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JULY 2008

REACHING OUT: Making a difference with young adults

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## F I R STLANCE

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## MINISTRY

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#### LETTERS

## Our Readers Respond...

### The sinner's plight

The article, "The Sinner's Plight in Romans 7," (May 2008) by Richard Rice, is truly an excellent article about a chapter in the Bible that has been quite controversial. He clarifies the issues so that one can easily understand what is at stake.

I also recommend Paul Myers's article "The Worm at the Core of the Apple," which is also an article about Romans 7:7–25, be read in conjunction with this article. It can be found in the book *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John (In Honor of J. Louis Martyn)*, Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa, eds. (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1990), 62–84. Both of these articles have insights that make Romans 7 understandable and meaningful for a world that is influenced by postmodernism. —Rollin Shoemaker, email

just finished reading Richard Rice's article in the May 2008 *Ministry*, and I must say that I appreciate his comments regarding the power of sin: "Sin is much more than the moral failure of an individual; it is an active and *enslaving power*" (emphasis added).

It is only the power of God made available to us at the cross that can free us from being enslaved by the carnal mind of sin. As I read the article, I kept searching for where Dr. Rice was going. In his conclusion he suggests that there is only "frustration from an exegetical standpoint." But he adds, "Jesus Christ is our only hope." But throughout the article there is no encouragement that we can be more than vacillating, carnal Christians.

I am grateful that Paul says, "'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," (Gal. 2: 20, [NKJV]). For me, it is not about perfection, it is not about being sinless, but it is about fixing my eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, fixing my thoughts on Him, clinging to Him.

As long as we are in this world, the enemy will continue to stalk us. But as long as we continue to abide in Christ, he is powerless!

—S. C. Kack, email

n reflecting upon Richard Rice's article, my first experience with Romans 7 came in 1951 after my baptism. After a year of struggle I approached a young minister who I felt would understand an 11-yearold boy. He listened, while trying to hide a smile, as I explained my inability to stop fighting with my older, bossy, big sisters.

His entire answer, while patting me on the shoulder, was "Don't worry about it. The apostle Paul had the same problem!" He then quoted the famous words from Romans 7 and left me standing there, confused.

That and other episodes in my life have shaped my understanding of this portion of Paul's letter to the Romans. As a pastor what I have explained on the radio, from the pulpit, and in writing, is simply this: Romans 6 tells us what the new life is like, Romans 7 acknowledges our problem if we step outside of Christ for even an instant, and Romans 8 gives us the wonderful answer!

I hope that none of my fellow pastors will make the same mistake that young pastor made so many years ago. It's too costly!

—Mel Phillips, pastor, Gila Mountain Seventhday Adventist Church, Yuma, Arizona, United States

## Ministry to families affected by autism

"Ministering to Families Affected by Autism" (May 2008) was extremely interesting and inspiring. I am a pastor who also serves as a recreation specialist in a school for developmentally disabled adults. Some of our residents are autistic, and Mrs. Ketelsen, the author, shared some very pertinent information on the subject. I specifically found her tips on diversion, modeling, and support helpful. My experience with autistic children and adults has given me a very different way of looking at the world! —*Rev. Victor Buksbazen, PhD, ThD, MHP, Spokane, Washington, United States* 

### Ministry to the grieving

Your two-part series, "Assisting Parishioners Through Grief" (March, May 2008) was an act of ministry to me. Even though I have not had to experience much grief in my life, it ministered to me in areas of loss other than death. I came to see all loss involves grieving and the need to express it. It brought me back to my days as a CPE [Clinical Pastoral Education] student at Kettering Medical Center. Thank you for a moving, touching, and personal ministry through the written word. —Rev. Jan Michael Nace, Gowanda, New York, United States

### Visiting church members

Thank you for the excellent article in the May 2008 *Ministry* by Errol A. Lawrence on "Building Relationships Through Pastoral Visitation." It is so important for us to realize that when we have finished our sermon on Sabbath morning our work has just begun.

It took me back to the very beginning of my ministry when I was placed with a pastor that believed in the visitation of his church members. He took me with him when he visited church members in their homes, when he visited those who were interested in our church, and *Continued on page 9* 

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EDITORIAL

## An urgent appeal: Our neighbors need you

ore than 75,000 men, women, and children were killed when a killer cyclone flattened parts of Myanmar (Burma) on May 2 with more than 55,000 still missing and presumed dead. Another series of devastating earthguakes demolished parts of China less than two weeks later, killing more than 70,000. Almost 20,000 are still missing and presumed dead. Thousands upon thousands of others have been left homeless and injured while experiencing unrelenting grief because of the death of family members. In addition to the human losses, both countries have experienced loss of agricultural fields, factories, highways, schools, and churches. And yet somehow the survivors find reason to move forward in spite of their losses.

I'm writing this just a few days after returning from China as I feel sorrow and anguish because of the challenges these people face. While in China I listened to religious leaders explain the large numbers of places of worship that have been either totally destroyed or made unsafe for worship. Fortunately, both countries are receiving aid from governments and various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and perhaps you are involved through your church's development or disaster organization in assisting the relief efforts. However, most of these governments or organizations will be addressing health, transportation, housing, and school needs. While there, I observed that the people in China continue to respond from their hearts to

Nikolaus Satelmajer



help the victims—in several of the cities I saw collection boxes for donations.

As my wife and I were returning to the United States, we had many hours to think about what happened in those two countries. Besides the personal losses, we grieved as we thought about the many houses of worship that have been demolished and the people who desperately want to again gather to worship their Lord. As we discussed the situation there, my wife and I felt that we must do something, personally, for the rebuilding of these churches. As we discussed the specific amount of our donation, I asked myself, Is there not something that the readers of Ministry, including pastors, professors, chaplains, or priests, would be willing to do either personally or corporately or both? You know, of course, that we do not, as a rule, participate in any major fund-raising efforts initiated through the journal. But these two events are extraordinary, and I am asking you to consider helping out either individually or from your organization. Surely our readers around the world will simultaneously share the blessings they have received from God to help rebuild these countless destroyed churches.

The entire Ministry publishing editorial team has, grateful for the opportunity, promised to participate—and we invite you to join us. Will you talk to your church, hospital, seminary, parish, conference, diocese, whatever organization you are affiliated with, and ask what you and they can do to help our brothers and sisters in those two countries? In China, church buildings become worship places for several congregations representing various denominational persuasions. All funds that are received will be distributed there by the appropriate channels so that what you give will bless many. These donations will be used in China and Myanmar (Burma) for the rebuilding of worship sites. One hundred percent of the funds will go there with no funds held back for fund-raising costs or processing, and we will let you know, through Ministry, just how much we will be able to share with these two countries.

When Jesus comes, He will say, "'"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you...."'" (Matt. 25:34, NIV). As we share that heavenly inheritance now with those who are anxious to again worship Him in an appointed church building, we figuratively put our funds in the hands of our Savior, Jesus Christ who has the power to multiply our gift again and again.

So, instead of just watching the news reports and thinking of how badly we feel about the devastation, let's do something concrete about it. Won't you join us?

## To make a contribution for churches in Myanmar (Burma) and China, please **1** use the enclosed envelope, or **2** send to:

Ministry, International Journal for Pastors Attn: Myanmar (Burma) and China Church Rebuilding 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA A receipt will be returned to you. If you have any questions, please contact me by email at SatelmajerN@gc.adventist.org, by phone at +1 301-680-6507, or by fax at +1 301-680-6502.

## **Reaching out:** Making a difference with young adults

### A. Allan Martin



A. Allan Martin, PhD, CFLE, is associate professor of discipleship and family ministry, Andrews University Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

Editor's note: This article addresses a critical issue from the perspective of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and primarily in the context of North America. We believe, though, that similar challenges exist in other denominations and in other parts of the world.

first learned the term, *the bystander effect*, in my undergraduate social psychology class. Wikipedia defines it as "a psychological phenomenon in which someone is less likely to intervene in an emergency situation when other people are present and able to help than when he or she is alone."<sup>1</sup> The article references a variety of horrific incidences in which dozens of bystanders "stood by" and did nothing as homicides occurred before their eyes.

I am still appalled by *the bystander effect*, but in another way. I found myself perplexed by how it may be impacting the church, allowing us to "stand by" and do nothing as a whole generation disappears from our ranks.

## Disengaging, disenfranchised, and disappearing

In light of his landmark study of Adventist adolescents, Roger Dudley of the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University noted, "It seems reasonable to believe that at least 40 to 50 percent of Seventh-day Adventist teenagers in North America are essentially leaving the church by their middle 20s. This figure may well be higher."<sup>2</sup> "This is a hemorrhage of epic proportions," warned Dudley and he suggested that, "the decline in membership of many mainline Protestant churches has been shown to be largely traceable to the shortage of young adults in the congregations."<sup>3</sup> Demographer George Barna noted that across Christianity, "the most potent data regarding disengagement is that a majority of twentysomethings—61% of today's young adults—had been churched at one time during their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged (i.e., not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying)."<sup>4</sup>

David Kinnaman of the Barna Group elaborated, "The current state of ministry to twentysomethings is woefully inadequate to address the spiritual needs of millions of young adults. These individuals are making significant life choices and determining the patterns and preferences of their spiritual reality while churches wait, generally in vain, for them to return after college or when the kids come."<sup>5</sup>

This disengagement threatens the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The president of the Seventhday Adventist Church in North America (NAD), Don Schneider, said, "We must [also] concentrate on the young adults of our Church... young people need to become more fully integrated into the Church... Is there some way of allowing young people to worship in a way that is meaningful while making it safe for them to do so? Young adults must be heard at leadership levels, and their feelings must be given validity."<sup>6</sup>

Paul Richardson of the Center for Creative Ministry, with headquarters in College Place, Washington, United States, reported that the median age for the Seventh-day Adventist community in North America, "including the un-baptized children in church families, is 58 . . . Among native-born White and Black members the median age is even higher."<sup>7</sup> The frightening implications of this figure are seen when that median age, 58, is compared to the median ages of the United States and Canada respectively—which are 36 and 37!

These trends are serious. There are more than 1,000 local churches (out of a total of about 5,500) in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America that have no children or teens at all. Fewer and fewer congregations have enough teens, young adults, or even young couples to provide "the critical mass necessary to conduct a youth group and other activities that have always been the life beat of Adventist churches."<sup>8</sup>

The departure of young adults from the local faith community has not gone unnoticed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church General Conference president, Jan Paulsen, who has over the past several years entered into broadcasted conversations with this younger generation (http://letstalk .adventist.org). Paulsen noted: "They [young adults] have perspectives, they have hopes, they have dreams, and they have visions for the church which need to be considered seriously. If we don't, they will feel disenfranchised, as many of them already do."<sup>9</sup>

This trend would not be as perplexing if we have promptly identified it and addressed it with all the immediacy it deserves. Yet, the fact is, we haven't.

Over a decade ago in research on Generation X, I found comparable statistics of young adults disappearing from local faith life.<sup>10</sup> Dudley's research reflects more than three decades of scrutiny regarding the departure of new generations from the church. His book, *Why Teenagers Leave Religion*, was published back in 1978.

