

MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors

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IN SEARCH OF A THEOLOGY**

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MINISTRY

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Subscription queries and address changes:

Email: calbij@gc.adventist.org

Fax: 301-680-6502

Phone: 301-680-6503

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AT THE RISK OF BEING SIMPLISTIC, MAY I ASK, "WHY MUST MRS. WHITE BE SEEN AS A THEOLOGIAN?"

What Matters Most?

I'm certainly confused about the purpose of the Viewpoint article, "What Matters Most?" in the October 2000 issue. I cannot for the life of me see any reason or wholesome purpose to this article. Imagine, Seventh-day Adventist pastors, SDA teachers, and SDA school board members sitting down to discuss the issue of allowing dancing in a Seventh-day Adventist school! This is shocking enough, but to see no references to the Bible or to the writings of Ellen White used in coming to this conclusion is beyond my comprehension as an SDA pastor myself. And to publish this article as if it has some valuable insight into how (if this is the suggested intention) we might also consider such issues in our church districts is certainly no model for any SDA to follow. Bringing dancing into our schools to appease a worldly appetite for entertainment is certainly no way to respond to the changes in the world either. If this is the only way we can keep our youth in our churches, then we would be better off without them.

I would like to remind us all that we serve a God who changes not, who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. His standards haven't changed! He is the One who said, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world!" And anyone with the index to the writings of Ellen White can quickly look up "dancing" and see what counsel is there. Yes, I could refer to many Bible passages myself in questioning the decision to dance, but we have come to a time when some new kind of thinking

is being used to determine what is right and wrong in our churches and schools. The clear Word from the Lord seems to be used less and less. And this article is in a *Ministry* issue that starts with a lead article on Ellen White as theologian. Do we still see her as a prophet too? If Jeremiah the prophet was here today reading this article, we could weep together! I am aghast!

—Douglas Carlson, pastor, Sault St. Marie, Michigan.

Editorial Note: We are truly sorry for any distress or confusion caused by this Viewpoint article. While it may be good to remind ourselves what it actually was that Jeremiah wept for, we should also say that we too would stand aghast if either the intent or the content of this article advocated what seems to be attributed to it in the above letter, or if it was as purposeless as is suggested. Even though Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy were not quoted in the article, their influence may definitely be felt in its thrust and thought; that is, as it discusses the issues it actually addresses.

It must be overtly stated that the purpose of the article is clearly not to consider the matter of dancing or not dancing, (or jewelry or no jewelry) but rather how those of us ministering in challenging areas of the Lord's vineyard may go about handling the intense differences that arise among significant numbers of our people when it comes to such matters.

Ministry editors would be among the first to admit that there is probably little purpose to this article when it comes to the pastor who ministers in a location in

which such questions do not arise with the force they do in other locations. It would indeed be a great editorial luxury if the readership of *Ministry* consisted only of those serving in small-town American Adventist church situations.

Even if the editors believed that the floodgates should be opened to sweep away all the valuable proscriptions against such practices as secular dance, they would hardly be unwise enough as to advocate such things in the pages of a magazine such as *Ministry*.

Here's a slightly modified quote from a recent email written by the Editor in connection with the article under discussion: "I believe that God guided this Church in the stand it has taken against dancing. . . . Seventh-day Adventists took this stand at a time when, compared with today, most dancing was a comparatively mild thing. Most dance today is . . . seriously foreign to the spirit of Christ.

I think it is clear that the dancing encouraged in the Bible is something very different from the dancing that went on during the time of the founding of our Church, let alone so much of the dance that is common in today's Western cultures. . . ."

Ellen White, Theologian?

Walter M. Booth takes issue with what has become a fairly common affirmation among Adventist students of Ellen White, that she was a prophet, not a theologian. He says, "I would like to . . . express my conviction that Ellen White was an outstanding theologian." However, during the

continued on page 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.

The value of Viewpoint

Viewpoint articles are designed to stimulate thought and do not necessarily reflect the position of our editorial staff or of *Ministry*." This statement has appeared on the title page of Viewpoint articles, which are published intermittently in *Ministry*. Such a declaration may appear to be a mere disclaimer, when in fact it is an honest expression of the nature of certain opinions that appear in *Ministry* and how they relate to what the magazine and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in fact stands for.

There are those among our readers who are uncomfortable with this feature and would like to see it discontinued. There are others who would be quite disappointed if it was discontinued. I must say that I am one who would be disappointed and who would experience a sense of loss not only for the magazine, but for the spiritual and intellectual persona of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and more specifically for Adventist ministry.

There is a very strong element present in both Christian and Adventist history that has ever championed ongoing responsible prayer and research, and has expected further and yet more lucid expressions of thought and belief to be ever coming to the surface. The way early Adventists grappled with whether or not to even have a statement of doctrinal belief and a Church Manual is clear evidence of this admirable mentality that is as much a part of Adventist tradition as is any other significant aspect of our history or tradition.

The path of purest faithfulness and discretion almost always appears to be the one that opposes any alteration in "traditionalistic" patterns of thought and belief. But that opposition is not automatically of God, any more than was the path of the leaders of the Judaism of Jesus' day.

WILL EVA



To be specific about our Viewpoint column, let me cite a relatively recent Viewpoint article. This article, authored by premier Adventist professor and theologian, Hans LaRondelle, received significant negative reviews from a number of our readers. The article was entitled "The Application of Cosmic Signs in the Adventist Tradition" (*Ministry*, September 1998). In it Dr. LaRondelle wrestled with the difficult question, Can we continue to feature events from the relatively distant past as convincing signs of the imminent return of Christ? Largely because of Mrs. White's appeal in *The Great Controversy*, to eighteenth and nineteenth-century happenings as fulfillments of the signs of Jesus' coming, some readers were disturbed by the suggested explanations of Dr. LaRondelle. Unfortunately none of these readers offered any further constructive explanation.

Had Dr. LaRondelle in any way questioned the validity of the Seventh-day Adventist stand on the imminent second coming of Jesus, we would not have published this article. Had he questioned the accuracy and veracity of Ellen G. White's work, we would not have accepted his article for publication. The motivation and approach in his article were in fact the opposite of these things.

In his explanation he simply attempt-

ed to come to terms with the very legitimate questions being asked us by a number of our pastoral readers, such as: How can we go on using a sign of the second coming that occurred, for example, on May 19, 1780, when we are now entering the twenty-first century? How can such an approach be credible in the eyes of the thoughtful persons we seek by God's grace to persuade that Jesus is indeed coming soon?

If we cannot allow ourselves to deal with such questions in the responsible way that a man of Dr. LaRondelle's caliber does and in a magazine such as *Ministry*, I believe, as do other Adventist leaders, that we are far off the spirit and essential content of Adventism and of Ellen G. White and our pioneers.

Viewpoint articles are not published in *Ministry* unless they constructively address an issue that will genuinely contribute to the discussion and hoped-for settlement of some difficult dilemma or controverted issue facing a significant swath of Adventist ministers. The fact that such articles are placed in the "Viewpoint" column should immediately alert the reader that they contain some controversial elements and therefore deserve careful thought, prayer and response.

Viewpoint by no means seeks to question established Adventist belief or practice, but instead seeks to clarify and improve on the way we view and present such issues. We must by all means express disagreement with Viewpoint articles, but it would be most helpful if thoughtful, pointed, yet kind responses were offered that actually contribute objectively to the issues raised in such articles. That is what Viewpoint articles are designed to elicit. ■

1 See Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), 33-34 (and for balance, 17-32).

2 Review Gil Valentine's two-part article, "The Stop-Start Journey on the Road to a Church Manual" in the April and June 1999 issues of *Ministry*.

Twenty-seven fundamentals in search of a theology

George R. Knight



George Knight is a professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Seventh-day Adventists need an integrated theology! Don't get me wrong. Adventism's 27 fundamental beliefs are well defined and adequate in what they attempt to do as individual statements. It is not the 27 that I am questioning, but the way they are presented.

To put it bluntly, the 27 fundamentals are set forth as a list, somewhat like a string of beads with each bead having the same size, shape, and weight. And beyond the official 27, Adventist "oral tradition" provides individuals with innumerable other beads that flow off of each end of the string. "Thou shalt not go to movies in a movie house," "Thou shalt not dance socially," and "Thou shalt not drink coffee," are examples of supernumerary beads. While the official list is a voted document adopted at a General Conference session, the extra doctrinal and lifestyle beads are added by individual Church members, by subgroups within the Church, or by the force of tradition. While not official beads, the supernumeraries appear to be equal in weight to the official ones in the minds and consciences of many church members and pastors.

The problem with the string-of-beads approach to fundamental beliefs is that it indicates no priorities, it doesn't help people see that some beliefs are more important or more "fundamental" than others. As a result, I have seen young people and unperceptive

Christians reason that since they have "gone to a dance" or broken the Sabbath they have in effect rejected Jesus. After all, they reason, if I have broken one rule or rejected one belief (official and even unofficial in many cases) haven't I rejected the whole package since every part is of equal importance? I have seen some leave the Church in despair in the wake of that train of logic.

Such reasoning can arise when people are taught the string-of-beads approach, the approach that says that each of the 27 has equal weight and importance.

The Bible takes quite a different approach. For example, while the Bible writers are unanimous in abhorring sins and faithless unbelief, the Bible is quite clear that "if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, RSV). Thus, doing wrong or even believing wrong does not necessarily imply a rejection of Jesus. The plain truth is that not all the beads are the same size and weight. Some of the 27 fundamentals are "more fundamental" than others.

When I floated my string-of-beads perspective past one of my friends he startled me by pointing out that while he agreed on the beads model he couldn't find the string. In short, he implied that Adventism's 27 are more like a pile of beads rather than a string of them. But for my purposes in this article the effect is the same. While the "pile" or "string" approach may be helpful in presenting and understanding Adventist beliefs, I believe that there are models for organizing the denomination's beliefs that are much more effective in enabling people to grasp the totality of what the Bible teaches or the Church believes. It is to one such model that we now turn.

A hierarchical model of beliefs

Not every doctrine is created equal! Some beliefs reflect theological realities more basic than other beliefs! Such are two of the basic postulates of the hierarchical model.

Foundational to any understanding of the Christian faith is that Christianity is not a body of doctrine or a way of life. Individuals will not be saved by what they believe intellectually or do behaviorally. A person can believe all the right things and perform all the right actions and still be lost.

In its essence, Christianity is a Person—Jesus

Christ who died "once for all" (Heb. 8:27), rose on the third day (1 Cor. 15:3, 4), and is coming back to take His children home (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Without Christ there could still be beliefs and actions but there would be no Christianity. The very most important entity in biblical faith is Jesus Christ and what He has done for a lost humanity. Thus, in a hierarchical model of Christian theology, Christ and the Cross are at the very apex. Jesus knew what He was talking about when He claimed that "this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3, RSV); "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36, NIV).

Every Christian needs to know that the most fundamental aspect of any list of fundamentals is knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. As a result, the most basic belief in Christianity is not a belief per se but an experiential relationship.

