

MINISTRY

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HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLES

ISAIAH'S VISION
OF INCLUSION

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Editorial

Pastors' Pastor

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THE URGENCY OF THE MUSLIM WORLD'S NEED FOR CHRIST HAS IMPELLED CREATIVITY AND EXPERIMENTATION.

Fallen pastors: redemptive response

This is in reference to Miroslav Kis's article "Fallen Pastors, Redemptive Response" (November 2004). Paul speaks in Romans 6:1 that the salvation experience is one of dying to sin and living for and with Christ. This death to sin is not a once-for-all act, but a constant battle. As Ellen White states: "Constant war against mind [sic] must be maintained, and we must be aided by the refining influence of the grace of God which will attract the mind upward and habituate it to meditate upon pure and holy things" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 2:478, 479).

That is theology. But we as pastoral wives have a duty as well to keep our spouses faithful to their ministerial calling. We need to stand by our husbands in their ministry, be supportive of them, understand their emotional needs, and show our love and relationship in such a way that they will keep sacred their vow both to ordination and to the [marriage]. Supportive and understanding spouses who can be open, communicative, and intimate can contribute much to the sanity and the fidelity of their pastoral husbands, and can keep them away from falling over the brink into the precipice.

—Estrella Anacleto Jordan, Prilly, Switzerland.

Miroslav Kis's article "Dealing with a Fallen Pastor" (January 2005) is very disturbing. Obviously, the author

cannot question God who dealt directly with David, and on the basis of his heartfelt repentance, forgave him. However, the curious comparison drawn between how God regarded the repentant David, as king, and how He might regard a repentant priest (or pastor) raises serious questions about the nature and effects of God's unconditional grace. The article also ignores the fact that God has conferred upon the church the authority to discern who are called and may be ordained to gospel ministry. A consistent application of this principle should also apply if and when consideration might be given to restoration to ministry of a truly repentant, fallen pastor.

—Alf Birch, interim senior pastor, Meadow Glade Seventh-day Adventist Church, Oregon.

Muslim evangelism

Borge Schantz's "Political Correctness in Muslim Evangelism" (June 2004)

represents one side of the on-going discussion on the topic. Political correctness toward Muslims may be, as the author states, a major force in Scandinavian society but it can hardly be identified as the motive for innovative Christian evangelism among Muslims. What missionary innovator laboring in some distant land cares about political correctness? Rather, the motive is to improve on the dismal track record of the traditional approach. The urgency of the Muslim world's need for

Christ has impelled creativity and experimentation. There are anecdotes (like those cited in the article) that point out the failures of some experiments but even more anecdotes that chronicle the failures of the traditional approach.

The article recommends the approach that seeks to "enlighten and correct" and "point out wrong doctrine, abuse, and even dangerous heresy in other religions." History demonstrates the failure of this strategy in the early stages of evangelism among Muslims. Barriers against Christianity have to be lowered before Muslims are ready to listen at all. . . . The experimental approaches try to draw Muslims toward receptivity by stages.

The article confuses the use of commonalities (like similar doctrines) in bargaining away distinctives and search for a theological lowest common denominator, in their use as initial points of contact. Of course, the Muslim doctrines of God and the Second Coming are different from the Christian doctrines. However, these Muslim doctrines are points of contact from which a start can be made that will lead to full Christian understanding. The word "Allah" is a form into which new Christian "meaning" can be injected, like Arabic speaking Christians have done. All over the world local names for God have been adopted in Bible translation, with Christian theology replacing the non-Christian theology in

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Ministerial humility

WILLMORE D. EVA



How refreshing and relieving it is for someone to come right out with it! How disarming, how telling, how winning it is!

Perhaps above all, it is reassuring when an "authority" makes such confessions. This is especially so when someone is honest about his or her limitations, even when the prevailing political pressure is for them not to do so. It can be a bit troubling, but it is at the same time very valuable when someone refuses to play the false role of being supremely sure of everything!

It is important in all this, of course, that the person who makes such confessions nevertheless goes on believing and embracing with both arms and a full heart the wonders of God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ. To carelessly express doubt is one of the most damaging things a minister can do. But that's not what we are talking about here. We're talking instead about humility, honesty, and the admission that even though we don't have all the answers we still believe with a full heart.

Humility and honesty go hand in hand. These traits endear us to people, build trust between us, and let them know that we can relate with them in

their struggles, fears, and doubts.

Our times are characterized by a skeptical cynicism not only toward the faith we hold dear, but often toward us as "believers." Christian faith and Christians themselves are being unprecedentedly questioned.

In reaction to this cynicism, too many of us have taken on an overcompensative, bombastic, almost pompous stance that leaves people with the impression we are "Know-it-alls" and that if people would just listen to us they'd finally "get it." That's always been a turn-off and it always will be. It only wins a few, and I'm not sure how much good it does them!

This issue of *Ministry* contains articles that relate to these questions in one way or another. Below is an apt sample quote from Samir Selmanovic's article, that encompasses my concerns well. Apart from Samir's own fine description of these dynamics, he draws this one from Thomas C. Oden: "The healthier the study of God, the more candid it remains about its own finitude, the stubborn limits of its own knowing, its own charades, Band-Aids, closets, masks, and broken windows" (see page 21).

At a closing point in Gerald Minchin's list of confessions there is this magnificently truthful statement: "Near death, Isaac Newton said, 'I am like a child playing with pebbles on the seashore, while the great ocean of truth lies stretched out before me.'" God help us to have the same kind of humble recognition of who we are and where we are. We are called, I believe, to be this veritably modest, this approachable and this honest about our calling and our faith, as we relate to those we seek to reach for Him. ■

I recently came across an informal little compilation called *The Faith, Wit and Wisdom of Gerald H. Minchin*. Dr. Minchin served the Church as minister and educator from the 1920s to the 1960s. Many, I'm sure, remember him as a genuinely spiritual man who was relentlessly thoughtful and honest about his faith. Here are a few examples of his thinking:

Under the subheading "Things I Do Not Understand," he confesses, "I do not understand the reasoning or logic of intercessory prayer. I know it works." "I do not understand why an omnipotent God could not have done a better job with this world." "I do not know why God did not reveal Himself in such a way that nobody could mistake his message or meaning." "I do not know why prophecy was not made so clear that a dozen different men would not come up with a dozen different interpretations." "I do not know why He did not give us a book so unmistakable in its teachings that honest men would not disagree over it." "I do not know why God is so silent when His creatures agonize in prayer."

Near the end of this list, there's this one: "I find it increasingly difficult to say what God ought to do under any given conditions. I do not have all the facts, and if I did, I would not know what to do with them. A few years ago I had all the answers—I knew what to say. The older I get the more certain I am that there are many things I do not know."

Like Gerald H. Minchin, we all struggle with our own "I-don't-know" issues, don't we? The difference may be, however, that Dr. Minchin openly confessed his, and by doing so he became one with all the rest of us—we who also have puzzling questions that challenge our faith.

A house of prayer for all peoples:

A vision of inclusion

Sigve Tonstad

My house shall be called a house of prayer for *all* peoples" (Isa. 56:7, italics added). Isaiah's dramatic pronouncement contains a radical vision of inclusion, reaching out to people previously left out on the periphery of the believing community. While many uncertainties with respect to Isaiah's message remain unresolved, there is no doubt that this statement sounded the beginning of a new era. The implications of this profound vision have not been exhausted even in our time.

A new community

To begin with, what are some assumptions with respect to Isaiah's original "target audience" for this vision of inclusion? The prophecy is no doubt strongly predictive, looking ahead to the restoration of the believing community after the exile.¹ The makeup of this community will help us better understand the text.

First, it was a bruised community.² This community faced the challenge of whether it would survive at all.

Second, the community was concerned about the preservation of its identity. Indeed, the thrust of the passage centers on the issue of identity. Who is to be included in the community? Who is to be excluded? Who may hold positions of leadership and influence?

Third, the issue of identity was framed by

the fact that the community had a hallowed tradition of exclusiveness and a self-image of exclusivity. Yet the prophet advocates the inclusion of eunuchs in his community (Isa. 56:4, 5), and his word of inclusion seems to run directly against the ironclad and inspired command, "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:1).

The controversial nature of the new vision is easy to spot: On this point about eunuchs, will the community set aside the inspired counsel and act against the rules laid down in the "church manual" by their founding fathers?

Isaiah also advocates the inclusion of foreigners. Again, his vision of inclusion confronts explicit counsel to the contrary. Foreigners are not immediately eligible according to the inspired Word. Among the stipulations specifying who may and who may not be part of the traditional community, there is the rule that only the children of the third generation of foreigners "may be admitted to the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:8).

On the whole, the boundary lines drawn up in the past seem to be conceived in terms of exclusiveness. Eichrodt holds that the result of the heritage of Deuteronomy "did in practice set the nations outside the covenant and taught that this should be regarded as a specifically Israelite privilege."³ How, then, will Isaiah's vision of inclusion stand a chance?

Fourth, there is no question that the prophet is envisioning a Sabbath-keeping community.⁴ This is borne out by the threefold mention of the Sabbath in the passage. When the prophet addresses the community as a whole, he constitutes it as a Sabbath-keeping fellowship; "Happy is the mortal [i.e., anyone] who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil" (Isa. 56:2).

When he turns to the eunuchs, conceivably Israelites whose genitals had been mutilated by imperial service during the exile, he addresses them as "the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths" (56:4). When he looks to the foreigners, he speaks to them as "the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord . . . all who keep the Sabbath" (56:6).

The configuration of the Sabbath and refraining "from doing any evil" has bothered interpreters because it seems to them to place



Sigve Tonstad, M.D.,
Ph.D., is a pastor and
physician in
Hvalstad, Norway

an unimportant point—the Sabbath—alongside what would be a defensible ethical imperative in any context.⁵ However, what modern interpreters see as an “awkward parallelism”⁶ was not seen in that light by the prophet. To him the Sabbath is not merely an identity marker of his community, but the expression of the unbroken and stable identity of the one God, the One who brings the community into existence.

Finally, Isaiah’s prophetic community should not be tied exclusively to the conditions after the exile. His vision has a future and an eschatological ring to it.⁷ The collective and national character of the Jewish religious tradition is to yield to a new era that will emphasize the individual and the personal nature of spirituality. “The chosen people has turned into the confessing community,” writes Claus Westermann.⁸

Isaiah’s vision is, therefore, appropriately read as a vision not only of the universality that came so powerfully through the gospel and in the gift of the Holy Spirit to the New Testament community, but of the end time and a prescription for the community that will live to see God’s ultimate solution. The entire vision is based on the conviction, expressed in the first person and on the high authority of God, “Soon my salvation will come and my deliverance be revealed” (56:1).

Vision of inclusion

Two groups are specifically singled out as beneficiaries of the new inclusion “policy”: the eunuchs and the stranger.

“To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off” (Isa. 56:4, 5).

This assures the heretofore stigmatized group full, unqualified membership and unlimited access. The

eunuchs are not assigned second-class status. Instead, this group, once excluded from the community, is given the stupendous privilege of a perpetual memorial—a hall of fame in spiritual terms.

The strangers are also welcome. “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar” (Isa. 56:6, 7).

Later, the foreigners—and here Isaiah is at pains to describe people who have been the furthest away from the community of faith—are inducted into and ordained to priestly ministry, a function previously the exclusive preserve of Jews of Levitic descent. “And I will also take some of them as priests and as Levites, says the Lord” (Isa. 66:21).

Emmerson points out the novelty of this opening of the doors to the priesthood. “Still more surprising is the final chapter where it is envisaged that some of foreign birth may share even in the service of the sanctuary as priests and Levites.”⁹

Inclusion and identity

The basis for the radical and transforming vision of inclusion is not left in doubt in our passage. God is redrawing the boundary lines to the specifications of His own character, saying to those previously stigmatized, excluded, or dispossessed, I welcome you.¹⁰

Nevertheless, obstacles to the reconfiguration of the community must not be minimized despite the initiative and authority of the One who insists that it be done. We should not expect the community to be transformed without discussion or even conflict. Indeed, the rhetoric of the passage implies that we are witnessing this discussion in progress.

When the prophet comforts, “Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from his people’; and do not let the eunuch say, ‘I am just a dry tree’ ” (Isa. 56:3), we hear the voices of the opposing side from the other side of the table. They advocate exclusion, perhaps even quoting Scripture in support of their conviction, chapter and verse, as if to prove that the exclusion policy rests on a solid and sound theological foundation. But this is just what God is redrawing.

This is not surprising. Redrawing community boundaries affects one’s sense of identity. History is replete with examples of groups struggling to come to grips with the demand for inclusion across established traditions and entrenched divisions that are based upon nationality, pedigree, color, caste, tribe, and gender.

Isaiah’s vision belongs in such a context. It is all the more remarkable since it moves the very limits that appear to be laid down by inspiration and that are as authoritative as his own, exactly because it comes to a group that is conscious of the traditional basis for its identity. Moreover, the prophet’s vision of inclusion violates human notions of religion and the defective pastoral instinct of the human agent. Where Isaiah’s vision is inspired by God as the great includer, the human disposition, manifested time and again in the history of institutionalized religion, tends predictably toward exclusion.