Beyond the statistical analysis, most of us know young people who have parted ways with our church. Many could exchange stories of peers or grown children and grandchildren who no longer participate in Adventism. We've known that young adults have been leaving our church for some time now and have been nothing but bystanders. Hence, the terrible "bystander effect."

#### Why they leave

The first question is, Why do they leave? Dudley found that young adult perceptions of the quality of relationship with religious authority figures played a significant role in their departure.<sup>11</sup> Leadership across Adventism concurred, stating that the reasons most frequently cited by persons who leave local church fellowship are found "in the realm of relationships, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission."<sup>12</sup>

Young adult Kimberly Luste Maran noted that "too often the negative words and actions of more mature church members push the younger set to feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness, and fear. . . Satan will employ any methods, including the use of church members, to tear us away from our loving Father."<sup>13</sup> As part of the *Let's Talk* broadcasts hosted by Pastor Paulsen, 25-year-old Kadene said, "I think the best thing that church leaders can do for the youth of our church is get acquainted with them. Too often, church leaders sit on their high horses and judge our youth without having the slightest idea of what they are going through."<sup>14</sup>

Paulsen added, "We [church leaders] need to hear and understand what they [young adults] are saying, for it comes across clearly and strongly from those who are under thirty in our church. The point they are making is this: being included, being trusted, being considered responsible, for elders to be prepared to take some risk with inexperience, are sentiments and attitudes which senior leadership must be willing to show, or we are gone! We are gone simply because we have no ownership responsibility in the life of this church."<sup>15</sup>

Robert Wuthnow, professor of sociology at Princeton University, noted various trends that are impacting young adults and contributing to the fading American religious landscape. "My view is that congregations *can* survive, but only if religious leaders roll up their sleeves and pay considerably more attention to young adults than they have been."<sup>16</sup>

Why are young adults leaving? Although the responses may be as diverse and personal as each young adult, clearly the lack of mutually valued relationships that engender trust and shared support have left both parties, young adults and Seventh-day Adventism, at risk of going under.

#### **Pointing out heroes**

So what is the solution? The Wikipedia article on "the bystander effect" made a fascinating recommendation. "To counter the bystander effect when you are the victim, a studied recommendation is to pick a specific person in the crowd to appeal to for help rather than appealing to the larger group generally. If you are the only person reacting to an emergency, point directly to a specific bystander and give them a specific task such as, 'You. Call the police.' These steps place all responsibility on a specific person instead of allowing it to diffuse."<sup>17</sup> To burst through the bystander effect, I am pointing TO YOU as a potential hero in the lives of young adults:

Parents. During the important transitional years of young adulthood, you play a vital role not only in the life of your child but also their sphere of friends. Make your home and your presence one that engenders hospitality, safety, and wisdom.<sup>18</sup>

Connie Vandeman Jeffery shared a simple formula of food, friendship, and follow-up that made her home a safe harbor for young adults.<sup>19</sup> If you are an adult without grown children in your home or don't have children of your own, make the simple effort of building an authentic relationship with a twenty-something. It's as simple as a lunch invitation, for starters.

*Pastors.* If the statistics are correct, your influence and impact on the climate of your church is desperately needed. Setting the culture of young adult inclusion is heavily dependent upon your vision and leadership.

Bill Bossert described how his dying church recognized their fate and took heroic steps to turn the tide. With careful self-analysis, practical research, and courageous yet inclusive change steps,<sup>20</sup> the Shepherd's House reversed the attrition tide, resulting in a 60 percent increase of young adults in their church.<sup>21</sup> Change does not come without challenges and discomfort, but in order to break through the bystander effect, pastors need to be heroic so as to inspire their congregations to be likewise.

Professors/Teachers. There is a profound influence that educators have in the lives of young adults. Beyond academic or professional prowess, you are called upon to invest in young adult spiritual development as well.

While teaching at Spicer Memorial College, Falvo Fowler found that his simple initiative to start a Sabbath School with his students made a profound impact on what was once a "nominal" Adventist experience in the lives of many students.<sup>22</sup>

Jimmy Phillips noted the "invisible majority"<sup>23</sup> of coeds are in schools outside of our Adventist system, and I suspect many Adventists are among their faculty and staff. Thousands of Adventist young

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adults will benefit from your efforts to collaborate with local churches and your respective college to establish student groups, faith fellowships, and discipleship communities.<sup>24</sup> Adventist Christian Fellowship (http://www.acflink.org) is a great resource to support your initiative. Your advisement and mentoring are keys to battling the bystander effect, so rampant on these campuses and in the churches adjacent to these colleges and universities. The journal *Dialogue*, published by the Education Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,<sup>25</sup> is also another great resource.

*Leaders.* Vision-casting leaders offer momentum towards constructive change. You are pivotal heroes with the ability to rally the crowd to action.

Mike Cauley, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Florida, challenged his constituency, "Do we care enough to learn the language of kids [young adults]? I'm as serious as a heart attack. We have a broken world. We have a society of Millennials [young adults] who are hungry for the gospel, and we aren't cutting it. . . . But I'm going to be asking them [Conference Executive Committee] to begin to plant churches to reach kids under 25. I'm going to be asking them to help us figure out how to become churches in the biblical, New Testament sense.... Somehow we have got to bring those kids, not to a place of entertainment, but to be fully committed disciples.... We need to give them the Church."26

Not only your endorsement, but also your conspicuous actions<sup>27</sup> as a leader will serve as a catalyst to transform young adult attrition statistics into retention trends.

*Peers.* There are stellar young adults who have not only remained in the church but are faith activists.<sup>28</sup> You are among the most influential and powerful—not only in taking heroic action with your drifting peers but also in rejuvenating Adventism and fostering a movement that will draw new generations.

"Many of the Adventist pioneers first began their work when they were teenagers. Pioneers such as Ellen Harmon White, John Loughborough, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith, and John Harvey Kellogg were teenagers and young adults when they began making an impact in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They were young, vibrant, and on fire for God!"<sup>29</sup> Other denominations also were started by youthful leaders.

In fact, it was the same age group (young adults) that was passionate about the early Adventist movement. "J.N. Andrews was 22 when he started on the publishing committee. 22! He was a kid... Uriah Smith was 21 when he joined the publishing work, and James White was 21 years old when he came upon the scene and began to preach the Advent doctrine."<sup>30</sup>

We need a movement of that caliber right now. Those heroes from our Adventist heritage took valiant steps to save a drowning world. Today, young Adventists are just as essential in the embrace and encouragement of their peers. Peers, as well as parents, pastors, professors, and presidents must build restorative relationships with young adults.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Bystanders no longer**

If the principles of social psychology hold true, you may have come to the end of this article and are now saying to yourself, *That's a fine article*. I'm glad that the issue of young adults leaving the church is being addressed. It's good that someone is doing something about it.

That sentiment is the tragic reality of "the bystander effect." It's a phenomenon that has already seen generations of young Adventists fall away, while potential heroes have been spectators. We must no longer be bystanders. So I am pointing you out. If you've read to this point, I am pointing at you: *take a step today to begin an authentic relationship with a young adult*. Become a mentor. Have lunch with them. Listen carefully. Open your home. Offer your heart. There are as many options as there are young adults. Start with one action with one young adult today.<sup>32</sup>

We're horrified when we hear stories of "the bystander effect" when someone is being murdered. Yet, what are we doing when we stand by and do nothing when young people, perhaps right in front of our eyes, are leaving us and, as so often is the case, leaving the Lord who died for them?

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2002, http://www.adventistreview.org/2002-1529/ story2.html (December 24, 2007), paragraph 16.

- 23 Jimmy Philips, "The Invisible Majority," in Adventist Review, September 20, 2007, http://www.adventist review.org/article.php?id=1371 (December 24, 2007).
- 24 Ron Pickell, North American Division Adventist Christian Fellowship Coordinator, offers some insights as to what college students are looking for in a church at http://www.adventistreview.org/ article.php?id=1372.
- 25 For more information, go to http://education.gc.adventist.org.
- 26 Mike Cauley, "2007 Florida Camp Meeting Sermon" [MP3 audio file], June 2, 2007, http:// www.floridaconference.com/campmeeting/ MP3/2007/FLCM\_06-02-07\_1930.mp3 (December 25, 2007) (also available as transcript from http:// www.floridaconference.com/campmeeting/ cauley2007.html), paragraph 48.
- 27 It is conspicuous actions of leadership that reveal their most important values. A couple of local conference presidents have already instated young adult ministry directors at the conference level. The Christian Leadership Center, http://www .andrews.edu/clc, recently endorsed the development of young leadership training, challenging presidents and all church officials to mentor new generations of leadership.
- 28 Kimberly Luste Maran, Wilona Karimabadi, Omar Bourne, "Adventist Review's Top 20 in Their 20s," Adventist Review, September 14, 2006, http://www. adventistreview.org/article.php?id=715 (December 24, 2007).
- 29 Lynette Frantzen, "Young Adventist Pioneers," Adventist Review, May 27, 2004, http://www .adventistreview.org/2004-1522/story2.html (December 24, 2007), paragraph 2.
- 30 Mike Cauley, "2007 Florida Camp Meeting

Sermon," 2007, paragraph 11.

- 31 For over a decade, dream VISION ministries, http://www.dreamVISIONministries.org, has offered training and resourcing in building authentic relationships with new generations. I offer a theological model for young adult ministry, http://www.adventistreview.org/2000-1556/story2 .html, challenging young adults to see their role as ministers to their peers.
- 32 A. Allan Martin, "Won by One: What if I Did Just One Thing. . ." Adventist Review, 175(36), September 1998, 20, 21.

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## LETTERS continued from page 3

when he gave Bible studies in the homes of people.

I think the Bible text used by Pastor Lawrence at the beginning of his article (Acts 20:28) is very basic for the training of pastors. Pastoral visitation in the homes of our church members needs to be promoted.

—Vernon L. Chase, Goldendale, Washington, United States

#### Nebuchadnezzar syndrome

wish I had learned—early in my ministry—the lesson that Laurence Turner discussed ("The Nebuchadnezzar Syndrome," March 2008). I had a "healthy" dose of that disease.

I thought I was a good preacher, and my wife backed me up on it. I thought I had a large number of Bible studies; and compared to other pastors, I did. I had a lot of baptisms to show for it. But, as you can see from this letter, I'm still struggling with the syndrome.

I'm retired now and should have learned my lesson long since. God has surely given me enough grass to eat through the years, and even now I taste it from time to time. Thank you, Pastor Turner, for putting into words a message I've needed all my life.

—Thurman C. Petty Jr., Burleson, Texas, United States

### **First person preaching**

Thank you for Derek Morris's article, "First-Person Narrative Preaching: A Fresh Approach for Telling the Old, Old Story" (May 2008). Such a method brings the Scriptures alive. There is tremendous hunger in our churches for expository sermons that let the Scriptures speak for themselves. God's Word has power—if only the preachers would let it speak.