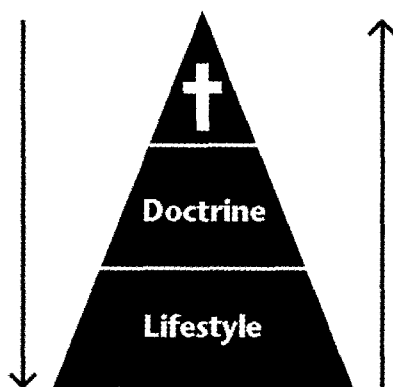
Closely tied to that relationship is a set of beliefs about human lostness and God's solution to that lostness through the cross of Christ. Thus, at the top of the hierarchy of belief are Christ, the human problem, and God's solution in the Cross. Without these elements one not only has no Adventism but no biblical Christianity.

Using the hub-in-a-wheel model (rather than the hierarchical model), essentially the same concept is set forth when it is said that "the sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. . . . The great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemptionXthe Son of God uplifted on the cross. This is to be the foundation of every discourse given."¹ In another context

she penned that "the central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God."²

One thing is obvious. Some beliefs are more important than others. The most important of those has to do with not only "knowing" Christ as Savior but with those understandings related to the cross of Christ as the only solution to the presence of sin in the human soul. That concept is reflected in the hierarchical model by the Cross being placed in the topmost portion of the pyramid.

Figure 1
The theological hierarchy



The role of the "doctrinal" fundamentals

Doctrines are not ends in themselves. They are not all-important. The belief that doctrine is all-important led to both Protestant and Catholic "inquisitions" in the history of the church. In a similar manner, it led some Adventists in 1888 and at other times to lose their Christianity in defense of their beliefs.

Mere doctrine is not Christianity. On the other hand, a genuine Christian experience will by all means lead to a biblical search for those understandings that are important in God's revelation.

I would like to suggest that doctrines are instrumental rather than

being ends in themselves. As noted above, no one will ever be saved by doctrine. But that does not mean that doctrine is unimportant. On the contrary, correct doctrinal understanding helps Christians understand the cross of Christ better. It also helps us know how to relate more effectively to Christ as Savior and Lord. Thus, doctrinal understanding is important even though it is not all important or even most important. Doctrinal understanding at its best is an instrument that helps us grasp the seriousness of the sin problem, God's solution to that problem through Christ, and how to relate to Him better. The central role of doctrine is to inform a Christian's walk with God. Thus, the upward arrow to the right of the theological hierarchy in Figure 1.

Note, however, that there is also a downward arrow to the left of Figure 1. That arrow represents the fact that a relationship with Jesus and an understanding of the cross of Christ and other central elements of the plan of salvation informs a person's understanding of doctrine. This is nicely put when it is said that "viewed in the light of" the grand central theme of the Bible, "every topic has a new significance."³ Christ's work in the plan of salvation informs all other understandings.

The role of lifestyle

Just as one can believe correct doctrines without being a Christian, so a person can also live a "good" lifestyle without knowing Christ as Savior or without even understanding correct doctrine. Like doctrinal understanding, living a biblical lifestyle is instrumental rather than an end in itself.

For example, take healthful living, or health reform as it is traditionally known of among Seventh-day Adventists. Some years ago during an evangelistic campaign, someone from a denomination other than my own helped me think through why I was even devoting an evening to the topic. In the midst of the second week

of the meetings, she told me that she wasn't going to come the next evening because she didn't like my topic; that I was going to tell her what she shouldn't do. Personally, I thought my topic was right on! After all, with a title like "Why I Don't Eat Rats, Snakes, and Snails," how could I go wrong? Humbling myself, I told her to come the next evening and she would conclude that it was the best sermon yet.

With a promise like that, I was driven to think through what I really hoped to accomplish. In retrospect, I am everlastingly grateful to that woman. She forced me to think through my priorities and my goals, and how my topic related to the central issue of Christianity.

The next evening I focused on the central theme of the Bible that God loves us. Within that context, I noted that because He loves us He wants us to be happy. And, I pointed out, we are happiest when we feel good, when we are healthy. Therefore, God wants us to take care of our bodies and our minds; not in terms of an offensive collection of negative restrictions but as a positive blessing of inestimable value.

With respect to the theological hierarchy of Figure 1, the instrumental nature of health reform is evident when we realize that a healthy body provides for clear thinking so that we can better understand the doctrines. With that better understanding, as noted above, we can serve Him more intelligently. A healthy body also is instrumental in helping us relate to God and our neighbors better. After all, people are grouchy when they are ill. We are more effective lovers of both God and other people when we aren't preoccupied with our own aches and pains. Thus, health reform helps me not only relate to God better but to be more like Him. Thus, the upward pointing arrow to the right of Figure 1.

The downward arrow to the left of Figure 1 implies, as it did in relation to doctrine, a two-way directionality in

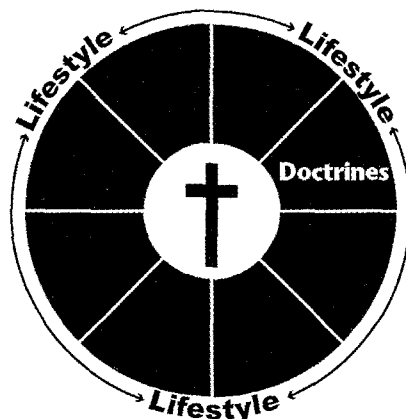
the hierarchy. Thus the cross of Christ, a person's relationship with Him, and the gift of the Holy Spirit provide the inspiration and power to live a Christian lifestyle. Beyond that, doctrinal understandings inform a Christian lifestyle. For example, the Bible teaching that a person's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit certainly informs a person's approach to lifestyle.

Similar understandings permeate the way one keeps the Sabbath, a topic that has both doctrinal and lifestyle aspects. Christ as Redeemer and Creator provides the motivation for Sabbath keeping, while cognitive doctrinal insights related to the Sabbath provide data that help Christians keep it more adequately. On the upward-arrow side of Figure 1, keeping God's Sabbath spiritually helps individuals find time to know Him better at the cognitive level and provides space for Christians to reach out more fully in love to both God and other people.

Refining our understanding

The theological hierarchy model is far from perfect. It certainly doesn't answer all the questions. Nor is it the only possible model. Two others that

Figure 2
The hub-in-a-wheel model



readily come to mind are the hub-in-a-wheel model referred to above (see

Figure 3
The foundational model

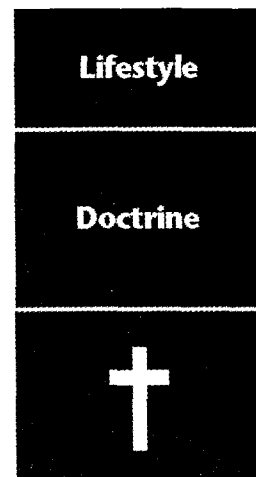


Figure 2) and the foundational model (see Figure 3).

In the hub model the cross of Christ (and related issues) stands at the center, various doctrines serve as spokes, and lifestyle issues form the rim. Likewise, there are excellent arguments for picturing the relational/cross aspects of Christianity as foundational to doctrinal understandings and lifestyle issues.

In the long run, however, it is not the model or specific approach taken in this article that is important but the need for Seventh-day Adventists to provide perspective for their theology. This article is not challenging any of the 27 fundamental beliefs of the Church. Rather, it is arguing that Adventism (or any faith structure) needs to move beyond the string-of-beads model to one that helps people see more easily what Christianity is all about and how the various aspects of the belief system fit together. Any reformulation, of course, must not merely be an intellectual exercise. It should be aimed at helping people live fuller and more consciously informed Christian lives. ■

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 315.
- 2 —, *Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 125, cf. 190.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 125.

Don't hang it up

Barry Black

Editorial note: This article is the manuscript version of a sermon presented by Admiral Black at the Toronto Satellite Ministers' Professional Growth Seminar in March 2000.

On gaunt hills rest the ruins of a city. It had once been the capital and religious shrine of a proud and prosperous people. Its walls and towers stood regal against the sky. The golden dome of its magnificent temple gleamed in the light of the noonday sun. Long caravans meandered in and out of the gates of its market places. Everywhere the blessing of God could be seen.

But the people of this city turned from God. They were selfish and unprincipled, and their sin brought them low. For "righteousness exalts a nation" (Prov. 14:34), but sin is an equal-opportunity destroyer. Fire and sword ravished the city, and its citizens were carried away as captives to Babylon.

We encounter some of these captives, sitting by Babylonian rivers in the 137th Psalm.

This psalm highlights a communal lament uttered by a people who knew the pain of exile. Once in the land of exile, the Israelites were spared many hardships, but there was one grief that seemed almost beyond bearing.

The sorrow triggered by the loss of Zion seemed overwhelming to them.

Babylonian dainties were tainted by captors' taunts: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion" (verse 3). "Celebrate for us the majesty and the protection provided by your God." Hence, in the midst of plenty, exiled Israel declared the mournful lamentation and query, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (verse 4) And they refused to sing. And they placed their harps, silent on willow branches by the river (verse 1).

Israel's decision to remain mute, to hang up their harps, was a mistake. They refused to sing of Zion's glories because their capital city lay in ruins and their loved ones had been destroyed by this heathen power. In refusing to take up their harps, they saw themselves in a noble light but the truth is that they missed a great opportunity. By singing they could have demonstrated the efficacy of gratitude. Does not the Scripture challenge us to "Give thanks in every thing" (1 Thes. 5:18). They could have shown that God's presence is not limited by geography and that nothing can "separate us from [His] love" (Rom. 8:38). Instead, they decided to hang it up, to swallow their pain, to hold their peace.

Singing the Lord's song anyway

The challenge of singing the Lord's song in a strange land is not new. Many are faced with the dilemma of how to bring personal spirituality into the work place, without appearing to be overzealous. Others find it difficult to sing, to remain optimistic in the face of failures, setbacks, or loss. Some seem temperamentally predisposed to pessimism. Others permit sins to steal their joy, refusing to confess or forsake them. Instead they hang it up, putting their harps in storage, refusing to sing on foreign soil.

And is it not true that often we feel the strangeness of our land? When one million men are raped in prisons each year, are we not reminded of this land's strangeness? And does it not seem like foreign soil when we hear about child abuse, weapons in schools, or gratuitous violence in our various forms of entertainment? This world is not our home.

Israel should have sung. Yes, music and mirth were far from their hearts. Yes, anger



Barry Black, Ph.D., is Rear Admiral and chief of chaplains, United States Navy.

and a desire for revenge buffeted their spirits. Yes, God seemed so far away. But the strangeness of our circumstances is no excuse for hanging up our harps. Jesus left us an example of singing in the rain of suffering and even approaching death. Moreover, praise brings deliverance. Israel should have sung.