Implementing the vision

Reading Isaiah’s vision today should not lead to the conclusion that the work of drawing new boundaries is done and that all the necessary specifics were covered in Isaiah’s time, or even in the times of the first-century Christian church.

“The community of Judaism is to be a community that remembers, cherishes, and preserves the name and identity of those otherwise nullified in an uncaring world,” says

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Adventist theology and deep time history: Are they compatible?

Editorial note: This is the first in an extensive series of articles that will be published in *Ministry* over the next year. They will be presented in no particular or logical order. These articles were first presented as papers at the Seventh-day Adventist Faith and Science Conferences of 2001 to 2004. This article has been adapted for *Ministry* and edited with the *Ministry* reader family in mind.

FERNANDO L. CANALE



This article attempts to assess the compatibility of Seventh-day Adventist theology with deep time history and cosmology.¹ It deals with questions such as, Can the Adventist Church adopt or adapt one of the many “intermediate models of origins” that harmonize Christianity with evolution? Can the church harmonize biblical creation to deep time evolutionary history without changing its essence and theological system? Is deep time/evolutionary thinking compatible with the inner logic of Adventist theology as articulated in its understanding of the “great controversy between Christ and Satan”?

To achieve this aim we will explore some systematic consequences that would follow from abandoning the historical-literal meaning of Genesis 1. We will start by considering the nature of the issue before us, and then focus on biblical history, God’s actions, and the inner logic and coherence of these theological ideas. Finally, we will note the hermeneutical role that cosmology plays in the formation of theological thinking.

The nature of the issue

The issue before us is not whether Adventist theology could harmonize Genesis 1 with deep time/evolution, but whether deep time/evolution fits with the entire system of biblical theology. In short, are the six 24-hour days of

Genesis 1 an essential component of or compatible with biblical religious truth?

Some Adventists suggest that Adventist theology is compatible with deep time evolutionary history. For them, to harmonize evolutionary theory with Adventist/biblical theology is to interpret Genesis 1 theologically, that is, not literally.² Those who view the Genesis record this way feel that if we were to make such a concession, Adventist theology and doctrine would not only remain unchanged but would also become “relevant” to those persuaded of the truthfulness of deep time and evolutionary ideas. The intellectual credibility of the church would be enhanced and its intellectual appeal broadened.

This view assumes that the deep time history of origins does not disturb the theological truths of Scripture or the system of Adventist theology and belief. When it comes to the theological understanding of creation, this view assumes that *time is not of the essence*. Yet, if due to scientific and methodological conviction, Adventists take deep time and evolutionary ideas as true, they will have to harmonize not only Genesis 1 but also the entire system of Adventist doctrine.

Those who assume biblical creation and deep time evolutionary history are compatible, forget that in biblical thinking, *time is of the essence*. It is basic to

the way Scripture treats its subject matter that God acts historically in human time and space. The truth of biblical religion is largely expressed in literal historical terms.

If time is of the essence when it comes to biblical theology, deep time evolutionary history conflicts with the closely knit historical system of biblical thinking. Under the innate or systemic expression of biblical thought and reality, the evolutionary version of historical development cannot coexist without severely impairing and even destroying the essence or basic truth of the Bible. Thus, God’s works in history cannot follow evolutionary patterns.

God’s history cannot (not may not) become evolutionary history.

Rewriting biblical history

I agree with the need for us to read Genesis 1 theologically and to embrace the resulting richness that flows from such a reading. *But* we need to recognize that there are very different ways of doing theological readings of Genesis 1.³ Theological interpretations of Genesis spring from our preunderstanding of God’s nature and His actions in created time.

Many, if not most, Christian theologians derive their understanding of God’s reality from Greek metaphysics, according to which “ultimate” reality is timeless. Since a timeless God does not act directly within the historical sequence of events, we can understand why in this view history does not belong to what is properly theological.

We can also understand why for most Christian theologians, the evolutionary rewriting of history does not affect theological (religious) content. This presuppositional perspective allows these theologians to harmonize creation with evolution by separating the theological (religious) content of

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Genesis 1 (its truth) from its historical
wrapping (the story).

Accordingly, the period of six 24-
hour days described in Genesis 1 and
the historical process the text describes
are dismissed by these theologians as
"nontheological," and God's actual cre-
ative action is displaced from the
historical and moved into the spiritual
realm.

Adventists and others depart from
many in the Christian theological tradi-
tion and that at the deepest hermeneu-
tical level. Decidedly rejecting the
timeless definition of ultimate reality as
expressed in Greek metaphysics, they
assume the biblical understanding of
ultimate reality as historical. Thus,
Adventist theologians do not read
Scripture from the perspective of Greek
metaphysical timelessness but from the
biblical understanding of God's being
and acting in human history.

To them the God of Scripture is not
timeless but infinitely and analogously
temporal. He creates and saves, acting
directly from within the sequence of
natural and human historical events.
For this hermeneutical reason, when
Adventists read Genesis 1 theologically,
they see God creating our planet in a
historical sequence of seven consecu-
tive 24-hour days.

This sequence of integrated divine
actions forms part not only of the history
of God but also of the history of our
planet. In creation, God is performing a
divine act in a historical sequence within
the flow of created time. In this sense,
God and His action on this planet are
inseparable.

However, all attempts to harmonize
theology with evolution start by accept-
ing the evolutionary rewriting of the
history of humankind as it is described
by Genesis as actually taking place.
When evolutionist-oriented paleontolo-
gists, geologists, and biologists, for
example, give their account of what
they see to be historical reality, because
the Genesis "story" does not fit the
"facts" as understood by evolutionists,
most Christian theologians, assuming
the Greek timeless understanding of ul-
timate reality, seriously consider letting

biblical history go. For them, changing
history is not important theologically,
because God does not act historically
but spiritually and timelessly.

When theologians believe that God's
act of creation does not take place in
history, they feel free to let the biblical
history of creation go as myth,⁴ saga,⁵ or
literary framework. The problem is that
the actual inner logic of theological
thinking suggests that letting the bibli-
cal history of creation go also entails
letting go of the biblical history of
redemption along with the future
eschatological history of God with His
redeemed church in eternity.⁶

For instance, some theologians,
working from the historical critical
method of biblical interpretation apply
the same evolutionary patterns to the
entire sweep of biblical history. They are
willing to let go not only the history of
creation but also much of biblical his-
tory, particularly when it presents God
acting historically within the spatio-
temporal flux of human history.

According to this approach, the real-
ity of the new earth will be not historical
but spiritual.

Can Adventist theology let go of bib-
lical history? Is the reality and truthful-
ness of biblical history of the essence in
Christianity? Can an Adventist theology
let the Genesis 1 history go without also
letting biblical and eschatological histo-
ries go?

At this point, we need to turn our
attention to the actions of God involved
in the process of creation. The answer
to these questions depends on our
understanding of "ultimate" reality.

Spiritualizing biblical theology?

Theology revolves around reality and
its causes. Evolution also revolves
around reality and its causes.

Genesis 1 explains the origin of the
physical world as an historical sequence
of divine creative acts in space and time.

Evolution explains the origin of the
same physical world by constructing a
different history with different length,
events, and causes.

Clearly, only one history took place.

The two historical scenarios cannot be true at the same time. Thus also their innate theological implications and meanings cannot both be accepted.

Thus, harmonization of biblical creation with evolution requires not only the acceptance of a different account of history but also a different understanding about the causal role God had in generating the history of the world.

The systematic centrality of this issue for theology cannot be overemphasized. Theological consistency requires that once we adjust our view of how God relates to the world to coincide with evolutionary history, we should also apply the same view of all divine relations to the whole history of the world. Thus, in the same way, we should embrace the entire range of human history articulating all the contents of Christian theology from within this framework.

How might God function in evolutionary history?

This brings us to a central issue that arises in any theological harmonization of Genesis 1 to evolution: The divine causality in evolutionary history. How does God operate in evolutionary history? Does God operate historically within the future-present-past sequence of time as Scripture says, or spiritually as some Christian theologies suggest?

Consider how the leading intermediate models harmonizing creation and evolution theologically conceive the nature of divine action in creation. Both theistic evolution and progressive creationism understand divine causality in evolutionary history spiritually rather than historically. Let us review each view briefly.

Theistic evolution. Teilhard de Chardin, a French Roman Catholic priest, imagines a system of theistic evolution where God works from the inside of nature and history, not from outside.

God works as spiritual energy to animate evolution in its lower stages. This “could of course only act in an impersonal form and under the veil of biology.”

Thus, according to Chardin, divine

causality does not operate within the spatio-temporal dynamics of historical causes but as hidden energy from the nonspatio-temporal realm of the spirit.

Progressive creationism. Bernard Ramm,⁸ an American Evangelical theologian, rejects theistic evolution because, according to him, it springs from a pantheistic view of God. Instead, he suggests progressive creationism as the theory that best accounts “for all the facts—biological, geological, and Biblical.”⁹

“Progressive creation is the means whereby God as world ground and the Spirit of God as World Entelechy bring to pass the divine will in Nature.”¹⁰ God works in creation by a combination of instantaneous miraculous events of fiat creation, and by a derivative and complementary process of evolution. God operates fiat creation transcendently from *outside* history.¹¹

Ramm suggests that several acts of fiat creation have occurred through deep evolutionary time.¹² These acts help to clarify the starting point and gaps in evolutionary history that science cannot explain.¹³ Then God “turns the task of creation over to the Holy Spirit who is *inside* Nature.”¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is the energy that brings about the evolutionary side of God’s plan of creation.¹⁵

According to these theories, God works out the events of natural and human history using the biological mechanism and laws of evolution.¹⁶ However, according to Scripture, God created our world by acting not from the inside or outside of the spatio-temporal series of historical causes but from within its historical flow.¹⁷

The difference between theistic evolution and progressive creationism consists in the way each sees God’s involvement in the process of evolution. Both, however, share the conviction that evolutionary science tells the true history of what took place in reality. Moreover, following the dictates of Greek metaphysics, both views assume that God does not work historically within the spatio-temporal sequence of historical events.

Divine causality does not operate his-

torically (sequentially), as they see it, but timelessly (simultaneously). Thus, Christian harmonization of creation and evolution stands on the prior harmonization of the biblical view of ultimate reality as spatial and historical to the Greek metaphysical and anthropological dualisms that guided Augustine’s and Aquinas’s theological constructions.¹⁸

They systematized the dehistoricization and spiritualization of Christian doctrine on which theistic evolutionism and progressive creationism build their theological syntheses.

The way in which theistic evolution and progressive creationism deal with creation may help Adventists and other creationists to see that harmonizing biblical creation with deep time evolutionary history requires more than a theological interpretation of the account in Genesis 1.

The way in which God acts in history must also fit the biological mechanism of evolution and the actual historical events it generates. How will this reinterpretation of divine activity affect Adventist theology?

A conflict of metanarratives

All systems of theological interpretation stand on the strength of their inner logic. In terms of our discussion, this logic revolves around the way theologians understand the being and actions of God and how He relates to human beings. Our “preunderstanding” of these issues acts as a hermeneutical “template” for the interpretation of Scripture. The point is that changes in the theological template necessarily unleash changes in the understanding of all theological ideas and interpretations of Scripture.

As already established, many theologians share the same template from which they develop their theology. Their template is a metaphysics with a timeless God, sovereign providence, and the immortality of the soul. Bernard Ramm recognized the defining role that the classical metaphysical template plays in his “progressive creation” model as he seeks to accommodate Evangelical theology to evolutionary

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theory. "[A] theory is *antichristian* when it denies something in Christian metaphysics, i.e., when it attacks the very roots of the Christian faith."¹⁹

Ramm goes further, "If it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of all that evolution is contrary to Christian metaphysics then we must brand theistic evolution as an impossible position. We shall be either Christians or evolutionists."²⁰ The same criterion applies to progressive creationism.

Obviously, theistic evolutionists and progressive creationists believe that evolutionary history is not contrary to Christian metaphysics. For them evolution fits within the metaphysical template Christian philosophers constructed from Plato and Aristotle's interpretations of ultimate reality.

According to this shared hermeneutical template, contradictions between the biblical and evolutionary versions of the history of life are not important because they do not take place in the timeless, spiritual, nonhistorical level of ultimate theological reality.

We need to ask ourselves, does evolution "fit" within the Adventist theological template? Does Adventist theology have a template? Does Adventist theology have a metaphysics?

Adventist scholars seldom address

this issue, even though Adventist theology has a theological template. It has implicitly rejected the metaphysical template on which much Christian theology stands and replaced it with what has come to be known as the great controversy metanarrative.

The main difference between the classical metaphysical template and the biblical metanarrative template as Adventists interpret is that the former places God and His acts in a spiritual-timeless, nonhistorical realm of reality while the latter places God and His acts within the historical continuum of created reality.

