

MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors

July 2004



WHOLLY

BOUNDMENESS

PREACHING
WITH THE COURAGE
OF PAUL

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Subscriptions: 12 issues: United States US\$29.99; Canada and overseas US\$31.99; airmail US\$41.75; single copy US\$3.00. To order, send name, address, and payment to *Ministry* Subscriptions, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904 U.S.A.

Web site: www.ministrymagazine.org

Circulation queries, renewals, new subscriptions, address changes: Email: norcottj@gc.adventist.org; phone: 301-680-6510; fax 301-680-6502.

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Writer's Guidelines available on request.

Ministry (ISSN 0026-5314), the international journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association © 2004, is published monthly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and printed by Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193. Member Associated Church Press. Standard mail postage paid at Nampa, Idaho.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Vol. 76 Number 7

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APPLYING THIS PRINCIPLE, I AGREE WITH NELSON THAT ADULTERY IS NOT THE UNPARDONABLE SIN. HOWEVER, OTHER ISSUES REMAIN.

I am a pastor's wife and so much enjoy reading the articles in *Ministry*.

Your article entitled "Unforbidden Fruit" by Miroslav Kis was very well written. It was one of the best explanations for how sex affects human beings differently than other sins. It has helped me better understand the story of Joseph; he did not flee Potiphar's wife because he was a goody-two-shoes, but because he knew that contemplation would only lead him into the sin—or worse yet, not giving in but storing up images that he would later have difficulty erasing in his married life when he would be wanting to strive for purity.

—Ruth A. Ross, St. Joseph, Missouri.

I want to give you all huge kudos for your work on this issue and especially to the decision to run Dwight Nelson's sermon. Of all the things that could and should be said to our church regarding clergy sexuality, Dwight's message is most apropos. By now, we are familiar with Pastor Dwight's passionate preaching. The intimacy and intensity with which he delivered this particular message of forgiveness to his church should never be forgotten. And I don't just mean the Pioneer Memorial Church. We all needed to hear this sermon. I needed to hear this sermon. Absolutely enormous. Thank you so much. I have for more than 12 years longed for a message like this for one of my closest friends in life who experienced a "moral

fall" in the ministry and I just pray that he will read it; that he will sense the forgiveness of his church. And I pray that our "community" will let its message sink very deep. Thanks Dwight and thanks to you editors at *Ministry*!

—Mark Carr, M.Div., Ph.D., associate professor of Christian ethics, theological co-director of the Center for Christian Bioethics, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

I appreciated Dwight Nelson's "Requiem and Resurrection for a Fallen Brother." It raises some important issues for continued conversation. I wish to focus on two of those issues—one negative and one positive.

In this article, it appears that forgiveness is reduced to being divine amnesia, which at best is amnesty (both share the common etymological root *amnesia*, forgetfulness). But forgiveness is not amnesty. If forgiveness is merely forgetting, then there is no precondition to forgiveness such as a satisfaction of justice. All God has to do is forget it. But Scripture teaches the opposite. "Without the shedding of blood is no remission." Biblically, forgiveness can only happen in conjunction with the satisfaction of justice. Additionally, when God "remembers," it is not implying a lost memory recovered, but rather that He is ready to take action. In not remembering sin, God is relenting on taking action. Nelson's position seems to

imply that the church should treat sexually fallen pastors with ecclesiastical amnesia instead of with biblical, corrective, and transforming forgiveness.

Applying this principle, I agree with Nelson that adultery is not the unpardonable sin. However, other issues remain. Would we argue that gospel forgiveness means we should reinstate to professional ministry? Or might we argue that reinstatement is unwise even though he is forgiven? Likewise are undue risks of temptation and scandal incurred by reinstatement of ministerial credentials to the apparently repentant? How are we to know? A real case study is instructive.

About 20 years ago, a colleague of mine "fell" and had to "leave the ministry." His wife separated from him, and both remained in the geographical area where he had ministered. He stopped attending church. The congregation impacted by his adultery reached out and wooed him back to regular church attendance, eventually leading him to genuine accountability, repentance, and reformation. About two years later, his wife reconciled with him. When he had spent eight to ten years healing and growing *in the congregation he injured*, THAT church body elected him as an elder, not holding his past sins against him. For the last decade he has served as an elder or head elder of that church, functioning as a lay-pastor. I

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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.

Fallen pastors need truth and grace

It is one thing for us to debate how parishioners should be treated when they are in violation of what is accepted as normative by the community of believers. We rightfully up the ante, however, when the offenders are clergy, and when their behavior violates the standards not only of the church, but also of the surrounding secular society, and borders on or actually constitutes an illegal act.

For example, how are we to treat our fellow clergy when they take advantage of the power and influence of their high and holy office to sexually exploit or simply be illicitly involved with those whom God and the church have placed in their care?

Few today would question that, under these circumstances, and contrary to anything that might have been done in the past, there is a great need for the *truth* to be told and disciplinary action to be taken. But is there any room for *grace*? Is there *still* room for grace when clergy exploit their parishioners or others sexually? If so, how much room is there, and when and how is this grace to be applied? These are important questions.

The series of articles this year in *Ministry* by Miroslav Kis (see this on this month's page 8, with more to come in September and November) has provided a base for anyone attempting to answer this question. Then in our May issue Dwight Nelson's "Requiem and Resurrection for a Fallen Brother" purposely provided us with the balancing element (grace) that must be part and



parcel of our attitudes and actions toward the "fallen."

Pastor Nelson's article deals with the role of grace and communal forgiveness in restoring—not necessarily professionally reinstating—a pastor who has become sexually involved with the wrong person. (See also the letters addressing this article, and Dr. Nelson's reply to them starting on page 3.)

In general terms the approach of Miroslav Kis and Dwight Nelson represent two inextricably connected, co-mingling principles—*truth and grace*—that must always be present when we deal with any offender. The intimate, irreducible unity we create between these two living principles, that is, the way we bring them together to interact as one in a given situation, is vitally important to the quality of our ministry to others, including our fellow clergy.

Truth means courageously telling it like it is to the guilty party. It means facing uncompromisingly the wrong that has been done so it can be seen for

what it is and be rectified. *Grace* is looking with authentic love right into the eyes of the offending person, noting the destructiveness and offensiveness of their act and being palpably willing to see beyond it to the ideal of unstinting love, forgiveness, and communal (not necessarily professional) reinstatement. Grace is what inspires a guilty person with the courage to honestly and fully confess their wrongdoing and reform; a vitally important act in the process as a whole.

"For the law was given by Moses, but *grace and truth* came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17, emphasis added). Here John is clearly implying that Moses and the law were not the ultimate revelation. The ultimate revelation is in the embodiment of grace and truth, truth and grace, which were inseparably fused into one in the divine-human person of our Lord.

While we devote ourselves to ministering to those who have been hurt and even devastated by the awful action of a fellow clergy person, we have to embrace the fact that we are in a truly unique "business": that of being ready, regardless of what's politically correct, to minister effectively and holistically to anyone who is weeping over the horrors of their own fallenness.

We are called to thoughtfully and prayerfully enter consistently into the wise and demanding practice of employing both truth and grace as we deal with one another. This is the way of Jesus Christ. It's a matter of truth *and* grace . . . grace *and* truth. ▀

Wholly boldness: preaching with the courage of Paul

John McVay

As we proclaim the gospel, calls for relevance and contextualization are common and needed. But here, in the imposing challenge of our times, such calls must be balanced by decisive exhortations to bold witness. Perhaps no scene in the Bible offers as compelling an invitation to such witness as Paul's defense before Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice (Acts 25:23–26:32). To appreciate fully this last and longest of Paul's speeches in Acts, we must watch his impressive congregation as they assemble.

Brawn, brains, bucks, bigwigs

Trumpet fanfare first introduces the tribunes: five cohorts of Roman troops stationed in the city. They enter in full military regalia, their chiseled features and muscular swagger bespeaking the might of the Roman Empire.

Next come the business leaders from the bustling port of Caesarea Maritima—Caesar's city by the sea: the owners of merchant fleets, bankers, entrepreneurs, and benefactors.

Behind them are civic, religious, and thought leaders: judges and attorneys, the mayor, Caesarea's official augurs—priestly types who read the signs and divine the will of the gods. The high priest of the grand temple to Augustus and Roma, a prominent poet-philosopher, and the president of Caesarea University are there as well.

As if this slate of characters is not interest-

ing enough, fresh fanfare announces three remarkable individuals. Festus, the new governor of the Roman province of Judea, hosts the proceedings. King Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I and great-grandson of Herod the Great, is in town to congratulate Festus on his appointment.

Raised in the court of Emperor Claudius in Rome, he is in his early thirties and is a student of religion who will hold discussions with Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyracanus. Interestingly, it is Agrippa who appoints the high priest in Jerusalem, controls the sacred vestments, and oversees the temple treasury.

The most colorful figure, though, is King Agrippa's sister and apparent consort, Bernice. As she enters the audience chamber, every head turns. She is a knockout, a king slayer. Once married to her uncle, King Herod of Chalcis (now deceased), she has just terminated a marriage with the King of Cilicia and come back to her brother. In a few years, General Titus, who puts down the Jewish revolt, will take Bernice with him when he returns to Rome. As she enters the audience chamber on her brother's arm, she is at her beautiful and alluring best.

The brawn. The brains. The bucks. The bigwigs—they are all here. It would be difficult to imagine a more intellectually sophisticated, smug, and powerful group than the one now assembled in the palatial audience chamber in Caesarea.

Enter Paul

"So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and Paul was brought in." (Acts 25:23).¹

No fanfare now sounds; only the dull grinding of the prisoner's chains. Paul stands before the enthroned elite of the Province of Judea, providing a study in contrasts.²

As we join them in the audience chamber, consider three facets of the story that promise to inspire our own courageous testimony.

First, consider Paul's moment of destiny. To all outward appearances, Paul seems the victim of circumstances, the mere pawn of Rome. He is led into the audience chamber (25:23). In the introductory speech of Festus, Paul is spoken about rather than spoken to (25:24-27). Paul has to be given permission to speak. He is



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a prisoner, in chains (26:29).

On one level, Paul *is* imprisoned, controlled, and subject to the whims of others; on another is a deeper reality. In the initial story of Paul's conversion, the risen Lord speaks to Ananias, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings" (9:15). Despite appearances, this is Paul's moment of destiny. To this moment before the assembled elite in Caesarea he has been appointed by the risen Christ.³

Paul is neither the victim of circumstances nor the pawn of Rome. He is the appointee and emissary of his risen Lord.

Parallels

Something similar—though apparently less dramatic—may be part of the reality of our ministry. On one level we may seem subject entirely to the whims of others, slaves to a long list of chores that seem peripheral to our calling. If our witness tracks on this surface story, we will play the part of the prisoner and the pawn and offer submission, even recantation.

However, there is another story unfolding. The risen Lord has commissioned us. We are appointees and emissaries of that living Lord. If our witness instead traces this deeper story line, we shall respond as did Paul, with valiant witness. As ministers of the gospel, we dare never forget the more profound narrative.

A second facet of the story also holds obvious promise of motivating bold witness—Paul's own daring testimony to the risen Christ. Imagine being able to pause the proceedings just as Paul stretches out his hand, in the classic gesture of the orator, to begin his speech (26:1).

In that frozen moment of time, step alongside Paul and serve as his homiletics coach. What would you say? "Paul, this is no sermon in the marketplace. You must do your audience analysis here, Paul, and do it with care.

"Keep this sophisticated group in

mind. Let's tune up your message to meet this moment of destiny, rounding off a few sharp corners and rough edges. Straightforward testimony about Jesus and His resurrection may not work well. Could we make it a bit more oblique perhaps?"

As Paul begins, you are quite satisfied that he is following your advice. He offers a polite, generous overture to Agrippa (26:2, 3). *Great start, Paul! You're staying on plan!*

Next, Paul summarizes his early life and asserts, "And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews!" (26:4-7). *That's acceptable, Paul. That's fairly indirect. You're still on plan.*

But then Paul continues with an abrupt question, "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?" (26:8). *Oh, no, Paul! Remember, you've got the president of Caesarea University in your audience. What are you doing, Paul?*

Your unease and chagrin deepen as Paul moves into the well-practiced story of his persecution of believers and his own rendezvous with the risen Lord (26:12-21). And his straightforward testimony continues: "To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (26:22, 23).

As he bears witness to Christ's resurrection, Paul is a practitioner of his later words to Timothy: "Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage" (2 Tim 4:2).

Invited to talk about himself, even to defend himself, in the end, Paul instead talks about Jesus.⁴ He cannot

help talking about the resurrected Jesus. The vision on the road to Damascus has become the controlling one of his life.

How often is it just the opposite for us: Invited to talk about Jesus, we end up talking about ourselves instead? At such moments we must ask ourselves whether we have seen a compelling vision of the risen Christ. Has that vision of the risen Christ become a controlling one for us?

A final, motivating facet of the story is Paul's concluding, pathos-filled plea (Acts 26:19).

As one studies the closing verses of the narrative (26:24-32), Paul's perseverance in offering testimony to the risen Christ inspires. Even an accusation of insanity cues a renewed call for belief in Jesus (26:24, 25).

Agrippa responds to Paul's vigorous advocacy for faith in the resurrected Christ by postdating his repentance, "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?" (26:28). To which Paul responds, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become as I am—except for these chains" (26:29).

One commentator calls this plea of Paul's "the declaration that makes him, beyond any other, the model of a Christian preacher (verse 29)."⁵

To the sophisticated elite of the Roman province of Judea and their royal guests Paul dares to say, "I wish you were like me, a person of faith in Jesus, minus the chains."