We can refuse to hang it up by making a commitment to three simple practices:

First, we must refuse to use the strange circumstances as an excuse. Second, we should follow Jesus' example in the way He sang through the pain. And finally, we should permit praise to bring deliverance. Practicing these three simple things can have a liberating impact in our lives.

Refuse to use strange circumstances as an excuse

Often we behave as if our trial is unique. But 1 Corinthians 10:31 reminds us that the tests we face are common to humanity. Others are traveling with us in the strange country of failure, frustration, and fear, and many of these saints have learned to sing in spite of struggle. We are, therefore, without excuse.

A minister friend of mine sought to provide solace for a woman who had endured the anguish of having her leg amputated. When he entered the hospital room, instead of having to cheer her, she lifted his spirits. She said, "Pastor, thank God it's as good as it is! I could have lost both legs." She had learned to sing the Lord's song in a foreign country.

Later, in Babylon, the Hebrew worthies, Daniel and his compatriots, would refuse to make excuses. They purposed in their hearts to maintain a diet that would honor God. They were determined not to deviate from strict integrity and refused to bow when the music played. They heard another melody, a heavenly one that empowered them to live with honor, even on foreign soil.

Once a friend urged Socrates to

avail himself of the opportunity to escape death. (Discussed in Frank Magills' *Masterpieces of World Literature*, New York: Harper-Collins, 1990, 43). But Socrates asserted the premise that "... the really important thing is not to live, but to live well. ... And ... to live well means the same thing as to live honorably or rightly." We are called to live with honor, to sing God's song even in a foreign land.

Follow Jesus' example of singing through the pain

Jesus was a stranger in this world, leaving the chants of cherubims and the songs of seraphims to journey to this planet on a salvation mission. He was despised and rejected (Isa. 53),

22:3). The enemy expects us to respond to life's trials with complaints and exasperation. But praise brings God's presence. Refusing to hang it up brings Divine reinforcement.

Paul and Silas were incarcerated (Acts 16) unfairly. They were beaten without the benefit of due process and jailed without being permitted to defend themselves. They sojourned in the strange world of injustice. But instead of hanging it up, they began to sing and the other prisoners heard them. Their joyful singing so influenced heaven that the earth shook and their chains fell off, for praise brings deliverance.

Our lives are beset with dangers, toils, and snares, but we must refuse to

THEIR JOYFUL SINGING SO INFLUENCED
HEAVEN THAT THE EARTH SHOOK AND THEIR
CHAINS FELL OFF. FOR PRAISE BRINGS DELIVERANCE.

abused and mistreated. Relatives and even His closest friends often misunderstood Him. Earth for Jesus was a strange land, but He refused to hang it up.

Only once in the New Testament is it recorded that Jesus sang (Matt. 26:30). When did He sing? He sang on the night in which He was betrayed. He sang after washing the disciples' feet. He sang as the shadow of a cross fell unmistakably across His pathway. He sang as Judas hurried to betray Him. He sang at the end of His Last Supper. He sang as He headed for the agonies in the Garden of Gethsemane and the hill called Calvary, the place of the skull. He sang a hymn as His outward world was falling apart. If Jesus could sing in the strange land of suffering, we have no excuse for hanging it up.

Permit praise to bring deliverance

We confuse the enemy, Satan, when we sing God's song in a strange land, for our God inhabits praise (Psa.

hang it up. Our Savior promises to be with us, yes, even in a strange land (Matt. 28). He said, " 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' " (Heb. 13, NKJV). He is able to keep us from falling (Jude 14). He has promised to supply every need of ours according to His unspeakable riches (Phil. 4). He has gone to prepare a place for us and promises to come again (John 14). Even in a strange land, that's something about which we can sing.

*So why should I feel discouraged?
Why should the shadows come?
Why should my heart be lonely
And long for heaven and home?*

*When Jesus is my portion
My constant Friend is He
His eye in on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.*

*I sing because I'm happy.
I sing because I'm free.
His eye in on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me. ■*

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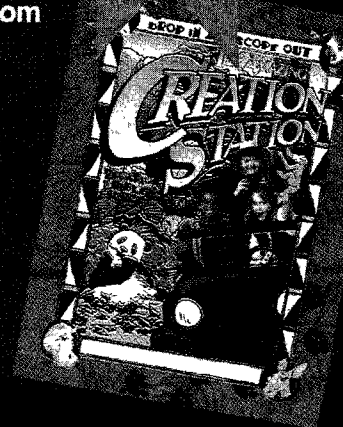
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A tale of two preachers

Leaving room for different kinds of ministry

Greg Taylor



Greg Taylor is senior pastor of the Foster Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church in Asheville, North Carolina.

For one young man, things could not have been better. He was a successful new preacher just coming into prominence. Thousands came to hear him. No buildings could hold the massive crowds. His name was in the headlines. His stirring stories were told and retold around the country. His unique way of teaching brought hope for the establishment of a new society. Polls would have placed him as the most popular personage in the nation.

For the other young man, things could not have been worse. Once a great and respected orator, he was now forgotten. Once a national figure, a successful preacher, a prophetic voice on a national level, he was now losing respect and prominence. Aside from the enormous crowds that had flocked to hear him, he had once been visited by presidents, statesmen, and even the intelligencia. Now nobody seemed to care about him; in fact, he was now languishing in prison where he faced execution. His had been a wild ride of prominence and popularity, but it had abruptly been halted. The crowds that had once followed him were now following the new sensation.

A tale of two preachers: Jesus of Nazareth, and John the Baptist.

Looking back over the contrast between their ministries, there is much to learn regarding different approaches to ministry, worship

and evangelism, and the way they related to one another.

Jesus and John: Similarities and differences

Despite the obvious differences between these two preachers, Jesus and John did, in fact, share some striking commonalities. Both had miraculous beginnings. Jesus was born of a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit, John of aged, barren parents, well past child-bearing years. Both were proclaimed by angels to be agents of God's grace. Both were given names chosen by the Almighty Himself. And both were filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. The similarities, however, ended there.

John became a recluse of sorts for much of his life. Attracted to the desert, he lived a monastic existence. He was a religious ascetic for most of his adult years. He wore strange clothing—a camel's hair robe, a leather belt, and sandals. He ate a strict diet of locusts and wild honey. He lived separate from the world, much like the Essenes. They lived in little self-supporting communities, ate a strict diet, wore simple clothing, and adhered to the law in extreme detail. John the Baptist seems to have resembled this sect of Judaism.

Jesus, on the other hand, appeared more "normal." He spent most of His years in a carpenter shop, working with His father in the family business. He dressed like the common people, attended the local synagogue, and functioned as a basically normal member of society.

Looking at their ministries, the contrast between the two men became even more marked. John was a hard hitting, hellfire-and-brimstone preacher. He called sin by its name. His primary target was the religious people, especially the establishment, whom he called to a higher standard of holiness. To some of the religious leaders he said, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath of come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance. . . ." (Matt. 3:7-9, NKJV)

Jesus, however, was primarily interested in reaching the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6, NKJV). He was considered unconventional, nontraditional. The fact that He neglected many of the traditions of the elders deeply offended the religious authori-

ties. Jesus actually associated and ate with sinners, even having a tax collector as one of His closest companions. Christ's mission statement, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:9-13, NKJV), didn't fit the mold.

The contrast between Jesus' modus operandi and that of John the Baptist was so stark that the religious community not only was aware of it, but was offended by both. They considered John a fanatic who "has a demon," and Jesus "a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19, NKJV).

How the two preachers viewed one another

Yet it seems that neither John nor Jesus would have been comfortable with the contrasts that people observed between them. Never once do we hear of John criticizing the

ministry of Jesus. He never seems to have allowed himself to foster jealousy. When he heard of Jesus' success, of the crowds coming to hear Him speak, of His unique approach to ministry and evangelism, John was quick to say "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, NKJV).

Surely he could have found reason to criticize. Jesus' methods were so different from his. He could have insinuated that Jesus was watering down the gospel or that He was telling people what they wanted to hear . . . tickling itching ears. But John recognized Jesus' unique ministry as from God. When he had questions, he brought those directly to Jesus (see Matt. 11:2-6). He never resorted to behind-the-back tactics.

At the same time, Jesus never once criticized John's ministry. He could have put down his old methods, fear tactics, extremely conservative lifestyle, offensive hellfire-and-brimstone approach, guilt trips, and his

generally unfriendly delivery. But, instead, He gave John the greatest compliment He gave to anyone. "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? . . . But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. . . . Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist . . ." (Matt. 11:7-11, NKJV).

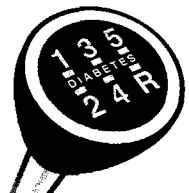
Neither John nor Jesus saw the other as a threat or irritant. They saw the success or apparent failure of the other as a part of God's divine plan. They believed they had different missions that complemented one another in ultimate purpose. They were faithful to their own calling and contented themselves to leave the ministry of the other in the hands of God. This is why there was never a dispute between Jesus and John. Though each saw the differences between their own ministry and that of the other, they purposely affirmed the other's ministry, different or not.

Looking back from our vantage point, we can see that the ministries of Jesus and John, however different, were also complementary and ultimately bound up with the same cause. But how easily they could have seen one another as a threat, either professionally or spiritually. Their faith in the One who called them, and their willingness to allow God to lead the other, shows a marked spiritual maturity.

Learning from Jesus and John

What can we learn, especially amid the increased polarization in our churches and personal relationships, over approaches and methods of ministry, worship, and evangelism?

Some approach ministry from the "friend of sinners" perspective; in fact, entire churches have broken the traditional format to go all out to reach lost people. I, in fact, pastor a church that has been targeting the



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June 19-21	Chicago, IL area Wheaton College Conf Cen
July 17-19	Colorado Springs, CO Glen Eyrie Conf Cen
August 5-7	Sacramento, CA area Weimar Institute
September 4-6	Albany, NY area Silver Bay YMCA Conf Cen
September 25-27	Santa Cruz, CA area Mt. Hermon Conf Cen
October 23-25	Santa Fe, NM area Glorieta Baptist Conf Cen
November 6-8	Portland, OR area Cannon Beach Conf Cen

unchurched for seven years now, using contemporary music, drama, multimedia, and other less traditional approaches. The experience has been nothing short of amazing.

God has blessed our ministry in amazing ways. We have seen atheists find Christ, along with agnostics, church dropouts, and other "lost sheep." What's more, they are staying in the church and even getting involved. They are growing in their faith and reaching out to their friends. We praise God every time we see His Grace, extended to another precious soul.

We sometimes feel something like the fresh, young Christian congregations of the first century must have felt when they approached an unconventional audience (Gentiles) in ways that troubled some of their more conservative brothers (not insisting on circumcision, eating questionable foods, visiting in the homes of the "unclean" and simply befriending them).