This metaphysical template helps us to understand why some Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians argue that evolution is compatible with their version of Christianity. Since evolution does not conflict with the template of classical metaphysics, they can harmonize it with Christianity without changing its theological structure, doctrines, or the inner logic of their respective traditions.

From the perspective of the biblical metanarrative template, we can also easily understand that evolution does conflict with the biblical template embodied in the great controversy metanarrative that includes the six 24-

hour consecutive days of divine creation of life on our planet, the inner historicist logic centered in the sanctuary, and the eschatological prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

The reason for this situation is simple. Evolution is a metanarrative about the origins of human history that fits well with the timeless nonhistorical template. By the same token, however, the evolutionary metanarrative collides with the great controversy metanarrative because both attempt to explain the same historical reality using different views of the causes involved in the process.

As Ramm correctly pointed out, we should reject deep time evolutionary history if it contradicts Christian metaphysics. Because biblical thought deals with metaphysical issues by way of historical metanarrative, it unavoidably conflicts with the deep time evolutionary metanarrative.

Evolution and biblical creation are rationally incompatible metanarratives between which theologians and believers must choose.

The role of cosmology in theological hermeneutics

To understand how the acceptance of deep time evolutionary history will affect Adventist theology, we need to recognize the macro hermeneutical role cosmology plays in Christian theology.

In theological thinking, cosmology is not a side issue. The design and history of creation set the stages from which sin, covenant, sanctuary, redemption, atonement, and eschatology draw their meaning and logic. Thus again, changes in the understanding of cosmology will necessarily unleash changes in the entire theological system. Besides, biblical cosmology assumes and depends on the biblical view of divine reality.

Those attempting to adapt Genesis 1 to evolutionary history will find themselves changing not only the length of time of creation but also its actual content and history.²¹ This is so because we cannot accommodate Genesis 1 to deep time history without also accom-

modating the theological order of causes implicit in the biblical text to the order of causality implicit in the mechanism of evolution.

In short, accommodating the six biblical 24-hour consecutive days of Genesis 1 to deep time scientific history requires accommodating not only the length of time but also the understanding of the order of reality and causes involved in the generation of life on earth.

Changes in cosmology require changes in divine reality and action. In turn, the changes in the understanding of divine reality and actions require accommodation of biblical thinking to evolutionary history and a wholesale reinterpretation not only of Adventist doctrine but of many other of the understandings in the broader world of Christian truth and faith.

Moreover, such an accommodation leads to a paradigmatic shift in Adventist theological authority: Science and philosophy replace Scripture as the source of what has truly happened in history.

Conclusion

The issue before us is not to decide between a literal or theological interpretation of Genesis 1 but between two rationally conflicting metanarratives that affect the entire scope of Adventist and even Christian theology. One posits God and ultimate reality as timeless-spiritual; the other understands God and ultimate reality as historical. One is rooted in Greek metaphysics; the other in biblical revelation.

These two incompatible metanarratives attempt to explain the entire history of reality. In postmodern times, incompatible metanarratives are the equivalent to incompatible metaphysics in classical and modern times. We cannot harmonize or rationally overcome conflicting metanarratives. Therefore, Adventist theology cannot harmonize biblical creation to deep time evolutionary history without changing its essence, doctrines, and theological system.²²

Adventist theology and indeed other thoughtful Christian people have to choose the metanarrative on which

their theology stands. What can that be except the biblical narrative, literal and historical, with an infinite God acting in time and space?

Adventists and other creationists, therefore, need to reaffirm the theological understanding of Genesis 1 as describing the literal-historical-six-24-hour-day period within which God created our planet. Such an affirmation is essential to the theological thinking of Scripture, and therefore, to the harmonious system of truth that gave rise to the Christian and the Adventist Church and its mission in the world. ■

Fernando L. Canale, Ph.D. is professor of theology and philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

- 1 Deep time and evolutionary ideas in this article refer to the origin of life on planet Earth, not to the origin of the universe or life in other galaxies.
- 2 See for instance, Fritz Guy, "Interpreting Genesis One in the Twenty-first Century," *Spectrum* 31, 2 (2003), 5-16.
- 3 Progressive creationism and theistic evolution are theological readings of Genesis 1, see below.
- 4 Bultmann's demythologization program described biblical sacred history as "myth." See for instance, Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith* (New York: Meridian, 1960).
- 5 Barth favored the term "saga" to categorize theologically the type of history Scripture presents in Genesis 1-11. Barth argues that "in addition to the 'historical' there has always been a legitimate 'non-historical' and pre-historical view of history, and its 'non-historical' and pre-historical depiction in the form of saga" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 Volumes, ed. G. W. Bromley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936): III/1, 81).

- 6 Jurgen Moltmann applies the Greek understanding of ultimate reality to eschatology. The world to come will not have a continuation of human history forever but will consist in timeless reality of the soul coming to share in the divine life of the Trinity. *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996).
- 7 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 291, 292.
- 8 Bernard Ramm argues, "[a]ccording to the Biblical view pantheistic identification with Nature is wrong. God is not Nature, but world ground to nature as both Augustine and Aquinas taught" (*The Christian View of Science and Scripture* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1955], 108).
- 9 Ibid., 293.
- 10 Ramm, 115, 116.
- 11 —, 116.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 —, 228.
- 14 —, 116 (emphasis in the original).
- 15 —, 116.
- 16 Not all representatives of progressive creationism will explicitly affirm that God uses the mechanism of evolution. Yet, the result of His providential guidance between ex-nihilo creative events follows the same history and development that science has reconstructed by using the patterns and biological mechanism of evolution.
- 17 Ramm claims that the way to fit evolution to creation is to understand it as "an element in providence" (ibid., 292). However, in Scripture divine providence does not act from "inside" or "outside" nature and historical events but from within their flow.
- 18 Bernard Ramm borrows freely from Augustine and Aquinas as he argues that "God is world ground." Ramm, 106-108.
- 19 Ramm, 291 (emphasis in the original).
- 20 Ramm, 292.
- 21 See, for instance, Langdon Gilkey "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *JR* 41, 3 (1961), 196.
- 22 In 1982 the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy "concluded that adherence to six consecutive twenty-four-hour creation days is nonessential to belief in biblical inerrancy." Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs Colo.: Navpress, 1994), 156.

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Techniques for great pastoral letters

Victor Pilmoor



Victor Pilmoor is treasurer of the British Union Conference in Watford, Hertfordshire, England.

No letter—no lunch! A home-bound letter was the prerequisite for Sunday lunch at the boarding schools of my youth. But school routine was not worth mentioning and my extracurricular activities would not have been good for my mother's soul, so my letters along with my penmanship perished, even under the pressure of the lunch-and-letter-writing rule!

Some years ago at a flea market, I came across a small leather-bound volume written by Cardinal John Henry Newman titled *Cardiphonia*—"letters from the heart." They were written to the great and the good of his parish, offering spiritual guidance and wisdom he could offer in no other way.

The New Testament epistles or letters also stand out for their warm, pastoral significance. While we give great respect to the content of these letters, their methodology has become the poor relation of spoken rhetoric. A good sermon reaches those who come out to listen, but letters have the potential to reach people where they are.

If preaching suffers the limitations of temporality, then letters from the heart have the potential to influence in perpetuity. I am reminded that my grandfather's love letters rekindled love in my grandmother's heart for 40 years after his demise and were buried with her for eternity.

In my teaching career, the integration of

faith and mathematics demanded all the creativity I could muster. Having now transferred to management, the challenge of integrating faith with receipts, checks, and pay slips is no less fascinating! The fun started for me when I simply began writing Thank-you notes to people who returned tithe to the Conference office. This principle was extended by sharing motivational or spiritual ideas, gleaned from my personal reading, on the foot of monthly pastoral expense summaries.

I thought little of this gesture until I got feedback indicating that these shared thoughts were valued, even planting occasional seed for their sermons. Better still, the quality of my relationship with most pastors was transformed! During the last three years, I have ventured drafting letters of encouragement. Penmanship with a purpose!

The letter is usually based on current events or my experience, woven with insights garnered from my professional and inspirational reading. The concluding motif reinforces mission focus and expresses gratitude for loyalty in service. The letter has no other purpose than pastoral encouragement. There are no hidden agendas, no demands. It allows me to express feelings and perceptions that I might never share face to face, even if I got the opportunity, for fear of being misunderstood.

As I have learned, it contributes to transformational relationships with colleagues that might otherwise be limited to transactional issues. I am conscious that more of us could benefit from meaningful encouragement; this is a contribution toward developing people as a resource, and thus it's a legitimate goal for a treasurer. Far from being a chore, the exercise has proved a blessing to me.

Although not totally familiar with pastoral literature on mail ministry, I am aware of significant fund-raising texts that may have transfer value. The concept of relational resource building in the local church seems particularly appropriate and adaptable to this kind of letter writing.

This could be called relational resourcing, whose definition could go something like this: *Relational resourcing is an approach to promoting a cause that centers on the unique and special relationship that an organization, member, or contact has with that cause. The primary consideration is to nurture the bond and do nothing that would undermine it. Every effort is made*

to let members understand their value to the cause with the effect of keeping the primary mission in focus.

The object here is a lifelong relationship that is mutually beneficial. Letters that demand money, service, or support, or that are motivated by a problem, are often received cynically, especially when received as a "cold call."

THE OBJECT HERE IS A LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP THAT IS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL.

Here are some principles distilled from my reading:

1. The *sincerity* of your tone and *honesty* of your intent are paramount. The purpose of correspondence is to keep the vision alive and develop the spirit of the readership. Period!

2. As the expected behavior of a friend, letters should be *regular*. People should not feel singled out or self-servingly targeted. The letter is neither a flash in the pan nor a seasonal ritual, but part of the pastoral curriculum.

3. To be read, the letter should be *interesting*, *memorable*, and *entertaining*, a story written with cheer. People respond to stories that include known actors. It is definitely not a vehicle for theological hobby horses!

4. The letter should be *cost or effort efficient*. People come to appreciate the inclusiveness of a method that reaches them where they are. The ministry is complementary to pulpit delivery and does not depend on attendance status. It takes less time and is more convenient than home visitation and embraces those who would not normally be visited.

Personal letters are arguably read in a more leisurely and considered context than email; they are also accessible to the wider home circle, being read several times if the content is sufficiently poignant. The letter is sent exclusively to people with whom you have a pastoral or leadership relationship and should not thus be regarded as spam.

5. Lastly, once the skill and custom of letter writing has been developed, letters designed for a variety of identified groups may be the next step. Methods of *segmentation* could be demographic (letters addressing the needs and styles of the young, old, couples, parents, singles, men, women, retirees, etc.) or based on functional roles (letters addressing the needs of business people, professionals, church officers, small group leaders, and so on).

Where contacts are sufficiently well-known, letters sympathetic to personal value systems could be beneficial. Differentiation between innovators, thinkers, achievers, experimenters, staunch believers, strivers, builders, and strugglers could have significant impact.

Research has shown that *trust* is the key to organizational commitment, and that the quality of inspirational communication is the strongest factor underpinning that confidence. Letters should thus be concise, unpretentious, and unambiguous. They should avoid unnecessary formality, self-satisfaction, or pomposity. The language used should be that of the people to whom you are writing.

Good writing makes for good reading and is best written while smiling. People may not appear to respond immediately or directly, but with consistency the cogs start turning, and they may be inspired to start a conversation with common ground on their terms at a time of their choosing.

Finally, if in the flow of correspondence the needs of the church are occasionally mentioned, the response can almost be assured. That's treasurer speak! ■



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A slice of history: How clearer views of Jesus developed in the Adventist Church

Gilbert Valentine



Gilbert Valentine, Ph.D., is vice president for academic administration, Mission College, Muak Lek, Thailand.

Discussions on the doctrine of the Trinity are again rippling the surface of Adventist reflection on the nature of the Godhead. Adventists as a whole have not always been Trinitarian in belief, as a number of recent authors¹ have pointed out. Some Adventists still think that we should not be Trinitarian.

Many early Adventist pioneers such as James White, Joseph Bates, J. H. Waggoner, and R. F. Cottrell were, in fact, strongly anti-Trinitarian. They came from Disciples of Christ or similar church backgrounds and brought their strong anticreedal, anti-Trinitarian theology with them. This was how it came to be that semi-Arian concepts of Christology were fairly deeply imbedded in early Adventist beliefs and literature.

When did the change to Trinitarianism occur?

As Jerry Moon points out, “an irreversible paradigm shift” occurred in the Adventist Church in the 1890s, spurred along by the church’s publication of Ellen White’s *The Desire of Ages* in 1898. This influential book on the life of Christ reflected Mrs. White’s own developing understanding and called attention “to scriptures whose significance had been overlooked.” Its publication contributed to a “complete reversal” of Adventist thinking on the Trinity, and it became a kind of “continental divide.”²

Because theological concepts are interconnected and interrelated, the paradigm shift inevitably had a deep and far-reaching impact on the church’s understanding of other parts of its theology as I show in my biographical study of leading church theologian W. W. Prescott. The development enabled the church to give its distinctive message in a new gospel context.³

How did change come?