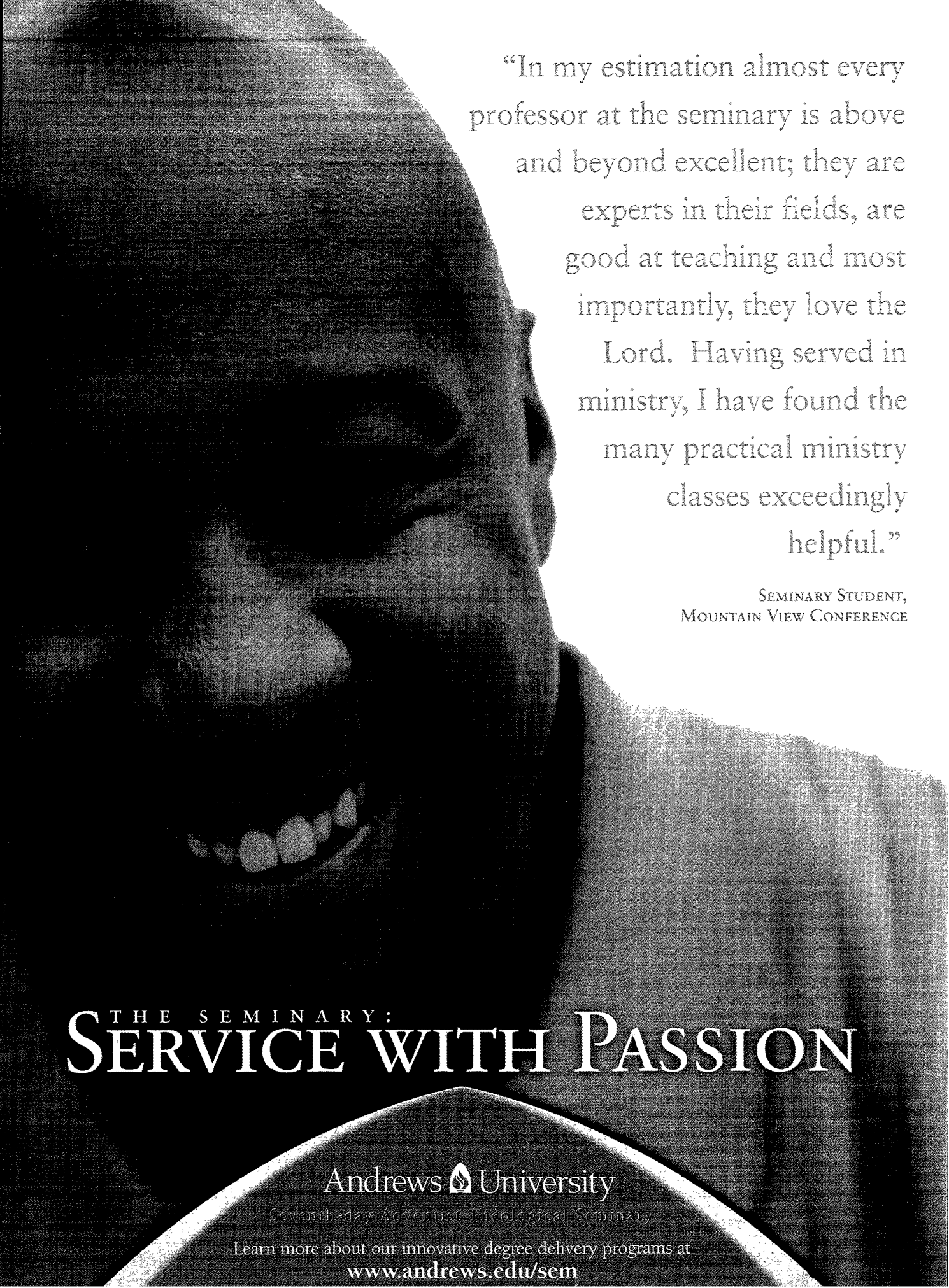
With the story as a whole, this final plea leaves us agape at Paul's courage and audacity, and motivates us to bold witness to and in behalf of our risen and returning Lord. ■

1 All Bible quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.
2 See Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub Assn., 1911), 434, 435.

3 Bruce W. Winter, "Official Proceedings and the Forensic Speeches in Acts 24-26" in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 331. "The speech in Acts 26 is primarily recorded by Luke because it is the fulfillment of God's promise that Paul would bear witness before kings (Acts 9:15)."

4 Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Band 2, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 5 (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 370, n. 9.

5 C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2, Corrected ed., International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 1145.



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Flirting with the enemy

Why and how does a breach of the marriage covenant occur within ministry? As healthy and normal human beings, ministers are as susceptible to the same causes for troubles in their marriages as the rest of society. But, because the call to ministry affects the person's identity at a deeper level than other professions, some of the causes for unfaithfulness are vocation-specific and the reasons behind them are more complex. We will first briefly spell out the causes, to be followed by ministry-specific reasons behind troubles in marriage.

Causes for sexual infidelity

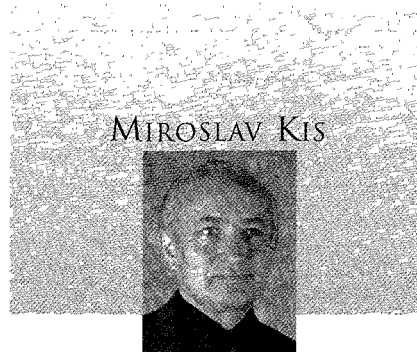
Stress and burnout are the most often cited cause for unfaithfulness in marriage. Sexual satisfaction and the need for intimacy are crowded out of the time and energy pool. The result is a greatly reduced capacity for self-control.

Unreadiness for relationship is another reason. It means that one or both partners do not have what an exclusive, permanent, devout relationship requires. Mental and emotional immaturity, financial insecurity, and an irresponsible attitude toward life's duties form shaky ground for mature relationships.

Sexual fantasies and addictions gnaw on the finest fibers of the marriage bond. Of particular concern is the secret fascination with pornography where an imaginary sex partner, always young, ready, and attractive, overshadows the ebb and flow of a real life relationship.

Spiritual drought drains the soul of flexibility and resilience in the face of hardships and temptations. Joseph's response to Potiphar's wife is very revealing (Gen. 39:9). Only in the context of a close walk with God will sexual misbehavior be seen as sin, as "great wickedness."

Imprudence accounts for many marital tragedies. It can take such forms as naiveté, excessive self-assurance, and



denial. Many such persons reason: "It won't happen to me" or "Why is it wrong to find support in a devout and sincere friend?" The fact is that no pastor is exempt from any type of aberrant sexual behavior.¹

*Vulnerability*² to caring attention and charming and manipulative advances from a person of the other gender can be a very subtle trap. The trouble is that vulnerable people may not be aware of their weakness until caught in the snare.

Midlife crisis brings us to a realization that many of our dreams and hopes will not be fulfilled. Questions such as "Is this it?" or "Is there nothing more to life?" are the silent cries of despair. Many of us may be tempted to seek compensation for what we have "missed" in illicit and immoral relations. Pamela Cooper-White adds several other causes, which include: "low self-esteem; deeply-held traditional values about male and female roles, however disguised in liberal rhetoric; poor impulse control; a sense of entitlement, of being 'above the law,' or other narcissistic traits; difficulty accepting responsibility for mistakes and difficulty establishing appropriate intimate relationships and friendships with male peers."³

Reasons for sexual misconduct in ministry

By reasons we mean an explanation or motive behind the cause of an action. For example, stress is a major

cause for immoral conduct, but reasons which explain stress and ultimately answer the question *why* is adultery possible in ministry can be many. Here are some of them:

Reasons for stress

◆ *Unrealistic expectations* can easily figure as the major reason behind stress in ministry.⁴ Just the number of tasks and duties that a pastor is expected to perform at any hour, combined with divergent constituencies to which a pastor is accountable, call for a pause. Pastors are often "in over their heads."⁵ Think of preaching, teaching, socializing within the church and with community, formulating and supporting various projects and ministries, sport with youth, lounging with the old, influencing the young to middle-aged adults . . .

Above all these stands the professional/administrative structure as well. Recently I listened to a tearful tale of a pastor facing his wife's adultery. "I was a 'super pastor' and I neglected my duties as a husband. But what could I do? Imagine the regular pastoral meeting. Each ministry department loaded us with projects, asked us to promote its programs, asked for reports, urged us to estimate how much can be accomplished until the next meeting. I felt overburdened to outdo myself each time." As I listened I could not shake a nagging question, Why do we insist on voting Type A, turbo-charged individuals into leadership positions, rather than well-balanced people? Why do we treat hard-working and sluggish pastors with the same fare of pressure? While hard work is a virtue, overwork is a vice, so what does it mean to be our brothers' keepers in this case? "As stress increases, one's good judgment decreases." The minister does not see his family deteriorating until it's too late.⁶

Heather Bryce lists several other factors that belong to the category of stressors due to unrealistic expectations.

◆ *"Insufficient income* is demeaning and apt to cause strife at home. It can plant doubt about God's sufficiency and care. It can cause a wife to seek outside work, leading to a feeling of distance." This is especially true when a denomination hires a pastoral team because the job fits two, but insufficient funds require that the couple live on one salary.

◆ *"Undefined success in ministry* causes further problems. A pastor, like anyone, needs to feel he is succeeding. Success in ministry should not be measured by human standards, but it is. A pastor is always, and especially at midlife, battling to feel he has done well."

◆ *"Then there is the 'professional license' to keep secrets,* which reflects itself in conversations like this:

"Who did you talk to today, Dear?"

"People with problems, as usual."

"Like who?"

"It is best you don't know, OK?"

"In order not to spend all her time jealous, curious, or angry, a pastor's wife has to give her husband to his work—almost to the point of not caring."

Relationships

◆ *Poor or nonexistent modeling at home.* Spouses who grew up in a one-parent family, or without parents at all, live with deficiencies of healthy male or female role-models at home. Similar needs surface with spouses coming from abusive and dysfunctional families.

◆ *Inability to reconcile the demands of ministry with marital life.* Often it is the question of poor prioritization of values, but there are other reasons as well. For example, the sensual and exploitative image of women and sex, as propagated by the secular culture, cannot fit well within the pastoral marriage. I have counseled with pastors whose mind could not bear the tension between their low view of sexuality and the pastoral role of moral purity.

Vulnerable spots

◆ *The unresolved traumas from the past* may cause unfaithfulness in mar-

riage. They create weaknesses and sensitivities of which the person may not be aware until temptation hits. We think of untreated memories of abuse, of hurtful dating experiences, of painful divorces. In times of rejection or injustice in professional life the memories of rejections in the past may flare up. Not wanting to share such humiliating feelings with his wife or a trusted same-gender friend, the pastor will try to keep it within his office and open himself vulnerable to a loyal and supportive secretary who knows the situation.

Power

◆ *The power and opposite gender.* Powerful people fascinate the opposite gender. Because the pastor is in charge, he is an expert and, to a certain extent, he wields power even over their husbands.⁸ Abuse begins when the pastor uses his position for personal advantage, to satisfy his needs, especially when such needs belong within the bonds of marriage.

◆ *Manipulation.* Power allows a minister to influence a potential secret relationship with a member because of his access to privileged information about her.

◆ *Credibility* and reputation may intimidate the victim not to report the inappropriate behavior. Who will believe an "ordinary" member's complaint against a minister's word?

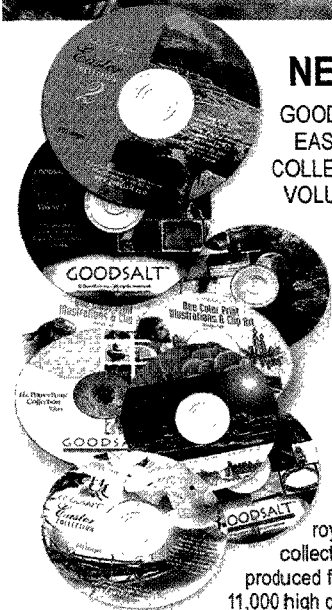
◆ *Entitlement.* Power may inflate the pastor's belief that he has the right to some "innocent" escapades and to relate to others as if he is "above the law."⁹

Karen Lebacqz makes this insightful comment: "The fact that professional power is legitimated and institutionalized has tended to blind us to the importance of the mere existence of that power. Precisely because it is legitimate power—authority—we forget that there is a significant power gap between professional and client. We also forget that it is a type of power that is very difficult for clients to overcome. The vulnerability of client to professional differs from the vulnerability of friend to friend: the professional cannot only hurt my feelings, but has legitimated, institution-

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alized power to make significant changes in my life."¹⁰

Trust

Ministry is a position of trust. Even on the first day in a district, people will approach us with amazing confidence. As a young pastor I had to adjust to the fact that much older and mature members wanted my counsel and guidance in the issues that belong to their station in life. The trust in the profession and the confidence built up by my predecessors rested on my shoulders, and I had to show myself trustworthy. A member of the other gender will seldom broach the personal and confidential themes with other people, even professionals, as easily as with the pastor.

Marie M. Fortune describes the case of Dr. Peter Donovan of the First Church of Newburg, and the prerogatives he enjoyed once he won the trust of his church and of the denominational administration: (1) Donovan had access to the women of First Church; (2) he had the prerogative to initiate contact with them; (3) he had reason for regular visitations to conduct church business; (4) the women did not use the same good judgment about him as they would have used with someone else; (5) they did not seek help from the outside for fear of not being believed; (6) the women preferred to "save the church family" by keeping the "family secret."¹¹

These then are some observed causes, and the reasons behind them which may result in adultery in ministry. There is yet another angle from which we need to approach this issue: the manner in which sexual infidelity occurs.

How does adultery occur?