There is a natural tendency in some to think that because this kind of ministry is reaching the people that we are passionate about, everyone should be doing it. The ministry of John and Jesus would not tell us such a thing. It is not true that any one method should be used by everyone or that anyone not using a certain form of evangelism should be questioned or criticized. Those involved in contemporary worship shouldn't be critical of churches or ministries using traditional methods, which have in fact worked over the years, especially in some contexts. But this does not mean that these more traditional methods are ideal for every locale or circumstance. Mainstream evangelism continues to fall far short of reaching some groups. The truth is that both approaches are valid, and the practitioners of one should not criticize those who advocate the other.

"Men are needed who pray to God for wisdom, and who, under the guidance of God, can put new life into the

NEITHER JOHN NOR JESUS SAW THE OTHER AS
A THREAT OR IRRITANT. THEY SAW THE

SUCCESS OR APPARENT FAILURE OF THE OTHER AS A
PART OF GOD'S DIVINE PLAN.

old methods of labor . . ."¹ "Means will be devised to reach hearts. Some of the methods used in this work will be different from the methods used in the past; but let no one, because of this block the way by criticism."²

The Great Commission

We do not have time to spend worrying about whether our brothers or sisters are too conservative or too progressive, or whether one worship style is better than another. We have time only to put our energy together and reach the lost. We must accept that the same God who has designed each of us differently has done so for a specific purpose. Some are called to a lifestyle, passion, and ministry for the "down and outers," others for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and still others for the "up and outers." All are lost "coins," "sheep," and "sons," and everything must be put aside so that they may be found (Luke 15). It is more an issue of personal calling than one of orthodoxy. We cannot embroil ourselves in the pouting of the older brother in Jesus' parable who refuses to come into the party that his father has thrown at the return of the younger brother because he (the older brother) believed it was not right for his father to do things in such a wrong and undignified way (Luke 15).

Given time, we will see how God makes no mistakes. His purpose is too great to have cut us all out of the same mold. While it may seem that we are going in different directions now, at the end, or in the end, we will look back and see how God designed this diversity for maximum impact. We are all different, but God is One

and our ultimate purpose—to reach the world for Christ—remains the same.

Conclusion

In fact, in light of the biblical precedent set by John and Jesus, here are some suggestions when we're confronted with another's success or failure, or with a different perspective on another's practice, theological understanding, worship practice, or evangelistic method.

1. Avoid destructive criticism.
2. Seek answers through personal rather than through public means.
3. Ask questions and seek explanations when discussing issues (in a public or private forum). Attacks on character, orthodoxy, or personality should always be avoided.
4. Rejoice over kingdom growth. When fruit is borne let us rejoice together. Another's success should be seen as our success (Luke 15:2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 20, 22, 23.)
5. Praise God for diversity of gifts, passion, and calling. Let us be grateful that our Creator is a God of variety within the context of the unity of the faith.

John the Baptist and Jesus were worlds apart in personal appearance, style, ministry practice, and evangelistic demographic targeting. But they trusted God to handle their differences and supported one another with confidence.

Let us "Go, and do likewise." ■

1 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 105. Emphasis mine.

2 *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 30, 1902. Emphasis mine.

The pastor's Sabbath School Class

Buford Griffith, Jr.



Buford Griffith Jr. is director of Sabbath School/Family Life Ministries, Southwestern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Burleson, Texas.

It's true! The parish pastor is called to be all things to all men . . . and women: leader, administrator, evangelist, counselor, consoler, and keeper of the household of God. Only God can equip us to be successful in the area of our calling.

Yet we are also teachers, Sabbath School teachers. I have discovered in 20 years of pastoral ministry that the greatest joy after preaching is that of watching people grow in the Lord. That growth is aided by special attention given them by their pastor in regular classroom interaction known in Adventist circles as the pastor's Sabbath School class.

It is with much prayer and effort that we observe the charge of God to "go into all the world and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Thus, after the effort to gather souls for the kingdom, we should exert the same, or even greater effort to retain them. This is discipling, and a pastor's class can play a crucial role in this important part of our mission.

Protection

Let's be honest. After baptism, the number of those who remain is alarmingly low. That trend must be reversed. I contend that if pastors were more diligent in "rooting and grounding" new converts, we would have more vibrant churches and more stable members who would not be in danger of being "tossed to and fro, and carried about with

every wind of doctrine . . ." (Eph. 4:14). We would also keep more from leaving through the "back door," sometimes moving with almost the same speed with which they came in the front. And who better than the pastor to teach on a regular basis the new converts, and in what better place than the Sabbath School?

A balanced menu of doctrinal topics can be studied that will serve as a follow-up to the pre-baptismal classes. New converts must be protected. They must be shielded from "strange doctrines," secured from church members who can give a distorted view of the gospel or who can be a stumbling block with their extremism or impatience. A faithful shepherd of the flock will especially care for the newborn lambs.

"Satan is no idler; he watches his chances, and takes advantage of every opportunity to win souls to his side. He constantly sows his tares in every heart that is not barricaded with the truth."¹

Pastor's responsibility

There are pastors who are taking on the seriously negligent habit of not attending Sabbath School! It is true that many pastors are charged with the care of many churches and therefore find it difficult to be with their people for Sabbath School. That is, of course, understandable, but the pastor should never be absent because of laziness or indifference. There is no excuse for the pastor who is genuinely able to do so, not to be at Sabbath School conducting his or her own class.

As pastors, we are teachers. Regular teaching of the saints, whether in an evangelistic or Sabbath School setting, keeps the tools of the pastor sharp and above all keeps him in close touch with the people who need him the most. It keeps him in touch with the new converts. One new in the faith needs the security of knowing that their pastor is there for them spiritually and ready to help with personal and doctrinal issues that arise. The pastor is charged with the responsibility of holding the reins of truth within the church. It is a responsibility that cannot not be taken lightly.

We preach the high standards of the will of God; these often attract men, women, and children to the message of Christ. But when they enter the fellowship of the church, new converts easily become confused as they

begin to see the truths that attracted them compromised by seasoned members or as those members treat them unkindly or carelessly. While it takes a cooperative effort between strong, committed lay people and clergy, the pastor must be a witness to the fact that God's Word is true and unchangeable, even if those who claim to follow it are neither.

Stronger bonds of friendship are engendered among the members of the class. It leaves more room for members in the class to become a support to one another in their new faith.

The warmth of class fellowship encourages members of the class to invite and bring members of their family to the class. In this way, the pastor's class becomes evangelistic

your own creativeness in lesson preparation.

It encourages attendance at mid-week prayer services. Series that have started in the pastor's Sabbath School can be continued at prayer meeting.

It engenders better, more "live" lesson preparation and greater involvement in the spiritual growth of the class member. This also sets an example for other teachers and could result in a more dynamic Sabbath School overall.

Of course, everyone needs to do what works best for their individual situations. The above list serves only as a simple base. Whatever approach works best in your situation is the one you should adopt.

If you are now conducting your own class, continue with it. If you aren't, put away the fears and the false reasons you may have for not doing so. Discover or rediscover the joy, satisfaction, reward, and productivity of teaching your own new-member Sabbath School class and observe the growth of those who take hold of the truth as you tutor under your Lord. ■

1 Ellen G. White, *The Home Missionary*, Feb. 1, 1890.

REGULAR TEACHING OF THE SAINTS KEEPS THE TOOLS OF THE PASTOR SHARP AND KEEPS HIM IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH THE PEOPLE.

There is often an appalling lack of knowledge regarding basic doctrines of the Bible and the Seventh-day Adventist Church by its members. Thus, it becomes a sheer necessity that there be ongoing instruction in the distinctive doctrines that identify the people of God. A solid pastor's Sabbath School class, where the essential teachings of the Bible are firmly rooted and affirmed by a pastor who takes the Word seriously, will greatly strengthen the foundation of these new believers.

The pastor's class

Within the realm of the pastor's Sabbath School class, the pastor has the privilege of adopting methods that will root and ground these new members. Here is a suggested methodology:

- ♦ Create your own lesson series. It will do the following things:
- ♦ You and the class will have greater flexibility.
- ♦ It will allow you to address those points of greatest concern in your particular setting.
- ♦ It encourages deeper study on the part of both the class members and the pastor.
- ♦ You are enabled to move at a pace that assures complete understanding of the Church's pillar doctrines.

without being called a baptismal class, which sometimes seems intimidating to a non-member.

You are more able to intercept hurtful views of truth before they become a problem for the new member, even while you are enabled to more easily help each member of the class in a personalized way as they deal with the particular questions they may bring with them.

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How to move into a church plant without killing it

Doug Tilstra



Doug Tilstra is assistant professor of religion at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Steve and Karen adopted a five-year-old boy from Russia. They spent months preparing for the adoption. Even though they were veteran parents, the prospect of adoption presented dozens of new challenges.

They watched and watched again video clips of their new son, Anton, long before he ever came to live in their home. There were mountains of paperwork and miles of red tape to work through. Other concerns included finances, dynamics of family integration, and bedroom configuration.

At last, Steve and Karen flew to Moscow, visited Anton's orphanage, met him for the first time, and brought him to their California home. But the work had just begun. Perhaps adopting a child relieves the mother from the physical "labor" that comes with giving birth, but the labor of the delivery room is certainly replaced with hard work the moment adoption occurs.

Unlike a newborn entering their family, Anton came with certain habits and expectations fairly firmly set. He spoke Russian, and responded to life from a preset genetic code (largely unknown to the new parents). He also had some medical needs requiring several surgeries and rehabilitation. Steve and Karen quickly realized this was parenting in a totally new dimension.

Who was this little boy? How could they bond to him and encourage him to bond to

them? How were they going to handle the extensive medical work? And what about the more subtle yet significant issues of character and personality? How could they as parents honor the little person Anton was, yet neutralize potentially destructive factors that had already shaped his young life? How could they facilitate relationships with grandparents, other children at church and school, and even big sister?

It was parenting all right, but in a totally new dimension!

The model of adoption offers some insights for the church planter who "adopts" an "orphaned church" in its infancy rather than giving birth to it. That is, for the pastor who is called to take over a congregation that has recently been planted or brought into being by someone else. Four key questions capsule these insights for the "instant parent" of a new church plant. Careful and honest answers to these four questions can lay groundwork for a more successful adoption.

The questions are: (1) What is my history as a new parent? (2) What is this child's history? (3) How has this child learned to relate to others? and (4) Is everybody willing to allow the process of growing up?

1. What is my history as a new parent?

Vision. One of the first questions Steve and Karen needed to ask themselves was, Why are we doing this? Parents (biological and adoptive) usually have some vision for the children they bring into the world. They dream of what they can become; their goals for their future and desires for the direction of their lives.

Most churches are planted with vision. The church founder and planting team typically share such a vision, even if it is not formalized on paper. The problem is, a new leader coming to the church may have little idea what that original vision is. The potential "instant parent" of a new church does well to ask, Why am I doing this? What are my dreams for this church? Why do I believe God allowed this church to come into being at this time, in this place, with these people? What can it become? How can God use me to help it achieve those dreams?