The change did not happen quickly, of course. It took many years. But how did the change happen? Did Ellen White simply initiate the changes in the late 1890s through some special burst of revelation or insight? Or did the development occur as the result of some sort of focused Bible study on the topic occurring in the church? Was there some sort of “agitation and discussion” happening somewhere in the background?

M. L. Andreason and others advanced the first explanation. Andreason clearly gave this impression in his repeated recalling of his own and the church’s astonishment at reading in *The Desire of Ages* the “revolutionary” statement on the self-existent deity of Christ, “in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”⁴

To Andreason this was clearly an unexpected burst of new light with no prior background discussion “of any sort.”⁵ Andreason’s surprise was apparently quite common in the experience of others in the denomination at the time.

Ministry editor Leroy Froom, on the other hand, suspected there was more to it than that. As he understood things, “the Spirit of prophecy [the work of Ellen White] was never the instrument to initiate doctrine, or other truths among us.” Rather, new perspectives and understandings “have come from study,” he suggested. Froom’s inquisitiveness in the mid-1940s led to his seeking out witnesses of what had been happening during the period when the changes occurred.⁶

Doctrinal development

How and why does doctrinal development occur? Cambridge University scholar Maurice Wiles in his study of doctrinal development in the earlier patristic period observes three underlying motivations at work.

First, apologetics played an important part. This involved the need for believers to express

truth in a form that met the questions of the surrounding world—defensively, on the one hand, to explain what really was meant by a doctrinal statement and to correct misunderstanding and challenges; and offensively, on the other hand, to recommend the faith evangelistically, persuading and convincing unbelievers.

A second motivation was to protect against heresy within the church. This motivation was concerned to protect against some unbalanced overemphasis on one part of a doctrinal statement at the expense of another important aspect of the whole. Protecting against heresy involved clarification of terminology or rejection of the use of inappropriate language to express the faith. This tended to result in an ever increasing precision of doctrinal statement.

A third motivation arose from the natural desire of Christian believers to think out the implications and meaning of the full spectrum of biblical teaching. It involved the community in an ongoing study of Scripture and a seeking for effective language to adequately express the understanding of truth. This was often related to some personal or community spiritual crisis. And frequently it involved the role of a “genius.”

Doctrinal development in the Adventist Church shows the same motivations and factors. The changes in Adventism may be seen first of all as arising from efforts within the community to correct a pronounced “heretical” drift toward legalism at both the practical and doctrinal level.⁸ The clearer understandings of justification by faith that developed around 1888 underscored this effort and led to further clarifications in doctrinal expression.

Second, development occurred in response to apologetic concerns about the effectiveness of mission and the clarity of Adventism’s evangelistic witness.

Underscoring these concerns was the third factor, the desire to understand correctly the full teaching of

Scripture with regard to these issues. And the process related to a community in crisis (the church faced the possibility of schism following 1888), and it involved “gifted” Adventist minds.

The details of the unfolding drama behind the profound changes form a fascinating window on history

change had come to him “almost like a personal revelation, like a person speaking to me.” When he first “started out” in the work in the early 1880s, he had thought that “the thing to do was to prove the doctrines. . . . As I had observed and heard.” The preacher’s task was “simply to demonstrate the truthfulness”

CHURCH DOCTRINES, HE NOW BELIEVED, SHOULD BE PRESENTED AS “SIMPLY THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD.”

through which we can see how theological development has occurred and will probably continue to occur in the church.

People precipitating change

The immediate context for the developments in Adventism involved a well-known preacher, an evangelistic campaign, the writing of a Sabbath School lesson quarterly series, a Bible conference, and a landmark publication venture by Ellen White. The events revolved around a visit to Australia in 1895–1896 by one of the church’s leading thinkers. Professor W. W. Prescott at the time was education secretary for the church, and he was on his first visit overseas.

While in Melbourne he engaged in a very effective new style of evangelistic outreach. At the same time he was involved in researching and writing a year-long Sabbath School lesson study series on the Gospel of John.

Professor Prescott’s theological emphasis had changed radically since 1888. Events following Minneapolis had led him into a new religious experience that centered on a “personal relationship with Christ.” As a result, he came to see the whole range of church doctrines from a quite different perspective.

As he explained to delegates at the 1919 Bible Conference years later, the

of church teachings through careful argumentative use of proof texts.

Following his “new vision,” however, he had “cast the whole thing aside and started in the simplest way presenting Christ.”⁹ Church doctrines, he now believed, should be presented as “simply the gospel of Christ rightly understood.” They should “grow out of a belief in Jesus Christ as a living personal Saviour.”¹⁰

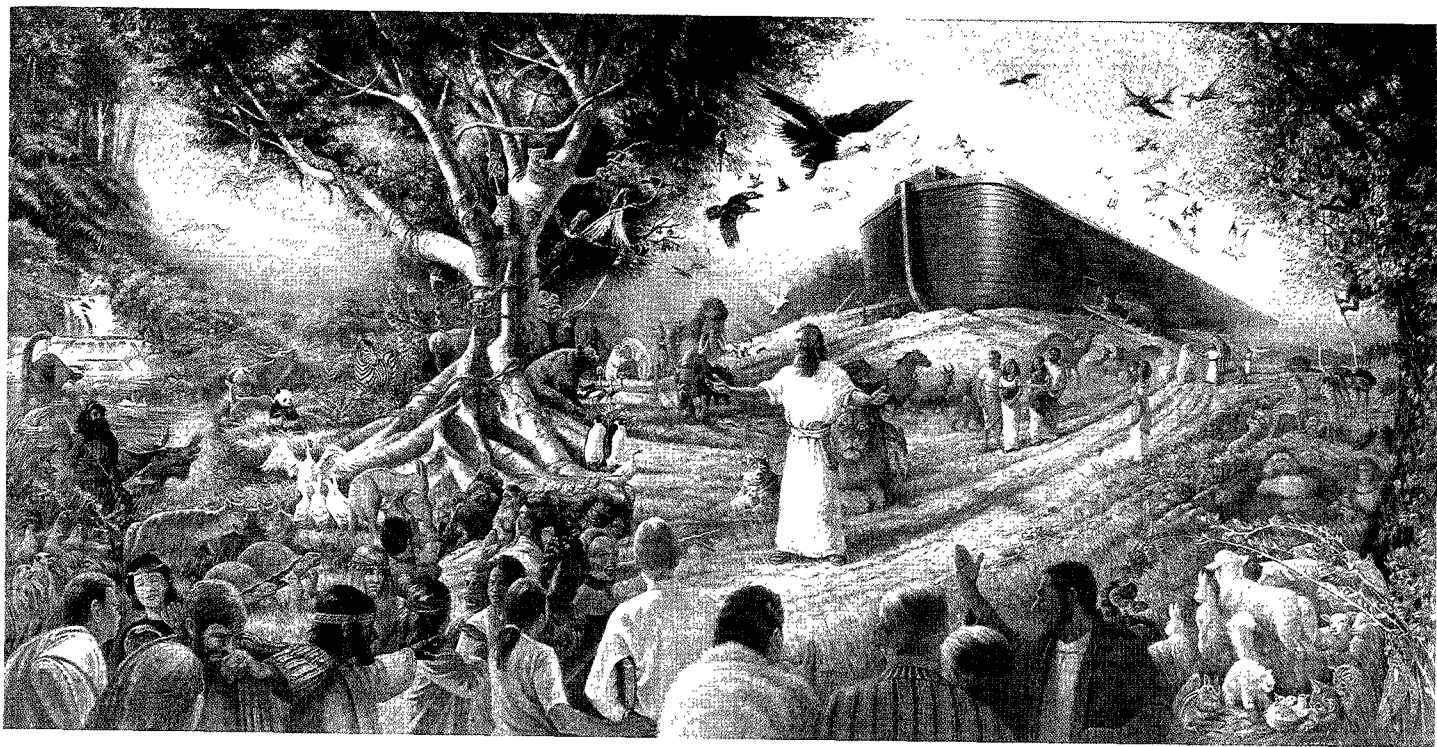
This approach was not merely some sugar coating that Prescott thought was necessary to give Adventist teaching a superficial gospel flavor. Rather, it was a genuine, total reorientation of his belief structure. For him, this gospel-centeredness was a personal spiritual and theological paradigm shift, and it set the pattern for the rest of his ministry.

To lead other Adventist preachers to the same conviction and perspective became his lifelong burden. “That ye might know Him, whom to know is life eternal” (ARV), became his hallmark text of Scripture, remembered long afterwards by generations of his students.¹¹ According to *Voice of Prophecy* broadcaster H. M. S. Richards, who attended some of the professor’s later ministerial institutes, Prescott’s “legacy to Adventist preachers” was that “Christ must be the center of every sermon.”¹²

But Australian Adventism in the

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1890s was still untouched by the message of 1888. Prescott's new message stirred both the hearts and minds of the people.

The evangelistic series— “apologetics” and change

The story of the evangelistic camp meeting in the Melbourne suburb of Armadale in late 1895 illustrates the “apologetic” motivations behind doctrinal development and highlights clearly the kind of impact produced by the new thrust in Prescott's preaching. Pitched in the center of a prominent middle-class suburb, not far from the city center, in full view of a major city railway line, the 65-tent encampment presented a striking novelty for the community.

As the meetings progressed, the regular congregation of two hundred camping church members was augmented during evenings and weekends by an inquisitive public. Evangelist John Corliss and Ellen White shared in the preaching, but it was Prescott who dominated with his charisma. Undoubtedly, the professor's legendary, richly resonant voice attracted the ears of the Aussie “colonials,” but the real attraction that drew in the crowds in ever increasing numbers was the Christ-centered content of his sermons.

Church workers were astonished at the interest, particularly in the light of the widespread prejudice against Adventists in the community. Uriah Smith's *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* had been widely distributed by colporteurs, and its semi-Arian teaching on the pre-existence of Christ had caused many to view Adventists as a heretical, sub-Christian sect that denied the divinity of Christ.¹³

These apologetic concerns led Prescott to respond by preaching sound Christian doctrine. “His theme from first to last and always is Christ,” reported an enthusiastic William C. White.¹⁴ Prescott even managed to turn the traditional Adventist Saturday-Sunday polemic

into a remarkable gospel presentation. Prescott had preached “with a clearness and power that exceeds anything I have ever heard in my life,” W. C. White reported.

The truth had been presented “with a freshness and a brightness” never seen before. White recalled that he had not even once heard Prescott preach “what we are accustomed to call a doctrinal sermon” on “the old lines.” “The old lines of work” of getting up an “interest” by “presenting the prophecies” must “be abandoned,” he asserted. “The whole thing” must receive “a new setting.” He longed to see “every one” of the ministers emulate Prescott in “preaching Christ and him crucified.”¹⁵

Ellen White was also ecstatic over Prescott's sermons and the quality of the people—society's “very best class”—who were drawn by his “exaltation of Jesus.” “Unbelievers turn pale and say, that man is inspired,” she reported to her son Edson.¹⁶ She saw in this Christ-centered evangelism a pattern for the whole church. Clearly Ellen White applauded Prescott's refocusing of the denomination on Jesus in this fresh new way.

“Preaching Jesus as Professor Prescott has done,” added local conference president Arthur G. Daniells, “seems to have completely disarmed the people of prejudice.” He felt that the public image of Adventists had been “completely revolutionized.”¹⁷

But it was more than just the public image of Adventism that had been changed. Adventism itself was changing. The Armadale meetings with their demands for clearer public witness to educated, informed people helped lead to profound shifts in Adventist thinking and understanding on Christology.

A. G. Daniells, president of the World Church, was a convert to the new perspective. It was as if someone had switched the lights on for him. Under Prescott's mentorship he became a new person. His evangelistic preaching took on new power as he used the same paradigm for teach-

ing the doctrines in his next series of meetings conducted after Prescott left.¹⁸

A quiet revolution was underway. It took a long time, however, before many others caught the same vision. Prescott in this, as in some other things, was ahead of his time.

A Bible institute and a Sabbath School lesson series

Some time after the Melbourne meetings, Prescott spent three months at Cooranbong, north of Sydney, working with Mrs. White and the founders of the soon to be established Avondale College. When the start of school was delayed by legal problems, it was decided to have school for the waiting teachers. Ministers were invited as well.

Thus in April 1896, Prescott conducted a Bible institute attended by about 40 ministers and teachers. The Cooranbong Bible Institute is noteworthy not just for the charter it produced for Avondale's educational development, but also because it crystallized profound new developments emerging in Adventist theology.

Prior to his journey to Australia, the professor had been commissioned to write a four-quarter Sabbath School lesson series for 1896–1897 on the Gospel of John. He considered this to be “no small task.” Thus, while en route to Sydney he took time for an intensive study of the Gospel.

After his arrival at Cooranbong, W. C. White, with whom Prescott shared the developing manuscript, was impressed. The lessons were “more appropriate” than former ones, he thought, and he urged the Battle Creek Sabbath School Association to accept them. As might be expected, the fourth Gospel provided the content for much of Prescott's preaching during this time.