Sexual affairs do not just happen, they are not inevitable, nor can we simply blame biology. Some fatalism comes from long-entrenched cultural conditioning, and some from the assumption that biology drives the way men and women behave sexually.¹² But the fact is that behind most, if not every, immoral act, there is a history, a context from which such conduct springs. The causes collude together with several reasons;

even when both actors are completely surprised and baffled at what happened, a closer look will discover some form of flirting with the enemy. An act of sexual infidelity is most likely a terminus of a longer journey.

Another important feature of fornication and adultery is that the first steps in the journey are very subtle and innocent. Often only later on, the person will realize being trapped in a relationship from which there is no easy way out. We will attempt to unmask some of the snares.

1. *The mixed signals trap.* Suppose I shake hands with an attractive member of the congregation, and she holds my hand a little tighter and a second or two longer. She didn't think or mean to do it. Perhaps she was distracted, or something I said that day had an impact in a unique way. But I get a message that she likes holding my hand. I wonder why? Next time I see her, she smiles and says "Hi." I hear in it a connotation, an intriguing tone. Immediately I put together the handshake and the "Hi" as something just between "us."

Halt! Right there! This is dangerous. From here on it will be downhill. A tiny spider-web-size lace is between us. Soon the spinning will commence and then the web. Even if this is only in my mind, even if she has no clue what is happening in my cortex, my responses might put some ideas into hers. And if that happens, just when she is stressed and when I battle with midlife issues, the risks are too high.

2. *The nonchalance trap.* I have just come into my new parish. For the first time in my life I see the faces of my congregation. As I scan the audience I wonder who will work well with me, who among them carries incredible burdens, who is on the fringes, and who are the stalwart conservatives. But I look with my male eyes also. I notice the old, the kids, the men, the women, and yes, those attractive to me. Then I realize what has happened. I noticed some as attractive. In humility and prudence I confess and pray: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). I con-

sciously decide to be careful and prudent but also nice to them. And this is good. Such direct and outright decision, when habitual, can prove a strong ally. "Susceptibility to sexual sin begins of course, with attraction."¹³ But what about those who to me are not particularly pleasing? Many adulterous affairs involve precisely this second group of sisters in Christ. With my guard down, I am vulnerable to temptation.

3. *The illicitness trap.* There is definitely something fascinating and stimulating about wrongness. First, it is because immediate consequences are not that bad. The surprising thing is that when an illicit relationship develops, at first things go better for both. The relationship with both spouses may revive, the pastor's sermons sound fresh and insightful, even his sermons about sin and illicit connections sound convincing and fresh. His energy level is amazingly high, and how can anyone, at face value, judge the friendship with another woman as evil or sinful?¹⁴

4. *The soul mate trap.* We click together like hand in glove. She intuitively me like no one else. What is wrong with bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2)? She is just a soul mate. Here is when everything should stop. My wife must know that I need her to be my soul mate. We must explore why if this is not the case anymore.

5. *The acquaintance trap.* I've known her since she was a child. I know her siblings and parents. She could be my daughter. It is so nice to become reacquainted and close again. She opened right up, especially when I reminded her of some good times our two families had together. She always was a charmer. True, we did not see each other ever since she was in grade school, but there can be nothing romantic between this young lady in her prime and this old man.

Halt! I do not know her. She is not a little girl anymore. If I held her in my lap then, and even stroked her hair then, now is a different thing with me and with her. Young ladies often have an attraction to older, mature, situated, recognized, father-figure men. And vice versa.

Desmond Morris has described in

detail the emotional road to intimacy, whether in legitimate courtship or in illicit sexual affairs: (1) Eye to body contact; (2) eye to eye contact. First hints of attraction are nascent here or this is the end. (3) voice to voice; (4) hand to hand. It might be just a "helping hand." (5) hand to shoulder. A feeling of "buddy" type relationship. (6) arm to waist. Seriously romantic expression. (7) face to face. Here the sexual connotations become more evident. (8) hand to head. Caressing. (9) hand to body; (10) mouth to breast; (11) touching below the waist; and (12) intercourse.

Ultimate cause, ultimate reason

There are no final causes, there are no absolute reasons for sexual infidelity in ministry. No one can cause us to fornicate, and no one can give us indisputable reasons for adultery. The above partial catalogue, and even any complete list, is but what can be observed in real life, but that is neither normal nor normative. There is nothing that can wrestle us down to prostitute our sacred marriage covenant *except if our relationship with God is weak or superficial*. God has everything to do with our faithfulness to our spouses. Ask Abimelech the king of Gerar (Gen. 20), check with Joseph (Gen. 39:6-12), consult with Eli the priest (1 Sam. 2:25), and inquire of David the king (Ps. 51:4). They will tell us.

My wife is God's private property, and so am I. The only reason we do not trespass His privacy in our relationship is because we both made a sacred covenant and pledged in His presence to love and cherish only each other until death do us part. Every other human being is also in His ownership. We dare not take liberty to intrude, to defraud Him of His sacred possession with impunity.

God has not capitulated before sexual sin! Not yet! Not ever! His hand is mightier than sex. He can hold us safely within the scars of His Son's hands, protect our vulnerabilities, heal our wounds, and strengthen our weaknesses. The only real cause that can

make us sin, the only real reason that can explain our fall is when we, pastors, do not remain in communion with our Chief Shepherd, Jesus. That is the cause of all causes, and reason of all reasons.

Precautions to take

Lois Mowday Rabey has this to say in terms of prevention: "If you are in a vulnerable situation, recognize that your judgment may be impaired. Determine to live by biblical standards no matter how tough the situation gets. Look for rationalization in your thinking. Don't allow yourself to rationalize ungodly behavior for any reason. Move slowly and cautiously in making any decisions. Seek counsel from trusted friends who are committed Christians walking closely with the Lord. Decrease your workload if at all possible. Enter into a relationship of accountability with a friend who has a mature Christian walk with the Lord. Maintain the basics: Stay in the Word, have quiet times, pray, and be in the fellowship of believers who are walking with the Lord. Do not take even a small step in the direction of a relationship that may lead to ungodly behavior. Pray for protection, pray for discernment, and pray for rest. Draw close to the Lord in ways that allow you to begin to feel His presence. Abide, read, talk to Him, think about Him, focus on Jesus."¹⁵ ■

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2 L. M. Rabey, *The Snares* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988), 25-30.

3 Pamela Cooper-White, "Soul Stealing Power and Relations in Pastoral Sexual Abuse" *The Christian Century* 108 (February 20, 1991): 198.

4 J. T. Seat, J. T. Trent, and J. K. Kim, "The Presence and Contributing Factors of Sexual Misconduct Among Southern Baptist Pastors in Six Southern States" *Journal of Pastoral Care* 47 (Winter 1993, No. 4): 367.

5 Joy Jordan-Lake, "Conduct Unbecoming a Preacher" *Christianity Today* 36 (February 10, 1992).

6 Ibid.

7 Heather Bryce, "After the Affair: A Wife's Story" *Leadership IX* (Winter 1988) 163.

8 Pamela Cooper-White, 197.

9 See J. N. Poling, *The Abuse of Power* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), especially pages 23-48.

10 Karen Lebacqz, *Professional Ethics, Power and Paradox* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985) 114, 115.

11 Maud M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 103-105.

12 Peter Rutter, *Sex, Power, and Boundaries* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 26, 27.

13 Stanley J. Grenz, *Betrayal of Trust* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 131.

14 P. Roger Hillerstrom, *Intimate Deception* (Portland: Multnomah, 1989), 43, 44.

15 Rabey, 30.

Preaching beyond modernism: problems with communication and proclamation in a modernist framework

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To preach the gospel means to communicate with others. Present communication approaches, however, seriously challenge the preaching that exists today within the more traditional modernist framework.

Modernism needs to be differentiated from modernity. Modernity is a more innocent, everyday concept, denoting the practical physical structures of modern development in life. In contrast, as it is used here, modernism is a framework of dogmatic Biblical interpretation, characterized by the following presuppositions and convictions:

- ◆ Empiricism: things are as they appear according to our common sense observations.
- ◆ Reductionism: that things may be reduced from the diverse phenomena of life to a primary explainable belief.
- ◆ That atomism and mechanism of Newtonian science is applicable to our quest for spiritual truth. Newtonian science indicated that life can be broken up into independent pieces or atoms, to be coordinated again so that they work like a clock with its coordinated mechanisms.

◆ That Sir Isaac Newton's way of formulating laws that explain physical phenomena may be used in much the same way in determining everything, including spiritual truth. (Today many of his conclusions have been relativized, if not contradicted—for example, by quantum physics.)

◆ That Descartes's rationalism, which has been basic to modernism, suggests the best way of arriving at spiritual truth. This is the understanding that life is to be understood only through rationalistic concepts. This rationalism was combined with Descartes's subject-object split of life, denoting that we can understand the world and find meaning only if matters are objectified and we become the controlling subjects.

◆ That positivism, the conviction that knowledge is confined to the observable, is a viable way of observing the parameters of truth.

Many preachers, even those with a fundamentalist orientation, who have tended to maintain the Bible as the only norm and source for truth, have unconsciously and in an undifferentiated way accommodated some modernistic elements.

Many fundamentalists, whose presuppositions are based on the modernist outlook, are defending themselves against the new, relativistic developments they are encountering.

But let us look closely and thoughtfully at the dangers that modernistic preaching presents when it comes to the communication of truth in much of the contemporary world.

The subject-object dichotomy

As mentioned, modernistic preaching has tended to conform to Descartes's subject-object dualism. Preachers start with the conviction that the listeners are objects. Such preaching follows a positivist method, indicating that contact can be made with listeners only if they are handled like objects. If people are seen to be objects of a sort, the next logical step is to consider it necessary to manipulate them.

In all of this, an underlying problem is the Cartesian division between the "sender," the preacher, and the "receiver," the listener.

The preacher is the thinking and preaching subject who proclaims the message to the objects. This split of the subject, the preacher, and objects, the listeners, has led to a conduit, or hosepipe, method of communicating, a limiting way to transmit finally formed ideas to be accepted willy-nilly by the listeners.

Preaching "objectively"

Preachers with authoritarian as well as the "right" interpretational and hermeneutic tools, claiming a so-called biblical expository

approach, believe that these things enable them to proclaim the Word of God in an "objective" and "absolute" way.

This proclamation model is embedded in these preachers' constructed metaphor of the prophets and the apostles. It is an eclectic method, a way of picking certain elements of the Bible, often at random, and proclaiming them as objective truth.

Such preachers tend to assume that confrontation as such is the most genuine biblical approach. They claim confrontational elements of the Nathan approach by exclaiming: "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7). In doing this they ignore the context in which Nathan and David communicated and, thus, the other dynamics that were present in Nathan's confrontation of David.

Aside from this, they neglect Jesus' way of preaching and teaching, which is the ultimate model. The advocates of this approach agree with the following statement: "Frankly, we are never told in the Bible to preach like Jesus, and probably we shouldn't try."¹ The way Jesus used the Scriptures, His methods of storytelling (for example, the rich man and Lazarus) as well as His view of people and the way He dealt with them do *not* complement confrontational preaching.

Under this model of communication, everything contradicting or impairing the message of the confrontational preacher is to be eliminated. The children's crying room is to be well-isolated and insulated from the sanctuary, and careful steps have been taken to abandon any "noises" during the sermon.

In this model, the Holy Spirit can speak through the preacher only during the sermon. Everything depends upon the "success" of the sermon in reaching the understanding of the congregation. The sermon must be unimpeded by any kind of static. Any distraction must be eliminated.

By isolating his message from all

other communication the authoritarian preacher is forcing his message away from life's natural way of communicating, coercing it to flow the conduit of his preaching alone. Thus the "objectivity" of his message is retained. No other understanding of the text is possible. Even awe and wonder tend to be seen as distracting "noises" that keep the objective message from influencing the listener.

The biblical text and community context

Christian conservatism has constructed a particular view of the Scriptures. Many preachers, especially those who are more "fundamentalist" in their outlook, seem to believe by default that they and no one else are to re-interpret the Bible within new contexts.

The Bible is simply regarded as "timeless" and with its unlimited general scope it can be understood without any particular sense of a specific human context. Any attempt to meaningfully place the present human context in the setting of the text is likely to be viewed as seriously suspect.

This causes the adherents to this kind of approach to give little consideration to people's "texts," to their situations and perceptions.

Under this philosophy preaching is not understood as communication but merely as an objective declaration, or at best, an objective proclamation. What's proclaimed is based largely just on "the facts."

The conservative goal is to "protect" biblical "truth," but, contradictorily, it separates people's circumstances from the Scripture's contexts. The idealistically constructed biblical world that is thus produced is presented as God's only world, leaving the listeners in a vacuum and struggling with a floating sense of frustration and meaninglessness.

Preachers have been regarded as wise and consider themselves so. After home visitations, after reading newspapers and books on sociopolitical,

cultural, and psychological issues, they assume to know the needs of people. They feel well equipped to address the questions of the congregation. After delving into the background information for a sermon, and after their study and writing of the sermon, their only task, they feel, is to deliver the message.

Under this approach, the function of the congregation is to "swallow and digest" the spiritual food, finalized for them.

This type of sermon is designed within a Newtonian mechanistic worldview (see above), where the substances and structures of the sermon are separated in an atomistic way into contents and form. Above all, priority is given to the contents, which functions as almost the only norm by which a sermon is determined to be effective or not.

Under this regime, it does not matter *how* the message is presented and whether there is meaningful communication or not; the *content* is important.

High modernists, who create an extreme form of modernism, on the other hand, regard the Bible as an ancient book originating from the myths of premodernism. They feel the need for a new "Bible" that should be constructed with a rigorous objective scientific approach. Then only will the "laity," the ordinary listeners, be able to understand it. While it appears to defend the veracity of Scripture, its dependence upon, and preoccupation with, the rational, as the means for authenticating the Bible, actually opens the way for the reducing of the Bible as it actually has been given to human beings.