Expectations. Vision is closely related to expectations. Both project a desired future. Both can motivate to excellence. Both can inspire a team with focus, unity, and coopera-

tion. But there are differences. Vision is usually broader; expectations are more specific and measurable. Vision is more idealistic; expectations more pragmatic. A parent's vision for a child may be for the child to enjoy excellent health and to pursue any sport she desires. The parental expectation may be more far-reaching and specific: for the child to win a gold medal as an Olympic gymnast by age twelve. Such an expectation drives the life of parent and child differently from the vision of excellent health and fitness.

Expectations are not necessarily bad. But they do need to be identified and evaluated. Church planters adopting a new congregation can benefit from some introspection. Am I projecting unrealistic expectations onto this new little church? Am I

building being open and ready to use each week) that one may take for granted in an established church often take major energy to accomplish in a newly planted one. All the members of the body may be present, but it's an infant's body. Not everything is "hooked up" yet. The body must mature and learn to accomplish adult functions.

If a person has planted a church before, such surprises are less surprising. Like children, no two churches are alike, but they do pass through predictable patterns and stages. If a person has never planted a church it may be wise to talk with church planters or read about church plants to discover some of these patterns.

I adopted a new church when it was about four months old. It was

from? Why did they give this child up for adoption? Was this child loved or resented in the womb? As an infant was the child nurtured and loved or given only minimal care?

Adopted parents of new churches can learn from similar questions. Who conceived this church? Why? How long was the "gestation period" for this church? How was the church planting team formed? What training did they receive? What process did they follow for setting a vision? Was that vision ever put in writing? Has it ever gone beyond paper and been internalized in members' lives? What role did the conference administration play in the project? What role did local churches, other church leaders, or a paid pastor play in the planting project? Who "owns" this project? Why did the founding pastor leave?

As I listened to the stories of area pastors, members, conference administrators, and the founding pastor of my adopted church, I began formulating a picture of this "child" I had adopted. I could understand its predictable life stages from previous experience, but I could only grasp its unique needs by hearing the story of its early life.

Genetic code. The "genetic code" refers to the unique personality the church builds in its formative stage and passes on as a heritage to all future generations. It is amazing how quickly such a "genetic code" is built and how long it lasts!

Ideally, the genetic code is carefully articulated in a vision statement and implemented through equally well-planned strategies and goals. More often, the genetic code, even if there is a written vision and strategy document, develops informally as the church just "lives its life."

The genetic code includes such things as how leaders are selected, how differences are resolved, attitudes toward "outsiders," a heart for the lost, how decisions are made, worship style, relationship to the corporate church and denominational administration, expectations for the pastor,

WHO CONCEIVED THIS CHURCH? WHY? HOW LONG WAS THE "GESTATION PERIOD" FOR THIS CHURCH?

eager to create a church in my own image? Am I trying to meet some personal need by what this church will become? Am I using this church to "make a statement"?

It is a good idea for the "instant parent" of a newly planted church to evaluate his or her own vision and expectations and then learn as much as possible about the vision and expectations of the congregation.

Experience. It isn't essential, but it can help to be a parent before adopting your first child. "Instant parents" may be surprised to learn that their child does not sleep an eight-hour night or dismayed that their baby did not come equipped with teeth. In the same way, a person who has never planted a church may be dismayed that this new group looks like a church, talks like a church, even acts like a church much of the time, but . . . surprise! This new group really has not learned to function as a church yet. Some church functions (such as the

separated by 1,000 miles, a cultural barrier, and totally different planting vision and history from the church I had planted several years before. But the intriguing thing was the familiar phrases I heard coming from people's mouths. It was almost as if people in my adopted church were quoting folk from my own planted church. They were passing through similar stages of new church life. I remembered what came next, and sure enough, it usually did.

My past experience allowed me to be a bit calmer, a bit less reactive. It was a little easier to distinguish harmful trends from minor distractions.

2. What is the child's history?

Circumstances surrounding the conception, birth, and infancy. Parents adopting a child often ask about birth parents. Are they addicted to alcohol or drugs? What is their general health? What sort of people are they? What kind of families did they come

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participation of the members, and dozens of other things.

As an adoptive parent, a pastor needs to know what genetic code is already in place and what genetic code still might be developing.

Forces that have shaped the child's life so far. Steve and Karen discovered that other forces had shaped Anton's early life. Life in an orphanage had been very different from life in their home. The transition from orphanage to family home required lots of time and patience, skill and understanding.

The church planter does well to understand the forces that have so far shaped the new church. Does this church hold public evangelism in high esteem because it was birthed from such an event? Are most of these members "born and bred" Adventists who became "bored and tired" of their local church? Have there already been power struggles in the formation of this group? What support or hostility have local Adventist congregations acted out in the formation of this new group? What experiments have worked well here? Which have not?

These questions are merely suggestive. Other appropriate ones will become obvious once adoptive parents know what they are looking for.

3. How has this child learned to relate to others?

Bonding issues: Attitudes toward each other. Families interested in raising secure and well-adjusted children give significant energy to bonding issues. How emotionally close are the people in this family? How emotionally available are they to each other? Can they feel each other's pain and pleasure? Can they support each other? Is it draining or energizing for them to interact? Do they like each other or just tolerate each other? Are they a team?

Many church plants fail for lack of bonding. Often the core group is made of a "collection of strangers." They may have met for the first time when the church planter called a

meeting of interested people. They may also be largely task-oriented people who bond slowly to people under the best of circumstances. The absence of the founding pastor and the arrival of a new leader merely compounds the problem. What does one do to facilitate bonding?

First diagnose the situation. How many of these people knew each other before the church planting project? What are the current evidences of group life, team spirit, and cooperation? What does it feel like when the group is together? Supportive? Tense? Warm? Cool? Awkward? Affirming? Do people seem to like and enjoy each other? What formal organizational structures are in place? Are decisions

THE CHURCH PLANTER DOES WELL TO UNDERSTAND THE FORCES THAT HAVE SO FAR SHAPED THE NEW CHURCH.

made inside those structures or outside of them? Do small groups form a significant part of church life? What does the group do for fun?

After diagnosing, there will be room for both celebrating the bonding that is already happening and for gradually filling in where pieces of the puzzle are missing.

Attitude toward the lost. Churches are planted to reach lost people. If the newly planted church does not believe that something is wrong, the adoptive parent of the new church may need to help the group refocus their vision until they see the priority of reaching the lost. They need to catch the vision of "making a place for them" as opposed to "making a place for us."

Perhaps it is the new leader who

needs to refocus his or her vision. If the new church has a heart for the lost and the new leader is indifferent, such a difference could kill the church.

Attitude toward leadership and authority. Some children relate easily to authority. Others resist it. Some authority is demeaning and demanding and some is selfless and serving. Do you know the leadership climate in the new church you will lead? Do you know how you exercise authority? Does your own theology and personal bias lean toward a view of church that downplays accountability or do you tend to demand rigid control? Have church leaders in the new church been supported or resisted? How is conference administration viewed? Is there an "Us versus Them" or a "We" mentality?

Such questions may help you evaluate the situation. If you discover serious conflict it may require a careful study of the biblical role of leadership, prayer for broken hearts, and repentance and help from specialists perceived as being neutral.

4. Is everybody willing to allow the growing-up process?

Neither parenting nor church planting is a quick and easy process. Unless parents and planters are willing to stick with the job for the long haul, the results will be disappointing. And the children and church members are part of that decision. Like adoptive homes, new church plants are no place for those who are quick to take offense or hand it out! People willing to allow the process of growth are people with a clear vision of the desired result and almost infinite patience in the bumbling processes that have to go on to get there.

Much of the discussion here has centered on asking probing questions to understand where to direct energies. Asking the right questions will not produce healthy churches. Producing careful solutions will not necessarily produce healthy churches. Only God produces healthy churches. We cooperate with Him. ■

Chaos and chronos

The integration of disorder and order

Richard O. Stenbakken



Richard O. Stenbakken, Ed.D., is the director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, General Conference.

The human mind seeks to bring order to a multitude of chaotic events in order to impart meaning and understanding and to promote survival and progress.

Perhaps I preach a sermon that is a total flop. My mind warns me not to do that again! It tells me that I must be a survivor in the age of pastoral cuts and “right-sizing” in the work force of the church! In the message my mind gives me, there is pain and fear. The chaos created by my “failure” may actually be the best thing that ever happened to me. It forces me to re-evaluate my sermons, their preparation, content, and delivery. This chaos may well propel me toward a much better process of study and preparation as well as a much better “product” (the sermon) and thus lead me to be a better spokesperson for God and more faithful to His call and my profession.

The message in such situations is both obscured and clear. Thus, chaos is a point of time that should be appreciated and valued as a teaching or learning opportunity in chronos (time). If I merely throw away chaos, or refuse to allow its lessons to penetrate my management of chronos and life, I will probably be operating on five cylinders when I could be running on eight.

The fact is that deliberate chaos is often the producer of fresh, new, and viable ideas. It is the invitation to a quality of growth that otherwise would never be. At times of chaos we

badly need a perspective that transcends the usual sense of fear or panic that comes over us. We need, if you like, a kind of brainstorming. That is, no holds barred, no ideas rejected, no comments unwelcome, no concepts too radical, nothing judged as unworthy or crazy. In this way, the chronos can begin to appear among the storm clouds of our chaos. If we do this, we are not allowing the chaos to destroy the chronos as it is born in on the wings of our chaos. When this takes place there is a synergy that often produces what in the end is quite logical. That is, it is logical at the *end* of the process looking back, for we would probably never have arrived at the idea by a linear or more logical step-by-step process. We reached the idea through chaos. Then the idea comes into chronos as a new “child” to be nurtured across time into a maturity as either a new process, product, or system.

Chronos and chaos in the Bible

Think of the impact of the juxtaposition of chaos and chronos in the Bible. In Genesis we begin with chaos. “Now the earth was formless and empty. . .” That sounds like chaos to me. But then God appears in the form of the Spirit, and that which was chaotic now takes on form, order, and beauty. Out of chaos comes chronos: days, weeks, months, seasons, Sabbath, worship, marriage, family, intimacy with God, and a host of riotous orderliness including flora, fauna, and geophysical forces. Then comes chaos again, in the form of the Fall. The total creation is now in chaos. Weeds come where once there were only flowers, thorns where there were roses, and back-breaking work where there had been life-fulfilling labor. Fear of God where there was love. Male and female ashamed of being with each other: “We are naked here! Another fig leaf, please!” And the fig leaves are humanity’s way of trying feebly to bring some order out of the chaos in a now fractured creation.

But, God has a brilliant idea. Save the situation from chaos by installing a new dimension of chronos: “‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your [Serpent’s] head, and you will strike His [Christ’s] heel’ ” (Gen. 3:15). This is the first promise of a Savior who will come in “the fullness of time [chronos]” to ultimately and finally bring order again from the chaos of

sin's intrusion. This is in juxtaposition to the previous state of things, which was described by God as "very good."

This theme is as it were a chiasmic Hebraism form repeated in cycles through the rest of the Bible. (See the list at right for a summary of some of the Old Testament examples of it.)