One of the questions that grew out of Prescott's study of John was the pre-existence and eternal deity of Christ and the implications of this for the church's generally accepted teaching on the Godhead. Many

Adventists at the time associated the doctrine of the Trinity with creedalism and other undesirable outside influences. But was that necessarily a valid linkage?

Prescott visited a secondhand bookstore shortly after first landing in Sydney in August and bought himself a copy of Augustus Neander's classic, *Lectures on the History of Christian*

Christian sect. And that they should be perceived thus was unfortunate.

The Arian slant on the pre-existence of Christ was not a "test" teaching of Adventism and it no longer seemed adequate. In the light of his study of the fourth Gospel with its strong emphasis on the divinity of Christ things began to look clearer.

Prescott's three months at Cooran-

Spirit in their daily workers' meeting. Daniells had also perused the second-hand bookstores and found Andrew Murray's *The Spirit of Christ*. He found the book helpful in nurturing his own personal devotional life and used it as a guide for the workers' study of Scripture on the topic.

The work and the person of the Holy Spirit were thus also being actively discussed among the ministers during this period.²⁰

THE OLD LINES OF WORK" OF GETTING UP AN
"INTEREST" BY "PRESENTING THE PROPHECIES"
MUST "BE ABANDONED," HE ASSERTED. "THE WHOLE
THING" MUST RECEIVE "A NEW SETTING."

Dogmas. The book, now in Andrews University Library, is extensively underlined by Prescott's editorial blue pencil. The chapters marked are those that deal with Christological controversies of the early centuries. Prescott had been rigorously trained in Greek and Latin in the United States (Dartmouth) and he now became interested at least to see how the church had, in the development of the historic church statements about Christ, grappled with problems of appropriate language in the expression of complex ideas.

In spite of the strong antireedal stance of many in the church, he was at least prepared to consider what the creeds had to say. The professor studied intently the specific issues of Arianism, the deity of Christ and the Trinity.

As noted above, the widespread prejudice against Adventists in the community that had been reported in Melbourne and which arose from the circulation of Uriah Smith's *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* bothered the professor and the ministers who studied with the new converts in their homes. They needed help. Adventism was not a sub-

bong were, in effect, a research and study leave. For the previous six months he had been constantly involved in intense evangelistic work and constant counseling regarding the perplexities of church administration. He was exhausted. His return to Cooranbong was planned as a retreat. His purpose: to write out the materials he had been using in preaching, complete his Sabbath School lesson series on John, spend time with Mrs. White and, at her specific request, assist in the editorial work on her voluminous life of Christ publication project.

As a result of his continued studies in John, Prescott's preaching at the Cooranbong institute specifically emphasized the implications of the "I Am" claims of Jesus, the full eternal sonship of Christ and the need for Adventist teaching to have a clear Christological focus.

Daniells, who spoke at the evening meetings, chose to speak on the theme of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Following the Armadale camp meeting and prior to the Cooranbong institute, the ministers in Melbourne, under Daniells's leadership, had followed up the interest stimulated by Prescott and had been studying the doctrine of the Holy

The publication project

Both doctrinal themes were highly lauded by Mrs. White, who attended the institute meetings along with her secretary, Marian Davis, and her other literary helpers. W. C. White commented shortly afterwards that while the institute "was a big interruption" of Mrs. White's editorial work on the life of Christ, nevertheless it was a "grand success" and "it has been a blessing to all her household and especially her literary helpers."

Mrs. White was thankful at this time for "the best set of workers she has ever had."²¹ As already noted, at the time her team was focused on work on the manuscript that eventually became *The Desire of Ages*. She solicited Prescott's help in critically reading her manuscript from a literary, biblical, and theological perspective. Why? Help was needed in organizing the material. And, it seems clear, it was important that the new emphasis Prescott was giving was properly presented.²²

According to H. Camden Lacey, W. C. White's brother-in-law (who was one of the young Avondale teachers at the time), Marian Davis was having a hard time with the arrangement of material for the first few chapters of *The Desire of Ages*. She found the professor's help invaluable.

Prescott's assistance and emphasis brought about a clearer and more decided presentation of Christ's deity in the book, reported Lacey. "Professor Prescott's interest in the 'Eternity of the Son' and the great 'I Am's' coupled with the constant help he gave Sr.

Davis in her preparation of the *The Desire of Ages* may serve to explain the inclusions of the above-named teachings in that wonderful book.²³

Lacey had been at the Armadale meetings and in the later Melbourne meetings with Daniells. His particular responsibility had been the nurture of new believers at Armadale.²⁴ He reports that his own interest at the time had been in emphasizing "the personality of the Holy Spirit" and that this new emphasis had also been an important part of the doctrinal and theological agitations at the time.²⁵

Lacey, connected to Mrs. White's extended family circle through marriage, was, in a sense, part of the "inner circle" as it were, and is an important witness. Lacey's aged parents had moved to Cooranbong from Tasmania to be with their children and grandchildren, and they bonded with Mrs. White and her family. Lacey's reports, although written out in the 1940s, are consistent with the primary source documentation available from the period. He does not seem to have overstated his case, nor did he see Prescott's help as undercutting Mrs. White's claim to inspiration.²⁶

Conclusion

The impact of the new emphasis in *The Desire of Ages* lingered long in M. L. Andreason's mind. "I remembered how astonished we were," he wrote, "for it contained things that we considered unbelievable: among others the doctrine of the Trinity."²⁷ Andreason was apparently unaware of the extensive background to the doctrinal developments that *The Desire of Ages* reflected. Those developments did not occur in a vacuum but were motivated by a desire to better understand the teachings of Scripture, more adequately confess them, and more effectively communicate them to the world.

As Prescott left Australia in 1897 he probably did not realize how long a shadow his study and preaching would cast. The events of 1896 set a solid foundation for further development. But many decades were to pass before

the church developed a common mind or anything that approached a unanimity of conviction on the eternal deity of Christ and its implications for the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁸ Even as late as the 1940s Prescott was still being viciously attacked for his Trinitarian views.²⁹

If the promise Jesus gave about the work of the Holy Spirit is true, then, as the Spirit of Truth does His work, He will continue to guide the church into deeper and broader understandings of truth (John 15:12). There will, of a certainty then, continue to be doctrinal developments.

There will continue to be new understandings unfolding on the mind of the church. Apologetics will continue to be a powerful motivation. The church will need to continue to make sure it is using the best language and the best thought forms to express and confess the full orb of truth.

Adventists as a community must continue to study the Word in its fullness, seeking to correctly understand, discarding inappropriate understandings, and searching for appropriate and meaningful language to effectively confess to the world the beauty of the truth "as it is in Jesus." As Bernhard Lohse has observed, "A faith which no longer knows how to confess, and which can no longer express this confession doctrinally will lose its vigor and become weak. For every epoch must answer anew the question which the Lord of the Church and of the world puts to it: 'Who do you say that I am?'"³⁰

Adventism has successfully weathered earlier periods of development. Under the Spirit's leading it will surely continue successfully in this pilgrim journey to the kingdom. ■

1 Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2002); Gerald Wheeler, *James White, Innovator and Overcomer* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2004); George Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2004); Merlyn Burt "Demise of Semi-Ananism and Anti-Trinitarianism in Adventist Theology, 1868-1957," unpublished research paper, 1996 AUHR. See also Russell Holt, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventy-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance," unpublished paper, Andrews University, 1969.

2 Whidden, Moon, and Reeve, 189. Moon shows clearly how Ellen

White's understanding in this particular area of doctrine developed. Her statements over the years evidence a clear progression "from the simple to the complex." Later statements became "increasingly precise and explicit" (196, 206, 208).

3 See W. W. Prescott, *Adventism's Forgotten Giant and Shaper of the Second Generation* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., forthcoming).

4 M. L. Andreason, "Unpublished Chapel Talk," at Loma Linda University, November 30, 1948; "Testimony of M. L. Andreason," October, 1953. The frequently quoted statement from *The Desire of Ages* is a loose paraphrase of a sentence from John Cuming, *Sabbath Evening Readings on the New Testament: St. John* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Company, 1857), 6.

5 Leroy Froom (LEF) to H. Camden Lacey (HCL), August 8, 1945.

6 LEF to HCL, September 26, 1945.

7 Maurice F. Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

8 George Knight shows how this strand in Adventism was laid down by Joseph Bates in *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Washington D.C.; Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2004), 83-88.

9 "1919 Bible Conference Transcript," July 13, 1919.

10 *GC Bulletin*, February 23, 1893, 350.

11 Author's interview with former Union College student George S. Hutches, February 11, 1981.

12 H. M. S. Richards to G. M. Valentine, May 21, 1981.

13 W. C. White to O. A. Olsen, October 24, 1895.

14 W. C. White to Brethren, November 21, 1895.

15 W. C. White to S. McCulloch, November 5, 1895; W. C. White to A. J. Breed, November 22, 1895.

16 E. G. White to S. N. Haskell, November 6, 1895.

17 A. G. Daniells to O. A. Olsen, November 22, 1895. Daniells acknowledged that his own spiritual experience had in fact been turned around under the impact of Prescott's preaching and spiritual mentoring. They became lifelong friends.

18 A. G. Daniells to W. W. Prescott, March 3, 1896.

19 "The Cooranbong Institute," *RH*, June 16, 1896, 378.

20 A. G. Daniells to W. W. Prescott, March 3, 1896; H. Camden Lacey to A. W. Spalding, June 2, 1947.

21 W. C. White to O. A. Olsen, May 1, 1896.

22 This was Ellen White's pattern. She had earlier asked A. T. Jones to read manuscript for her from a biblical and theological perspective to help ensure that the expression of ideas was correct. W. C. White to C. H. Jones, May 18, 1887.

23 H. Camden Lacey to L. E. Froom, August 30, 1947. See also W. W. Prescott to O. A. Olsen, February 10, 1896; E. G. White "Diary" February 1896 and April 1896. *The Life of Christ* manuscript was actually reworked and not published for another two years.

24 A. G. Daniells to W. W. Prescott, March 3, 1896; H. Camden Lacey to A. W. Spalding, June 2, 1945.

25 Interestingly, when Daniells reports to Prescott about the helpfulness of Andrew Murray's book in his Armadale workers meetings, he still refers to the Holy Spirit by the impersonal pronoun: "we studied about the Holy Spirit and prayed for its indwelling presence, we felt assured that it came to us and truly blessed us." A. G. Daniells to W. W. Prescott, March 3, 1896. The usage may simply indicate that Daniells was unconsciously locked into his usual language or that the issue of the personality of the Spirit came up in the later meetings at Cooranbong rather than in Melbourne. This latter suggestion is implied in Lacey's correspondence with Froom. L. E. Froom to H. Camden Lacey, August 8, 1945.

26 Lacey's report to Froom was called out by a request from Froom specifically enquiring if there was any background of "agitation or discussion" of any sort that was occurring in Australia at the time the much clearer statements on the eternal deity of Christ appeared in *The Desire of Ages*. L. E. Froom to H. Camden Lacey, August 8, 1947. In Lacey's response to an earlier enquiry from Arthur Spalding on the same issue, Lacey cited some of the changes Adventists had adopted in the lyrics of some of the "outstanding hymns of the Christian Church" to avoid overt references to the Trinity and the personality of the Holy Spirit (as well as some references to righteousness by faith). He was glad that the 1941 hymnal had reverted to the original wordings. The changes to the wording had bothered his Anglican church musician mother when she first became an Adventist.

27 Unpublished chapel talk, November 30, 1948; E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 530.

28 Although *Review* editor F. M. Wilcox was able to say in a doctrinal summary in the *Review* in 1913 that Adventists believed "in the divine Trinity," his language sidestepped the issue of the eternal self-existent deity of Christ and was still sufficiently vague as to be able to include both the traditional semi-Anians and the Trinitarians. Jesus was simply "the son of the Eternal Father." But the Holy Spirit was the third "person" of the Godhead. "The Message for Today" *RH* October 9, 1913, 21.

29 See Judson Washburn, "The Trinity," 1939.

30 Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985), 22.

Two-way evangelism:

Needed, humility and humanity

Samir Selmanovic



Samir Selmanovic, Ph.D., is a teaching pastor at the CrossWalk Seventh-day Adventist Church in Highland, California.

Wisdom is so kind and wise that wherever you may look you can learn something about God. Why would not the omnipresent teach that way?"¹

I did it! I invited my new friend to come to an evangelistic meeting. Mark was a thoughtful and generous man. I admired him and wanted him to begin his journey of faith and to come to love God as I do.

Every night, the evangelist conducted a question and answer session. He glided smoothly through the cards, each one with a question about God, the Bible, or faith. These were questions people had submitted the previous day. The evangelist's confidence was impressive. He tackled the most difficult questions with the conviction of a person who has mastered his subject. The highlight of the evening was the sermon that followed, presented with air-tight arguments.