Philosophy, psychology, social programs, and the media have their own place. But they can't be substituted for the Word. We as a people are Bible illiterate because we are starving for the Bread of Life. Young people are fleeing the church because of the shallow and lifeless messages that don't nourish their souls.

Dr. Morris makes an excellent point that creativity and engaged Bible study will revitalize sermons. I join the author in the plea to all ministers: "Please, let the Scriptures speak!"

—Iryna Bolotnikova, Cincinnati, Ohio, United States

#### The common touch

Marguerite Shuster's article, "Love God, Love Your People" (March 2008), reveals a warm, caring character in the writer. Her material is excellent; she is not carried away by her high position at her seminary. She writes with a sense of lightheartedness, no theological jargon all too common in many journals. And she tells her story without being shackled by an overdose of holiness.

This is one of your better articles. The rest are of high quality too. —Reverend E. Bruce Ross, retired pastor,

United Church of Canada, email

#### **Doing God's will**

very much agree with Nikolaus Satelmajer's editorial in the May 2008 issue ("Titles Do Not Make Leaders"). However, I slightly disagree with his closing statement. In it he wrote that God will, in the final analysis, ask us, "What have you done?" According to Matthew 7:21–23, many who are lost when Jesus returns will have done many wonderful things in His name. But the issue is, Have we been faithful in fulfilling God's will (Matt. 7:21)? So instead of God asking us "What have you done for Me?" I believe He will ask, "How faithful have you been in following My will in ministry?"

If we are following our own plans and ideas in ministry, we will be building with "wood, hay, stubble" (1 Cor. 3:12), that will not abide. But if we are following the will of the Father in our ministry, we will be building with "gold, silver, precious stones" that will endure eternally.

—Dennis Smith, pastor, New Haven, Connecticut, United States 🕅

## The power of relationships in evangelism

#### S. Joseph Kidder



S. Joseph Kidder, DMin, is associate professor of Christian Ministry, Andrews University Theological Seminary, Berrrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

### "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ" (Philem. 6, NIV).

aul's desire for an active church in faith sharing continues as a perennial concern. Each generation needs to review its commitment level in witnessing and sharing their faith to the community, thus maintaining a continuous link with the Great Commission entrusted to the church. With a view to finding out this commitment in North America, the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University sent a survey in 2004 to a sample of Seventh-day Adventist members attending on a given Sabbath. The survey sought responses to three questions: (1) In what witness activities do members generally participate, and how many were brought into the church as a result? (2) What was the personal devotional life of the members like? (3) What was instrumental in their own experiences of joining the church?

The survey elicited 1,689 usable responses. This article will summarize the key features of the data. If we understand the principles behind the findings and pay attention to the implications, it will improve the way we do church and give us tools for effective evangelism.

#### The demographics

First, a look at the composition of the respondents. Genderwise, 57 percent were female

and the rest male. Sixty percent were long-time Adventists—members for more than 20 years. Fifteen percent have been members for 11 to 20 years. Four percent have been members for less than a year. In addition, 61 percent of the respondents grew up with an Adventist parent. All this seems to indicate the power of relationships and that our congregations are not bringing in many new members who have no Adventist background.

The data also indicates an aging church. More than 60 percent are over 45 years of age with 22 percent being 65 or older. Only about 9 percent are under 25 years. This shows the need for the church to be much more intentional about reaching and keeping young people in the church.

#### Witnessing

In what witnessing activities did members usually engage? The survey reviewed 11 common activities (see table 1). Topping the list was small-group or Home Bible Fellowship studies, with 36 percent participating. Seven activities—phone contacts, evangelistic meetings, health seminars, Revelation Seminars, other Bible seminars, one-to-one Bible studies, and door-to-door contacts—clustered around 20 percent. Two activities—Daniel and family seminars—took in 10 percent.

As to the question regarding how many hours in a month on average members were involved in church-related, community-service programs, one-half of the respondents reported none. About 30 percent reported 1 to 5 hours, 11 percent said 6 to 10 hours, and nearly 6 percent put in a high 20 hours or more.

 Table 1: Witnessing and Evangelism Activities Engaged

 in by Adventist Members in North American Division

Small group or Home Bible Fellowship	36 %
Telephone contacts	24 %
Public evangelistic meetings	22 %
Health seminars and programs	21 %
Other Bible seminars	21 %
Revelation Seminar	19 %
Giving one-to-one Bible studies	19 %
Door-to-door contacts	19 %
Daniel seminar	11 %
Family seminar	10 %
Literacy for adults or English as a second language	3 %

Respondents were asked, "How many people have you been wholly or partially responsible for bringing into the church in the last three years?" About two-thirds indicated that they were not aware of any. Fifteen percent could think of one, and another 15 percent remembered two to five. Only 4 to 5 percent could identify more than five in the previous three-year period.

### **Devotional practices**

The second set of questions dealt with devotional practices. Respondents were asked how often they participated in five devotional activities. Leading the way was personal private prayer, where 73 percent were involved daily and another 21 percent at least once a week (see Table 2). Personal Bible study did not fare nearly as well: 37 percent reported daily study, and 43 percent at least once a week. The study of the Sabbath School lesson registered lower: 28 percent daily and 41 percent at least weekly. So far as Sabbath School attendance was concerned, 71 percent attended each week, and 9 percent attended at least once a month.

Other researchers have shown that family worship<sup>1</sup> is a key to a solid Christian home and an important factor in retaining young people in the church. With Adventists, the survey showed 28 percent of the respondents have daily family worship, 33 percent on a weekly basis, and the remaining 39 percent have family worship only occasionally or not at all.

Table 2: The Frequency of Participation in Devotional Practices of Adventist Members in North America

Personal private prayer	Daily: 73 % Once a week: 21 %
Personal Bible study	Daily: 37 % Once a week: 43 %
Study of Sabbath School lesson	Daily: 28 % Once a week: 41 %
Reading Ellen White books	Daily: 14 % Once a week: 29 % Never: 57 %
Family worship	Daily: 28 % Once a week: 33 % Never: 39 %

### Why they joined

The third set of questions attempted to probe what was instrumental in their own choice of joining the church. The survey measured the relative strength of each of nine possible factors (see Table 3). Table 3: Instruments Influencing Members to Join the Adventist Church in North America

Brought up in an Adventist home	59 %
A friend or relative	58 %
Reading of literature	49 %
Public evangelistic meetings	36 %
Bible studies in the home	34 %
Visits by a pastor	20 %
Television or radio programs	20 %
Bible correspondence course	19 %
Material on the Internet	7 %
Others	22 %

Respondents were invited to indicate what this "other" meant. While not all did, the most frequent comment had to do with Christian education and teachers.

Table 3 shows that key factors leading people to join a church relates to positive relationships and friendships, with this fact also documented in similar research, such as by Win Arn<sup>2</sup> (see Table 4) and more recently by Rainer.<sup>3</sup>

Arn discovered relationship as the most effective way of reaching people for the Lord. He extensively talks about the importance of *oikos* (relationship). That's what I'd like to call "relational evangelism."

Table 4: Win Arn's Study of the Factors That Influence People to Join the Church<sup>4</sup>

, ,	
Special need	1–2 %
Walk-in	2–3 %
Pastor	1–6 %
Visitation	1–2 %
Sunday School	4–5 %
Evangelistic crusade	0–5 %
Church program	2–3 %
Friend/relative	75–90 %

## The importance of relational evangelism in the Bible

*Oikos* (sharing faith through relationship) was and still is the most effective way of spreading the gospel. *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*<sup>5</sup> devotes approximately ten pages to oikos, relational evangelism. *Oikos* in Greek means the dwelling place, the structure of the family or a community with the word strongly related to salvation history. The Lord created us to live in community because we need each other. He wants this community of faith to make a difference in the world by sharing their faith and love.

Relationship becomes not only important in bringing people to the Lord, but also in keeping them in the Lord and the church. We need a support group that encourages us, prays for us, holds us accountable, and fosters an environment of growth, spiritual health, and vitality.

Arn shows that unless the new believer develops at least 7 to 11 friendships in the first six months of their conversion, the possibility of leaving the church registers as very high. With those who do develop a minimum of seven relationships and feel comfortable in the church fellowship, the possibility of staying in the church is very high.6 The more friends a new believer has. the more likely they will stay in the church. We come to the Lord through relationships, and we stay in the Lord through relationships. We are discipled, encouraged, and nurtured through relationships.

## Why is relational evangelism effective?

Several important factors may be cited to show why relational evangelism is the most effective means of sharing the Gospel.<sup>7</sup>

Relational evangelism provides a natural network for sharing the good news of God's redemptive love. Naturally, people who are close to each other share their faith with each other. Friends and relatives hang out together. They eat out together. They enjoy sharing and talking with each other. Andrew brought his brother Peter to Christ. We have the privilege of bringing our brothers and sisters, moms and dads, sons and daughters, friends and neighbors to Christ.

Relational evangelism deals with receptive people. Often we hear that we are more effective with strangers than our families, but this is not necessarily true. The Bible records many examples where one brought one's relatives and friends to Jesus. Andrew brought Peter. Philip introduced Nathaniel to Christ. The jailer in Philippi brought his whole household to Jesus. When people around us see a change in us, they will be attracted to the God we worship.

Relational evangelism allows for unhurried and natural sharing of God's love. In friendship evangelism, no one feels pressure to make anyone be baptized in a short period of time. A natural process takes place over time—and in the context of love and acceptance.

Relational evangelism provides natural support when the web member comes to Christ. The single most significant reason why people leave the church is that they do not have a support group to pray for them, disciple them, and constantly encourage them. But, when people are brought to the Lord by a trusted friend, they already have their own pastor.

Relational evangelism results in the effective assimilation of new converts into the church. Friendship evangelism serves as a means to assimilate people into the life of the church. All experts in church growth agree that assimilation is one of the hardest things to do. You need an accepting group of people and an interested group of converts. In the case of *oikos*—relational evangelism—both are naturally present.

Relational evangelism tends to win entire families.

Relational evangelism provides a constantly enlarging source of new contacts.

Friendship evangelism is about a chain reaction that has no limit to its influence and effectiveness.<sup>8</sup>

### What should we do in the face of such overwhelming evidence as to the importance of friendship and relational evangelism?

Recognize that friendship and relationship evangelism remains as the most potent means of witnessing. Moreover, the home still serves as a catalyst to make the gospel real to people. We learn to apply the principles of the gospel to real life in the home. Relationship, when it is healthy and intentional, will also help us to see in a concrete way how to live the Christian life effectively and with joy. As people who associate with us see that we are better people because of Jesus, that we are better fathers or mothers or spouses or children, they will more likely be attracted to Christianity than just by sharing doctrine or theology.

Educate, train, equip, and motivate members to be effective in sharing their faith with others. The church should be a training ground, a motivating center. Every obstacle should be removed to make it as easy as possible for people to actively and effectively share their faith.

We often give the impression that witnessing is about going to strangers, knocking at their doors, and trying to witness to them. We should train and inspire our members to share their faith naturally in whatever context they are in, whether in the home, the marketplace, or the neighborhood.