As if that isn't enough, look at the New Testament. God comes to a young woman (the least of her culture) to tell her of a plan in *chronos* to bring forth a Child conceived of the Holy Spirit to cure the chaos of the aeons. Think for a moment of *her* chaos! After all, an unwed mother of her day was a candidate for death by stoning. And Joseph is wondering about all this. His beloved Mary, with whom he has been a total gentleman, is now pregnant, and he knows it was not of his doing. Talk about chaos! It is only through the intervention of an angel that his chaos comes to have meaning in *chronos* (Matt. 1:20-24).

These events are not mere sleight of hand or radical reframing of facts. They are part of a pattern of bringing chaos and *chronos* into balance. In due time, according to Scripture, *chronos* will win over chaos. The guarantee was set in motion when the minions of hell shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" And Christ slumped dead on the cross to be placed in a borrowed tomb (chaos). It was ratified when consistent with *chronos* He burst from that tomb establishing a whole new creation.

Chaos and chronos and my ministry

Now the great theological question: *So what?* What does this theme of chaos and *chronos* have to do with my ministry Monday morning? Interesting, but is it practical? Yes, I think it is not only practical, but *vital*.

Knowing that chaos can be focused or refocused into meaningfulness in *chronos* is what ministry and ministering the gospel is all about. It keeps me from being frozen in chaos and invites me to examine chaos for the possibilities and newness, which can

CHAOS

Pre-Creation

Fall

Pre-Flood/Flood

Babel's tower

Polytheism

Lot captured

No heir for Abraham

Joseph the slave

Slavery in Egypt

Babylonian captivity

CHRONOS AND ORDER

Creation

Promised Messiah (at the right time)

Noah and new beginnings (note the time references)

Table of nations

Abraham called to serve The One God

Lot rescued

Isaac

Becomes second to Pharaoh

Exodus/Promised Land

Daniel's deliverance (and time prophecies of ultimate deliverance).

(and already has in God's grace) come into *chronos*—even now.

Let's go back to the illustration above on dealing with sermon preparation and delivery. If there had not been the chaos of a poorly preached sermon, I would probably not have any red-hot stimulus to be creative and innovative in developing new and better ways to preach. That, in turn, could well have propelled me into the molasses of mediocrity, and could even have led to my ultimate removal from ministry.

With the mind-set of keeping a balance between chaos and *chronos*, and the ability to seriously look at chaos and mine new diamonds out of its rubble, I can move beyond chaos into a new and ever-renewing *chronos*. More than that, I have a view that allows me to minister to people in chaos and help them discover newness and renewal where there is fear, despair, and desperation.

The psychologically and spiritually healthy mind moves beyond being stuck in present or past chaos. Those who are so impressed by the power of chaos that they cannot or will not move on, remain in a chaotic and destructive state. That is why some

married couples can experience severe chaos in their relationships and yet use that very chaos to develop an even stronger marriage as they move through it and learn from it, finally coming to a vibrant renewal.

Similarly, some congregations can go through a traumatic event and come out more healthy than before, and other congregations will be utterly destroyed by the same or a similar event. On a personal note, this is why, in the utter carnage and chaos of combat during my time in Vietnam, I could come to a personal epiphany embracing both the precariousness and preciousness of life.

Making applications of this principle of life is an excitingly productive way to seek controlled chaos through group or individual brainstorming. We can mine the diamonds out of the uninviting rock—the totally unpredictable chaos that inevitably visits our best laid plans. Doing so will be a personal, and sometimes profound, application of Isaiah 43:18, 19 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past [chaos]. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it [chronos] springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way. . . ." ■

How can the church grow?

Gnanaraj Kore



Gnanaraj Kore is the director of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries of the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Hosur, India.

Church growth has dominated the functions of the world church in recent times, providing a giant leap in evangelism and outreach, and taking the gospel to unentered areas around the world. Church leadership and laity have invested enormous resources in this growth. Results have been good. New outposts and new churches have been established.

But what about growth in existing churches? Are they growing or are they largely stagnated, with only the children of the congregation constituting the major increase? Are the new members added in the existing churches the result of a living witness in the surrounding community? Do the church records indicate honest membership figures, or are there names that are not even traceable?

Four New Testament principles of church growth

The New Testament church gives us twin pictures of church growth. While individual church grew daily (Acts 2:47), the evangelistic thrust of taking the gospel to unentered areas went about with vision and vigor. How was this possible?

The answer is found in Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (NIV). A careful study of

this verse and the rest of the chapter explains the fourfold formula of church growth both locally and globally.

The key word is *devoted*, which means to persevere, to give constant attention to, to remain firm. The KJV and NKJV use the phrase *continued steadfastly*. Members of the New Testament church would not be shaken. They would not be divided. They stood firm in their convictions. They devoted themselves to four particular principles of church life and growth.

The apostles' teaching

First, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings. This involves both knowing the *Word of God* as well as *living the Word*. The apostles' teachings centered in the essentials, such as the love of God; the plan of salvation; the centrality of the crucified, risen, and soon-coming Jesus; the hope of resurrection; and the lifestyle that the gospel called for in the lives of the disciples. The members of the church met together (verse 46) to learn the Word, and their lives became one with the Word.

Today many members do not know what they believe and why they believe. Even the central teachings of Jesus affecting our daily life seem neglected in many circles. Often the Sabbath itself seems not to celebrate its primary emphasis in God as Creator and Redeemer, and is often either ignored or relegated to mere ritual. Lifestyle issues do not stand out to reflect what God's grace can do to transform lives as models of citizens of the coming kingdom. On the contrary, the early church believed the Word of God and stood firm for it. There was oneness in their belief. We cannot do any less.

Fellowship

Second, the early church was noted for fellowship—with the Lord as well as with one another. How much fellowship do we have as a church today? Do our churches provide an atmosphere where both members and visitors eagerly await getting together? I know of churches where worshippers would rather not look at one another.

In my early ministry I pastored a small village church. On the first Sabbath of the new year, the Sabbath School superintendent invited me to read Isaiah 58. I went up and read, "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise

your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins" (verse 1, NIV).

I found out later that the Sabbath School superintendent's family in my church and another family were at odds with each other. My reading of Isaiah 58 was seen by each of these two families as a message appropriate to the other, who should be shown their sins and rebellion. In all of this, when one family came to the church, the other wouldn't. What kind of fellowship can exist in a church like that?

Fellowship must not stop with just singing "What a fellowship, what a joy divine," but must transform the lives of Christ's body and create such a unity that the community will take note that here are a people of different backgrounds and interests who can live and worship together—in Christ's name.

Breaking bread together

Third, the disciples devoted themselves to the breaking of bread "from house to house, . . . with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). Breaking bread can mean both the observance of the Lord's Supper and also having a communal meal. The New Testament church strongly believed in the brotherhood of all believers, without any class difference.

Eating together symbolized their oneness, a family created by the saving power of the risen Jesus. Potlucks may bring us together in a social way, but such get-togethers must create a family spirit. The observance of the Lord's Supper must transcend mere routine to actually become the occasion for what was meant in the beginning: a gathering of people who together acknowledge their sinfulness and find strength as a congregation in confessing corporately what God has done for them in Jesus and their need for one another. The Lord's table destroys every wall of partition and creates a commonality and oneness for the glory of the Cross

and for the completion of the mission that the Lord of the table has left for us.

Prayer

Fourth, the early church spent much time in praying together as a body (Acts 4:31; 12:5,12; 13:3). Much of the strength of the early church was because of prayer and fasting. Nothing works as well as time spent in prayer—in small groups, in homes, in schools. Intercessory prayer for others is a power that, by and large, we have not tapped. When we intercede for others, when we confess our sins in prayer, when we meet together to seek God's will, there is power. A

church that prays grows. Fervent and earnest prayer is the greatest need of the church today. We need to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit.

A geologist studying the strata of rock under St. Paul's Cathedral in London reported that the church building is moving down Fleet Street at the rate of one inch every 1,000 years. A reader of the report commented, "The church ought to move faster than that."

The church will move fast, will be vibrant, and will grow if it follows these four simple New Testament growth steps. Let us be challenged to find ways of putting them into practice in our congregations. ■

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Promised a miracle?

David N. Marshall



David N. Marshall, Ph.D., is Editor-in-Chief, Stanborough Press, Grantham, England.

If you had half the faith in the Lord that you place in doctors and needles, I believe that boy would get well." How would you react if you had a sick son and someone said that to you?

Well, Larry and Lucky Parker did have a sick son—8-year-old Wesley, a diabetic—and those words were said to them.

As you identify with their situation, do you feel yourself pulled two ways?

Larry and Lucky were members of a "charismatic" congregation. They heard healing stories in church regularly. After one such story a well-intentioned group of women turned to Lucky and said, "We're going to do the same for Wesley."

Lucky was hesitant. "Well, I do believe the Lord will heal Wes one day . . ." But the women's group was up and racing. Wesley's healing was made the number-one priority in their prayer circle. "There's nothing He won't do if you just show Him you have faith," they told Larry and Lucky.

The well-intentioned women's group, with Lucky in its midst, met in a home. They worked themselves up by an almost frenzied singing of Gospel hymns. Then there was a prayer session in which all spoke (shouted?) at once, one voice louder than the rest. First they demanded Wesley's healing in the name of Jesus, and then they chanted, "Hear us, Lamb of God," so many times that they lost track of time.

Shortly afterward a visiting speaker to their church told how God had restored to him the use of his legs. When the testimony was over, there was an invitation to "come forward and be healed." Larry and Lucky were present with Wes and his two little sisters. When no one made for the front, a woman in the pew behind them leaned forward and said, "Don't you know the Lord wants that sweet little boy to get well? If he were my son, I'd do everything I could for him!"

After that, Wesley, with his parents, went forward. The healing service was impressive. Wes "felt something" and was sure he had been healed.

When they reached home, Larry said, "We're gonna believe this all the way! We're gonna fast! We're gonna read our Bibles! We're gonna pray! We're gonna strengthen our faith till there's no room for doubt!"

In the days that followed, certain practical issues had to be addressed:

Lucky: "What if Wes shows signs of sugar? Should we stop the insulin?"

Larry: "He won't."

Lucky: "He has to have his insulin. He'll get sick."

Larry: "The Scriptures promise healing. God has to stand on His Word."

Each morning Wes continued to test for sugar, which continued to be high. One morning Larry grew agitated: "You show symptoms because Satan has put them there to test our faith. We're gonna show our gratitude for this healing—by believing in it!"

Larry and Lucky persistently affirmed the miracle in church services. Wes, with his parents' permission, began to eat unwisely. Standing with the fridge door open one day, his father said, holding the needles and insulin, "I guess we don't need these anymore." It all went into the garbage bin.

But Wesley continued to feel ill. Lucky confessed to her women's prayer group "moments of doubt." The response? "Oh, Lucky, I wouldn't throw doubt in the face of God's miracle! It's blasphemy! Let's get some prayer power working."