Under this approach, preachers must learn the particular methods of construction (i.e., reconstruction) so that they can present the Bible "truthfully." Preachers are made to be experts who exist to inform others. The congregation remains the uninformed laity and, consequently, this approach fails to produce the priesthood of believers that Luther and

Calvin sought to restore in the church.

Anthropology and preaching

Authoritarian preachers speak to people based upon their view of what might be called a low anthropology; a presupposition that concentrates on the spiritual limitations of people.

Because humanity in general is seen as lacking spiritual insight, even sincere lay people are regarded as unable to understand the Scriptures properly, and thus they are seen as needing an authority figure to interpret it for them. This outlook is a more subtle version of the one that predominated in the presuppositions of the clergy in Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for example.

The subject-object dualism of authoritarian preachers prefers the *shepherd-flock split model of communication*. This becomes an objective mechanistic tool to enhance domineering preaching. The preachers feed the flock with food prepared as a package, believing that they do this under the guidance of the Spirit.

The preacher is the sender, and the congregation consists of the receivers; the preacher convinces them to receive the final pre-prepared message.

This modernistic paradigm has created a gulf between preachers and congregations and, worse, between congregations and the Scriptures. If the sermon is seen as the only truly viable bridge between the Bible text and the context of the people,² this can disastrously separate the congregation from the biblical world.

High modernist preachers, on the other hand, employ a covert subject-object dichotomy. Here people are not lifeless objects, for relationships are important and there is no rigorous authoritarian approach. Thus these preachers employ persuasive techniques that accommodate cultural likes and dislikes.

People are seen as living human documents, and preaching originates

within their needs. They maintain a high anthropology, with a positive view of people. Yet people are still not seen as spiritually and psychologically creative, nor as effectively thoughtful worshippers of God, but rather they are seen to be the products of political and cultural dynamics. They are in need of a kind of horizontal salvation. Again, this makes the congregation only a little more than mere listeners, in need of being led by the real experts.

In this context, preaching is seen not as confrontation but merely as an encounter. This encounter between people is supposed to show God's face, as His presence. But the preacher is still subtly the sender of information to the listeners, who are still objects. They are supposed to be persuaded by the smoothness, practicality, decency, and academic quality of the preacher's message. In terms of the conduit metaphor, this leads to an unreflexive approach, indicating no reciprocal communication.

Consequently, technical effectiveness rather than real interactive and creative participation becomes the important criterion for preaching.

Further, lay people may be motivated to read the Scriptures and may even interpret them, but without the authority of the minister, this remains a subjective understanding. If they really wish to hear the so-called objective meaning of God's message, the pressure is for them to simply listen to a "man of God," with the proper spiritual and "expert" credentials, as well as a person with religiously informed qualifications.

Secondhand and thus second-class

In all of this, it becomes obvious that both authoritarian and high modernistic preaching reach people in a second-class way. They are potent forms of hearsay. The pietistic preacher, or the academic expert, assumedly explains the Scriptures correctly, and no other interpretation is possible.

The congregation is allowed to read the subjective message of the Bible in private, at home; however, they need to listen to the preaching of the "priest of the spiritual world" to find the real so-called objective truths in the Bible. Thus they become spectators, watching the "scientist" preacher perform his arts through his interpretational tools, while they wait passively to receive and apply the sermon package delivered to them.

To experience God's presence and to hear His own voice in worship, beyond modern objectivism, remains a great need.

Language

The traditional understanding of language conveys the assumption that it is an absolute system of signs with common meanings. For instance, to understand what is said as certain words are used, we need to follow the meaning of words as they are presented in a good dictionary.

Similarly, when it comes to authoritarian and high modernist preaching, the assumption is that the preachers' words carry clear, definable meaning and the congregations understand the preachers, as long as they stay within the rules of the dictionary.

This, however, does not take into consideration that words may *not* have clear meanings. Words are a system of signs *not* necessarily reducible to a fixed frame of reference. *We create the meaning of words within our own context.* What's important is not so much what words *mean* but what they *do* as they reach people.

Rationalism

Modernistic, informative preaching is based on Descartes's rationalism, understanding life within absolute rationalistic concepts. This French philosopher and mathematician obsessively asked how we could obtain absolutely certain and objective knowledge. He concluded that only the certainty of thinking, "I think, therefore I am," was unquestionable.

He believed that by way of rational thinking we could know absolutely. Consequently, knowledge became even more separated from the experiences and emotions of life. This approach demeans intuition and imagination as well as our emotional and relational dimensions.

Rationality, as well as irrationality, become grand narratives, that over-arch thought while they determine structures that are supposedly able to explain everything in this world, thus giving them a priority over faith and wonder.³

Many preachers have come to believe that their rational powers, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, can extract God's message from the Bible. Thus they conclude that if they present the product of this process of sermon construction in an absolute logical and rationalistic way, all will be well.

Modernistic preachers often ignore biblical wisdom literature that espouses uncertainty and skepticism regarding our ability to know absolute truths (Prov. 21:30). This happens, of course, because such preachers fear that this biblical skepticism may impair their authority to say definitively "Thus says the Lord," making everything too relative.

Consequently, spiritual knowledge and insight are not the main issues for the authoritarian, modernist preacher, but instead the pursuit of power to determine "the truth" and dominate the congregation with their understanding of it. While it is very important for the pastor to be authoritative in his or her proclamation and to speak with authority, it is destructive to the basic principles of communication for a pastor to be authoritarian.

Truth

Following Descartes, such preachers regard their knowledge as "the truth." Truth is regarded as an abstract pietistic ideal, an academically oriented concept, rather than a pointer or guideline to truthfulness and to God.

In this way of thinking, preaching is regarded as *remembering*, rather than as *experience*. Preachers claim that God spoke to Abraham and Jacob, but now He speaks differently to us, and the primary way by which he does this is simply through preaching.

The aim of this approach is to reduce "present" truth to "historical and dogmatic" truths. In modernistic preaching, truth is *not* truth as a relationship with God, but truth only as knowledge. This truth does not really set people free.

Future challenges

We urgently need a comprehensive theology of preaching that goes beyond modernism. Such a theology, however, cannot be simply conceived in the same way modernist preachers and theologians might do it . . . by a rationalistic approach to the Bible!

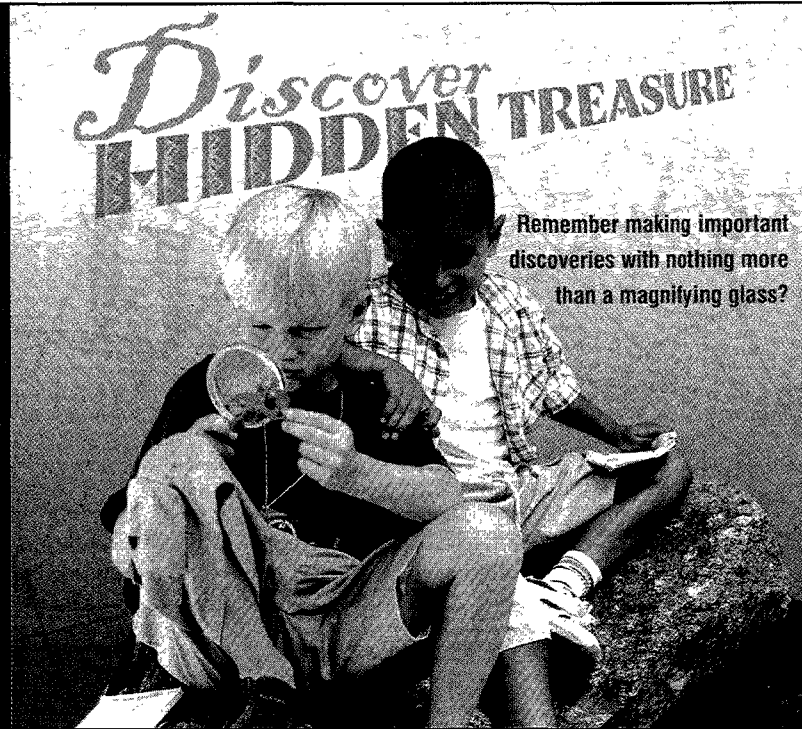
Far reaching challenges and questions remain for preaching. Can preaching transcend modernistic cap-

tivity and become communal? How is the conduit method replaced with truly effective networking? In all of this, how does preaching escape subjectivity? Can God's message and people's contexts meet in truthfulness?

This is clearly material for another article dealing positively with how ministers may preach beyond modernism. In *Ministry's* September issue, an attempt to describe the contours of such preaching will appear as a sequel to this article. ▀

Editor's note: *The final part of this two-part series will appear in the upcoming September issue of Ministry.*

- 1 Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching With Bold Assurance* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Pub., 2003), 16.
- 2 York and Decker.
- 3 For the rational/irrational debate see P. J. Visagie, "Enkele Opmerkings Oor die Spawning: Rationalisme—Irrationalisme" (*Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap*, volume 15, 1979).



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The interaction between behavior and outcome, cause and effect, compliance and reward has been debated since the founding of Christianity, and even before. The disciples questioned Jesus regarding the man who had been blind from birth: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus' answer reprimanded the curious, and judgmental, disciples. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus,

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"but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:2, 3, NIV).

Is behavior, then, not important? What about the injunction of Paul: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble" (1 Cor. 10:31, 32, NIV).

And didn't Jesus Himself encourage His disciples to reveal their love for Him by a distinct code of conduct? "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15, NIV). "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me" (John 14:21, NIV).

How easy it is to emphasize the behavioral aspects of Christian living and debate the details of what we should eat, drink, wear, read, listen to . . . and so forth. In the New Testament, the Pharisees, of course, were depicted as the archetypal model of this form of religion. Some of them even practiced the behavioral approach to the extent of praying publicly on the streets.

But Jesus brings this sort of legalistic self-improvement into immediate perspective when He says, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20, NIV).

But what about Paul? Was he, after

his Damascus Road experience, just a more learned protagonist of righteousness by works; was he still clinging to the behavioral lifebuoy when he wrote, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31)? Certainly not. And the key disclaimer to salvation through our own good behavior is embodied in the words "to the glory of God."

Our body temple

Not only in this instance does Paul resonate with the teaching of Jesus as described in John 9 (that the work of God may be displayed, i.e., God be glorified), but on at least three occasions Paul refers to the human body as the temple of God and says that His Spirit lives in that temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16).

Jesus referred to His own body when He said, "'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days!' . . . But the temple He had spoken of was His body" (John 2:19, 21, NIV).

Paul further expands on this theme with these words: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body." Because of the precious blood that was spilled in our stead, we are exhorted to pay homage to God in how we treat our bodies, and also in what we eat, drink, and in all our behavior(s) to glorify our Creator and Savior.

This injunction includes intention, attitude, and actions. Jesus enhances this call to live for God by providing us with the empowerment to do so. This way of life will be possible when based on a living relationship with Him that is bonded in love. Through an inner knowledge of Him, we will learn to love Him; as we freely love Him, we will find ourselves compelled and empowered to serve Him. All aspects of behavior and being will then be under His control.

Jesus and the whole person

Toward the end of his life, John addressed Gaius the elder: "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well" (3 John 2, NIV).

John implies here that physical well-being may influence spirituality and vice-versa. He had witnessed Jesus' activities involving the whole person, the healing of the soul never far from the healing of the body. Perhaps in later years, when John wrote this, he relived the indescribable fellowship of an early morning breakfast of fish and bread prepared by the nail-pierced hands of his Savior.

He may further have reminisced, with tender recollection, Jesus' empathetic attention to detail after raising Jairus' daughter from the dead; when the Bread of Life "told them to give her something to eat" (Mark 5:43, NIV). No doubt he remembered, too, the miraculous feeding of thousands, where Jesus again revealed His concern for people's physical well-being.

Jesus' involvement with the whole person is prosaically described in the opening paragraphs of *The Ministry of Healing*: "Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man's necessity. He 'took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses,' that He might minister to every need of humanity" Matt. 8:17. The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them health and peace and perfection of character."¹

Jesus spent large proportions of his time healing the sick. Matthew reports that "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matt. 4:23, NIV).

Single-handedly, the Great Physician practiced and demonstrated the spirituality of health and blended healing, teaching, praying, and preaching. He pressed on, saying, "We must do the work of him who sent me" (John 9:4, NIV).

The healings performed by Jesus addressed body, mind, and spirit. He not only healed physical maladies but addressed the forgiveness of sin and relief from guilt. He affirmed and called out the spiritual faith of those who approached him for physical healing. Their physical need was His opportunity to inspire and engender their faith.

He advised changes in life values and admonished those healed to turn away from sin.

Jesus emphasized the importance of wholeness. He recognized the vital interaction of body, mind, and spirit.

This is also an emphasis reflected in the Old Testament: "fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands . . . and so that you may enjoy long life" (Deut. 6:2, NIV).

Jesus subsequently reinforces this wholeness of purpose required in loving God: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30, NIV). In the latter exhortation, there is a graphic description of all facets of our being and behavior. This is a theme reflected in other places, where Jesus' ministry is recorded (Matt. 22:37; Luke 10:27).

The concept of loving and caring for others is connected to this commandment and introduces the importance of social support in wholeness and well-being: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31, NIV).

Modern health science and the concept of wholeness

It was only toward the latter quarter of the twentieth century that the World Health Organization emphasized a more holistic view of health. Today this concept is included in their definition of health. This definition says that health is not to be defined only as the absence of physical disease, but that mental and emotional well-being are essential to wellness.