As we walked out of the auditorium I felt triumphant. But Mark was strangely quiet. Restless to hear about his experience, I broke the silence, "So, what did you think?"

Mark slowed down his walk, glanced into my eyes and said, "He seems to have God in his pocket. He has an answer to every question. He has no doubts, no confusion, and no awe. I do want to believe in God, but his god is too small. Something is missing. I felt no wind in his soul."

God who cannot be mastered

In Isaiah 55, the prophet addresses God's people who have all the information about God. But, unknowingly their souls are hungry and thirsty for a deeper faith. So, God rattles their self-confidence declaring, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and neither are your ways my ways. . . . As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9, NIV). In other words, "Don't assume you can master Me!"

God is a mystery. Job asks, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?" (Job 11:7). In this world God is not as obvious as we often claim He is. Instead, what we do know has a way of creating more roads for our thoughts to travel on in discovery of still more baffling questions.

Bono of U2, in his introduction to the book *Selections From the Book of Psalms*, puts it this way: "How do you explain a love and logic at the heart of the universe when the world is out of whack?"² The predicament of being a creature is that we simply don't have all the answers.

We live in the kingdom of God, and that kingdom was especially ushered in with the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But although real and powerful, the presence of the kingdom of God and the actions of God's spirit are hidden, small like a mustard seed (Matt. 13:31) and invisible like a wind (John 3:8).

Dancing with God

All told, however, there are distinct advantages to being a human being before a mysterious God.

First, because God is a mystery, we have deeper lives. There is more depth to phenomena such as friendship, art, motherhood, or plant life than any textbook can contain. These subjects are mysteries; they cannot be mastered, yet they are as real as the type we are reading.

So it is with God. He takes more than our reason captive. He rouses our imagination, our feelings, our intuition—human faculties that can reach deeper or take one in important directions, inaccessible to mere logic.

Look at how Isaiah describes the way the Word of God affects our world. "[When the Word comes to you] . . . you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all

the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12, NIV). The Word makes reality move to its music.

That's what happened when the daughters of Israel danced in celebration with Miriam (Exod. 15:20), and when David "danced before the LORD with all his might" (2 Sam. 6:14), God was pleased.

That's why in a beloved story about salvation there was a whole village dancing in the celebration of the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15:25). That's why Jesus certainly danced in response to the repeated invitation of God to praise Him with dancing (Ps. 149:3; 150:4). Dance involves the whole of a person.

Church father St. Augustine wrote a poem about the relationship of dance and Christian life. It was titled "In Praise of Dancing": "I praise the dance, for it frees people / from the heaviness of matter / and binds the isolated to community. / I praise the dance, which demands everything: / health and a clear spirit and a buoyant soul. / Dance is a transformation of space, of time, of people, / who are in constant danger of becoming all brain, / will, or feeling. / Dancing demands a whole person, one who is / firmly anchored in the center of his life, who is / not obsessed by lust for people and things / and the demon of isolation in his own ego. / Dancing demands a freed person, one who vibrates / with the equipoise of all his powers. / I praise the dance. / O man, learn to dance, or else the angels in heaven / will not know what to do with you."³

We are to be people of wonder. As believers in God, we are not only dispensers of answers—a body of doctrine that we can demarcate and control, but we are also dispensers of mysteries. We point not only to the answers, but also to the unanswered questions of our faith. As thirst makes us struggle for water and appreciate the rain, these mysteries lead us to experience God in deeper ways.

Those who cannot surrender to music cannot dance. That's why faith is very much like dance. The Word of

God wants to have its own way with us and we cannot experience it without surrender. Without surrender, our desire to control leads to insecurity and awkwardness. This is a picture of a Christian who believes certain information about God but does not see, hear, and touch the beauty of the gospel. For those who let go, there are such things as the Salsa of Grace and the Waltz of the Kingdom.

God who cannot be manipulated

The second advantage of being a human before our mysterious God is that God cannot be manipulated. Sufi poet Rabia (Sufism is a pacifist movement within Islam) wrote a poem titled "Troublemakers": "Since no one really knows anything about God, those who think they do are just troublemakers."⁴

We are not exempt from this. Christians of the past and present who have "mastered God," have done more than their fair share of troublemaking in this world. The personal lives of contemporary people and the records of history are littered with suffering and injustice inflicted by human beings who have made God too small—small enough to be packaged and boxed into a government, into an ideology, into a leader, into a religious organization, or into a denomination.

But if God is a mystery, no person and no organization can assume the authority of God over anybody. Nobody can shrink the kingdom of God into their own little kingdom. Nobody has God in a pocket, let alone their pocket.

Because God has a tendency to surprise us at every corner and spill beyond our definitions, we as believers in this God are not called to be master teachers of God, but master learners.

At the end of that evening with Mark, I thanked God for Mark's ministry to me. I realized that in the matter of knowing God, it is not triumphalism but humility that takes the day.

Christian theologian Thomas C. Oden writes: "[Our] egocentric temptations are always seeking to inflate the fantasy that one's own time-bound, parochial way of reasoning toward or from God is the only way. The healthier the study of God, the more candid it remains about its own finitude, the stubborn limits of its own knowing, its own charades, Band-Aids, closets, masks, and broken windows."⁵

Learning before teaching

What does the mystery of God have to do with evangelism? Everything! When Christianity was about to break out beyond the confines of Judaism, God visited Peter, a leading apostle, and Cornelius, an outsider to established religion. Instead of receiving clear verbal teaching from God, Peter received a bizarre and disturbing vision that surprised, stirred, and mystified him deeply.

He saw a pack of strange animals. He insisted that these animals should symbolize for Peter people different from him; the chosen people God had just included along with the Jews.

With this dream, Peter's established categories were disrupted. He was forced to rethink the ways the good news was in fact being received and by whom. He was accustomed to talking to Jews and arguing them into becoming Christians.

But now, instead of Peter being an *evangelizer*, and Cornelius being an *evangelee*, God guides them to become spiritual friends.⁶ They are about to discover more about God *together*.

As he enters the house of "impure people," it is Peter who is stretched first (Acts 10). He is forced to show respect to the people of a "wrong religion." Peter had never done this before and he finds himself off-balance (verses 28, 29). These circumstances oblige Peter to ask, "Why am I here? Why did you send for me?" He is out of his comfort zone and just by being there he violates his previous religious commitments.

In effect, Peter is saying to Cor-

nelius, "I am learning here along with you." To comfort and encourage Peter, Cornelius utters the first teaching about God, "We are here in the presence of God" (verse 33, NIV). It is clear that Peter changes and grows first.

Instead of presenting ourselves as dispensers of answers, we are invited to become spiritual friends and discover the treasure of God in and among other persons. Others don't begin their spiritual journey with us. They are already on the journey and our first task is to listen to their story and discover fresh truths and beauties about God. There are footprints of God in their lives. In any encounter where God is discussed, Christians should be the most ready and eager to learn.

By genuinely receiving more of God from others, we model for them an attitude of openness. We become safe spiritual friends.

That's why Peter proceeds not by preaching, but by conversing, talking *with* Cornelius, not *to* or *at* him (verses 34, 35). Instead of showing them how much they have to learn from him, Peter tells the household of Cornelius about how he stands corrected by God and what he is learning through this experience saying, "I now realize . . ." (verse 34, NIV).

And when Peter does begin to teach, he emphasizes not the ignorance of Cornelius but what Cornelius already knows about God. He starts his sentences with, "You know . . ." (verses 36-38, NIV).

Hearing the music vs. winning the argument

We're accustomed to evangelism as an argument. If two people have different views, we tend to assume that one must be right and the other wrong. We begin with the premise that the conversation about God is a showdown to establish who is right and who is wrong.

But if God is also a mystery, then humility is in order. We can't invite a person to make a step toward our point of view if we have painted them into a corner.

Argument is always about winning and losing. Dancing is not. That's why Isaiah describes the Word of Life as a music that comes to us from the heart of God and Zephaniah describes God as rejoicing over us with singing (Zeph. 3:17, NIV).

Imagine. God singing! Spiritual friendship is when both sides work together to hear these songs of God and make their lives move to the melody and rhythm of the revelation of God.

For the postmodern person, spirituality is evangelism.⁷ Our goal is not to win arguments. Our goal is for everyone to know God better.

In the Bible, the Word of Life comes from some of the most unexpected places and people. The Sovereign God does the same thing today, and we must be willing to receive the Word wherever it is encountered. However difficult it may be to accept, in our meetings with other people there must be a real chance that we will change as a result. If matters of life and truth are discussed and we do not allow for the possibility of our transformation if we are only willing to take the role of a teacher, and not of a learner, then we are simply not fit to teach about God.

The power of humility

Our concept of evangelism has been changing over time. In the pre-modern world (medieval) the market of ideas was like a long table with a Christian ruler sitting at the head of the table. Evangelism was conceived of as *increasing the domination of Christianity*, as in a conquest. The establishment of a new Christian kingdom was the goal. Our brothers and sisters of the time often thought, "The more power we accrue, the better off God's mission in this world will be."

The era that followed, called modernity, was ushered in by the Enlightenment, when the believers in empirical science liberated the world from the oppression of such religion and established reason as the ruler at the head of the table of ideas. Under

this regime Christianity has been slowly banished to sit in a separate dunce chair and evangelism came to be conceived as a battle of arguments.

We came to think that "the more right we prove we are, the better off God's mission in this world will be."

Now we live in postmodernity, a time when trusting reason alone has been found inadequate at best and dangerous at worst. The unexpected happened: The table of ideas itself *changed shape*. It became round! So now there is no longer a head of the table at which some dominating personage may sit.

Christianity, like everyone else, is allowed back to the table as one of many ideas in the market.

This development is a fresh opportunity for us. However, assertions of power or barrages of arguments do not work for people who have increasingly more complex expectations of how a vibrant faith should be validated. The main question the world has for us is, "Can Christianity produce good people?"

Since humility and a willingness to learn are a large part of what it means to be good, we cannot just talk. We have to hear others first. And however strange this might sound to us, we must learn about *our* God from them. We must allow others to impact us and demonstrate the same humility we expect from them.

Pursued rightly, this kind of attitude does not relativize what we believe. In fact, it radicalizes what we believe because it establishes God as Sovereign who "shines in all that's fair."⁸ Humility and strong conviction are not mutually exclusive. Humility is not a sign of weakness but of strength, and the Bible's call to humility is a call to faithfulness. In fact, genuine regard for what others can add to our faith does not compromise our Christian commitment, but rather *expresses* it.⁹

Humility is not just another method of outreach. It is a command from God and one of the core teachings of Christianity. John, in his

Gospel, comes to a pinnacle of revealing of the glory of God. He introduces the occasion by this statement, "Having loved his own he [Jesus] now showed them the full extent of his love" (John 13:1, NIV).

What follows is a description of the God of the universe, kneeling down before His creatures and washing their feet. This cosmic servanthood of God is what distinguishes the Christian God from every other. In one way or another, all other deities on this world are described as merely powerful. That's how they get things done. But our God uses humility to get things done. He relies on the weakness and foolishness of love (1 Cor. 1; 2).

Because of the gospel, death becomes life, the last become the first, giving makes one rich and humility becomes the most powerful force in the universe. Through the humility that is at the heart of the Incarnation, God evangelized us (Phil. 2:4-11). That's why humility holds such promise for the future of Christianity. It does not exclude evangelism but improves its prospects..

Remnant that refuses the compliment

The Bible talks about the remnant that would throughout history be keepers of the truth. One of the first times the concept is mentioned in the Bible is when God speaks to Moses.

Disappointed with the Israelites, God declares His intention to destroy them and make a new nation (a remnant) from faithful Moses (Exod. 32:10). Surprisingly, Moses does not find this apparent favoritism of God toward him to be good news. In fact, Moses declines the invitation and offers his own life to be blotted out of the *Book of Life* so that the Israelites could somehow stay in favor of God. Moses, much like Jesus himself, interceded for others at the expense of his life. And God loved Moses for this.

Remnant people are those who like Moses look for the best in others, finding reasons why others *should* be saved.

Remnant people are to be defiant includers, champions of lifting others up, even at the risk of losing their own standing with God. Perhaps people who claim to be the remnant over everyone else automatically get disqualified. One of our scholars from Europe¹⁰ once told me, "Our complex of superiority keeps us on the bottom."

Humility sounds timid, but let's not be fooled. Humility is the expression of ultimate courage, and pursuing personal and corporate humility is a means of aggressive evangelism. In the economy of the kingdom of God, the sheer display of power is simply too weak and ineffective. The Bible talks about the Word of God as a double-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). It cuts both ways. Applying it to our own hearts is the way to successful evangelism. These inner shifts of attitude appear to be small, but are in fact tectonic. They speak louder and longer than programs, events, and campaigns ever can.