Wesley was obviously ill, and his condition was deteriorating. However, believing that to admit symptoms would be to show a lack of faith, he tried his best to prevent his parents from realizing just how sick he was. There came a time when Larry wanted Wes to go back to the insulin. At that exact moment

Lucky, with her entire prayer group in tow, entered Wesley's sickroom. "It's because of our doubts, Larry," said Lucky. "Wes, you will be healed because we've got faith."

Leaving the house, one of the members of the women's prayer circle said to Larry, "Wes would have been healed a long time ago if you'd had enough faith."

A few days later Wes died.

Amazingly, Larry and Lucky didn't lose heart. For months they had been randomly selecting verses of Scripture and claiming them as promises. Before Wes's death they had read the story of the raising of Lazarus. Hence, when Wes died, they believed that God would show His power by resurrecting him. They even delayed the funeral until the 8-year-old boy had been dead for four days. Then they prolonged the funeral, waiting for God to act.

A few days later Larry and Lucky Parker were arrested and charged with second-degree murder.

The members of the women's prayer circle were conspicuous by their absence now.

In the ensuing trial, the pastor was evasive about the whole thing. However, a bumbling attorney managed to present to the jury a picture of a couple who, with the best intentions in the world, had brought about the death of their son.

Lucky and Larry Parker were found guilty. But the judge, having listened carefully to the defense, sentenced them to five years' probation.

All this happened back in 1973. During their five years on probation, the Parkers wrote a book entitled *We Let Our Son Die*. Recently the book was made into a film/video entitled *Promised a Miracle*.

In the book, the sense that Larry Parker makes of the situation is that they had put their faith before love. But having read the story and checked into some of its details, I believe that the lesson to be learned from the death of 8-year-old Wesley Parker is that his parents, egged on by

their local congregation, had a totally wrong idea about faith.

What is faith?

So what is faith? Yes, I know you can recite Hebrews 11:1. But how would you explain the meaning of faith to a child?

One word that is foundational to the Christian's experience is *dependence*. The Christian life is a life of dependence on God. We use three different words to describe that dependent relationship: belief, faith, and trust.

These days belief implies no more than a grasp and acceptance of the facts. It is merely mental assent. James 2:19 says that the devils have this kind of belief, and it terrifies them!

So what about faith? Remember the story of the centurion in Matthew 8:5-10? "Speak the word only and my

servant shall be healed," he said. Jesus responded, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Do you remember the story of a Canaanite woman when Jesus and His disciples were in the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon? The woman sought help for her daughter "tormented by a devil." Jesus tested her to see how much she trusted. When she continued to press her case, He said "Woman, what faith you have! Be it as you wish!" (Matt. 15:28, NEB).

Jesus invariably commended people for their faith. Remember the story of the healing of the women with the flow of blood (Matt. 9:18-22)? Then there were the men who let the paralytic down through the roof (Luke 5:18-26).

From the use that Jesus made of the word faith, here and elsewhere, is it possible to find another word closer to the biblical meaning of dependence

Honoring Evangelistic Achievement

Recently the Ministerial Association joined with the Voice of Prophecy and West Point of Evangelism to honor the life and memory of several individuals for their personal contribution to soul-winning: **George Atiga** (fourth from left), for evangelism and coordination of Asian ministries and evangelism; **Connie Vandeman Jeffery** (seventh from left), daughter of honoree George Vandeman, founder of *It Is Written* telecast; **Virginia Fagel** (seventh from right), co-founder of *Faith for Today* telecast; **Doug Batchelor** (fifth from right), speaker for *Amazing Facts*, who received the plaque honoring *Amazing Facts'* founder, Joe Crews; **George Rainey** (fourth from right), for evangelism and metropolitan ministry. Honoree not pictured: **Kenneth Cox**, for evangelism and pioneering multi-media techniques.



upon God? Let's face it, nowadays faith has come to mean positive thinking. This, of course, was the problem with Larry and Lucky Parker. They were the victims of a particularly audacious form of religion in which positive thinking is all. Does anyone have the right to demand that God should heal someone? The Parkers and their friends believed that they had that right. They believed too that God's willingness, or otherwise, to accede to their demands was entirely dependent upon their own ability to work up or manufacture enough faith/positive thinking. That's why Larry said, "We're gonna believe this all the way." He was going to fast, read his Bible, and pray until he felt he had the right to force God to heal his son. On one occasion Larry said, "The Scriptures promise healing. God has to stand on His Word." Where do the Scriptures promise that in every situation God's people have the right to demand and receive divine healing?

This perception of faith as audacious positive thinking is an aspect of the modern Christian scene that the devil is taking full advantage of.

Trust and dependence

I would like to suggest that wherever in Scripture you find the word belief or faith, you can substitute the word trust and come much closer to grasping the meaning of the passage. The Greek word for faith is *pistis*, and the verb form is *pisteuo*. Neither word has to do with grasping and accepting the facts (belief) or how the modern charismatic uses faith (positive thinking). These Greek words go much further than that. They imply the idea of trust, reliance upon, and allegiance to. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "Faith . . . is not merely an intellectual awareness of the truth, or even an intellectual acceptance of the truth. You can have that and still be without faith. Faith means a real trusting in Him and what He has done on our behalf and for our salvation. . . . The man who has faith is the man who is no longer looking at

himself, and no longer looking to himself. . . . He does not look at what he hopes to be as a result of his own efforts. He looks entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work, and he rests on that alone."¹

Our relationship with God in all aspects of our life—and this includes sickness as well as salvation—is to be characterized by trust and complete dependence. "Faith includes not only belief but trust."² "Faith is trusting God."³

Trust and surrender

Trust is being content to depend on someone else. It involves surrender; for salvation we must surrender our sins and our sin-tainted efforts to achieve what is beyond our capacity to achieve; and in all aspects of life—including sickness—we must surrender all to God.

The dependent Christian does not demand healing for himself or for anyone else; he places the situation, in trust, in the hands of the One who knows what is best.

The phrase "Let go, let God" is more than a corny American bumper sticker. Genuine faith or trust lets go. And letting go takes trust. And how does trust come?

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith [trust], meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22, 23). The Bible invariably presents faith/trust as a fruit or gift. It is never something we can work up or manufacture. Everyone has a measure of it (Rom. 12:3), but we cannot work to produce it. You don't work on fruit. You don't work for a gift. You put your effort into coming into the presence of the Giver and accepting the gift provided.

Using Scripture correctly

To pick a text out of Scripture at random, wrench it out of context, and demand that God honor it by a miracle in your life is not to use Scripture legitimately. This practice is an aspect of modern charismatic religion that has replaced faith-as-trust with posi-

tive thinking. It is this audacious positive thinking that makes people believe that what they want to happen is what is going to happen, that if they can find anything in Scripture that looks like a promise, they can grab it and claim it for their own. "The Lord would have you trust in His love and mercy amid clouds and darkness, as well as in the sunshine."⁴

It is natural for us to prefer the story of Daniel in the lions' den to the story of John the Baptist. It is equally natural for us to be prepared to parrot Hebrews 11:1 and the first half of the chapter that follows—while ignoring the second half. Do you recall the second half, the part that comes after the stories of God's deliverance? "Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained up and put in prison. They were stoned" (verses 35-37, NIV). And remember the end of the chapter: "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better" (verses 39, 40, NIV).

Roger Morneau's *Incredible Answers to Prayer* has just had its seventh printing at the Review and Herald. I'm glad. Morneau's wonderful life of prayer and intercession is a marvelous example of the faith-as-trust model in action.

Praise God that having abandoned their efforts to manipulate Him, Larry and Lucky Parker matured in their Christian experience and in their understanding of faith. I pray that when I face the crises of life, I may be given the gift of trust, the capacity to leave all things, whatever they are, in the hands of the One who knows what is best for me. ■

1 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 45.

2 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 1:389.

3 ———, *Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press7 Pub. Assn., 1903), 253.

4 ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press7 Pub. Assn., 1948), 2:274.

Hallelujah anyway?

Robert Schuller, in one of his devotional books, recounts the heart-breaking story of his daughter's motorcycle accident in which the beautiful young woman lost a leg. Receiving the news while overseas speaking, he immediately flew home with his wife. In anger and desperation, he unbuckled his seat belt in the middle of the flight and walked to the lavatory. As he stood in front of the mirror with tears streaming down his face, he audibly articulated his praise to God. "Thank you, God. No head injury, no internal organ involvement. She is not paralyzed. She lost only her leg. Hallelujah, anyway!"

"Hallelujah, anyway"?

How many of us, facing stark tragedy, could cry out such a thing?

Recently, the organization where I work mourned the death of a key associate's mother—to cancer. Despite our fervent, heartfelt prayers, the woman died.

"Hallelujah, anyway"?

Then, not long after that death, there was Rhonda, an associate in our organization. She was only 36 years old when diagnosed with advanced cancer of the stomach that was spewing cancer cells all over her abdominal cavity and into her ovaries. Chemotherapy was the only option. The prognosis was, of course, grim: she had only a few months left. The agonized family considered an anointing and healing service. She was anointed in a special service accompanied by prayer all over the world. Today, she is healed; all traces of cancer gone.

"Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!"

Now, of course, the key question: Why was Rhonda healed and others, like Donna's mother, not? We prayed just as hard, just as confidently for them. Why should some be healed, even miraculously, when others die as if,

JUDITH A. THOMAS



seemingly, no one heard or cared about their fervent petitions?

Or, perhaps, are we asking the wrong question? Donna (whose mother had died of cancer) says that the last days of caring for her mother were among the most profound spiritual times she, Donna, had ever experienced. She learned so much spiritually that she could have never learned without going through that experience.

I agree. I have had my faith strengthened by good people who, despite pain and loss, died with courage and conviction,

people who kept their faith right up to their last agonizing breath.

Should I celebrate less for Rhonda because others, equally worthy, were not healed? Of course not. If God's ways are not my ways, then surely there are spiritual and mental changes that are needed that may be less miraculous than physical healing, even if I'm not aware of all the implications involved. Perhaps my associate who had quality time with her mother experienced a miracle in her own life no less spectacular. I don't know. We just don't have all the answers.

Robert Schuller's daughter, Donna's mother, Rhonda—all are beloved of the God who gave His one and only Son so that no matter happens to us here, now, we can all have the ultimate quality of an everlasting life with Him. And to that I cry, "Hallelujah!" ■

Judith A. Thomas is an Adventist professional laity leader and serves as president of J. A. Thomas and Associates in Georgia.

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Comfort in chaos

First the bad news. My aunt died yesterday while Sharon and I are traveling a third of the way around the globe. We have just begun our journey and have found it is impossible to return for the funeral services.

As I have reflected and grieved over the past few hours for the life of a favorite relative, I'm impressed to share my experience with you.