Modern science is showing that people who practice religious beliefs and also are involved with the welfare of others have enhanced immune func-

tion.² Religious involvement and spirituality have been associated with a decrease in cardiovascular disease and hypertension; improved mental health; and less depression and anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide.³

Even among the foremost researchers on spirituality and health, varying definitions of spirituality exist. Harold Koenig refers to spirituality as "the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community."⁴

A more succinct and less unwieldy description of spirituality is "the opening of every part of life to the presence of God."⁵ This latter working definition encompasses body, soul, heart, mind, and strength comprehensively.

Wholeness in brokenness

At creation there was perfection and wholeness. Since sin's entry, this perfection has been eroded, and many suffer physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Job, despite all his mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual struggles, "did not sin by charging God" (Job 1:22, NIV). Paul pleaded three times for his particular "thorn in the flesh" to be removed, but instead of physical healing for his "brokenness," he received a special kind of wholeness: "My grace is sufficient for you," he was told by the Lord, "for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV).

No wonder Paul could say, "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (verse 10). This encouragement is particularly meaningful to those who, despite faith, prayer, and medical intervention, still suffer with chronic diseases. Paul here reflects the spirituality that opens every part of life to the presence of God.

This same spirituality has been seen in various people: Fanny Crosby, who—though blind—wrote of a wonderful assurance and friendship in Jesus; Helen Keller, who overcame the obstacles of

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Second Advent hope: the presence of the future

Kendra Haloviak



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Adapted from a sermon recently preached by Dr. Haloviak.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new'" (Rev. 21:1-5a).*

This amazing vision at the end of the book of Revelation is about a renewed, re-created world. The vision is so vast that it overwhelms our imaginations; it astonishes, captivates, and moves us. Thus, this vision of a future, renewed realm is able to transform our lives now in our present existence.

As a pastor I have especially seen this transforming vision "arrive" at funerals, and I've watched people with hearts breaking with grief imagine themselves reunited with their loved one in a new, remade earth. Somehow there is a power in this vision that transforms our present pain. Even though it doesn't

eliminate all the heartache of the present, it makes facing another day possible.

Aunt Clara

Everyone called her "Aunt Clara." She was one of the 18 residents of the Hillhaven Nursing Home in Silver Spring, Maryland, where at the age of 16, I worked part time as a nurses' aide. Our youngest resident was 79, our oldest, 101. Aunt Clara was almost 90. She was a delight to care for. Easygoing and kind, she had a wonderful sense of humor.

One evening, while working the 3/11 shift, I noticed that Aunt Clara had fallen asleep in her chair. I went over to gently wake her by placing my hand on hers. As I got closer, something caused me to pause just before my hand reached hers. With my hand right next to hers, I noticed the huge contrast between them. I remember thinking, *someday my hand will look like Aunt Clara's; someday I will need a young woman to help me get ready for bed.*

That evening, standing next to Aunt Clara, I glimpsed the future, imagining myself at 90. My "vision of the future" indeed caused me to think quite differently about the present.

A glance into the future transformed the way I saw the present.

John glimpses the future

In a much more dramatic way, John, the seer of Patmos, had the same kind of experience. He did not merely see the aging of an individual, he saw the aging *and* the restoration of the cosmos! He looked into the future, and what he saw transformed his present.

The future became so real, so present in his own experience that it changed not only the way he saw the world but how he responded to that world. It transformed, too, the way he shared his faith—the way he called out to others to view the world.

While John's contemporaries looked out at a world dominated by the Roman Empire, a world where power won all arguments, John's vision allowed him to see a different reality.

John might have seen only a world in which those who proclaimed Jesus were a small, seemingly insignificant sect, apparently on the verge of extinction. That was the "reality" others saw in that turbulent first century. But they didn't have the vision.

Instead, this banished man of Patmos, old and alone and soon to die, saw a world where those who proclaim Jesus as the Christ would

stand victorious.

Instead of a world where Caesar was lord and Christ seemed little to nothing, John saw a world where the *holy God* sits upon the throne with “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth” paying Him unbridled homage (Rev. 5:13, KJV).

After John’s commission to write to the seven churches of Asia Minor and the seven letters that follow in chapter three, the first words of Revelation 4 read: “After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’”

Typically apocalyptic literature begins with the seer being taken off in vision through distant lands and strange eras, with an emphasis on the huge gap between God’s realm and our human, earthly existence. However, the book of Revelation is written from the perspective of one who believes in *Emmanuel* (God with us!).

In other words, this is a *Christian* apocalypse. This book about the future includes a God who entered human history in the past and whose spirit continues to *be with* the churches. This book about the future is expressed in scenes that John’s audience can understand—they are scenes of worship!

It’s all about worship

In verses 2-8, John attempts to describe the indescribable throne of God. He says that it appears like jasper and carnelian, and has a rainbow that looks like an emerald. There are strange creatures with eyes all around. Then he hears the familiar sounds of worship: “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”

Instead of a future time and a totally unfamiliar realm, John knows he is in the presence of God, in a worship scene like that of Isaiah and the prophets before him. John watches, and then participates. And through his account of the vision, he invites

those who read the account he writes to do the same; for worship scenes invite participation.

Such worship surrounds each key moment in Revelation. This book, so strange and troubling at times, is full of worship scenes. Sixteen songs fill its pages, along with other aspects of worship, such as prayers, offerings, and proclamations. Even when judgment occurs, there is singing! The frightening scenes of warning and judgment are *surrounded* by images of the redeemed singing and celebrating.

The worship scenes are not only relegated to some future time; they involve the present. When we enter the worship scenes, we experience the presence of the future. When we enter the worship scenes, the future transforms our present lives.

The Second Advent present even now

The first song in the book of Revelation is sung by the four living creatures day and night without ceasing: “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”

The only other time in Scripture that we hear the song “Holy, Holy, Holy” is in Isaiah 6, when the prophet Isaiah enters into a heavenly throne-room scene. In the verses that surround this scene, especially those before it (Isaiah 1-5), God agonizes with Judah to turn from wickedness and to follow the holy God, who “shows himself holy by righteousness” (5:16).

In Revelation 4, John sees the worship of the holy God and, in the experience of worship, this God is present. God is not far removed in time and space, but present in worship. The One who is the Almighty, the One who is God of all time (“who was and is and is to come”), the God of all creation (verse 11), is present with John and with all believers who worship.

This God walks among the candlesticks and welcomes people into the throne room at the center of the uni-

verse. This song proclaims the presence of the future. All who sing Revelation’s songs proclaim the experience of God in the present.

This song, like the experience of worship itself, calls us to embrace a different reality from the one we see. The name *revelation* means “unveiling” or “pulling back”; it implies a revelation of things as they really are, not as the world portrays them. Worship always calls us to see what’s real, and then to act accordingly.

Such worship has this way of transforming our present. Those who worship anticipate a new heaven and a new earth.

The future enters their present now, and they live now as they will live in the future.

◆ Because God’s future will be an earth full of justice, worshipers now seek justice.

◆ Because God’s future will bring peace on earth, worshipers act now for peace.

◆ Because God’s future will be an earth with plenty for all, worshipers act now to end hunger.

◆ Because God’s future will be existence without tears, worshipers act now to comfort and to heal.

◆ Because God’s future will be life without death, worshipers act now to fight disease and death.

As worshipers anticipate a new heaven and a new earth, the future enters their present, transforming it and calling them to live now as they will in a new heaven and a new earth.

Embodying the Advent hope

One Easter Sabbath, while living in the San Francisco area, I attended a small Seventh-day Adventist Church in St. Helena, California. I walked in, having never been there before, and sat in an empty seat three rows from the front. Surrounding me on both sides were people in their 80s and 90s. I was reminded of the years I worked at Hillhaven.

When we stood together to sing “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” I

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Presenting Jesus to Muslims: a suggested approach

Praban Saputro

Various approaches on how to share the gospel with Muslims have been suggested. The most current one is an attempt to understand the worldview of Muslims and then express the truth of the gospel in forms and terms that can best be understood by them.

This approach may have the most potential for penetrating the Muslim world, but it may also lead to an unhealthy syncretism.

As we seek for ways to faithfully speak to and reach Muslim people with the message of Jesus Christ, we must keep both these possibilities in mind.

This article seeks to understand the Islamic view of the person of Jesus and then express the truth of Jesus in terms that can be best understood by Muslims. It discusses the life and titles of Jesus, then suggests a biblical model for faithfully sharing Jesus with Muslims.

How the Quran looks at Jesus

Muhammad had a high regard for Jesus. This is evident both from the accounts of Jesus' life as well as the titles which are used in the Quran in which references to Jesus are found in 14 suras or chapters, totaling 90 different verses.¹

The Quran speaks of the birth of Jesus through the virgin Mary. Sura 19:18-22 states that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and

said, "I am only a messenger from thy Lord to announce to thee the gift of a holy son."

Mary responded, "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?" The angel replied, "So it will be; Thy Lord said: 'That is easy for me, and we wish to appoint him as a sign unto men and a mercy from us.' It is a matter decreed."² So Mary conceived Jesus, and she retired to a remote place.

Many Christian scholars state that the Quran supports the Christian teaching that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary and His birth was different from that of any other human being. This, it is said, implicitly suggests the divinity of Christ.

However, in order to stress the humanity of Jesus, Muslims teach that the birth of Jesus was similar to the creation of Adam. This belief is based on Sura 3:59: "Jesus is like Adam in the sight of God. He created him of dust and then said to him, 'Be,' and he was."

Muslims maintain that "God demonstrated omnipotence by creating Jesus in the womb of Mary without a father's involvement. Even more miraculous, however, they note, was the creation of Adam without father or mother."³

Nevertheless, the Quran speaks of the nature of the birth of Jesus in Sura 19:21, pointing to His divinity. It states that Jesus is "a sign unto men and a mercy from God."

Since the Quran was written in a Semitic culture, parallelism consisting of two statements of the same thought is found in this verse.⁴ Thus, the phrase "a sign unto men" is parallel with "a mercy from God." Thus, to the Muslim this means that Jesus' birth is a sign of God's mercy to humanity.

The Quran speaks of miracles performed by Jesus. All miracles that are attributed to Jesus are summarized in Sura 5:113: "When God saith: 'O Jesus Son of Mary, Remember my favour unto thee and unto thy mother; how I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit, so that thou spokest unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught thee the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and how thou didst create of clay as it were the figure of a bird, by my permission; and didst breathe thereon, and it became a bird by my permission; and thou didst heal one blind from his birth, and the leper, by my permission; and when thou didst bring forth the dead, by my permission.'"⁵

Many Christian scholars believe that the

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Quran's record of miracles performed by Jesus point to His divinity. For example, although Roelf S. Kuitse says that the story of the child Jesus giving life to birds made of clay is not biblical, but a story in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, he demonstrates that many words used in the story are also used in the account of the creation of Adam.

Consider these Quaranic statements: "Sura 3:49: Jesus makes; Sura 6:2: God makes. . . . Sura 3:48: Jesus makes from clay; Sura 6:2: God makes from clay. . . . Sura 3:49: Jesus breathes into it; Sura 32:9 God breathes into it. . . . The Arabic imperative *kun* (be) used in the creation story (Sura 3:47) is also used in the story of Jesus (*kun fā-yakun*)."⁶

Fuad Accad, a Muslim convert to Christianity, compares the story of the child Jesus and the creation story of Adam to show Jesus as the Creator and hence, divine.⁷ Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq, also a Muslim convert, adds that "the story of Jesus making birds out of clay makes a significant point about His divinity."⁸

The point is, however, that while Muslims believe that Jesus performed more miracles than any other prophet, they maintain that these miracles were done only by the will of God, not as a proof of His divine nature.⁹

The Quran and the death and resurrection of Jesus

The Quran speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus in Sura 3:55; 4:157-58; and 19:33. But Muslims deny the death of Jesus based on Sura 4:157-58: "The Jews said, 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary.' But Muhammad said, 'They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them. . . . God raised him up unto Himself; Allah is exalted in power and wisdom.'"

Muslims believe that it was impossible for such a good man as Jesus to die on the cross. God would have saved Him from such a terrible death. They believe that God took Jesus to heaven just before the Crucifixion

and that a substitute, perhaps Judas, was crucified in His place.

However, a certain sect of Islam, the Ahmadiyyah, holds that Jesus was crucified but did not die on the cross. He was taken down in a coma and subsequently revived and traveled to Kashmir, where He finally died.¹⁰

Accad suggests the possibility of harmonizing Sura 4:157-58 to the death of Jesus on the cross, as follows: "It was not the Jews themselves who crucified Jesus, as this was not permissible to them. They caused the Romans, who were the masters of Palestine then, to do it for them. It was God who planned this crucifixion according to the Old Testament. The Jews were not able to slay him, because 'God raised him up unto himself,' after His death and resurrection."¹¹

The ascension and return of Jesus

The Quran speaks of the ascension of Jesus in Sura 4:158. Muslims believe Jesus is now in heaven and has access to the throne of God. The Quran, in Sura 43:6, also implicitly makes a singular reference to Jesus in connection with the coming judgment.

It states, "And Jesus shall be a sign for the coming of the hour of Judgment. Therefore have no doubt about the hour, but follow ye Me: this is a straight way."

Islamic tradition says that Jesus will descend to a mountain in the Holy Land, near Afiq. He will kill *Al-Dajjal*, the antichrist, with a spear. Then Jesus will go to Jerusalem to worship in the Islamic manner; thereafter He will kill the swine, destroy the churches and synagogues, and kill all Christians who do not believe in Him.