The most effective form of evangelism is the natural one—the one which takes place in the context of relationships. When this happens, the new believer has the added advantage of having their own pastor to minister to their spiritual needs.

Inspire and encourage personal spiritual growth of every member. The more passionate believers are about God, the more passionate they will be about sharing Him with others. Our churches should be sanctuaries, always encouraging and challenging people to grow in their walk with God. We cannot take for granted that people will somehow grow spiritually, and we cannot rely solely on the Sabbath sermon to do all the educating, motivating, and training to help people grow spiritually. We need to launch out into new ways of spiritual training and growth, and equip believers with as many effective tools to naturally and attractively share their faith.

Promote a paradigm shift from thinking of evangelism as an event to a process. As I talk to people about spiritual growth and evangelism, I often ask, "Who is the most effective evangelist in the world?" and the predominant answer I get is the name of a famous evangelist. But notice how the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 conceives evangelism as not the task of a few but a way of life for all.

Ask the question, "Define evangelism and when did your church do evangelism?" The inevitable answer? "We had evangelistic meetings last year or three years ago or ten years ago." Such an answer views evangelism as an event rather than a way of life that takes place any time, anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances.

Adopt multiple pathways and entryways for sharing Jesus and helping people connect with the church. Though research has shown that the most effective way of evangelism is through relationships, we still need multiple ways to influence people for Jesus. Our research showed many programs scoring high effectiveness: public evangelism (36 percent), books (49 percent), television or radio (20 percent), Bible correspondence courses (19 percent), and Internet (7 percent).

Multiple ways serve at least three purposes: to create an avenue for the believer to share their faith in a natural way; to reach multiple groups of people when one method might not be the right one to reach all, to find new and receptive seekers who are out of our circle of relationships.

Personal and public evangelism must complement each other. Under the umbrella of public evangelism, the need to do personal evangelism definitely exists. Equally important is the need to do public evangelism under the umbrella of personal evangelism.

- 1 George Barna, Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 55–76. See also Myrna Tetz with Gary L. Hopkins, We Can Keep Them in the Church (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2004), 42–47.
- 2 Win Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth, 1982), 43.
- 3 Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 73.
- 4 W. Charles Arn, *How to Reach the Unchurched Families in Your Community* (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, n.d.).
- 5 Colin Brown, gen. ed., The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 255.
- 6 Arn, The Master's Plan for Making Disciples, 45-53.
- 7 Arn, How to Reach the Unchurched Families in Your Community, 45–53.
- 8 Arn, The Master's Plan for Making Disciples, 45-53.

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## "The Word of God should be the measure": An interview with Eta Linnemann

### Frank M. Hasel



Frank M. Hasel, PhD, is dean of the Theological Seminary at Bogenhofen, Austria, and teaches systematic theology and biblical hermeneutics. He is also the director of the Ellen G. White Study Center at the seminary.

Author's Note: Eta Linnemann, ThD, well-known theologian and New Testament professor, presented two public lectures and four seminars for the theology students and faculty at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen in Austria, in October 2007. In those lectures the 81-year-old theologian passed along, in a compact form, her theological legacy. Linnemann studied under such well-known Bible critics as Rudolf Bultmann, Ernst Fuchs, Ernst Käsemann, and Friedrich Gogarten in Marburg, Tübingen, and Göttingen universities in Germany. She held an honorary professorship at the well-known Philipps University in Marburg before she experienced her personal conversion at the height of her academic career. From that time on, she became convinced that Jesus actually lived, and that the widely propagated atheistic method of historicalcritical theology presented an inaccurate picture of lesus and the content of the Bible. She distanced herself from this method and pointed out the weak premise upon which it is founded. She joined an independent Evangelical Church. At Bogenhofen she addressed us as brothers and sisters in Christ, and also wished to be addressed the same way.

**Frank M. Hasel (FH):** Sister Linnemann, in your books and lectures you repeatedly mention the historical-critical method. In your opinion what are the consequences of this method for the believer and ecclesiastical theology?

**Eta Linnemann (EL):** Normally I do not use the term historical-critical method. I prefer to

speak about historical-critical theology. The term historical-critical method<sup>1</sup> is an expression used by those who practice it. Already, in my earlier articles, I pointed out that although it claims to be a scientific method, in reality, it is not scientific. One consequence of historical-critical theology<sup>2</sup> is the destruction of faith. This might sound harsh to some, but I have seen this in the lives of dozens of students. Often they commence their theological studies as devout individuals, but later, as a result of the historical-critical theology, they are no longer able to be a pastor. What is even worse, there are pastors who, because of such theology, do not even know that humans are lost and we have to be born again. And what they themselves do not know, they cannot pass along to their church members.

It could be that someone as an infant may have been brought to baptism, may even have attended children's church services and later may have lived on the margins of church life, but in the end, be lost because there was never an awareness of the necessity of rebirth. That is the worst of it. Apart from that, we can see Sunday after Sunday, in every church where historical-critical sermons are preached that those churches are empty. And those churches that still have members, become emptier. On the other hand, one makes the following observation: wherever God's unadulterated Word is preached, people are attracted. This has nothing to do with the question of denominations. Wherever a pastor is found who knows Jesus personally and really preaches the pure Word of God, there you have a full church.

A historical-critical preacher provides stones to the congregation instead of bread. These stones can be beautiful and rhetorically polished stones; they can be interesting stones. But what do I do with stones? They are not suited for spiritual food.

In addition, historical-critical theology deals selectively with the Holy Scriptures. With this method it is possible at anytime to avoid being personally affected; for instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, when it is claimed that parts of the sermon are "secondary" or that Matthew or Luke were not the original writers. This method prevents the Word of God from saying what it actually does say.

**FH:** How do you explain that among evangelical theologians there are some who advocate a moderate use of the historical-critical method? These theologians are not all unbelievers, are they?

**EL:** That is correct. The situation is more complex. On the one hand we have those who have lost

their faith through their course of study. On the other hand, there are those who perhaps have already received Christian teaching, and who also have a supportive congregation who prays for them. These are able, more or less, to pull through. However, in certain areas compromises are made. For example, some believe that the pastoral letters are not from Paul, or the Johannine letters are not written by John, nor was Revelation written by him, and of course, the five books of Moses were not written by Moses. But one still believes in the resurrection, perhaps even the virgin birth, also in the second coming of Jesus. When you are a real evangelical, you believe this. However, some brokenness remains because one has compromised in many single issues whilst continuing to cling to other points of faith.

FH: How do you explain that?

## Publications by or regarding Eta Linnemann

- Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology: Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2001).
- *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific Is Scientific Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2001).
- Is There a Synoptic Problem?: Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992).
- Was ist glaubwürdig—Bibel oder Bibelkritik? (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2007). English translation forthcoming.
- "Historical Critical and Evangelical Theology" in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society,* vol. 5/2 (1994): 19–36.
- Article by Robert W. Yarbrough, "Eta Linnemann: Friend or Foe of Scholarship?" in Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, eds., *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 158–184.

**EL**: Actually, this is not surprising. Just imagine: as a student you arrive at the university or seminary. The professor at the lecturer's desk is a master in the field and very good. Within their respective fields these people are quite brilliant. Also, by a wide margin, the professor is the absolute authority. And then it is officially stated from the lecturer's desk that certain things are thus and so—even when much of what is said cannot be confirmed in every detail but simply reflects the general consensus.

One simply accepts many things because the professor has said it. What is not learned from the professor is learned from older students. It is inevitable that during the course of one's studies one becomes accustomed to hearing much that does not harmonize with one's beliefs and that has really not been fully examined. Then one graduates and even is unaware of all the instances where certain compromises have been made. This often remains hidden from oneself. Man is a rascal! He is of the opinion that when one still continues to believe in the resurrection and perhaps in the virgin birth, and is still convinced that the Bible is the Word of God, then everything is still OK.

The graduation of one's studies also brings satisfaction. The theological exams have been passed, and what one has learned contributes to the experience of personal success. With that, a student is duty bound, unless of course, they are prepared to make a clean break and turn from all this, but then he would stand there naked, so to speak. What do academically trained pastors have to offer if they say "No" to all that they have learned in the course of their studies? Haven't they been hired as pastors on the basis of their academic studies? They would have to admit, in the truest sense of the word, a conversion experience, a foundational conversion of their thinking. A certain brokenness prevails: they no longer feel free to speak clearly on certain topics, partly because they no longer clearly know, and partly because they are no longer convinced about it, and so they lack power and authority.

**FH**: In your lectures you stress the importance of using the intellect and that one should also

study the Bible in an attitude of faith. Would you briefly outline the best way a converted, Bible-believing theologian should work?

**EL**: First of all, one should keep in mind that we do not have any wisdom on our own. When we think that we know everything, and we approach the Bible with such an attitude, we will soon be headed in the wrong direction. Without a humble attitude, one cannot practice theology. After all, we are ultimately dealing with the Word of God, and this cannot be dealt with in a purely academic manner. Naturally, there is also the question of guidance: what does God want that I should do now? Somehow, someway, the Lord will let you know this.

## **FH:** What advice would you give to a theological seminary?

EL: First, they should really, without any reservation, take students who have already been born again. I would accept no one as a theology student with the idea that they will be converted some time. There should be unity in spirit. This is the context for spiritual growth. Furthermore, I would not recommend that students pick and choose from the university prospectus what they like best during a semester. If time and money are to be used effectively, a unified curriculum is needed. Otherwise, you have some lectures that are attended by only one or two students, while other lectures are overcrowded. That is not helpful.

Secondly, I believe an engaging spiritual life, where students can participate in a united manner on campus is important. This means, of course, that each individual has their own personal quiet time, but also that there are opportunities as a group to grow spiritually.

Then I believe practical work is important. Theology students should not live in an ivory tower. They should also learn in practical terms to carry responsibility in various areas. Good theology and practical experience in the churches should go hand in hand. I would recommend that by the second semester, at the latest, during the summer vacation, students should gather practical experience in children's camps, for instance.



They should also have the opportunity to engage in practical work during their studies. After three to four years of study, I would suggest a longer period of practical work, something like an internship, in which students can publicly prove themselves. Such an internship should not only teach the practical aspects of work, but should also engage the student under the leadership of experienced mentors and expose them to appropriate literature. I have written a manuscript about such a concept for theological seminars. I have been impressed by the training here at Bogenhofen, and I am also happy that here church history has not been neglected in the theological training. It is very important to learn from history and not to repeat earlier mistakes.

**FH:** Now a personal question: Do you have a motto in your life that has made an impression on you and sustained you?

**EL:** Some of the first words that came to me after I had given my life to Jesus were: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

**FH:** This is not the first time you have visited with Seventh-day Adventists. You have been invited to various churches. Is there something that you have learned to appreciate about Seventh-day Adventists?

