These differences are not only international (Asian, African, European, Australian, American) but also intranational (Black, Hispanic, Asian, gender, generation, socioeconomic, etc., in the United States).

Three levels

The varying worldviews of the people groups who comprise the Adventist Church often conflict with each other on three varying cultural levels. The first of these levels is that of local culture, the environment in which a person grows up and lives. It is primarily from local culture that a person learns how to act. This is also one of the strongest levels of culture, one which a person rarely loses.

The second level is world culture, through which an individual or institution relates to the rest of its world vis-à-vis its economic and social life. Survival of the individual and/or an organization and its unity at this juncture depends on good interpersonal and oftentimes, good international, relationships. The second level of culture may incorporate elements of the local culture, but it also adopts and adapts their many varied characteristics and forges them into a hybrid so that all can communicate and carry on business.

The third level can be termed a biblical culture, which is based upon the absolute truths taught in Scripture and that should govern every Christian everywhere. It is from the perspective of biblical culture that the church should and must relate to the other two levels.

When cultures collide

World and local cultures as a whole do not provide us with unifying moral structures. They simply prescribe varying ways of doing things. In parts of Asia, for example, one might seek to get a person's attention by having the palms of the hands

BRUCE NORMAN

facing down, whereas in America, the palms face up. Neither way is *right* or *wrong*. They are just different.

Basic biblical principle, on the other hand, transcends cultures and subcultures because, for the believer at least, it is based on the absolute truth of God's revelation as revealed in Scriptures. If, for example, the Bible tells us that it is morally wrong to kill, then that is true everywhere, regardless of local customs. This is a moral imperative that transcends local and world cultures. It is right or wrong because God declares it to be so. And this, for the Christian, becomes the standard for any local or world cultural practice.

The problem created by diverse cultures within an organization, in our case the Adventist Church, comes when one local or even world culture claims to have the only possible interpretation of reality. The emphasis is upon the *rightness* of one's own cultural way and the *wrongness* of others. This attitude plays one culture over against another and usually leads one to judge the other for not being like it or for doing things differently or for thinking differently. Often the attempt is made to impose a local culture upon all others as the standard for making decisions and accomplishing goals. Hence, the tendency is to erect barriers that judge another's cultural perspective and/or national heritage.

When these barriers are erected, the church can find itself unable to live in peace or to even respect diverse cultures. Is it possible for Adventists to live together unified in our cultural diversity, or must we remain individual communities separated by parochial concerns?

Four biblical principles

For the Christian to explore this question, he or she must begin with the Bible, which gives at least four foundational principles that, properly understood, provide the basis for helping us transcend the culture gap.

1. *All are created by God.* According to Genesis 1:26, 27, God created every individual in God's own image, which means that we each have an intrinsic value that should not be undermined because of the locality of our birth. We can and should respect each other if for no other reason than because we are children of God. We are all

related because God is our Father. Each person is called to be a part of the family and culture of heaven.

This should remind us that just as there is diversity in human families, so also is there in God's. The differences are not good or evil but simply represent the diversity of God and its expression in His creative ability to produce unique beings. This creative power of God might be best illustrated by the proverbial truth that no

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"wrongness" of others.

two snowflakes are exactly alike. When you consider the millions of flakes that fall with each snow, it gives just a glimpse into the diversity of God's creative purpose.

2. *We are all saved by faith in Christ.* The second foundational biblical principle is found in John 3:14-16. We have been saved by the grace of God as demonstrated by the infinite gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, all believers are on the same footing in Christ, no matter their origin, race, nationality, or gender. The process of salvation is not different for different cultures nor does one

culture have the market on salvation or spirituality. All who believe in Christ by faith are included in the heavenly culture, which transcends barriers of sex, race, and nationality.

3. *All are equal in Christ.* According to Galatians 3:26-29, all are equal in biblical culture and heirs to the same promise given to Abraham because all are in Christ and of Christ. Equality in the biblical sense means that no class distinctions, no racial barriers, no gender separation, and no cultural bigotry exist in the kingdom of God, because all people have been united by Christ's death. Not all differences are eradicated, but the person of biblical culture looks to the unifying power of the cross of Jesus Christ to bring diverse people and people groups into oneness (Eph. 2:11-22). This helps make a person colorblind so that he or she treats everyone with respect, as a brother or sister in Christ.