From that time on there will be only one faith on earth. Jesus will reign for 40 years and die and be buried in Medina beside Muhammad.¹²

The Quran and the titles of Jesus

The Quran gives a greater number of honorable titles to Jesus than to any

other prophet. It refers to Jesus, for example, as a "Prophet," an "Apostle," a "Servant," a "Sign and Mercy," an "Example," a "Witness," "Blessed," One who "held honor in this world and the hereafter," and "Nearest one to God."¹³

Other Quaranic titles for Jesus, such as the "Word from Allah," the "Spirit proceeding from Him [Allah]" and the "Messiah," may imply some belief in the divinity of Jesus. These three titles are discussed below.

The most exciting title given to Jesus in the Quran is the "Word from Allah." It is found in Suras 3:39; 3:45; and 4:171. Some scholars think that the Quran's statement that Jesus is the "Word from Allah," means that He is the "Word of God" who became the "Son of Mary."¹⁴

In addition, since the Quran was written in the Semitic culture, the title "Word from Him [Allah]" in 3:45 is parallel to Jesus Christ who "held honor in this world and the hereafter" where these titles appeal to His divinity.

The name "Jesus Christ" is parallel with "Son of Mary" in connection with the birth and humanity of Jesus. Thus, Sura 3:45 essentially states that Jesus is the Word of God who became a man through the virgin Mary. However, Muslims believe that God does not reveal Himself to anyone in any way. He reveals only His will.¹⁵ Therefore, most Muslim scholars argue that the "Word from Allah" did not become flesh but became a book, namely the Quran.¹⁶

For them, "the great theophany of Islam is the Quran."¹⁷ As one writer expresses it, "The Quran was more than a book. It was a faithful reproduction of the original scripture in heaven. To this heavenly copy, it is not implausible to hold, was transferred the Christian concept of the uncreated Word of God, the Logos, which was later applied by the orthodox to the Arabic copies of the Quran."¹⁸

Other scholars, such as Al Tabari (d. 932), Zamakshari (d. 1144), and Al

Baidawi (d. 1286), believed that the "Word from Allah" referred to Jesus, but only as a created being.¹⁹

Another title given to Jesus in the Quran is a "Spirit proceeding from Him [Allah]" (Sura 4:17). This title is more supreme than any given to other prophets. In the Quran, Adam is called the "chosen of God," Noah the "prophet of God," Abraham the "friend of God," Moses the "spokesman with God," and Muhammad the "messenger of God."²⁰ But some Muslims believe that the Spirit from God is a created spirit, while others explain that it is the angel Gabriel.²¹

This view on the Spirit from God is ambiguous. Sura 21:91 suggests that the Spirit from God is neither the angel Gabriel nor a created spirit, but it pertains to God: "And remember her who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all people."

The Quran speaks of Jesus as the "Messiah" eleven times.²² One of them is found in Sura 3:45: "Behold! The angel said: 'O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of those nearest to Allah.'"

Abdul-Haqq points out that Muslim scholars believe that the word *Messiah* is derived from the Arabic word *Saha*, meaning "to travel." Jesus was called Messiah because He had traveled much.

Other Muslim scholars such as Baidawi and Zamakshari reject this derivation, stating that the word was foreign to the Quran. But Abdul-Haqq believes that the word *Messiah* means "the Anointed One." The meaning of Messiah is found implicitly in Sura 2:87, where God said, "We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit."²³

To conclude this part of this study dealing with the way the Quran speaks of Jesus, here is a summary:

The Quran speaks of various aspects of Jesus and of His titles which reflect Muhammad's knowledge of both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus.

The Quran confirms the existence of the virgin Mary, the unique birth of Jesus, His miracles, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His coming judgment.

These Quranic teachings about the person of Jesus can be used as a bridge to approach Muslims. But Muslims, as monotheists, reject the divinity of Jesus. This is where the model of Matthew can help.

Matthew's model

From Matthew (16:13-17), we learn that it is not easy to share the divinity of Jesus with monotheistic people like the Jews.

In a way, it was easier to share Jesus with Gentiles than with Jews. Indeed, Matthew points out that when Jesus was born, the Magi from the East searched out the birthplace of Jesus and worshiped Him, but the Jewish leaders did not show any interest.

To approach the Jews, a monotheistic people, Matthew first introduces Jesus as the Son of Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1). This introduction of the person of Jesus would not offend the Jews because they believed themselves to be the descendants of Abraham and they admired King David, Israel's most famous monarch.

Matthew was aware of the beliefs of his audience when he started with the humanity of Jesus. Indeed, he followed the advice of Jesus: "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (10:16).

Matthew introduces the divinity of Jesus united with His humanity by stating that through the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary gave birth to a son named Jesus (1:20, 21) or Immanuel, which means "God with us" (1:23). When Matthew introduces Jesus'

divinity to Jews, he points to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning His unusual birth and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

By doing this, he shows the necessity of examining the Scriptures, particularly the prophecies concerning the Messiah. This is vital in sharing the doctrine of the divinity of Christ with monotheistic people.

Matthew indicates that Jesus first used the title "Son of Man" to introduce Himself to the Jews (8:20). Afterwards, Jesus demonstrated His miraculous works such as healing the sick, raising the dead, and driving out demons. He then introduced Himself as the "Son of Man" who had authority on earth to forgive sins (9:6).

After His resurrection, Jesus introduced Himself to the disciples as the One who has "all power . . . in heaven and in earth" (28:18). It is important to note that Matthew was a Jew, a monotheistic believer, yet he believed that Jesus was God who became a man.

In summary, Matthew started with the humanity of Jesus, moved to His divinity, and then shared the person of Jesus with the Jews. That is Matthew's model.

When Christians talk to Muslims about Jesus

Christians working with Muslims should follow what Matthew did. They should begin with the humanity of Jesus, something Muslims already believe. They hold that Jesus is the "Son of Mary," which shows that He is human. Thus, by way of introduction, Christians may start their dialogue with Muslims with the humanity of Jesus.

They may use the title "Son of Mary" instead of the title "Son of God" in the initial stages of the dialogue, because the title "Son of Mary," is familiar to them. Christians may also use the Quran wisely from the beginning to explain Jesus as the "Son of Mary."

Though Muslims believe the birth of Jesus was similar to the creation of Adam, Christians can stand together

with Muslims in terms of the birth of Jesus. Christians can show biblical verses about the birth of Jesus and the creation of Adam to demonstrate the significance of the former.

Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet. Prophets, according to Muslims, are not ordinary men. Muslims believe that Jesus performed many miracles. Yet they admit that unlike the prophets, Jesus is never found confessing sins or praying for forgiveness either in the Quran or in the Bible.

Muslims believe that Jesus is in heaven now and that He will return to this earth for judgment.

In the light of these things, Christians can invite Muslims to believe in Jesus because, in biblical teaching, Jesus will return to save people who believe in Him. It is important to note that most Muslims are uncertain of their salvation.

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ is important to help Muslims open their minds about Jesus' coming to save people who believe in Him.

As to the death and crucifixion of Jesus, while some Muslims believe that Jesus did not die on the cross, others believe that He did. The Quran points out both His death and resurrection.

Christians can explain that the divinity of Jesus did not perish on the cross, but Jesus as a human being died on the cross. They can emphasize that the person of Jesus is more than human by pointing to the titles of Jesus in the Quran which reflect His divinity. These include Jesus "the Messiah," who "held honor in this world and the hereafter," the "Spirit from Allah," and the "Word from Allah."

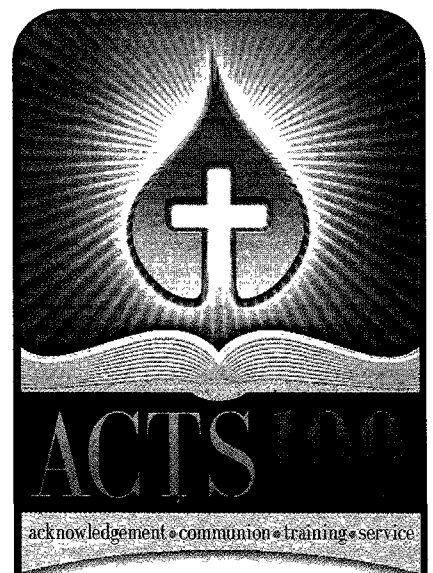
Christians can explain the divinity and the humanity of Jesus in the Quran where it refers to the "Word from Allah" who became the "Son of Mary" (Sura 4:171). At this point, Christians may review quranic and biblical teachings ranging from the birth of Jesus up to His second com-

ing. Finally, they can invite Muslims to accept, by faith, the person of Jesus, which includes His divinity.

The essential Christian reality that Jesus is divine and the Savior of the world, cannot be compromised in any way, even if it is done in a well-meaning attempt to reach our Muslim friends. To accommodate here would deeply impair the central soul of Christian faith.

At the same time, a careful look at what the Quran in fact says and what Muslim people actually believe, can provide us with a way of meeting Muslim people where they are, and ultimately inviting them to believe heart and soul in Jesus as God and as Savior of the world. This will open the way for further conversation. ■

- 1 The Quran consists of 114 suras (chapters) and 6,205 verses, totaling about 78,000 words.
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- 3 Paul Varo Martinson, *Islam: An Introduction for Christians*, trans. Stefanie Ormsby Cox (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994), 185.
- 4 Giulio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1977), 70.
- 5 Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq, *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1980), 101.
- 6 Rolf S. Kuitse, "Christology in the Quran," *Missiology* 20 (1992): 358.
- 7 Fuad Accad, "The Quran: A Bridge to Christian Faith," *Missiology* 4 (1976): 334.
- 8 Abdul-Haqq, 97.
- 9 Ishaq Husaini, *Christ in the Quran and in Modern Arabic Literature* (n.p., n.d.), 3, quoted in Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Quran* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 83.
- 10 Michael Nazir-Ali, *Islam: A Christian Perspective* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 17, 18.
- 11 Accad, 340.
- 12 H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, "Isa," *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (1974), 173, 174.
- 13 Parrinder, 30-54. See respectively Sura 2:136; 3:45; 4:159, 171; 19:21, 30, 31; 43:57.
- 14 Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Quran* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1984), 9.
- 15 Phil Parshall, *The Fortress and the Fire* (Bombay: Gospel Literature Service, 1975), 112.
- 16 Frank K. Flinn, *Christology: The Center and the Periphery* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 106.
- 17 Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, trans. D. M. Matheson (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), 43.
- 18 M. S. Seale, *Muslim Theology* (n.p., n.d.), 66, quoted in Abdul-Haqq, 69.
- 19 O'Shaughnessy, 13-17.
- 20 Parshall, *New Paths*, 140.
- 21 Michael Nazir-Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* (Oxford: Regnum, 1987), 32.
- 22 Parrinder, 30.
- 23 Abdul-Haqq, 82, 84.



ACTS

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Trusting God's Word

A worthy old bishop of yesteryear had a pretty sound philosophy: "Jesus absolutely trusted the Bible, and though there are in it some things inexplicable and intricate that have puzzled me so much, I'm going to trust the Bible because of Him."

The attitude of Jesus toward Scripture is worth noting:

- ◆ Jesus read Scripture (Luke 24:27).
- ◆ Jesus trusted Scripture (Matt. 5:17, 18).
- ◆ Jesus accepted Bible history (Matt. 19:4).
- ◆ Jesus believed its prophecies (Luke 24:44-45).
- ◆ Jesus endorsed its creation account (Matt. 19:4-6).
- ◆ Jesus validated the historic flood (Matt. 24:34-39).
- ◆ Jesus warned of rejecting Scripture (Luke 16:31).
- ◆ Jesus declared Scripture the basis of judgment (John 5:45-47).
- ◆ Jesus recommended Bible study (John 5:39).
- ◆ Jesus taught that Scripture sanctifies (John 17:17).

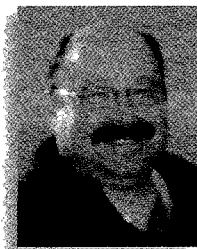
—W. A. Townend

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Death of the dream: when you have to close your church

Les Kingdon



Les Kingdon is pastor of the Poplar Springs Alliance Church, British Columbia, Canada.

We all enter a new pastorate with dreams and visions of growth and health for the church. No one comes to a congregation with the intention of closing it down.

What happens, then, when the dream fades, the vision dies, and it becomes obvious that the church will close? I know, because it happened to me.

Many issues surround the closing of a ministry, but none touch us more closely than what happens to the individuals and families of the congregation, and to us and our own family, as the church closes.

The act of closing a church, even under the best of circumstances, will always be painful. And when the pain arrives and the troubles come, the congregation will likely look to its pastor for care. However, if the pastor doesn't care for himself, he or she cannot properly care for others. This article is about caring for one's pastoral self in times of crisis in our congregations. And we may need this care not only when churches have to close but in the midst of all kinds of crisis times.

Look to God. These three words may seem trite, but they are profound. The heavier our crises, the truer are these words.

Having said that we need to care for ourselves, we must admit that we cannot adequately meet our needs ourselves. We lack the needed wisdom and objectivity.

Our first resort must be our God: "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Prov. 18:10, NIV).^{*} Unless we draw strength and wisdom from God Himself, we will not come through well. There is no better help available to us than the God whose we are, whom we serve, and who called us into His ministry and to the church in which the crisis faces us.

Pray. Through prayer we access the wisdom, the strength, the grace, and the peace of God. Through prayer we withstand the assaults of the crisis, which are also the assaults of the evil one. Through prayer we seek the blessings of God for ourselves, our families, and the people we serve.

While as pastors we feel we know all about prayer, we are often not that likely to pray as we have the privilege to pray and as we need to pray in the midst of our greatest tests. Pray for yourself and your family. Pray for the people you serve. Pray about the decisions to be made, the things to be done, the details to be taken care of, and the form of the final service.

You and I cannot pray too much.

Maintain personal spiritual disciplines. A key part of the successful closing of a church (or of any other dilemma) is the necessity for the pastor to maintain his or her own spiritual health. Central to this are the disciplines.