**EL:** The very first contact I had with Seventh-day Adventists was through Gerhard F. Hasel,<sup>3</sup> who, on the occasion of a visit to the United States, had invited me to speak at a conference. He then also invited me to Andrews University where I spoke with theology students and faculty over a period of days. What I learned to appreciate is the high percentage of bornagain Christians and that one can take it as a rule that amongst Adventists one normally deals with born-again Christians. This gives me the freedom to come to Adventists and serve them. I do not agree with all that Adventists believe, as you know, but I believe that it is important to have unity in essential things. That means we know that our Lord Jesus died for us on the cross of Golgotha, and we are in agreement in our attitude toward the Holy Scriptures. That is so important for me, and, therefore, I enjoy visiting with Adventists. There are also born-again Christians amongst the Catholics. By this I do not say that every Catholic is born again, indeed not, but there are some among them, and those I treasure. One can feel whether or not someone is truly a brother or sister in Christ. Since I was born again I feel this inner assurance, and one notices it when this is missing.

FH: Sister Linnemann, thank you very much for this interview. I hope that your new book that recently came off the press, Was ist glaubwürdig—Bibel oder Bibelkritik?<sup>4</sup> (What Is Credible—The Bible or Biblical-Criticism?) (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2007), will be a blessing to many people.

- 1 In this approach "research is conducted ut si Deus non daretur ('as if there were no God'). That means the reality of God is excluded from consideration from the start... Statements in Scripture regarding place, time, sequences of events and persons are accepted only insofar as they fit in with established assumptions and theories." Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 83–88; quoted in Kairos Focus, "Theology and the 'Enlightenment,' " Kairos Initiative, www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/resources/ Intro\_phil/Mod\_Theol.htm#libmain.
- 2 According to Linnemann in "historical-critical theology, critical reason decides what is reality in the Bible and what cannot be reality.... Due to the presuppositions that are adopted, critical reason loses sight of the fact that the Lord, our God, the Almighty, reigns." Ibid.
- 3 Gerhard F. Hasel was a professor of theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States until his death in 1994.

4 This book has not yet been translated into English. Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

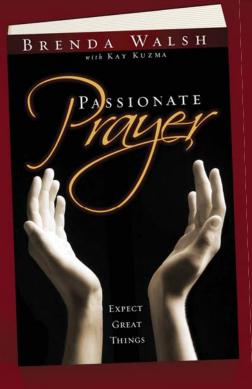


**13. Pray for a spirit of sensitivity** Openness of heart (Luke 10:30–37)

- **14. Pray for a spirit of compassion** Love in action (Mark 8:1, 2)
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## The ministry of the deaconess through history Part one of two

#### **Nancy Vyhmeister**



Nancy Vyhmeister, PhD, is professor emeritus of missions, at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. Editor's Note: Part one of a two-part series examines the role of the deaconess in the New Testament and early church. Part two, to appear in September 2008, will examine the role of the deaconess in the Adventist Church.<sup>1</sup>

> hat was the role of the deaconesses in the New Testament and in the church through history? To understand this issue fully, we shall first turn

to the New Testament for a study of the word *deaconess* and review the life and work of some of the deaconesses mentioned there. Then we shall briefly explore the role of the deaconesses in the early church from available historical records.

### The word in the New Testament

The word *deaconess* is the feminine counterpart of the male *deacon*. Both words come from the Greek verb *diakone* (to serve, to assist, to minister).

In Matthew 8:15, Luke 10:40, and Acts 6:2, the authors used the verb *diakone* in connection with serving food and other aspects of ministry. For example, Jesus coming to minister or serve (Matt. 20:28); Paul's trip "to Jerusalem to minister to the saints" with the offerings he collected in Europe (Rom. 15:25, NKJV); and the commendation of believers "ministering" to the saints (Heb. 6:10).

The noun *diakonia* also describes: the table ministry the apostles entrusted to the seven (Acts

6:1, 2); Paul's God-given ministry of the gospel (Acts 20:24); and the spiritual gifts given to the saints to prepare them for ministry (Eph. 4:12).

The noun *diakonos* is used in several ways. It denotes one who waits on tables, as at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:5). Jesus told that " 'whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant [*diakonos*]' " (Mark 10:43, NKJV). With Paul, the word takes on a specifically Christian sense. Paul is a *diakonos* of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), of God (2 Cor. 6:4), and of the church (Col. 1:25). In these texts, the meaning comes much closer to *minister* than to *servant*.

In Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8–13, *diakonos* identifies specific church officers. Theirs was evidently a spiritual occupation, for the requirements were spiritual, personal integrity, and blamelessness.

The Greek, which usually distinguishes carefully between masculine and feminine forms of a noun, does not do so with *diakonos*. The same word is used for male and female religious servers, both in pagan religions and in Christianity. When the article is used, the gender is visible: *ho diakonos* (masculine) and  $h\bar{e}$  *diakonos* (feminine). The feminine *diakonissa* appeared only in the early fourth century.

## Women deacons in the New Testament

*Phoebe.* Paul, in Romans 16:1, 2, called Phoebe a *diakonos* of the church of Cenchraea. Besides this brief statement, we know nothing about Phoebe, except that she was a benefactor of Paul and others, and that Paul commended her to the church in Rome.

That she was a benefactor or patroness (*prostatis*) suggests a woman of wealth and position. In the first-century Mediterranean world, a patron or benefactor funded the construction of monuments or buildings, financed festivals or celebrations, and supported artists and writers.

Of interest to this study, Paul recognized Phoebe as a *diakonos*, or minister, of the church at Cenchraea. Only here is *diakonos* used in relation to a specific church, implying some kind of position in the church. Translation of the term *diakonos* in this passage has more to do with the translator than the meaning of the Greek word. The KJV has "servant"; the NIV has "servant," with "deaconess" in the note; the NRSV says "deacon," with "minister" in the note.

Early church writers give their own interpretation of this passage. Origen (185–254) interprets Paul's statement to teach "that there were women ordained in the church's ministry."<sup>2</sup> About Phoebe and the other women of Romans 16, John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) wrote: "You see that these were noble women, hindered in no way by their sex in the course of virtue; and this is as might be expected for in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female."<sup>3</sup> Theodoret (393–460) noted Phoebe as "a woman deacon, prominent and noble. She was so rich in good works performed as to have merited the praise of Paul."<sup>4</sup>

"The women likewise." In 1 Timothy 3:2–7, Paul lists the characteristics of bishops or overseers. Verses 8–10 describe the spiritual traits required of *diakonoi*. Verse 11 seems something of a digression: who are these "women"? The Greek word, which can be translated "women" or "wives," has been variously translated as "women," "women deacons," or "their [deacon's] wives."

The suggestion that the term refers to wives of deacons presents difficulties, for in the Greek there is no possessive. Whose wives were they? On the other hand, if one takes the context seriously, these women serve the church as do their male counterparts. Quite probably, these women were female deacons, as was Phoebe.

In the late second century, Clement of Alexandria (155–220) indicated that this text presented evidence for the existence of *diakonon gunaikōn* ("women deacons"). John Chrysostom and Theodoret, writing in the fourth and fifth centuries respectively, also understood these women to be female deacons.<sup>5</sup>

## Women deacons in the early church

During the early centuries, women deacons and widows were recognized church leaders. We will examine evidence for the existence, tasks, and ordination of women in the diaconate<sup>6</sup> and then point to reasons for the demise of the female diaconate.

The existence of deaconesses. Somewhere between A.D. 111 and 113, Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, wrote to the Emperor Trajan asking how he should deal with Christians. In the letter, he tells of questioning two women, who were called *ministrae*, the Latin equivalent of *diakonos*.<sup>7</sup> Of the ministry of women, Clement of Alexandria wrote: "But the apostles in conformity with their ministry concentrated on undistracted preaching, and took their wives around as Christian sisters rather than spouses, to be their fellow-ministers ["fellow deacons"] in relation to housewives, through whom the Lord's teaching penetrated into the women's quarters without scandal."<sup>8</sup>

The Didascalia Apostolorum [Teaching of the Apostles], undoubtedly from the eastern part of the empire and composed in the third century, gives specific instructions about the role of men and women church workers: "Therefore, O bishop, appoint yourself workers of righteousness, helpers who cooperate with you unto life. Those that please you out of all the people you shall choose and appoint as deacons: on the one hand, a man for the administration of the many things that are required, on the other hand a woman for the ministry of women."<sup>9</sup>

Tomb inscriptions also provide evidence that female deacons served the church. Among others, an inscription

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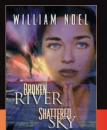
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found in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives tells of "Sophia the Deacon." Dated to the second half of the fourth century, the tombstone reads: "Here lies the slave and bride of Christ, Sophia, the deacon ( $h\bar{e}$  diakonos), the second Phoebe."<sup>10</sup> As a "bride of Christ," Sophia would have been celibate.

A sixth-century inscription from Cappadocia in Asia Minor gives not only the title, but shows what this female *diakonos* did: "Here lies the deacon Maria of pious and blessed memory, who according to the words of the apostle raised children, sheltered guests, washed the feet of the saints, and shared her bread with the needy. Remember her, Lord, when she comes into your kingdom."<sup>11</sup>

In the East, deaconesses appear as late as the twelfth or thirteenth century. The *Liber Patrum* states: "As for deaconesses, they must be wise. Those who have provided a clear witness of purity and fear of God are the ones who should be chosen. They should be chaste and modest and sixty years or older in age. They carry out the sacrament of baptism for women because it is not fitting that the priest should view the nudity of women."<sup>12</sup>

The ordination of deaconesses. The Apostolic Constitutions (late fourth century) give instruction to the bishop on the ordination of church leaders, male and female. The bishop is to lay hands upon the woman and pray: "O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and woman, who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Hulda, who didst not disdain that Thy only begotten Son should be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony and in the temple didst appoint women to be keepers of Thy holy gates, -Do Thou now also look down on this Thy servant who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Thy Holy Spirit, and cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, that she may worthily discharge the work committed to her to Thy glory and the praise of Thy Christ."13

At the Council of Chalcedon (451), the ordination of deaconesses is expressly called ordination by the imposition of hands. Members of the Council agreed that "a woman shall not receive the laying on of hands as a deaconess under forty years of age, and then only after searching examination."<sup>14</sup>

Emperor Justinian directed a novella (March 16, 535) to the archbishop of Constantinople, indicating that the church there should have 40 women deacons. In subsequent instructions, he stated that the same rules should apply to women deacons as to priests and deacons. As virgins or widows of one husband, they merited sacred ordination.<sup>15</sup>

The Barberini Greek Euchology, an eighth-century Byzantine ritual for the ordination of male and female deacons, calls for the laying-on of hands in ordination. The first of two prayers was said by a deacon, and noted that God sanctified the female sex through the birth of Jesus and has given the Holy Spirit to both men and women. The second prayer, said by the archbishop, stated: "Lord, Master, you do not reject women who dedicate themselves to you and who are willing, in a becoming way, to serve your Holy House, but admit them to the order of your ministers. Grant the gift of your Holy Spirit also to this your maid servant who wants to dedicate herself to you, and fulfill in her the grace of the ministry of the diaconate, as you have granted to Phoebe the grace of your diaconate, whom you had called to the work of the ministry."16

Tasks of deaconesses. From ancient documents, we learn of the functions performed by early deaconesses. The Apostolic Constitutions command the bishop to "ordain also a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for the ministrations towards women. . . . For we stand in need of a woman, a deaconess, for many necessities."17 Female deacons had a special ministry for women, especially in pagan homes, where male deacons were not welcome. They took the eucharist to women who could not attend church. In addition, they ministered to the sick, the poor, and those in prison.<sup>18</sup> The most important ministry of the female deacons was to assist at the baptism by immersion of women. The deaconess anointed the baptismal candidate with oil, apparently over the whole body. In

some cases, she held up a veil so that the clergy could not see the naked woman being baptized. She may have accompanied the woman into the water.