4. *Unity in diversity and diversity in unity.* First Corinthians 12:12-14 reminds us that there is diversity in the united body of the church. Just as the human body has many different parts that contribute to the whole, so the body of Christ, the church, has a diversity that contributes to the whole. In fact, the Bible communicates clearly that we do not need to be identical, look the same, act the same, or be the same. God's design for the universe is full of diversity; that diversity, however, is a diversity that gathers into a great oneness. We must get along with each other, appreciating our differences rather than exploiting them to judge one culture as being better or worse than another, using cultural aspects rather than biblical principle as our basis for judgment.

Six guidelines for living together

Now, how can we apply these principles? There are six essential guidelines built upon Scripture that will help us to live with each other in spite of our differences.

1. *Show love and toleration.* One of our first tasks as members of an international community is to show love and toleration toward each other. Ephesians 4:32 admonishes us to be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other as Christ has forgiven us. Unquestionably, the one great need of the church today is this kind of compassion.

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Thousands, particularly youth, leave our churches because of our lack of Christian compassion. If we can learn to show love and toleration, realizing that there are many different ways to do the same thing, the church will be able to work unitedly in spite of our differences.

2. *Serve rather than rule.* Leadership in Christianity is not a hierarchical but a service performed for others. We should not, like the secular world, attempt to control and condemn one another because we believe that our culture has the only right way of doing things. Rather, we should emphasize service and deference. Christ tells us that the greatest among us is to be the servant of all (see Matt. 20:20-28). Hence, servanthood is an important key in helping us to get along with one another.

3. *Treat each other with respect.* Galatians 6:10 lays down the principle of being good to all people, especially those in the church. Ephesians 5:17-21 reminds us to submit to each other out of reverence to Christ. Peter encourages us to respect everyone, love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, and honor our rulers (1 Peter 2:17). Respect for each other's cultures is an essential for living together in unity. We must be sensitive to the differences in cultural practice while remembering that every Adventist is working toward the same goal: spreading the good news of the gospel, in the setting of the Three Angels' messages. Our cultural method of reaching these goals will be as diverse as each culture itself. None of these approaches should be judged as "right" or "wrong" as long as they are consistent with the essential principles of Scripture. One culture's way of doing evangelism, for example, should not be imposed on the entire church as the "only" way. Evangelism must be done differently in China than on an American university campus. They are just varied ways or alternate routes to reach the same destination.

4. *Treat everyone equally.* This is what the Bible means when it condemns favoritism. If we show favoritism to a particular culture, then we are sinners and will be judged and convicted by the law (James 2:1-13). We must work together and respect the fact that each person (and culture) has equal status before God because of Jesus Christ.

5. *Avoid gossip.* In Proverbs, gossip is said to separate close friends (16:28), betray interpersonal confidence (20:19), and cause quarrels to continue (26:20-22). We all know the power of the tongue and the destruction that it can cause (see James 3:5-12). We should especially avoid gossip, which engenders rumors about particular cultural practices and/or the spiritual condition of a certain culture. Ephesians 4:29 is helpful in this regard: It says that we should not let unwholesome talk (such as criticism of culture) come out of our mouths but should rather speak only that which benefits and uplifts our hearers. This means that differing practices of culture should not be condemned but rather seen for the richness of their diversity that the cross of Christ unifies into a beautiful tapestry of rich colors, which in turn reflects God's character and fashions humanity into His temple of living stones (1 Pet. 2:4, 5).

6. *Learn to be content in your circumstances.* Regardless of which culture a person comes from, we need to be content in all circumstances (Phil. 4:10-13). Godliness should not be a means for financial gain, nor should the Christian covet that which does not belong to him or her (1 Tim. 6:3-10). In fact, we should keep our lives free from the tyranny of material things because these things are often causes for fights among believers (James 4:1-3).