There are the usual disciplines and then there are others not mentioned or entered into that often: prayer, fasting, reading, studying, and meditating on the Scriptures.

There must also be worship and regular confession of sin to God. By seeing to our own spiritual well-being, we are able to assist others as well. Even amid the activity and struggles of the actual church closing process, it is necessary to reserve time for our own spiritual life.

The reality of the truths we have preached will be demonstrated in tough times like this. Maintaining spiritual health is also necessary to combating the spiritual attacks that will inevitably come. For in the end, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood . . ."

Care for yourself. We've been saying this all along, but we need to be more specific.

It is very spiritual for us to enjoin fasting, praying, reading your Bible, meditating. But we were not created only as spiritual beings.

We have been designed with mental, emotional, and physical components, which also

need to be cared for. A run-down body will result in a run-down spirit and a run-down mind. We all need to sleep well, eat well, and play well.

“Get away from it all” with your family from time to time for your refreshment and encouragement even if you can afford only the simplest retreat. Such retreats can be easily as important as maintaining the spiritual disciplines.

After all, spiritual attacks may come in the form of depression and discouragement. The sense of failure is real even if you have not failed.

I found it difficult to accept the fact that the church closing was not my fault. And having determined myself a failure, I naturally asked, “So what good am I to anyone? Who will want me?” And the evil one excels in his ability to exploit our doubts and fears to his advantage and our harm, especially our self-doubt and the fears we have about our future.

Can you be a good pastor if your church closes? Yes! Christ was a good shepherd even though one of His followers betrayed Him, one denied Him, and all deserted Him. What could have looked more like failure than did the Cross?

Get counsel. Find those you respect and trust and ask their advice. They may see some of the issues with greater clarity and objectivity than you can.

If your denomination makes counseling available to you, take advantage of it. More than one person involved in a church closure has had to deal with depression and related issues.

Some of the greatest encouragement came to me came from fellow pastors. There is a need to move beyond the feelings of failure and “what will people think of me?” It is these concerns that prevent us from getting the help others can give us and therefore lock us up in our crisis.

Care for your family. Your spouse and family have been your ministry partners through the good times. They will continue to be a part of

your ministry now. Sheltering them from the difficulties of the situation may not always be possible. And as they see you struggle with situations and people, they will hurt with you and for you.

While it may seem that the needs of the congregation are more pressing now, your family needs you too. Beware not to fall into the “I’ll-make-it-up-to-them-later” syndrome. They need to be cared for now.

Keep them informed of developments, consult them on decisions—especially when things clearly concern them. If you have no immediate employment prospects, it can be a time of uncertainty and anxiety. Your confidence in the Lord’s leading and provision can be a source of stability for them.

Consider your future. OK, so the church is closing. Now what do I do? There are many options, but all need to be explored prayerfully and in consultation with your family and any trusted counselor(s) you may have chosen.

The closure of the church may mean the end of your ministry in that place, but it certainly does not have to mean the end of vocational ministry for you, even though it may seem so. The question of remaining in pastoral ministry needs to be addressed not merely on the basis of feeling or even of “fact” but through the direction of the Holy Spirit.

This may be the time to be looking for a new pastoral position. But perhaps it is the time to get some further education or to pursue a career change. While it’s not the easiest thing to hear the voice of the Spirit, this is the time to search the heart of God, seeking His special guidance.

Do not lay blame. Who is to blame for the closing of the church? Attempting to lay blame on others will not be productive. It will inevitably lead to the following response: “Yes, but if you had been a better pastor . . .”

The question that needs to be honestly answered is “Am I to blame for

this church closing?” And an honest answer can be “No, it’s not my fault.”

As a colleague said to me, “Aren’t we being a little arrogant if we think the church stands *or falls* because of us?”

We need to ask ourselves if the circumstances that led to closing began before or after your arrival. Do those circumstances relate directly to your ministry? Have you been guilty of gross sin, serious errors, or negligence in your ministry? If yes, then we must deal with our faults. But it’s not likely that the church closed only because of you, regardless of the mistakes you might have made.

As I went through our church closing, more than one church member comforted me with the assurance that I was not responsible. You will ask the question repeatedly, “Would the church have come to this place if I had been a better pastor?”

This is worthy of some reflection, but we must avoid prolonged, morbid introspection. Ask the question. Answer it honestly, and then move on.

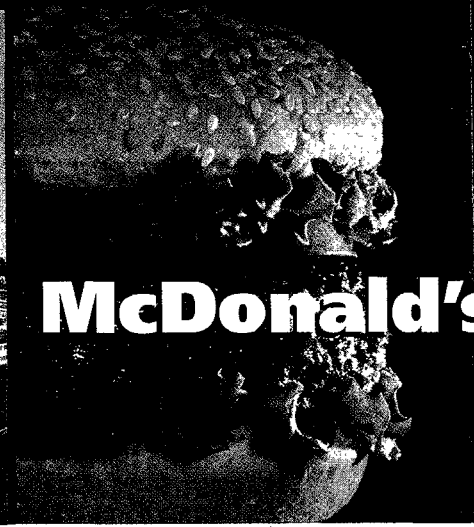
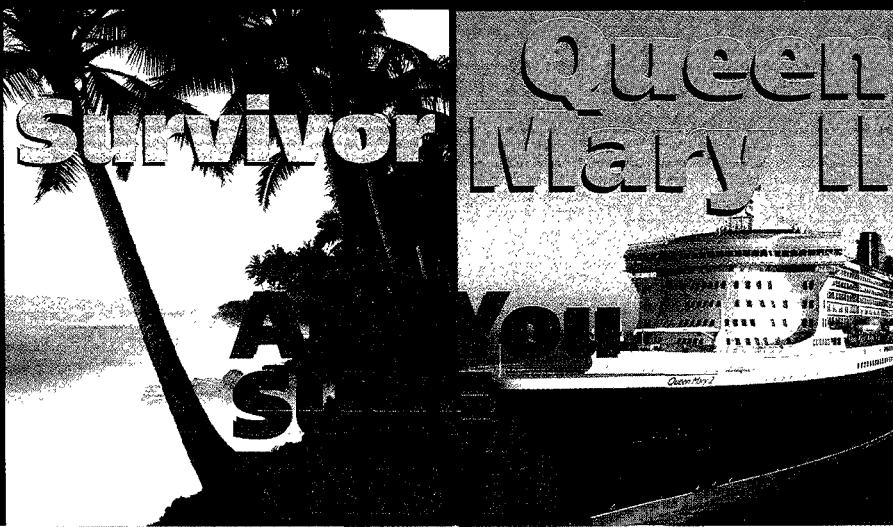
We accept the pastorate of a church with dreams and hopes. But sometimes the dream dies. And for us, by the grace of God, life and ministry goes on.

I think the hardest part is for the keeper of the dream to lay the dream down before the feet of his or her Master and say, “I tried, Lord. I’m sorry, but now I must give this dream back to you.”

For the Giver of the dream is the ultimate Owner of the dream, not we. He knows what purposes He sought to fulfill through the dream in us and in others. We seek the glory of the dream fulfilled, while He seeks the working of the dream as it changes and fashions our hearts and our lives into new and more purified persons.

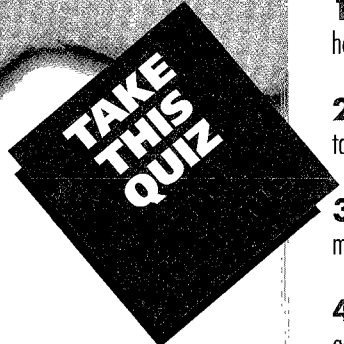
He is the One who is able to heal our hurts and our hearts, and to renew our broken spirits through His Holy Spirit. ■

* All Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society.



Church News?

Do you know what's going on in your church?



1. True False Andrews University is conducting a nationwide health study of Seventh-day Adventists.
2. True False Sow 1 Billion is a plan to distribute 1 billion invitations for Bible studies.
3. True False An Adventist couple on the Pearl Islands hosted members of the production crew for the television series *Survivor*.
4. True False The *Queen Mary II*, the world's largest passenger ship, commissioned an Adventist artist to paint ocean liners.
5. True False Pitcairn Island experiences population increase.
6. True False Wal-Mart stores in Greater Atlanta will stock their stores with an illustrated version of *Child Guidance*.
7. True False McDonald's Australia serves vegeburgers.
8. True False Winterfest is an ice-carving competition for Adventists in Minnesota.
9. True False The Adventist Church sponsors an annual film festival.
10. True False Students and teacher at Union College discover possible cure for cancer.

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9-10 You're as informed as a *Review* subscriber.
6-8 You're a few toppings short of a good haystack. Maybe you should get the *Review* every week.
3-5 You're almost as bad off as those who think Choplets are karate classes for small children.
1-2 Wake up and smell the Roma. Subscribe to the *Review* and find out what is happening in your church.

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Answers:
 1. False. Loma Linda University is conducting the study. See the February 1/AD 2004 issue.
 2. True. See the January 8, 2004, issue.
 3. False, but it would make a great story.
 4. True. Gordon Bouwens, an international missionary artist, created the original paintings. See the December 18, 2003, issue.
 5. True. The first baby to be born in 17 years was delivered on September 14, 2003. See the December 11, 2003, issue.
 6. False.
 7. True. See the Newsbreak story in the November 6, 2003, issue.
 8. False. Winterfest, held in Colorado, is an annual festival for skiing, winter sports, spiritual growth and other activities for youth and young adults from around North America.
 9. True. Screenshot is a film festival for young Christians in media, sponsored by the Adventist Communication Network (ACN). See the December 18, 2003, Newsbreak.
 10. True. See the December 25, 2003, Newsbreak.

Letters *continued from page 3*

believe that such a careful process, over a prudent length of time, allows for a maturing and healing that would justify reinstatement to ministry when recommended by the local congregation that was hurt. Thanks, Dwight, for calling our attention to a glorious vision.

—Steve Bauer, associate professor, Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Should fallen pastors be forgiven? Of course! But should they then be restored to leadership? In all organizations, the requirements for leadership are higher than the requirements for membership. In any given congregation, few of the church members are qualified to be the pastor. Some lack skills or educational qualification, others have character flaws—including, it seems to me, anyone who has betrayed the office by sexual misconduct. Forgiveness restores one to membership, not to leadership. It is only common sense that one would not hire a pastor with a demonstrated weakness after ordination for murder, embezzlement, adultery, etc. The penitent offender can still serve the Lord in other capacities. Only the passage of years can demonstrate that their repentance is deep and their life is transformed. Let's reserve some grace and mercy for the victims of pastoral misconduct—the congregation.

—Tim Crosby, pastor, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Dwight Nelson responds: *I agree with Steve Bauer, forgiveness is more than "merely forgetting." As I indicated in my article, even as Good Friday precedes Easter so the Cross must precede the Resurrection. Surely the justice required of forgiveness was satisfied by Christ's sacrificial blood. And surely His sacrifice is the basis of a forgiveness that involves complete forgetfulness—"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Heb. 8:12).*

Bauer and Crosby question whether a pastor guilty of sexual misconduct could be restored to a pastoral position of lead-

ership even after genuine repentance and recovery. Though I did not specifically address sexual misconduct in my article, it certainly constitutes one very public expression of many leaders who have fallen. I wish, however, Bauer and Crosby had responded directly to my "exhibit A" of how God responds to fallen and subsequently repentant leaders—the John 20-21 narrative of Peter's restoration following his great, public fall. Their specific focus on sexual sin introduces the matter of David's moral fall and divine restoration to kingship—itsself an astounding display of "divine amnesia" when God bemoans to a new generation of leaders: "But you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes" (2 Kings 14:8, emphasis supplied). Is not divine grace a model for human grace? Wouldn't a careful, prayerful case-by-case commitment to journey with the fallen and their congregation (as Bauer suggests) provide the possibility that the Body of Christ could one day both celebrate the healing of all involved and rejoice in the reinstatement of even a David and Peter in our midst? How diminished sacred history would be had both fallen leaders been forbidden to ever lead again.

I read with interest the letters in the March 2004 edition of *Ministry*. I wonder why we just find negative objections to an article rather than studying the biblical evidences behind the author's position. I read the Greek and Hebrew fluently and culturally and believe that Dr. Hans LaRondelle should be at least listened to in a positive way. From my way of thinking, research then needs to be done to better perceive the biblical support for his position. I have done this, and even though I might see some things a little differently, I must admit that he has some strong evidences in his favor. And why do we have to come straight in with a quote from Ellen White? Wouldn't it be better to consider the biblical position first? Surely the Bible is the primary source of truth. ■

—John Oaklands, Cardiff, New South Wales, Australia.



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PK prodigals

Let go of your guilt. You cannot even blame God when your kids refuse your counsel or abandon your spiritual heritage. No guarantee has been voided.

Many clergy parents are overwhelmed with anger, shame, guilt, self-condemnation, and resentment when their PKs depart their upbringing. God seems to have failed His own Word. After all, doesn't the Bible promise, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6)?

What a promise! If it were true. Many of us have emotionally destroyed ourselves trying to discern what went wrong—either with our parenting or with God's promise. Some of us are uncomfortable blaming God for our prodigals, but satisfied to applaud our own parenting skills for those kids who "turn out OK."

First a disclaimer. Since I am not a parent, I claim no authority about child raising. However, as a pastor, I do claim responsibility to "rightly divide the Word" to share some light and hope.

No promise in this proverb. This text is just what it purports to be. A proverb. Not a guarantee; not a promise. A principle by which to practice. The text does not assure pleasant outcomes for faithful parents. Rather, it describes parental responsibility for learning their child's own capabilities and interests and then guiding them to find a fulfilling career path in harmony with their innate talents and interests.