The *Disdascalia* points to the role of women deacons in the teaching ministry: "And when she who is being baptized has come up from the water, let the deaconess receive her, and teach and educate her in order that the unbreakable seal of baptism shall be (kept) in chastity and holiness. On this account, we say that the ministry of a woman deacon is especially required and urgent."<sup>19</sup>

James of Edessa (683–708) noted that deaconesses in the Eastern Church "had no authority regarding the altar." They could "sweep the sanctuary and light the sanctuary lamp." In a community of nuns, they could take "the holy sacrament from the tabernacle and distribute this" to her fellow nuns.<sup>20</sup>

## Demise of the female diaconate

While deaconesses appear in the Eastern Church until the twelfth or thirteenth century, in the West their end came much earlier. British monk Pelagius (c. 420) wrote that the female diaconate was an institution fallen into disuse in the West, though remaining in the East.<sup>21</sup>

The Synod of Nimes (396) pointed out that the problem with deaconesses was that women had "assumed for themselves the ministry of the Levites," which was "against apostolic discipline and has been unheard of until this time." Further, "any such ordination that has taken place is against all reason and is to be destroyed."<sup>22</sup>

A series of church councils made pronouncements against the ordination of deaconesses. The First Council of Orange (441) ordered: "In no way whatsoever should deaconesses ever be ordained. If there already are deaconesses, they should bow their heads beneath the blessing which is given to all the people."<sup>23</sup> The Burgundian Council of Epaon (517) ruled: "We abrogate totally within the entire kingdom the consecration of widows who are named deaconesses."<sup>24</sup> The Second Synod of Orleans (533) followed up on this prohibition. Its Canon 18 states: "To no woman must henceforth the *benedictio diaconalis* be given, because of the weakness of the sex."<sup>25</sup>

The ordination of deaconesses, rather than their work, seems to have become an issue, perhaps because of their monthly "impurity." Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis (315-405), who held that women "are a feeble race, untrustworthy and of mediocre intelligence," pointed out that deaconesses were not clergy, but served the "bishops and priests on grounds of propriety."26 In a letter to John, Bishop of Jerusalem, he insisted he had never "ordained deaconesses . . . nor done anything to split the church."27 By 1070, Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch, could affirm that "deaconesses in any proper sense had ceased to exist in the Church though the title was borne by certain nuns."28 One of the reasons he gave was the "impurity of their menstrual periods" and the fact that law "prohibits women from entering the sanctuary."29

Jacobite author Yahya ibn Jarir, writing from Persia in the third quarter of the eleventh century, wrote: "In antiquity deaconesses were ordained; their function was to be concerned with adult women and prevent their being uncovered in the presence of the bishop. However, as the practice of religion became more extensive and the decision was made to begin administering baptism to infants, this function of deaconesses was abolished."<sup>30</sup>

Michael the Great, patriarch from 1166 to 1199, seemed to agree: "In ancient times there was a need for deaconesses, principally to assist with the baptism of women. When converts from Judaism or paganism became disciples of Christianity and thereby became candidates for holy baptism, it was by the hands of the deaconesses that the priests and bishops anointed the women candidates at the time of their baptism.... But we can plainly see that this practice has long since ceased in the Church. . . . There is no longer any need for deaconesses because there are no longer any grown women who are baptized."31

#### Conclusion

The existence and ordination of deaconesses in the early church is evident. Their tasks—assisting at the baptism of women, teaching, and caring for people are also clear. Yet, they disappeared.

Three factors seem to have contributed to the demise of the female diaconate. First, infant baptism replaced adult baptism, making the assistance of a female at the baptism of adult women unnecessary. Second, the sacrifice of the Mass, which gave to the priest the power of converting bread and wine into the very body and blood of Jesus, shaped the understanding of clergy and laity and removed lay people-male and female—from ministry.<sup>32</sup> Further, the rise of monasticism, with the institution of nunneries and the insistence on celibacy, changed the focus of church work for women. M

- 1 A fuller version of this article appeared in *Andrews* University Seminary Studies 43 (2005): 133–158.
- 2 Origen, *Epistola ad Romanos* 10.17.2; commentary on Romans 16.
- 3 John Chrysostom, Homily 30, on Romans 15:25–27; taken from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 11:1002.
- 4 Theodoret, *Interpret. Epist ad Rom.* 16:1, *PG* 82, Cols. 217D, 220A.
- 5 Clement Stromata 3.6.53; John Chrysostom, In Epistola 1 ad Timotheus 3, Homily 11.1.
- 6 For further information on the history of female deacons, see "The History of Women Deacons," at http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/deac\_ovr .htm (May 21, 2007). See also, John Wijngaards, No Women in Holy Orders? The Ancient Women Deacons (Norwich, UK: Canterbury, 2002). While Wijngaards interprets the evidence as including women deacons in the clergy, Aimé Georges Martimort, whose careful analysis, Deaconesses: An Historical Study (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) is considered a classic on the topic, admits the existence of women deacons but denies that they were ever considered clergy.
- 7 Pliny, Letters 10.96.
- 8 Clement, *Stromata* 3.6.53; English translation from *Clement of Alexandria*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 85 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1991), 289.
- 9 "Concerning deacons and deaconesses," The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac, ed. Arthur Vööbus, Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium, 407 (Louvain: Sécretariat du Cor.pus SCO, 1979), 2:156.
- Ute E. Eisen, Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 159.

- 12 Liber Patrum, ser. 2, fasc. 16, in S. Congregatio pro Ecclesia Orientali, *Codificaziones canonica orientale*, *Fonti* (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930), 34, quoted in Martimort, 158.
- 13 Apostolic Constitutions 8.3.20, ANF 7:1008.
- 14 Canon 15, Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, 94.
- 15 Justinian, Novellae 3.1; 6.6; Corpus Iuris Civilis, vol. 3, Novellae (Zurich: Weidmann, 1968), 20, 21, 43–45.
- 16 Barberini Greek Euchology 336; for the original Greek, English translation, and the history of the manuscript see http://www.womenpriests.org/ traditio/deac\_gr1.asp (May 15, 2007).
- 17 Apostolic Constitutions 3.2.16 (ANF 7:884).
- 18 Mary P. Truesdell, "The Office of Deaconess," in *The Diaconate Today*, ed. Richard T. Nolan (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1968), 150. Truesdell, an Episcopalian deaconess, based much of her writing on secondary sources, such as *The Ministry* of Women: A Report by a Committee Appointed by His Grace the Lord Arcbishop of Canterbury (London: SPCK, 1919).
- 19 Didascalia 16, Vööbus, 2:157.
- 20 Syrian Synodicon, in "James of Edessa."
- 21 Pelagius, Commentary on Romans 16:1, Theodore de Bruyn, Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 150, 151.
- 22 Charles Joseph Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1871), 2:404.
- 23 Canon 26, Council of Orange, in Charles Joseph Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents* originaux (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1908), 2:1:446, 447. In a long note, Hefele outlines the history of the female diaconate and maintains that the council had to take strict measures with deaconesses because they were attempting to "extend their attributions" (447).
- 24 Council of Epaon, Canon 21, in Edward H. Landon, A Manual of the Councils of the Holy Catholic Church (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909), 1:253.
- 25 Hefele, A History of the Councils, 4:187.
- 26 Against Heresies 79.1, 3, 4.
- 27 Epiphanius, Letter to John Bishop of Jerusalem, '2 http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/epiphan .asp (May 15, 2007).
- 28 Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Deaconesses."
- 29 Replies to the Questions of Mark, reply 35, http:// www.womenpriests .org/traditio/balsamon.asp (May 15, 2007).
- 30 Jahya ibn Jarir, Book of Guidance of Jahya ibn Jarir, G. Khori-Sarkis, Le livre du guide de Yahya ibn Jarir, Orient Syrien 12 (1967): 461, quoted in Martimort, 166.
- 31 Syriac Pontifical, Vatican Syriac MS 51, quoted in Martimort, 167.
- 32 Daniel Augsburger, "Clerical Authority and Ordination in the Early Christian Church," in Women in Ministry (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1998), 77–100.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 164–167.

## Achieving the mission of the church

Brempong Owusu-Antwi



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July 2008

"'I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her'" (Mark 14:9, NIV).

f all the followers of Christ before His death, Mary Magdalene seemed the least likely to be associated with the mission of the church. Yet Mark 14:9 records that Jesus directly connected the two.

With preaching the good news of hope to the world as the mission of the church, what, then, does Mary's alabaster bottle have to do with it? What was so important about Mary's action that qualified her story to be told wherever the gospel is preached?

The answer? Commitment—self-denying, self-sacrificing, total commitment.

### The cost of Mary's offering

Mary Magdalene is no stranger. Her name brings to mind a girl seduced by Simon, a prominent man. A young woman who, perhaps trying to avoid the Bethany village gossip and ridicule, relocates to Magdala. There she loses her identity and gets initiated into a life of prostitution.

At the mention of her name, the picture of an exhausted, fearful outcast being dragged by men with stones comes to mind. You can probably feel her emotions as, under such uncomfortable circumstances, the words of hope drop into her ears like music: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). That event led to her release from the shackles of seven demons, and into a love relationship that led to a total commitment. How did she develop her self-denying, self-sacrificing commitment?

To her, being at the feet of Jesus had gone beyond probability to reality. That is how she got her strength and commitment—just as you and I would when we sit every morning at His feet, gazing at His face and listening to His voice in a personal relational Bible study and prayer. This probably describes the "how" of commitment.

#### The feast at Bethany

But I learn the "what" of commitment in the afternoon when Simon threw a party in honor of Jesus.

Come with me to Bethany, to a feast. People are eating and enjoying themselves. A woman enters stealthily and moves apprehensively toward the Guest of Honor. With a heart that seems to be pounding out of her chest, she kneels by His feet and starts to weep and moistens His feet with her tears. She wipes the tears with her long flowing hair, breaks an alabaster jar of perfume, and anoints the feet of Jesus.

What interests me is that Mary went beyond tears of repentance and appreciation. She wiped the tears with her long flowing hair in public. First Corinthians 11:15 says that a woman's hair is her glory. Notice, Mary poured out her glory at the feet of Jesus—in public. That was self-denial.

She also demonstrated self-sacrifice by giving what looked like her life's savings. The perfume was prepared from the roots and hairy stems of a plant found on the high mountains of the Himalayas in India. To get it, one had to climb to the heights of the Himalayas, uproot the herbs before the leaves opened, dry them, and extract an aromatic oil to make that fragrant perfume. The perfume was, thus, expensive in India. Now it was exported all the way from India to Palestine, making it extraordinarily expensive.