We can live together in harmony in today's church, even though we come from different cultures, because in the kingdom of God there is unity in diversity and a diversity which leads to unity. "There is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-29). Being in Christ breaks down religiocultural differences (no Jew or Greek), socioeconomic distinctions (no slave or free) and gender bigotry (no male or female). And the result is that all "are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

If we are all heirs to the same promise, then we should all be able to get along together. This is the truth that stuck uppermost in my mind as I sat in the church behind mission compound walls and contemplated the dilemma of trying to teach in that highly multicultural setting. ■

The heart of the pastor's task

continued from p. 4

depicts beautifully this pivotal task of the Christian minister. "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NIV). This is what we proclaim and live. Jesus stretching out the wounded palms of his hands for the world to see so that those who will may place their searching fingers right into those wounds, see and feel the reality of His suffering and so perceive Him, come to faith, and have life through His name. It is the essential task and privilege of the minister of Christ to take hold, as it were, of the fingers of struggling human beings and bring them over to the outstretched, crucified hand of the living Christ. It is to lead them into the wounds of a resurrected Lord so that they can see for themselves and believe.

Preaching the Resurrection. This was definitely at the heart of the New Testament mission, and it remains at the heart our mission. It is what Dwight Nelson, Gardner Taylor, and Hyveth Williams are about in the three sermons published in this issue. It is, of course, the particular passion of this issue of *Ministry*, and we hope the underlying ethos of every issue. ■

Good news from the grave

continued from p. 9

Death defeated

The second piece of good news is the heart of the angel's testimony to the women. It is that which Paul wished Timothy would never forget, and the entire New Testament urges this generation to always remember, which is that Jesus Christ is not here. He is risen. Death could not control or overwhelm Him.

Death, the wages of sin, began with the act of a woman in the Garden of Eden, and to women was given the first announcement of the Resurrection and assurance that Jesus Christ had overcome, paid it all, finished the task for all humanity.

He is risen, seated at the right hand of

God in heavenly places, and because He lives, truth lives. Because Jesus lives, hope endures. Because Jesus lives, love triumphs and virtue is justified. Because Jesus lives, integrity is legitimated. Righteousness is imputed and sanctification is imparted to those who will come to Jesus "just as I am without one plea," as the old song says. Because He lives, holiness is real, salvation has arrived, grace is all sufficient, and mercy is invincible. Because Jesus lives, the oppressed will be liberated, justice will be adjudicated, and judgment will be definitive. Because Jesus lives, we do not have to grieve like those with no hope. Because Jesus lives, we live, and from an empty grave comes the message that gladdens the heart.

The gospel call

Another piece of good news from that empty grave holds important instructions for us today. "Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead" (verse 7). Remember, the disciples had deserted Christ. They had not stood by Him at the cross. They had not helped with His burial, so they were not to be honored with the vision of angels or the first sight of the risen Lord. This was reserved for the faithful women, who thus received their mission to carry a message—a foretaste of the ministry they and all of us are to perform in the church of Christ until Jesus comes. It was a gracious message full of sweetness to the sorrowing who had abandoned their Lord in the hour of danger. It was a message filled with forgiveness and love for His conscience-stricken apostles.

And it's our message for today. Are we taking the responsibility to tell people that Jesus Christ is risen, or are we still trying to prove that Easter is a pagan holiday? The world knows that it is. What they do not know, experientially, is that Jesus Christ died so that those lost and crippled in sin can be resurrected in Christ Jesus and become new creatures. That's more good news from the grave.

He lives!

When I was pastoring the Boston Temple, one of our member's teenage nephew was struck by a stray bullet one Friday afternoon in New York City. The

bullet permanently lodged itself in the back of his head, leaving him unconscious. MRIs confirmed that there was no expectation of recovery. Early Sabbath morning, the member, named Gilberto, was summoned to his nephew's side for the family's final farewell. As it happened, we had our regular morning prayer ministry, and Gilberto stopped for prayer and support before rushing off to New York. Pastor Ken Baumgarten, my associate, joined me and about six others in a circle of intensive prayer. Someone pleaded with God to go before Gilberto and perform a miracle.

Several hours later, as he sat by his nephew's bed, holding his lifeless hand, Gilberto began to cry and pray. He said he prayed, "Lord, You are our risen Saviour. You can do something special for us and this child." As he whispered his urgent plea, the boy began to cough so hard that blood spurted from his mouth. A nurse was called immediately to wipe the blood away in case it would block the young man's breathing. As she wiped his mouth, she discovered that the bullet had come out with the blood!

The physicians were amazed. They emphasized that there was no way that bullet could travel through from the back of the head to the mouth without destroying vital tissues and taking the boy's life. God had gone before Gilberto and performed this incredible miracle on his nephew who, within a week, was released from the hospital. He is now fine.