We have been given some insight into the mystery of the gospel that even angels long to look into (Eph. 3:4; Col. 1:27; 1 Peter 1:12). We are thankful to God for all the revelation we have. Because of the answers we do have, we trust God from within the mysteries we live with. The time has come, however, to become thankful for the mysteries of God as well as to humbly let others enhance our knowledge. Air-tight arguments give us a sense of being in control, but they keep us isolated and stagnant. Letting the wind back into our souls deepens us. ■

1 St. Catherine of Siena, "Wherever You May Look," in *Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West* (Daniel Ladinsky, trans.) (New York: Penguin Compass, 2002), 191.

2 *Selections from the Book of Psalms: Authorized New King James Version* (Grove Publishing, 1999) VII.

3 St. Augustine, *Daily Dig* (newsletter from <www.bruderhof.com>), June 24, 2003.

4 Ladinsky, 27.

5 Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology, Volume One* (New York: Prince Press, 1998), 406.

6 For ideas about spiritual friendships and the problem of evangelism as an argument I am indebted to Brian McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002).

7 Statement by Jon Dybdahl at the main presentation on *Dancing With God*, RE-CHURCH conference 2003, Lake Arrowhead, CA (<www.re-church.org>).

8 Verse from the Christian hymn *This Is Our Father's World*, for discussion of common grace see Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001).

9 Brian McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 264.

10 Vilorad Kojic, Cornell University, New York, 2002, Personal Communication.

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No, you can't pray for me

Sandy Wyman-Johnson



Sandy Wyman-Johnson is director of pastoral care at San Joaquin Community Hospital, Bakersfield, California.

Dorothy walked into the hospital lobby, signed in on the Volunteer Pastoral logbook, and made her way to the chapel. There, she prayed, asking God's Spirit to open her heart and lead her through the next four hours to patients who were in need of comfort and hope.

Dorothy was excited to be a part of the Volunteer Pastoral Caregiver Team at San Joaquin Community Hospital in Bakersfield, California. She had taken the two-day volunteer chaplaincy training just one month before in response to a profound sense of personal calling to represent God's presence to patients and families who were in crisis. She was very involved in her own local Christian church, helping every Sunday in various ministries. And yet there was something about ministering to the sick and discouraged in the hospital that she said "feels even closer to the ministry that Christ did while on earth."

After her prayer, Dorothy made her way to one of her favorite nursing units—favorite because she had made friends with many of the nurses there. Those nurses knew they could trust Dorothy to be effective in her compassionate care of their patients.

She made her way into the room of a 64-year-old woman. As she entered the room, she breathed a prayer, committing herself to God's purpose and leading in the human connection that would follow. Her recent

training had taught her about the ministry of presence: to be present to the pain of another without needing to fix it or to flee from it; to listen without judgment; to not impose her own spiritual path on another; to meet the other person where they are.

She learned that to *be* the presence of God is far better than just talking about it; that the definition of compassion is "your pain in my heart." She had learned new communication skills, including being comfortable with silence. She had learned about the nature of grief and crisis and how to be most effective; she had learned that people actually need the spiritual struggle so that in the presence of compassion, they can safely explore their own fears and life meanings, and come to experience God's comfort and hope.

And so with this garment of grace ready to be donned, Dorothy entered the room. A pleasant exchange ensued. In the course of conversation, Dorothy learned that this patient's spiritual tradition was very important to her. The woman described herself as a Seventh-day Adventist, which she believed to be God's true church. Dorothy listened and validated the woman's courage and faith. As the visit drew to a close, Dorothy offered the opportunity for prayer. She said to the woman, "Would a prayer be helpful to you?"

Prayer and earrings

Although her training had prepared her for the possibility that the patient would decline prayer, she was very surprised at the patient's response to her question. "No, you can't pray for me." Dorothy kindly responded, "That's all right, I wish you God's peace and I will remember you in my own prayers."

The patient emphatically responded, "No, you can't pray for me . . . because you're wearing earrings."

Dorothy, still stunned by the experience, shared the incident with me. I confess that I felt a little heartsick that someone from my own denomination would respond with such a closed heart to a sincere kindness from another Christian.

This experience brought to the surface a concern I've had for some time. I'm concerned that my denomination may be more fervent about being right than it is about being relational. For example, how many friends from other communities of faith does each of us have? Friends, that is, with whom

we actually associate, talk deeply with, and whom we allow to help us in our times of need?

I know that many of us Adventists came up through our own culture of churches and schools, so our circles of associations have been quite polarized. But if we are really honest, the paradigm we grew up with seemed to suggest that we associate with non-Adventists primarily to “straighten them out” and “bring them into the fold.”

Us and them?

And so, in the case of many of us, we create an “us and them” mentality. If we go to them, it is with an agenda, an assignment. It's a lot easier to pass out a flyer inviting people to an evangelistic meeting, or to debate the right day of worship, than it is to roll up our sleeves and enter into the hurting lives of real people.

After all, we too are pained and puzzled by the deep questions of life, of suffering, and of spirituality that just can't be completely answered. And we don't know how to be with that which we can't explain.

While I *deeply* value and embrace my Adventist heritage and beliefs, propositional “truth” in itself does not make me Christlike. Nor is truth my savior. Cherished truth does not give me a corner on God's favor or grace. I believe that God raised up the Adventist Church with a powerful message for these pressing times, but I wonder if we've created a theology that says we are saved by our *right understanding* of these truths.

Can we admit that we don't have an answer for everything, that we can't explain God—and are not called to? That He does not need our defense or our protection? Do we understand that He lives to love and impart grace through His Spirit so that we can become His grace to oth-

ers? Can we attest that we have experienced His grace and that we *know* in whom we have believed?

Dorothy knows these things. And although Adventist beliefs are precious to discover, Dorothy does not need to understand everything as we do in order for God to hear her prayers or work through her to advance His kingdom or comfort sinners—even Adventist sinners.

When we quote the text, “If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,” the “word” referred to here is not the 27 fundamental beliefs of Adventism. The Word is Jesus Christ, that is, God Himself (John 1:1, 14).

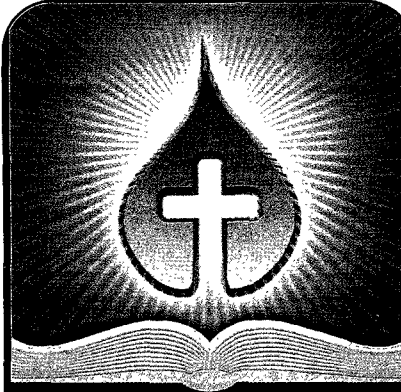
Doctrine and relationship

I truly believe that when we stand before our Savior on that final, nearing day, our invitation to enter into His eternal kingdom will have more to do with how we have treated others, and less about our right understanding of time prophecy and doctrine (see Matt. 25:31-46).

For my part, I can honestly say that as a nurse for 25 years, and now having been a chaplain for six years, I have been deeply blessed and inspired by allowing the patients of many faiths to be my teachers and to touch my life. Allowing myself to have an open heart to receive from them actually strengthens my own walk of faith and creates a much more profound mutual connection. And I think I'm a better Adventist—a better person—because of this inter-faith connection.

Let us not be ashamed of what we believe, but let us share it as His Spirit leads us. Let us not be arrogant or think for one moment that we are the only ones God is using to build up His kingdom.

So who is the Dorothy God wants to use in your life? ■



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—Alexander Biscette

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What new believers need

Often we neglect the sobering work of discipling in favor of going back to the much more exciting process of gathering new converts. The dazzle of public preaching, coupled with the joy of witnessing thousands baptized, makes disciple-building seem mundane and, thus, easy to neglect.

However, we neglect follow-up at our own peril and at risk to the kingdom we hope to advance. Jesus' great commission intends that new born believers will be ongoingly preserved, nurtured, and built into His body as strong disciples. All of this is evangelism—the whole process. As Peter Wagner so eloquently reminded his church growth classes, "any scheme which separates evangelism and follow-up into distinct functions has already built into the system its own defeat."

So what do new members need? In a word, "everything." Just as a newborn totally depends upon its parents for survival, so newly-born believers are totally dependent upon the church's parental role in everything necessary for their survival.

Jesus intentionally chose familiar imagery of love, family, conception, gestation, birth, development, and maturity to describe the process (evangelism must always be understood as process, not event) by which individuals are brought to belief and matured into discipleship. If we wonder what new believers need, we can simply apply what newborns need to the spiritual development of new believers.

Total care. Loving nurture, tender care, acceptance, affirmation, companionship, conversation, admiration, high-touch bonding, appreciation, security, simple food, cleaning, copious companionship, and consistent attention are vital for the survival of either babies or believers.

JAMES A. CRESS



Discipline. Long before reasoning allows an infant to comprehend dangerous situations, a firmly-worded "No!" command is essential to protect the baby from placing their hand in a fire. Such protection is essential to learning the authority of both God's word and the responsible parent. Discipline is not harshly punitive, but protective. Abandoning a baby to its own conclusions would be destructive abuse.

Instruction. The milk of the Word is repetitive assurance of God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness; freighted not so much with information as with reassurance; taught by mentoring example, not by reasoned logic. Infants learn to walk, not by a discourse on the dynamics of locomotion, but by a patterning of "walking with them" until, eventually, they take their first steps.

Education. Next believer must be taught to think for themselves. Education is not assimilating information only. Education is learning to reason for one's self rather than merely reflecting the thoughts of others. Why questions are essential in the educational steps.

Discernment. Youngsters must learn to distinguish between the genuine and clever counterfeits. When my brother, John was a toddler, he drank a glass of gasoline thinking it was ginger ale. Deadly consequences were averted only by immediate intervention. Believers must be taught to test the

"winds of doctrine" that are swept their way by all manner of well-meaning and ill-intentioned individuals.

Deployment. Every believer must receive a ministry assignment. Otherwise, they cannot mature and will remain perpetually immature dependent. The work of the pastor is to "work" the members."

Partnership. Those being deployed must also be partnered with experienced leaders who teach by associative example what they have experienced themselves. From the very beginning, Jesus designed a partnership role for the most effective pursuit of any good venture. It is dangerous to work alone.

Supervision. The deployed must also be closely supervised to assure their success and to correct mistakes from becoming habits. When Jesus sent his disciples two-by-two, he also brought them back together after a short time to evaluate their performance, rejoice in their successes, and instruct them for even greater achievements.

Accountability. Maturing disciples must embrace accountability both to leadership and to their fellow members. Independence in belief or action indicates immaturity. Unwillingness to accept the counsel of the wider body disqualifies anyone.

Responsibility. As disciples mature, they will value the things that their Saviour values. His priorities will be their priorities. His mission will become their mission. They will earnestly pray and diligently work to build up His church and to hasten His coming.

Reduplication. Only when the disciple is reproducing other new believers and assisting them into become disciples do you have maturity. Only then is the church's evangelistic process complete as these disciples, themselves, are effectively engaged in birthing new believers. ■

Tale of a twenty-first-century pastor

William Colburn



William Colburn is pastor of the Ventura Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ventura, California.

My work day had begun at 7:00 a.m., and now it was after 10:00 p.m. I was sitting in my car chatting with a church member—in his driveway—some 20 miles from my own. This evening, we had both participated in our small group's outreach project. I am thankful the event included dinner, because lunch had been a logistical impossibility.

A few months earlier both of us had traveled to Southeast Asia to build latrines at a mission school. There we negotiated mosquitoes, language challenges, food that carried the constant possibility of illness for our foreign digestive systems, and cultural practices different from our way of life. Despite all that, I thanked God for the opportunity to work side by side with this man of God. I delighted in his practice of Christian graciousness—to everyone we met whatever their demeanor, whatever the circumstances. This man, a building contractor, had unselfishly contributed his time, energy, and expertise in his ministry for Christ.

Our late evening discussion in his driveway had surrounded his recent life-altering accident. It had cost him a large percentage of his sight. It was one of those profoundly puzzling "God, why?" experiences. My friend had been suddenly and traumatically confronted with a life-altering handicap that effectively retired him from his career.

At first he had struggled with all the usual questions. But his faith in God admirably reoriented him. He was confident that God would teach him through this tragedy how to use his loss to the glory of his Lord. My heart simultaneously agonized and cheered for him.

As we were ending our conversation, he surprised me with a question. He asked how I was doing.

I don't like talking about myself. My work isn't supposed to be about me. My response was typically evasive and minimalist.

Me? "Thanks for asking. I'm OK. It has been a hectic week, but God is good."

He cut to the chase. "It must be very tough at times—being a pastor. Our church has faced so many tragedies recently and you have been there through all of them. How do you handle all that and still have something to offer the next person?"

Through my mind there flashed the things that had demanded my attention during just the previous four days. It was only Wednesday evening, and I knew I had already put in a 50-hour week.

I responded to his question saying, "God called me to this work and for the most part I really enjoy it. I'm still learning how to unceasingly pray and trust God for the wisdom and strength I need each moment. Ultimately, He is the Shepherd and I'm just His under-shepherd."

As my friend left the car he turned and said, "I'll pray that the rest of your week will be peaceful."

What it means to be a pastor

But that night as I drove back to my home, tired and anxious to see my family—doubtless, fast asleep—I thought more about what it meant to be a pastor.