Rather than an ironclad warranty that only frustrates and disappoints when events don't turn out as anticipated, the verse counsels parents to study the ways in which their particular child can be expected to be of most service and which career paths will bring the most happiness. Therefore,

JAMES A. CRESS



parents should recommend lifework choices in harmony with their child's natural bent and parental efforts should be directed toward this discovery. "The training that Solomon enjoins is to direct, educate, and develop. For parents and teachers to do this work, they must themselves understand the way the child should go."¹

Good parenting does not eradicate free choice. Love always risks. Perhaps our Creator's greatest risk was free choice. Neither religious faithfulness nor parental skill eliminates free choice. Scripture never promises to reward your own spirituality by forcing your children's good behavior.

Note the clear example of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son in which the father's love represents the attitudes and actions of our heavenly Parent. Surely this is a model of the best possible "training up." Yet despite such parenting excellence, one son left home and the other (the one who stayed and claimed to have been faithfully obedient) journeyed just as far into rebellion. Remember, not all prodigals leave home.

The younger son wished his father dead—"give me my inheritance now." The elder son so plotted to possess everything, when the old man finally would be out of his way, that he resented his own brother's conversion.

Both boys wanted nothing of Dad's values. Both expressed greater confidence in good works than in grace. The runaway reasoned that he would return home to earn his place through servitude, and the other believed that years of obedience ought to yield greater rewards.

God helps you love your prodigals.

The parable offers insight and hope. You are not responsible for every choice your children make. Sometimes all you can do is wait for a change of mind and spirit. If the father could have changed his son by counseling against disobedience, chasing after the wanderer, scolding profligate lifestyles, or any other personal effort, He surely would have chosen for his child to avoid the traumatic consequences that inevitably follow rebellion.

Take courage. Our timing is not God's timing. Pray for your wayward kids. Never give up. You do not know how the Holy Spirit will work to turn their hearts and minds back again.

Do not tolerate behavior that endangers your safety or the security of your spouse and other children. But do not conclude that you can harass your children into the behavior you desire. Love unconditionally and avoid nagging. If you are tempted to criticism or to repeatedly express opinions about the lifestyle your child already knows you oppose, pray that God will perform the same miracle on you that He did for Daniel's lions. He shut their mouths!

Love unconditionally. Don't assume too much responsibility for their choices. Forgive yourself as well as your child and forgive your all-loving Savior who promises free choice for every child. ■

1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1885), 131.

Abundant life

continued from page 17

blindness and deafness—not through healing—but achieving wholeness in brokenness; Joni Eriksen-Tada, who continues to thank God for her quadriplegia, and sings His praises and reaches out to the disabled.

Health: not an end in itself

Eating and drinking healthfully, having sufficient exercise, living in moderation and modesty, etc. do not of themselves achieve wholeness. God's strength is made perfect in weakness. This is providential, so that we cannot boast in our own strength or works; it helps us remember that physical health, although desirable, is a means to an end, not the end in itself. This is where the Pharisees of Jesus' day, and their modern-day counterparts, falter and fail.

Christ's promise, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10) can still be a reality even among the most physically broken. Health is not a right in this life. As important as wellness is, Jesus emphasized an important balance: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matt. 10:38, NIV).

God's instructions on health

Early in the Old Testament, God saw fit to give His people instructions on healthful living, including diet and living cleanly. The Levitical laws were to be preventive and distinctive.

As early as 1863, Ellen White counseled the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church on healthful living. The outstanding feature of her initial message was the "relation between physical welfare and spiritual health, or holiness."⁶ Throughout her life, she was the channel of information that fashioned the church's philosophy and emphasis on health.

Long before medical evidence emerged on the extreme dangers of smoking, Ellen White spoke out strongly on this and other issues, including the use of alcohol and poisonous medica-

tions such as arsenicals and mercury-based drugs.

The drinking of tea and coffee and the use of stimulants was very strongly discouraged, as—ultimately—was the use of flesh food. Mrs. White promoted a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet as the most desirable. In addition, the use of fresh, clean water (inside and out), clean air, adequate exercise and rest, temperance, faith, appropriate sunshine exposure, integrity, and social support were strongly encouraged.

Time magazine reported the positive outcome of the first Adventist Health Study, describing the results as the "Adventists' Advantage."^{7, 8} This study revealed that in the general Adventist population there was significant reduction in most cancers and in cirrhosis of the liver.

Subsequent studies have shown a significant increase in longevity in those living the Adventist lifestyle. The results of meta-analyses have been so compelling that \$19 million has been allocated to conduct Adventist Health Study II, with a special emphasis on the differences in malignancies between Adventists and the general population.

More important than living a few years longer is the injunction to "do the works of him who sent me [Jesus]" (John

9:4, NIV). God has given us, through varied sources, consistent guidance on how we can be healthy, happy, and holy. This health and wellness is to be channeled into His service. We are, indeed, blessed to live in a time when science continues to affirm and confirm the instructions given Seventh-day Adventists. History and the universe will judge us on how we apply the knowledge and benefits.

"Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful" (2 Chron. 20:20, NIV). ■

Peter N. Landless, MD, FACC, with a specialty in cardiology and a subspecialty in nuclear cardiology, is associate director, GC Health Ministries, Silver Spring, Maryland.

- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1905), 17.
- 2 Paul S. Mueller, David J. Plevak, and Teresa A. Rummans, "Religious Involvement, Spirituality, and Medicine: Implications for Clinical Practice," in *Mayo Clinic Proc.*, 2001; 76:1225-1235.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough, and David Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health* (Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 5 Benjamin C. Maxson, "The Missing Connection," *Dynamic Steward*, October-December 2003, 7-4.
- 6 D. E. Robinson, *The Story of Our Health Message* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1965).
- 7 *Time* magazine, October 28, 1966, 68.
- 8 Gary E. Fraser, *Diet, Life Expectancy, and Chronic Disease: Studies of Seventh-day Adventists and Other Vegetarians* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

Advent hope

continued from page 19

noticed the words as never before. I watched people who have lived decades longer than I have, and I listened to them enthusiastically sing, embodying in the present their hope for the future:

"Lives again our glorious king, Allelujah! Where, O death, is now thy sting? Allelujah! Once He died, our souls to save, Allelujah! Where's thy victory, boasting grace? Allelujah!"

After the pastor's powerful sermon, we prepared to sing the closing hymn.

The woman directly across the aisle from me was rubbing her knees. When the congregation stood to sing, I saw that it took her the entire

first stanza to straighten out her arthritic knees. But she stood! She stood and she sang.

She has no idea how she blessed me. She embodied those singing before the throne, those whose hope in the future transforms their present. It was as if she were saying, *I stand to sing now, because I will stand quickly and lightly some day. I look ahead through cataracts now, because I will see clearly someday. I worship and I sing now, because I will sing "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come."*

Of course, the Advent hope focuses on the future, but it's here—now! ■

* Throughout this article, I have used the New Revised Standard Version, except where noted.

Evangelism, a constant of the church

IVAN OMANA



For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). This magnificent and familiar declaration reminds us of a number of things related to the gospel.

First, the gospel is always the same; second, the presentation can be changed according to circumstances; and third, the gospel is of God, which means it has the power to change those who accept it.

Old ways in the old days

I am a third-generation Adventist. My grandfather was an ordained Adventist pastor, and I listened as he told how he conducted evangelistic "efforts" in his day. He told of how he would "challenge the priest of the town where I was going to hold the evangelistic campaign to a public debate to see who knew the Bible better." These kinds of debates were generally held on a Sunday morning, and the whole town met on the plaza near the Catholic church to witness it.

When the debate ended, those of the crowd who considered the Adventist minister to have "prevailed" would listen as the pastor invited them to study the Bible with him! Some would come, and after a few weeks there would be baptisms.

In my grandfather's day this type of campaign was very successful, but things have changed. This kind of approach no longer persuades, though to this day churches still exist in those towns where the debates were first held.

I also witnessed the days of the

great, interminable campaigns, when the evangelist occupied the meeting place for as long as five or six months. These evangelists never identified with the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the beginning, in order not to awaken prejudice. These campaigns were long! But they ended with an established congregation, and a pastor in charge of it. The evangelists prepared the field, reaped the harvest, and then consolidated the congregation.

Year of evangelism

Today the gospel is presented in different ways. Each area has its own pattern of presentation, adjusted to local needs and situations.

In the Inter-American Division, some use small groups; others use health evangelism; and still others focus on the family, because the family is of vital importance due to the struggles in so many of today's homes.

We also use radio and are beginning to take advantage of evangelism via satellite. Laymen are bringing new methods, and the pastors are interested in using new ways and a new evangelistic focus.

During the Year of World Evangelism, the church reminds us that, first of all,

evangelism should be a constant in our church with total membership participation. Of course, we shouldn't wait for "years of world evangelism" before we proclaim the gospel. We cannot place dates on the work of proclaiming the gospel. Evangelism is a mandate from heaven that should be carried out at all times. It is a way of life, and the church was born evangelizing and it will end in the same manner.

We must also embrace the fact that during this Year of World Evangelism everything we do in the church should be geared toward evangelism. It is well that we have coined the word "evangeliving," which presents the gospel through our lifestyle.

Real evangelism

Pure evangelism is like a beautiful smile on the part of everyone in a congregation. It has to do with the warm reception a person or family experiences when they attend church for the first time. Evangelism is a timely visit to encourage someone who is discouraged.

For this reason, a friendly church will always bear more fruit, because what people need the most in today's world is a demonstration of love and affection. We are often reminded that if we humble ourselves before God and are friendly, courteous, and compassionate, there would be one hundred conversions where there is now only one.

A church school that understands its mission and opens its doors to give its message through Adventist education is evangelism at its highest level. An Adventist clinic where, through simple treatments, we present the Divine Healer, Jesus Christ, is evangelism as well.



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The primary object of evangelism is to reach the total person. We cannot pretend to give the message to someone if the person to whom we are preaching is literally hungry or is visibly in need of basic medical care. We first must feed him and attend to his needs, and then he will ask the reason for our actions.

The power of love

One Sunday morning I was in my front yard working in my garden. A man, apparently in need, approached and said, "I would be willing to help you in any way you ask. I just need some money so I can feed my family." I looked at him and understood his situation. He was poorly dressed and seemed hungry himself.

At that moment my wife came to tell me that breakfast was ready, and I asked her to bring me an extra plate of food for my co-worker. When she brought the food the man looked at me and asked, "Is this for me?" I answered, "Of course, it's yours."

He began to eat, but while he ate his hands trembled. I could not believe my eyes—a man born in my own country in that condition! After he had eaten with a gusto that I will never forget, he said, "Sir, who are you to be so kind to me?" I answered, "I am a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church." This man was now ready to listen to the gospel.

Anyone should be able to look into our churches and find there the manifestation of the principles of love and kindness. Psalm 122:1 says, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD." There should be very practical reasons for someone to say these words of David. Love, care, and kindness are the clearest evidence that we understand the gospel. Thus we can all be involved in the proclamation of the gospel, for in the end, the gospel is love.

The gospel has its own power. It is not the power that I have because I can express myself well, or because I can articulate things clearly in public. The

gospel is the power of God, not of man.

When I was a district pastor on the island of Puerto Rico, I learned a great lesson from one of my church elders. This brother was simple in his speech but full of the power of God in evangelism. There was nothing impressive about him that demonstrated his power as a man or as a preacher. He did nothing to call attention to himself but hid himself well in the Lord as he presented the gospel of Christ. The people came to the church because of the power revealed in that brother.

Acts 2:47 says, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." God wants to perform a work in us, and the church is the chosen place for this work. Therefore, *let us make evangelism constant in our church!* This is our calling. To do anything else would mean being unfaithful to the very mandate that defines our existence as a movement and a people. ■

Ivan Omana, D.Min., is the ministerial secretary for the Inter-American Division, Miami, Florida.

Evangelistic Handbills & Supplies

**Are you weary of unsuccessful evangelism attempts?
Can you relate to diminished strength and
energy when planning outreach events?**

The Hamblin team assisted Don and Diana Clemons – Pastoral team at Wheeling SDA Church West Virginia – putting together advertising materials which took them from cooking schools, Bible study correspondence school using “In His Word” lessons, and a

Health Fair. This led into their MAIN EVENT, a Bible Prophecy Seminar using ASI’s DVD lessons.

Don, a pastor with previously little experience in technology said,

“I can’t say enough for all the guidance the Hamblin team provided. From their courteous telephone answering receptionist to the knowl-

edgeable and patient Customer Service Representatives, the total Hamblin approach helped alleviate my anxiety when planning a major outreach for our community.

“Our handbills were highly effective and Hamblin’s customer service department guided me step-by-step, from our initial year-in-advance planning, through the final phases of a very successful Evangelistic Series (120 non SDA’s in attendance the first night).

“Thanks, Hamblin team, for educating me, guiding me and having the staff and technology to back me up.”

Other professionals helping with the Wheeling outreach said,

“The handbill for the Wheeling Prophecy Seminar was one of the most professional pieces I’ve seen. This was a standout piece and it worked! It was a good testimony to other churches that photocopies just won’t grab the attention as well as a professional piece. This was the real deal.” Thomas Peck, Circulation Manager, *The Intelligence & Wheeling News Register.*

“Advertising with Hamblin’s products proved to be tremendously successful for our Prophecy Seminar. With their professional products, we were able to coordinate all pieces of our advertising campaign by carrying a central theme and look. Not only were we able to leave an enormous impact with these products, but we gained respect throughout the community.”

Amy L. Garvick,
Communications Director,
Wheeling Seventh-day Adventist Church.



Health Team: Dr. Andres Saenz,
Dr. Carol Richardson, Dr. Bonnie Head



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