Our God will go before us in times of trouble. Behold, the Lord is going before us, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow. He will go before us in marriage, to iron out the rough edges when no other help can be found. He will go before us with our children and level out the mountains of rebellion. He will go before us at work and straighten out the crooked paths. He will go before us always to exalt the valleys of disappointment and chase away the shadows of death.

Thus, in this world of fear, of sorrow, of death, the greatest discovery for humanity was not when we learned to harness the power of electricity or when we split the atom or even when we created the Pentium chip. The greatest discovery was when a few women went to anoint the dead body of a Man and discovered the empty tomb of our living Lord. ■



These two women could not have been more different. Mary K. was a pastor's wife. Karla Faye was an ax murderer.

Mary K. was a woman of virtue. Karla Faye was a woman of violence.

For nearly 60 years, Mary K. gave her life in willing service to others. During her much shorter life Karla Faye destroyed the lives of others.

Recently, much of the world watched and waited to see if Karla Faye Tucker would become the first woman executed by the State of Texas in 135 years. Thousands of individuals—including personal pleas to the governor from such notables as Pope John Paul II and Pat Robertson—prayed that her life would be spared from the lethal injection which finally ended her life.

Now let's make one thing clear. Karla Faye Tucker deserved to die for her sins.

Back in 1983, during a weekend orgy with her boyfriend, Karla Faye, a drug-addicted prostitute, consumed astonishing quantities of Valium, heroin, speed, percodan, mandrax, marijuana, dialudid, methadone, tequila, and rum. Then, in a revenge robbery, the pair brutally murdered two individuals by hacking their bodies into pieces with a pickax.

A Texas jury found the evidence of her guilt so compelling and her crime so heinous that they sentenced her to death for her deeds.

And at the end, Karla received the death penalty she deserved despite unmistakable evidence that while in prison she had been genuinely converted and had become a born again Christian.

Neither legal appeals that reached even the Supreme Court of the United States, nor fervent requests for mercy from famous preachers, nor a United Nations

Mary K. and Karla Faye

JAMES A. CRESS

resolution, nor the fervent prayers of thousands of believers, deterred her execution from moving forward on schedule.

Of course, not everyone prayed for Karla's life to be spared. Although the brother of one of her victims' pled for her death sentence to be commuted, the husband of that same victim expressed his delight in the approaching death penalty and loudly declared that Karla was about to meet his wife "on the other side." There, he asserted, she would receive an even more severe punishment.

Likewise, skeptics of jail house conversions declared that any prisoner facing execution will get religion and that if Karla's conversion was not "death bed," it was, at the very least, "death row." They point out that jailhouse conversions are both commonplace and not relevant in deciding who gets a reprieve and Texas has never granted pardon to anyone based on religious conversion.

On the other hand, Mary K. was the consummate pastor's wife. Baptized as a young girl of 14, she devotedly followed her Lord for the next 56 years, over half a century of that in partnership ministry.

If Mary K. understood God's will on any subject, she followed it. All who knew her declared she was a saint, if for no other reason than that she faithfully supported her pastor spouse who self-admits he was "difficult" to live with.

Throughout their ministry, Mary K. was often the oil poured on troubled waters in the churches they served and her sweet spirit was influential in showing many the meaning of God's love.

From a young age, Mary K. dedicated whatever talents she possessed to Christ's service. Her musical abilities, organiza-

tional skills, outgoing demeanor, savvy understanding of personalities, intuitive comprehension, firm will, and financial acumen consistently secured the best for God's cause and for her family.

As a direct result of Mary K.'s influence, all three of her sons became ministers. The Biblical description of a virtuous woman aptly describes Mary K.'s life.

Facing her threescore and tenth birthday in declining health, Mary K. expressed her confidence in her Saviour and her desire to rest in Jesus rather than to continue the struggle with pain and disability. In His mercy, our Heavenly Father allowed her to fall asleep in Jesus.

Now let's make one more thing clear. Mary K. deserved to die for her sins.

You may wonder at this assertion after I've told you of her saintly service through so many decades. But the reality is that Mary K. was as much a sinner as Karla Faye.

Scripture declares the wages of sin is death and, like Karla Faye, Mary K. was a sinner. Whether pastor's spouse or pickax prostitute, the reality of human existence is that we are sinners. We may all sin differently, but we are all sinners alike.