Life is bad but God is good. The experience of our sinful world is the reality of death and loss. Sometimes in the joy we experience with family, friends, or transient circumstances, we forget that our lives are like grass that withers or flowers that fade. Death's crushing grasp, however, reminds us that every person is born under a mandatory death sentence. Although death was not part of God's original creation, its horrendous reality is the consequence of humanity's disobedience. Life is the promise of God's ultimate restoration and in the midst of loss, that reality is more difficult to see than the grief that envelops us. Assurance of His ultimate victory eases, but does not eliminate the sting of pain in the midst of loss.

Death never arrives on schedule. Although I knew that my aunt was ill and even though my brothers and I had strategized how we might handle her possible death during my travels, I was not prepared to receive the bad news that she had died the very morning we left the United States. Even when death is anticipated, its apparent finality brings a crushing load that overwhelms those of us who are left to grieve. Whether suddenly springing to rip a family apart or dragging to conclusion a long struggle with disease and suffering, death never comes at the

JAMES A. CRESS



"right" moment. There is no convenient date for death. And even if we could schedule death's timing, few of us would actually choose to keep the appointment.

Long life is not long enough. When I last spoke with my aunt, she reminded me that she had already lived beyond three-score and ten. She rejoiced in the good things that had come her way during her life and declared that she had made peace with the nearness of her anticipated end. Nevertheless, when the moment came, her daughter, who was with her, longed for just one more day or even an additional hour in which to somehow cram some last farewell. Perhaps one of the most destructive of death's results is the lost opportunity to say anything else to those we love.

Sorrow and grief will abate in time. Eventually the present pain of loss will lessen as we who are left behind move through the various stages of grief. Such progress will be greatly aided by participating in a grief-recovery group with others who have recently suffered loss. At the moment, however, even the assurance of Christ's ultimate victory seems a more distant hope than the distracting scratching of shovel on earth or the thud of the cof-

fin lid. God's true gift of the Holy Spirit somehow sends us comfort in the midst of chaos. In the firestorm of our loss, His still, small voice communicates love and concern for our need.

Others have suffered more. While we grieve at death's stroke against our family, we grapple with the comparative blessing we have experienced compared with someone who has lost a loved one in more tragic circumstances. What of those whose son is a casualty of war or whose spouse is taken in a crushing automobile accident? What of parents whose little children suffer horrible disease or whose aged parents lose their memory while their bodies continue to function? For my aunt to have lived a long life, endured traumas, and to have also enjoyed her dogs and her grandchildren, remains a blessed experience that thousands of less-fortunate would envy.

Plan for the future; live today. Twin challenges confront every believer. How to focus on plans for the future while staying in touch with the tenuous present. Good intentions never transformed into present actions remain only figments of our thoughts. Irresponsible anticipation of future things can stymie hard work and corrective action today. Likewise, hedonistic abandonment of appropriate concern for ultimate things means a shallow, meaningless repetition of daily life. God's challenge for his people has always been to live in keen anticipation of eternity while joyfully embracing His blessings and benefits today.

Death is an enemy but rest is a gift. My aunt's life mercifully concluded before the worst ravages of painful
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Comfort in chaos

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deterioration or the harsh realities of medical treatments destroyed all quality of life. Scripture describes our loving Father as giving rest to faithful followers and as painful as death's separation is, there is mercy in resting free from the harshest consequences of death's protracted process.

God's breath suffocates death.

Our crushing enemy will ultimately be crushed by our Heavenly Father's final solution. As Dennis R. Bolton, pastor of West Columbia, South Carolina's Mt. Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church says, "Just as God's breath restored life to the valley of dry bones and returned to their own land (Ezek. 27), so the people of God will resurrect into a new creation as the new Israel." The Creator who first breathed life into Adam's nostrils in that body which He had just fashioned from the dust of the ground, so the same Jesus will suffocate death and eradicate this final enemy into the joy of His eternal restoration. ■

Letters *continued from page 3*

remainder of the article, Booth talks about Ellen White's theology, not her qualification as a theologian.

There's a major difference between a person having a theology and being a theologian. I have a definite theology on a variety of issues, but I do not consider myself a theologian. When we say that a person is a theologian, we mean that he or she has been trained to think analytically about biblical teachings and to express those conclusions very precisely in order to avoid even apparent contradiction, insofar as possible. Ellen White had no such training, and her writing reveals clearly that she spoke prophetically, not with the careful precision of a theologian. Ellen White has a

marvelous theology—a point that Booth makes very well. And she was a marvelous prophet, but not a theologian. There is nothing demeaning in saying of myself that I'm an editor, not a theologian. I've noticed that most theologians aren't good editors, either—and most of us wouldn't make very good prophets!

—Marvin Moore, Caldwell, Idaho.

May I express my heartfelt appreciation for Will Eva's editorial along with Walter Booth's paper focusing on Ellen White's credentials as a theologian. While the scope and breadth of her views make some academicians insecure, her prodigious and effective use of Scripture, in my opinion, is unprecedented.

I sometimes wish I had accompanied Cleopas as unaware he walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus when, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He [Jesus] expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

Though unschooled, Jesus still causes men's hearts to burn within them. I suspect He would be comfortable with Ellen White, who was also an unschooled student of the Word.

—Oliver Jacques, Fallbrook, California.

I was pleased with the affirmative stand taken by Eva and Booth in their respective discussions of Ellen White's role as a theologian. I imagine it would be convenient for someone who disagreed with Ellen White on a theological point to satisfy himself by reasoning, "After all, she was not a theologian."

But while I appreciate the intent of both the editorial and the article, may I, at the risk of being simplistic, ask, "Why must she be a theologian?" Theology is man's attempt to understand and systemize the information he gathers from the writings of the prophets. But although the prophets themselves did "enquire and search diligently" to understand the things that the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify when it testified, the published writings

of those prophets are not the product of their own work of theology. Regardless of the degree to which a prophet personally engages in theology, his inspired writings must be the testimony of Jesus. For a prophet to interject his own theological conclusions into his writings would make him a false prophet. "They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord."

It is wonderful to know that the messenger to the remnant church was a thinking person who strove to properly understand and accurately present the revelations divinely given to her. Yet the ability to engage in technical theology was no more a requisite for her than for any other prophet . . .

—Ken LeBrun, pastor, Kamiah/Grangeville, Idaho.

Editorial Note: Thank you for excellent letters on this topic.

In writing on Mrs. White as a theologian, we did not feel bound by the need to say that Ellen White must be a theologian, but by the weight of evidence that she simply was one, that it was one of her gifts; at least within the parameters of less academic or specialized views of what a theologian is. Few would deny that Paul, for example, was a theologian and that he used this theological gift and training in writing his inspired/prophetic work. One gift cluster does not cancel out the other. Rather, each gift enhances the other.

In connection with this line of thinking, the question may also be asked, Is someone in fact a theologian if there is not at least some "inspiration" or transcendence present in the theology being done? The subjective elements in such a question make it difficult to answer, but it is nevertheless a question that in all fairness should be tackled. A companion question would be Is Christian theology merely thinking and studying about God and "exegeting" Scripture, or does it by its nature demand something transcendent, which if absent precludes it from properly being called theology and its practitioner from being named a theologian? In other

words, Is theology merely an intellectual pursuit, as is philosophy or biochemistry? Most definitions or discussions of what a theologian is seem to leave out this crucial question. We believe that real theology or being an authentic Christian "theologian" must include a precise, thoughtful, honest and disciplined study of God and the Bible, as well as being true to the transcendent aspects so profoundly present in Christian truth. This combination of dynamics is profoundly present in the work of Ellen G. White. This integrated or inclusive approach to theology does engender a considerably different product from that which is brought out by the merely academic or intellectual approach. The two kinds of theology do look and feel different from one another. But does this difference justly preclude us calling the integrated theology "theology" or the one doing it "a theologian?" We don't think it does; not in Ellen White's case at least.

As mentioned in last October's editorial, persuasive to the case for Mrs. White as theologian is an open-minded look at the precision with which she wrote on subjects such as the nature of Christ. In looking carefully into the actual content and tone of this aspect of her writing it is hard to conclude that Mrs. White was merely developing or writing a theology. No, the evidence reveals that in such cases her theological writing contains the precision elegance, thrust and focus of a theologian.

Added to this, it is difficult to deny an active theological or "theologian" role for Ellen White when reading her Conflict of the Ages series. This is especially true of some parts of these five books, which together make up an impressive theological work, whether or not there was unreferenced borrowing, editing or secretarial assistance involved in their composition. Another loaded yet interesting question to ask is, All things being equal, would Mrs. White be more likely to be respected as a theologian if her gender had been male?

It should be said that one of our main intentions in addressing this issue in last October's Ministry was to slow down the tendency now among us of, in effect, removing almost any definitive role for the gift given Seventh-day Adventists in the work of Mrs. White.

Based upon the substantive questions that have surfaced about Mrs. White's use of sources, editors and secretaries it has become an expanding, politically correct inclination in broadening circles to decry any definitive role for Mrs. White's work among us. Even the devotional value of Mrs. White's work is to all intents and purposes appreciably diminished in the Church by this tendency.

When due weight is given to all the rather complex dynamics surrounding the phenomenon of Ellen White, people on all sides of the matter may find themselves

valuing the gift in ways never anticipated. Thus all its aspects need to be holistically weighed in a way that we may not yet have allowed or discovered. The recent dismissive tendency among some of us seems almost as simplistic and destructive as is its opposite: that of claiming more than was ever intended for the gift that is among us.

The Dropout Dilemma

I was pleased to find the article "Indicators of Ministerial Resilience: The Dropout Dilemma" in the October 2000 issue.

For years I have had a burden for my brothers and sisters in the Adventist ministry who have left our ranks due to unresolved issues in their lives. While pastoral ministry has never been easy, the pressures and realities of the times in which we are living have complicated the role of the pastor tremendously.

Our current ministerial dropout rate is unacceptable, in my opinion. While I realize that not everyone who enters the ministry will or should stay, studies by individuals such as Doctors Bynum and Clark indicate that we have a serious problem facing us.

I thank God for ministries such as the Barnabas Center in North Carolina, which are reaching out to ministers and their families who are hurting. . . . We have a moral obligation to try to save as many for continued service as we can. . . . Aside from the human costs, when ministers leave denominational service prematurely, the money invested in that person's education and training is largely lost to the Church.

The problem needs to be addressed at every level, from college ministerial training programs to the General Conference Ministerial Department. While we can't save everyone, I believe we can save many more than we now are.

Let's put the best minds in our Movement together and come up with a plan for ministering to our ministers who have been wounded. . . . The ministry saved may be our own! ■

—Bob Burns, chaplain,
Celebration/Kissimmee, Florida.

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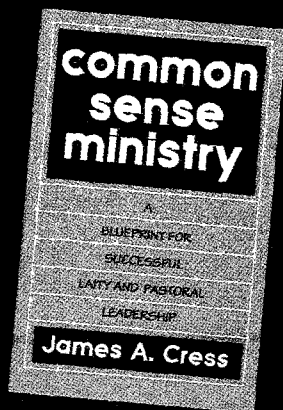
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