### The bottle

The alabaster bottle was also expensive by itself. It was a sealed flask made from a rock and had a long neck that had to be broken in order to use the perfume. Once broken, it could not be used anymore. You can imagine the appreciating effect it would have when added to the extraordinarily expensive perfume.

Mark 14:5 gives an idea of how much the perfume could have cost—more than a year's wages. To put this in perspective, to our knowledge all that the good Samaritan paid to the innkeeper for the care and hotel bills of the wounded man on the Jericho road was two denarii (Luke 10:35). At that time, two denarii was the bill for two months in an inn. However, the perfume cost more than 300 denarii.

Like the woman

with the two mites, Mary poured all her life savings at the feet of Jesus. That was self-sacrifice.

#### A needed lesson

Those who were closest to Christ, those whom we would expect to have understood what was happening and to have given the greatest support to Mary, instead criticized her harshly. Mark 14:4, 5 says, "But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, 'Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they criticized her sharply" (NKJV).

The Greek word *embrimaomai*, used here for "criticize sharply," describes their indignation as being like "snorting horses." That was the problem of the disciples then, and perhaps also today. They, at that moment, suffered from the disease that causes self to navigate away from what really matters. No wonder none of them was given the privilege of being the first to bear the words of hope, as was Mary, but were told to wait until they had become committed enough to receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, Mary was a living demonstration of self-denial and self-sacrifice. She exhibited a total commitment that made her the first bearer of the words of hope, "He is risen." While all the others had left, she was still there by the tomb.

Mark 14:5 states that the perfume *might have* been sold for more than a year's wages. The New Living Translation puts it, " 'It could have been sold for a year's wages.' " The root meaning of *dunamai*, which has been translated

## THE CHURCH CANNOT ACHIEVE MUCH WITHOUT THE TOTAL COMMITMENT OF ITS LEADERS AND MEMBERS— Leaders who will humble Themselves and be examples of Self-Denial and Self-Sacrifice.

"could have," or "might have," incorporates the concepts of ability, capability, and power. The substantive form is used in Acts 1:8, " 'You will receive *power* when the Holy Spirit comes on you' " (NIV; emphasis added). *Dunamai*, in the context, implies that she could have sold it for over a year's wages, yet she surrendered it all at the feet of the Lord. Her action shows that one has to surrender one's abilities, capabilities, power, and self-glory to the Lord before one can fulfill the mission of the church.

What was important about the action of the woman with the alabaster bottle? She did not only sing "I Surrender All." She lived it. She was a living demonstration of self-denial, self-sacrifice, and complete commitment, which must accompany the proclamation of the gospel.

The church cannot achieve much without the total commitment of its leaders and members—leaders who will humble themselves and be examples of self-denial and self-sacrifice. Commitment is the driving force that the Holy Spirit will use to achieve the mission. Surely wherever the gospel will be preached there also will be the Mary Magdalene commitment.

#### A living demonstration

I was conducting an evangelistic series in Goaso, Ghana. A group of young people from Kumasi joined me for the last two weeks in order to sing and give Bible studies. At the end of the first week, there was a boisterous thunderstorm. Thunder roared and threatened to tear the darkened sky into pieces while accompanying lightning flashed. The leader of the group, at that particular moment giving Bible studies, was hit by a bolt. We believed God was going to do a miracle. We prayed all night while he was transferred from the small clinic in town to a district hospital. But he died.

The superstition

associated with lightning killing a man induced fear in a lot of people. Discouragement hung in our sky because, in the context of superstition versus the power of God, a great controversy in its own right had emerged with many questions being raised. I pleaded with the young people to go back to Kumasi and put the minds of their families at peace and also to prepare for the burial of their leader. But, like Ruth, they said, "No, let the body be put in the morque until we have completed the campaign." None left, complained, or showed discouragement. They even worked harder and, as a result, a vibrant church was planted. The young people were not employed by the church, they were not paid, and they were not going to be given any special positions in the church. Yet they stuck with the evangelistic series. That was commitment.

Those young people had learned to spend time with the Lord in prayer, Bible study, and witnessing—three indispensable and interconnected elements for any sustainable growth in Christianity.

The point? Wherever the gospel will be preached, Mary's love, self-denial, self-sacrifice, and total commitment will be told. May the Holy Spirit help us develop those qualities as we proclaim the words of hope. Then our offices will emit hope, our relationships will transmit hope, and our proclamations will effect hope as we, under the power of God, work to achieve the mission of the church.

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## Grief and faith

Michael R. Lombardo



Michael R. Lombardo, DMin, pastors the Rossville and Ringgold Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Georgia, United States.

ow should Christians react to grief? What is the relation between faith and grief? Some Christians assume that something has gone wrong with their faith if they experience or express grief, and particularly so at a time when the spotlight shines on the young, the virile, the positive, and the successful. But the point remains that in the course of any normal human experience, grief and sadness do have their share. Normally, people of faith do feel sadness and grief at times of loss. God has made us with the capacity to express our sad as well as happy emotions.<sup>1</sup>

When Abraham lost his wife, he mourned and wept for her: "She died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her" (Gen. 23:2).<sup>2</sup> When Jacob died, Joseph "fell upon his father and wept over him and kissed him" (Gen. 50:1), and his family and friends "lamented loudly and bitterly" (Gen. 50:10). Hannah grieved over her inability to bear a child (1 Sam.1:5), and David composed two great psalms on grieving over his failures and sins (Pss. 32 and 51).

Many psalms speak frankly about the reality of grief: "My eyes grow weak with sorrow; / they fail because of all my foes" (Ps. 6:7); "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts / and every day have sorrow in my heart? / How long will my enemy triumph over me?" (Ps. 13:2); "Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; / my eyes grow weak with sorrow, / my soul and my body with grief" (Ps. 31:9); "The length of our days is seventy years— / or eighty, if we have the strength; / yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, / for

they quickly pass, and we fly away" (Ps. 90:10); "Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled / by oppression, calamity and sorrow" (Ps. 107:39); "The cords of death entangled me, / the anguish of the grave came upon me; / I was overcome by trouble and sorrow" (Ps. 116:3).

From these and other similar passages, we note that God does not condemn our grief and sadness but understands them as a normal part of human experience. Paul acknowledged God's goodness in healing his friend Epaphroditis and mourned that his death would have brought "sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil. 2:27). In other words, Paul freely admits that he would have had a hard time in coping with the loss of a friend and gives some counsel on a Christian's attitude to grief. The apostle acknowledges the normalcy of grief and does not suggest that Christians should be strong and avoid the pain associated with loss. Rather, Christians are reminded that while they grieve, they must not lose faith. "We do not want you . . . to grieve," says the apostle, "like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). In other words, the Christian response to bereavement includes both grief and hope.<sup>3</sup>

### **Twofold affirmation**

That response includes a twofold affirmation: first, we live in a world of pain, separation, and death (1 Cor. 15:56); second, we know a better day is coming, a resurrection day of triumph over suffering and death (1 Cor. 15:16, 17; John 5:28, 29; 11:23, 24). In between, we are asked to endure the pain of separation, "the sting of death" (1 Cor. 15:56), and comfort one another with the hope of the Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:17).

Jesus chose that ultimate hope to comfort Martha in her hour of grief (John 11:23). While Jesus' words were meant to bring encouragement, His intent was not to repress Mary and Martha's need to grieve. In fact, as Jesus saw their pain, He provided appropriate and meaningful ministry and support by mirroring their grief: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Whatever the case, Jesus did not rebuke Mary and Martha for their grief.

When we lose a loved one who has died in the blessed hope, we can take consolation in the hope that we will see them again and know that they are not suffering but simply waiting in an unconscious sleep (John 11:11; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:51), which for them lasts but a moment. Their very next thought will be to wake up to Jesus' calling them to come forth (1 Thess. 4:16; John 5:28, 29). At the same time we can acknowledge the fact that we hurt because we miss them and will endure the sting that will one day come to an end.

Where do some Christians get the mistaken idea that it is inappropriate to grieve? How does the expression of sorrow and hurt become a demonstration of weakness? Nowhere does the Bible teach that concept.<sup>4</sup> Solomon reminds us of the reality of death and grief by pointing out that there is "a time to be born and a time to die, . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Eccles. 3:2–4). Christians are not to live in a fantasy world.<sup>5</sup>

Oftentimes when significant loss occurs, the bereaved persons feel that their faith has been shaken or even shattered. Religious people may find themselves questioning their entire belief structure and doubting all that has been the foundation of their past life. This would be a normal consequence of grief.<sup>6</sup>

Derek Nuttal says, "Having a religious belief will not necessarily reduce the pain of loss nor remove the need to work through the stages of grief. Such belief, however is an aid to grieving."<sup>7</sup> In bereavement we need to know we are not alone, that God understands our pain and in some ways shares our sorrow. "At the heart of Christianity is faith in a God who through His son has shown he loves us and shares in what we experience and through the cross suffers with us."<sup>8</sup>

To say that a deeply religious person will not face grief situations is unrealistic and emotionally unhealthy.<sup>9</sup> Jesus felt free to express His grief on different occasions including weeping openly (John 11:35; Matt. 26:37). He even confided in His disciples toward the end of His life that His soul was "'overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death'" (Matt. 26:38). He even asked for an impromptu support group when He appealed to His closest disciples to "'stay here and keep watch with me'" (Matt. 26:38).

Commenting on Christian attitudes toward grief, one writer says, "Grief appears to have a transcendent function and can in the end enhance spiritual growth of bereaved people as it awakens them to existential and spiritual essence of life."<sup>10</sup> We, as Christians, sometimes go wrong when we use the hope of life to come to mask our present feelings of pain, which must have expression. Not continuous expression as if we had no hope, but sufficient expression in order to get past them through to healing.<sup>11</sup>

#### Jesus: Model in grieving

Christians should consider Jesus as the Model. He shared our emotions and feelings. There were moments when He was troubled and full of sorrow: "Surely he took up our infirmities / and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4). He told His disciples, "'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death'" (Matt. 26:38). "He [lesus] began to be deeply distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:33). He knew how to cry: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it" (Luke 19:41). He experienced anguish: "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). He experienced and displayed the full range of emotions including joy, love, and compassion (see Luke 10:21; 7:13; John 15:10,11; 17:13; Mark 10:21; 1:40, 41; Matt. 14:13, 14). He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3, KJV). He displayed the deep emotion of anguish and despair in a time of impending loss when he said, "'My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Jesus' questioning and despair demonstrated a part of the grieving process. In addition, Jesus also showed grief over His beloved city Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37).