I can even tell you a few of Mary K.'s faults. Although she would have never stooped to their level, she seldom suffered fools or their ventures. She also made obedience a virtue to the extent that she later realized she had never fully known the reality of righteousness by faith until the last decade of her life when she read the personal testimony of Martin Weber in his book, *My Tortured Conscience* and experienced years of greater joy as a result.

Now Mary K. was several decades ahead of Karla Faye in her walk with God as well as light-years in the process of sanctification, the life-long, ongoing experience of God's work in the lives of His people. But in the assurance of justification and in eager anticipation of resurrection, the pastor's wife was not one step ahead of the pickax killer.

Although they approached their

death's from different perspectives, both these women now await the promised resurrection when Jesus returns.

Both Mary K. and Karla Faye approached death in the certainty of the blessed hope. Mary K. knew that she would experience the rest of the blessed in Jesus and Karla Faye was certain that she would meet face to face with Jesus the next moment after her execution.

And that blessed hope they shared is the personal promise of our Saviour. If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, to receive you unto myself that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:1-3). The whole purpose of Jesus' return is to reunite Himself with His

people so that we can all be together in His kingdom.

Blessed hope! Blessed assurance!

Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. For the Lord Himself shall

descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then, we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (I Cor.15:51-54 and I Thess. 4:16-18).

By the way, I share the Blessed Hope with Mary K. and Karla Faye. In fact, I am personally related to these two women of such disparate backgrounds. Mary K. Cress is my mother. And Karla Faye Tucker, through our mutual faith in Jesus, is my sister. ■

Letters

continued from p. 9

very possible for the divorced pastor to remarry. If this happened, he would not be the husband of one wife. This being the case, he would not meet the *biblical guidelines*.

We have always been a fundamental Bible-based church, so I think we need to be very careful in this situation.—Malcom C. Dwyer, Horseheads, New York.

Timeless Healing

I am concerned that the uncritical book review of *Timeless Healing* (October 1997) may appear to be an endorsement of its content.

Subtitled "The Power and Biology of Belief," the book is an encouragement to use autosuggestion and self-hypnosis via the route of positive thinking and heavily dosed with visualization and guided imagery—using specific repetitive mantras in the form of words, sounds, or prayers familiar to the practitioner.

While his book is informative, Dr. Herbert Benson has merely described the mechanism by which Emile Coue's system of autosuggestion worked and describes the state as prehypnotic (p. 138). In practice there is little difference between the prehypnotic and actual self-hypnotic state.—Pastor Richard J. B. Willis, health and temperance director, British Union Conference. ■

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Quiet Hour update

Philippines: The Quiet Hour helped to send 120 teams for the Voice of Prophecy's golden anniversary where teams worked with the local churches and more than 51,000 people were baptized.

Romania: In 1997, 36 evangelistic teams went to Romania, where 7,000 people were baptized and 100 new churches were established.

Poland: A nationwide evangelistic program is being organized for 1998.

1998, 1999, 2000: Scores of youth teams, youth pastors, and Bible teachers are needed to conduct field schools of evangelism in many countries and to help establish new churches. Please contact Jim Zachary at The Quiet Hour: phone 909-779-9984; fax 909-769-9252; E-mail 74617.1552@compuserve.com. (See The Quiet Hour advertisement on p. 15.)

Canned goods concert

Often we want to help the needy in our community, but are unsure where

they are. This idea works well at Easter or Christmas. We even did it during Vacation Bible School and Kids Summer Crusade the year of the great Midwest flood. We asked children attending (and adults) to bring several canned goods for the needy to a specially decorated refrigerator carton in the foyer. Then at the end of the service or concert, we invited the local Salvation Army captain to visit and ask for the offering. Then we presented the captain with both the canned goods and the cash.

It was a wonderful reminder of the practical ways God has of supplying our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus. It also teaches our children the importance of sharing what they have, lest they become selfish Americans. —Douglas Rose, Belleville, Illinois.

Missionary moments

In order to emphasize missions and utilize youth on a weekly basis, our church uses a young person to share "Missionary Moments" in each service. After the youth has shared, we pray for the missionary or missionaries and their specific prayer requests. I feel any church could benefit from doing something similar. It's easy and effective. Why not try it?—E. Vance Culpepper, pastor, Myrtle Creek, Oregon.