There were the usual role responsibilities. Each week I was expected to preach a sermon that the congregation anticipated would be words directly gifted to me from God's throne. I take sermon preparation very seriously. I ask God each week to give me the wisdom needed to expose the biblical text in a way that feeds the most inquiring mind, while being simple enough for the youngest in the Lord to comprehend. I pray for a practical illustration that will serve as an anchor for the ship of truth in the consciousness of my congregation. I ask for divine cleverness in reaching the saints of each generation under my care.

Each week I'm humbled by the realization that I have no idea how to accomplish this God-given task. Yet, I'm never disappointed by my encounters with God as I struggle to make His Word clear and life-altering.

There is much more to ministry—counseling, administration, instruction, continuing education, fundraising, meetings, and the list goes on. The formerly mundane aspects of the pastorate have today evolved into intensely challenging stressors demanding decisive but wise judgment and well-processed action. Mature pastors seek to surround themselves with a team of spiritually gifted and experienced members who can complement them in areas we now openly confess as our weaknesses.

In many parts of the world, the twenty-first-century church's complexity has all but eliminated the any-person-will-do helpers of the past; not that people stand in line these days. We all but interrogate anyone volunteering for certain roles, feeling that we must confront them with sometimes invasive questions and life scans before allowing them to be alone with our children.

An understandable social neuroticism has riveted our consciousness to the rules of ethics when it comes to relationships—male/female, adult/child, and even male/male. The ever-present possibility of litigation increasingly convinces us to welcome the fiats of risk management personnel even though they unhesitatingly excise spontaneous *fun* from once popular church activities.

In many countries, building codes disqualify weekend volunteer warriors from quick, convenient church remodelings. Along with this, there are stricter tax laws requiring the oversight of informed financial officers.



Everything about church demands pastoral expertise in budgeting and demanding accountability for every penny—not to mention making sure each donor receives an accurate year-end report for tax purposes.

Fearful of being fired

It is not an exaggeration to say that American culture—which seems to permeate so many world cultures at some level—has turned the leadership role of pastors on its head. The ubiquitous absence of respect even for the *office* of pastor is implicit if not explicit. Everyone, whether qualified for the role or not, seems to want equal input in declaring the theology of the church. A pastor can no longer march ahead tacitly expecting the flock to follow. Pastors cannot take for granted that they will be seen as expert guides in negotiating spiritual life.

We ministers cannot hedge our decisions, confident that God's grace will overlook our disobedience to what we honestly believe we should say or do. Nor can we blithely meander through the fickle mine field of constituent whims to the extent that we used to. The truth is that these days we are more fearful of being fired (sacked) at the starting gate by humans than being judged by God at the pearly gates!

In addition to these realities, we often sense little by way of a corporate safety net; often there's really no one to turn to or to confide in or, in some cases, even to safely consult with. It's difficult to find anyone safe with whom we may have an honest discussion about difficulties, doubts, or temptations.

Thus, the tenure of the *successful* pastor is often measured by that pastor's adeptness in the art of avoiding anything that seems to alienate certain people or exacerbate a given "situation."

When I reflect on my 60- to 70-hour work week—never expecting time-and-a-half for overtime; conceding to the prohibitions against moonlighting for extra cash overlooking the

annoyance of glass house scrutiny by that practiced, self-appointed posse for ecclesiastical (and, of course, theological) purity, and the exasperating question that perpetually seems all too close to the surface: *And what, besides preaching once a week, does a pastor really have to do, anyway?* then I understand the catharsis I feel in penning this piece.

Pastoral emotions float yo-yolike somewhere between joy and grief; delight and horror; courage and fear. During any one day as a pastor I might officiate at a wedding and then sit with a grieving family at a hospital; enjoy a young disciple's "Aha!" as she grasps a new biblical truth and then rebuke the waywardness of some other hell-bent youth; anoint an ill member and then baptize a new believer; be angrily confronted by a seemingly neglected parishioner and also praised for being such a caring and organized pastor; be rung by a distraught parent or nearly hung by a mentally disturbed transient; back away from the flirtations of a lonely woman and yet embrace a frightened cancer-stricken woman; again disappoint my family to minister to a member and later rejoice at the confession of a child's blossoming faith; be asked to have the graduation address and later to deliver a funeral homily. Of course we are expected to remain emotionally healthy and spiritually unfrazzled through all this.

Daunting price

Naturally, the twenty-first-century pastor is perpetually tethered to a periodically useful cell phone that's equipped with email and text messaging and an early model PDA synchronized daily with his aging laptop. The "miracle" of our age is that in one afternoon we may actually maneuver through what pastors a century ago took a month to accomplish.

All this comes at a daunting price. Instant access to the caring pastor means receiving calls that include asking or demanding, suggesting or pontificating, accusing or even

threatening—and all wanting an equally immediate sincere reply from wherever one happens to be when the call comes in—a meeting, driving, in the restroom, sleeping. The cost is often assessed in the currency of spiritual sanity.

My humanity is often tested—necessarily so, I confess. I am a sinner in need of grace—lots of grace. My character—though often expected to be pristine—is in reality a work in progress like everyone else's. I had a past before I let Christ into my life. I still have issues that need to be resolved. I have ups and I have downs. I don't always know what God is doing or wants me to do. I sometimes complain to God, even angrily. I have temptations. I fall short. I sin. I feel pain, shame, and guilt. I weep. I hurt. But, thank You, Lord Jesus, that I'm alive to feel all of these things, yet know You love me still despite my imperfect reflection of Your love.

But it's worth it!

All this reminds me of Paul, who once cried out: "People are watching us as we stay at our post . . . in hard times, tough times, bad times; when we're beaten up, jailed, and mobbed; working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand; in gentleness, holiness, and honest love; when we're

telling the truth, and when God's showing us his power; when we're doing our best setting things right; when we're praised, and when we're blamed; slandered, and honored; true to our word, though distrusted; ignored by the world, but recognized by God; terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; living on handouts, yet enriching many; having nothing, [yet] having it all (2 Cor. 6:6-10. *The Message*).

I was nearly home when I noticed that my cell phone—now finally within a zone where I could pick up a signal (another story)—had several

unanswered messages. The first was from my wife—"Did you know there was an accident at the youth social tonight? An ambulance took one of the young people to the hospital. They want you at the emergency room." The second message was from the hospital. "Pastor, when you get this message, please come to the hospital. We need you."

At the stop sign, a right would take me home. A left would take me to the hospital.

It was after midnight when I finally got to bed. But I can't imagine any other profession, any other calling in the twenty-first century, which could be as rewarding as this work of being a pastor. ■

Letters *continued from page 3*

a process of education.

Criticisms of innovative mission strategies often have a common flaw—they offer no positive alternatives. They promote the status quo—which is failure. The jury is still out on contemporary Adventist innovations and the discussion about the best approach is on-going. But Christianity has little to gain from condemning experimentation done with integrity. The real question is not "have we done too

much" but "have we done too little" to adapt our methods to the Muslim context.

—Gorden R. Doss, *Department of World Mission, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

Appreciation

Thank you for *Ministry*. Your publication is an inspiration, especially the article in January on "How to Make Your Church Grow" by David Pendleton and Wayne Cordeiro. ■

—A. P. and Betty Lou Bailey, *syndicated columnists, Fredericksburg, Virginia.*

House of prayer

continued from page 6

Brueggemann.¹¹ What is thus applied to "the community of Judaism" concerns the church of the end time even more. New specifics are presenting themselves to spur the Sabbath-keeping community in the direction of implementing the prophetic vision; that is, to include the many who have been left on the outside of the fellowship, and to harness the calling of those previously thought to be excluded from the full-fledged ministry of the church.

If the vision of inclusion stalls on

the illusion that it has been fulfilled, or if it founders on the notion that we can go no further, the word of the prophet raises the stakes another notch: "Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered" (56:8).

This is the God of inclusion speaking, God as the insistent and persistent gatherer, so much so that it can be said that the verb denoting gathering "is Yahweh's most defining verb, Yahweh's most characteristic activity."¹² "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples," says the God of inclusion (Isa. 56:7, italics

added. See also Matt 21:13).

Aren't the implications of Isaiah's prophecy and its New Testament application clear and challenging enough for us to implement in our own congregations and communities? ■

1 John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

2 Oswalt, 11.

3 Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. John Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), 55.

4 Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 310; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 135.

5 *Ibid.*, 310; Blenkinsopp, 135.

6 Westermann, 310.

7 Oswalt, 451, 452.

8 Westermann, 313.

9 Grace L. Emmerson, *Isaiah 56-66* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 55.

10 Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 165.

11 *Ibid.*, 171.

12 *Ibid.*, 173.

Pastoral popularity: privilege or pitfall?

Popularity: Is it a privilege or a pitfall? There are two ways of being popular: One is to be merely publicized; the other is to be productive.

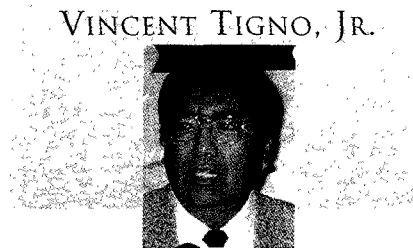
Ministry is a high-profile profession. Anything that involves public service is. Public sentiment, however, is often unpredictable. Today's coronation could be tomorrow's crucifixion. The cry of "Hosannah" could easily change to a cry for your head! The "many" that followed the Lord at the beginning forsook Him at the end (John 6:66).

Paul knew how one could be loved today but loathed tomorrow. There were places where the people wept when he left, and there were places where people praised him and then stoned him; there were places where they imprisoned him or forced him to flee. One night, he had to escape in a basket over a wall, just to elude those who wanted him dead by daylight.

At the Corinthian church, people were polarized in their preference for a pastor. Some preferred one and some another; others voted for Paul, and still others wanted Apollos; and the rest chose Christ. The popularity contest divided the church into contentious factions (1 Cor. 1:10-12).

The poor pastor at the middle is pushed into a tightrope act. In principle, one cannot please everybody. Still, everybody wants to be pleased. A pastor's predicament can sometimes be described as follows:

"If he visits his flock frequently, he is up to something; if he doesn't, he is a do nothing. If he preaches past 15 minutes, he talks too much; if he doesn't, he has nothing to say. If he drives a nice car, he is worldly and luxurious; if he



doesn't, he has poor taste and no class. If he tells jokes, he is flippant; if he does not, he is no fun. If he starts services on time, he is time-obsessed; if he doesn't, he is not organized. If he is still young, he is inexperienced; if he is older, he should retire."

So, the pastor is often caught in the middle. Which is better, to be acceptable or to be accessible?

The best choice is to choose the right above the convenient. This is when the pastor should plead with God for a double portion of patience and wisdom.

Paul's words of advice come in handy at this point. He said, "Let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory" (Gal. 5:25, 26).

The word *vainglory* is a synonym of "vanity," hollow honor, and "empty pride." Seeking popularity for the purpose of being praised is vain, hollow, and empty. Paul very wisely counseled young Timothy to go for God's approval instead of human praise (2 Tim. 2:15).

One pitfall in seeking popularity is the tendency to turn into a people pleaser. In the long run, the people pleasers are pressured to sacrifice principle. At critical junctures, they could lose their courage and opt for compromise. They are hesitant to upset the status quo. They

become reluctant to rock the boat.

Religion professor James W. Jones of Rutgers University warned against what he called *smorgasbord religion*. This means eating anything and everything on the table in order to avoid offending anyone.

In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas spoke about those who deliberately shut their eyes to avoid taking or making a stand. He said, "If we do not see God, it is not because He does not exist. Neither is He hiding. But it is all because of our refusal to see."

So, pastors who are faithful to God and to their calling must face the truth about themselves and other people. Do they want to be famous or just fruitful—that is, full of the fruits of the Spirit, the fruits of good work, and the fruits of souls saved?

Being productive does not always mean being popular. Popularity and publicity are not necessarily wrong in and of themselves. But these should be deserved rather than designed or arranged, and we must remember that genuine good works and fine accomplishments cannot be hidden.

So we can be grateful if we're in the limelight. We must just make sure that the beam of light comes from the Sun of Righteousness; from Him who is the Light of the world. When we stand or walk in that light, we will do our pastoral duties faithfully and with no deliberate fanfare. The reward itself is a result instead of a reward.

So, which one will it be—popularity or productivity? ■

Vincent Tigno, Jr., Ph.D., is a retired pastor. He lives in Yucaipa, California.

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Bettina Krause, General Conference

Thursday, July 7

Women in Ministry—
*Seminar presentations and interviews on the following
topics:*

- * Ministry for Young Women—Cynthia Prime
- * Hospitality Ministries—Nancy Van Pelt
- * Discipleship Ministries—Evelyn Nagel
- * Friendship—Marti Schneider
- * Reclamation—Sara Carter
- * Small Groups—Young-Ja Lee Nam

Exhibit booths to include tabletop display, samples of departmental
resources, giveaways, and many more interesting items.



For information on GC Session 2005, log onto <http://www.gcsession.org>





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