YouthNet Rig

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- Encouraging business and ministry leaders to become YouthNet Rig logo sponsors—it's a great way to receive national exposure! YouthNet Rig, Center for Youth Evangelism, P. O. Box C, Berrien Springs, MI 49104; phone: 800-YOUTH2U; fax: 616-471-9883; E-mail: YouthNetRig@juno.com.

The Bible's Book of Revelation: Hope for Earth's Last Days

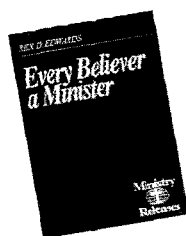
The editors of *Signs of the Times* have produced a special edition of the magazine entitled *The Bible's Book of Revelation: Hope for Earth's Last Days*. This 48-page, full-color magazine is designed to be used in connection with evangelistic meetings, seminars, Bible studies, prayer meetings, and small groups. This special edition is available now through your local ABC at 1-800-765-6955 and Seminars Unlimited at 1-800-982-3344.

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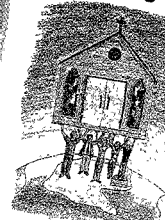
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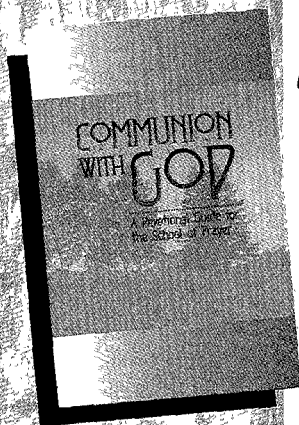


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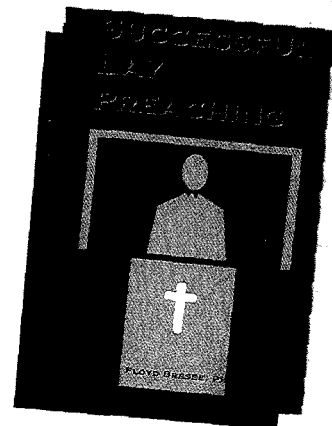
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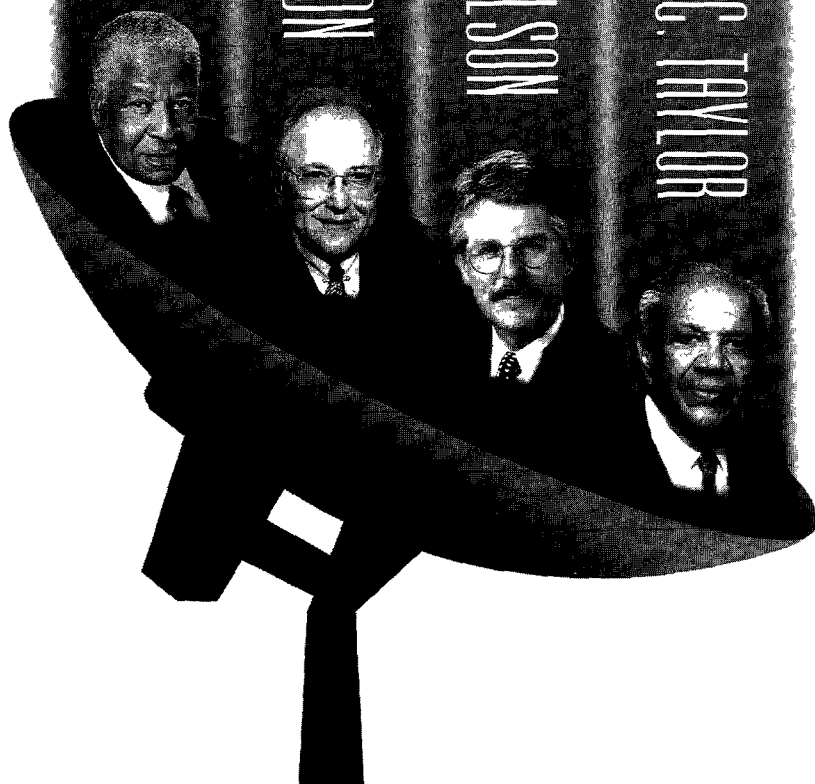
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