Jesus grieved at the time of Lazarus' death (John 11). He cried, and others observed "'how He loved him!'" (John 11:36). The passage also states that Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (11:33). Ellen White comments on how Jesus felt "every pang of anguish, as He said to His disciples, 'Lazarus is dead.' "12 Although Jesus was aware that He would raise Lazarus in a short while, He grieved for the pain and anguish that Mary and Martha had to experience.13 In human sympathy He wept for those in sorrow. He also wept for those who would plan His own death because of their unbelief in and hatred of Him.14

If Jesus, our Model and Example, can grieve and be "human," then other humans in this world of sin can also hurt and grieve. Ministers who are commissioned to pastor the flock need to stop shutting down the expression of pain from their hurting sheep because it makes them (the ministers) uncomfortable. Much of the time, whether we realize it or not, we are motivated by our own needs. Shutting grieving people down becomes one way of keeping a lid on our own repressed grief. It would be better if we sought help and assistance in working through our own losses so we could feel more comfortable and therefore able to be present in the midst of our congregant's pain and suffering.

The griever needs our presence. When the timing is right, we can certainly share the reality of heaven that serves as a foundation for our hope in the midst of grief and loss. But our encouragement should never be used to shut down the need of hurting people to express their pain over the sorrow they are experiencing regarding separation from their loved ones.

- Derek Nuttal, "Christian Theology and Pastoral Practice," in *The Needs of Bereaved People in Interpreting Death*, ed. Peter Jupp and Tony Rogers (Herndon, VA: Wellington Publishers, 1997), 370.
- 2 Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture passages are from the New International Version.
- 3 William Cutler and Richard Peace, *Dealing With Grief and Loss: Hope in the Midst of Pain* (Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1990), 11.
- 4 Richard Winter, "A Biblical and Theological View of Grief and Bereavement," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 18 (1999): 368.
- 5 J. Donald Bane et al., eds., *Death and Ministry: Pastoral Care of the Dying and the Bereaved* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 125, 126.
- Marta Felber, Finding Your Way After a Spouse Dies (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2000), 20.
   Nuttal. 27.

- 9 Granger E. Westberg, Good Grief: A Constructive Approach to the Problem of Loss, large ed. (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1979), 6, 7.
- 10 Li-chu Chen, "Grief as a Transcendent Function and Teacher of Spiritual Growth," *Pastoral Psychology* 46 (1997): 79.
- 11 Winter, 369.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 528.
- 13 Ibid., 528, 533.
- 14 Ibid., 533, 534.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



## "Be prepared. Have your house in order."

Pastor Jimmy and Shereen Ferguson / Baltimore, Maryland



e learn by example. Shereen's two elderly

aunts lived together and shared everything. Worried about what might happen if one or the other of them died, the aunts prepaid their funerals; wrote out all their wishes for their belongings; and had an

attorney prepare their wills. When they died, there were no unanswered questions. Their testimony, in death as in life, was: "Be prepared. Have your house in order." Ellen White wrote, "Death will not come one day sooner...because you have made your will." By wel-

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## A few things I have learned

**Jay Randall Sloop** 



Jay Randall Sloop, MD, is the health ministries director, Upper Columbia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Spokane, Washington, United States.

hen I was seeing the usual array of patients on an ordinary day in 1962, one lady came in who appeared particularly troubled. As she detailed her symptoms, I sensed that her need was more spiritual than anything else. At that time in my life, my spiritual toolbox contained only a single item, and that was to invite her to visit my church.

Much to my embarrassment, when I met her at church, I couldn't remember her name, so right away I called my receptionist. After I described the patient, she gave me name after name until she said "Wilma."<sup>1</sup> That was she, so I went back into the church and introduced her to the pastor.

Because I had never even had a thought about giving Bible studies to anyone, let alone Wilma, the pastor offered to study with her. When he began, Wilma's 15-year-old daughter, Sharron, joined in. One lesson per week was not enough, so they did two. At that rate, it was not many weeks until both wanted to be baptized. Wilma's husband, Everett, saw the wonderful changes in them, and he, too, was eventually baptized.

Then there was the matter of school for Sharron. The high school crowd had different values from Sharron's new ones, so her parents were interested in hearing about Gem State Academy, a Christian high school. The financial obligations, however, seemed overwhelming. But between what Everett and Wilma could do, and adding what Sharron's older brother contributed, what Sharron could earn at the school, and what aid the local church could offer, Sharron attended the academy after all. Following academy, she went to what was then known as Walla Walla College for elementary education training.

Eventually, I moved to Washington State and set up practice there. Our local church school needed a teacher, Sharron applied, and we hired her. Some time later, she married, and still later, she was my patient for her pregnancies. The first were twins. Sharron and Larry kept a growing spiritual life and raised their three children as Jesus' close friends.

Years later, tragedy struck. A mammogram and biopsy confirmed Sharron's breast cancer, which the doctors treated. However, it was later found in her brain. There were several brain surgeries, but each time the cancer returned with a vengeance. Her pastor and friends did what they could to help Sharron through this difficult time. Angela, her daughter who had just graduated from college, moved home to nurse Sharron through those trying years.

With my last visit to this family, not long before Sharron's death, I concluded that in spite of the persistent and spreading cancer, God did His healing miracle in the mental and spiritual areas.

Since Sharron's death, I have visited Angela several times. Now it is she who needs, and is finding, healing. She uses her physical, mental, and spiritual tools well, with her spiritual life centering around her daily devotional time with Jesus and the privilege of sharing God's healing with her friends. And, she has just led her church in its Vacation Bible School.

She also tends to the physical factors in her personal life that she finds necessary for healing, such as careful nutrition for the health of her body's cells, proper exercise for tension release, and regular times for sleep to bring both physical and mental stability and renewal. Emotional healing is, of course, also essential.

As we look over these three generations, what do we see, and what can we learn?

Wilma came seeking physical answers to spiritual problems. When given a spiritual start, she ran with it and gained the physical and mental blessings as well. Sharron had a physical problem that we never were able to cure. However, she was healed in the mental and spiritual areas. Angela now finds herself needing emotional healing, and she will find it with help from spiritual and physical tools.

As I have watched all this unfold during more than 45 years of medical practice and ministry, a few points have stuck out in my mind about how—if ministers and health professionals would work together—our churches would be in much better position to meet the needs of our members, as well as be more effective in outreach to the community.

#### It takes all three

What if we were to separate these three areas of healing? What if I, as a physician, had not thought to address Wilma's spiritual needs? What if the pastor had left her spiritual care to me, since I had been her initial contact person? What if the church had not joined together to help provide for the educational needs of Sharron?

First, ministers should recognize the need to keep the physical, emotional, and spiritual areas of life together as they work with Christian physicians and other professionals when people with special needs come forward.

Second, there are studies that show that purpose in life and spirituality are positively correlated in HIV-positive patients.<sup>2</sup> Total sobriety maintenance for those with spiritual involvement and beliefs was significant over those who relapsed.<sup>3</sup> There is support for belief that spirituality can significantly improve healing from cancer.<sup>4</sup> "Total health is possible only when the body and spirit are integrated into one reality."5 Research confirms our understanding of humanity and human nature. That's why ministers and health professionals need each other. None can do it all alone, but together they can be an effective team, working toward ministering to whatever needs arise with the folks they encounter on a daily basis.

Third, we need to work together on a personal basis by asking for help from each other when we need it. We need to join each other in the church, showing that we are on the same team, and we need to work together in our community outreach programs. We have often relegated the pastor's role in a cooking school to ask God's blessing on the food, or we request the doctor to give a personal introduction or a three minute "health nugget" at the start of the evangelist's meetings.

Often those who might not be interested in a preaching series will be interested in an integrated physical, mental, and spiritual series done in your local church. God alone knows how many folks are members today who came looking for physical healing, not realizing how much more the Lord had in store for them.

### A more effective ministry

In recent years, great strides were made in our local church when some of the individuals in the medical field had a weekly early morning meeting with the pastor for Bible study and prayer. Differences were worked out, and a spirit of trust grew so that we could count on each other to help in areas outside of each one's primary expertise. We know we can refer more complex problems over to those who are best qualified to handle them, and as a team we are exponentially more effective than working solo.

Presently, for instance, we conduct weekly community health classes in which health professionals deal with the scientific data about health, another person deals with the social and emotional aspects, while the pastor takes one-third of the time with a dovetailed presentation centered on the healing stories from Scripture.

## How can ministers, then, do the same work as their Master?

Team building has become the best answer I know to this important question. When we work as a team, God's healing messages—grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life—have new luster and power. But, if a person hurts, physically or mentally, their own pain will be their first priority—not the nature of the Trinity, the prophecies of Daniel, or what happens during the millennium.

Imagine how much more effective your ministry would be if, through working with health professionals, you were able to better meet the physical and mental challenges of those with whom you come in contact. Think about how much more open folks would be to the spiritual messages if you were able to bring relief and comfort in areas where they hurt the most. People are not just spiritual beings but mental and physical as well, and we will be most effective when we can help them, as a team, in all three areas.

Have we forgotten this well-known statement ? "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' "<sup>6</sup>

Herein lies a crucial key to effective ministry: meeting the people's needs wherever and whenever we possibly can. And so often, aren't those needs physical *and* mental *and* spiritual? Not just one or another?

#### Nobody can do it alone

"I am the LORD that healeth thee" (Exod. 15:26). Ministers and health professionals are only the tools in God's hands. God is our Healer, our Comforter, and our Savior. We can do none of these things. We can, instead, choose to cooperate with Him and others of His servants in seeking to reach out to the hurting, the lost, and the suffering who are always all around us. I saw this first with Wilma, then with Sharron, and now I'm seeing it with Wilma's granddaughter, Angela.

Our work isn't over. And it will never be, at least not until that day when, as was read at Sharron's funeral, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:16–18). **M** 

- 3 A. E. Brown et al., "Association of Spirituality and Sobriety During a Behavioral Spirituality Intervention for Twelve Step (TS) Recovery," *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* 33, no. 4, (2007): 611–7.
- 4 M. H. Torosian and V. R. Biddle, "Spirituality and Healing," *Seminars in Oncology* 32, no. 2, (2005): 232–6.
- 5 C. J. van der Poel, "Pastoral care: Recognizing Life as Multidimensional," *Hospital Progress* 61, no. 6, (June 1980): 50–5.
- 6 E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 143.

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<sup>1</sup> The names used in the scenarios throughout this article are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Carla J. Groh and Kathleen M. Litwinczuk, "The Relationship Between Spirituality, Purpose in Life, and Well-Being in HIV-Positive Persons" *Journal* of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care 18, no. 3, (May 2007): 13–22.

## Dateline

## The critical importance of evangelism

**Arua, Uganda**—A two-week intensive training program in evangelism sponsored jointly by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Middle East and the Seventh-day Adventist Church for Trans-Europe, was recently conducted in Uganda for pastors from southern Sudan. The event, held in Arua, featured classroom lectures, hands-on workshops in evangelistic sermon preparation and delivery, and time for questions. The training was part of a far-reaching plan to emphasize the critical importance of evangelism as the lifeblood of the church in southern Sudan.

Janos Kovacs-Biro lectured on the motives, theology, and practice of evangelism, as well as practical suggestions on preparing for an evangelistic series. Maywald Jesudass dealt with Bible study and sermon preparation and issues relating to the personal life of the pastor/evangelist. Complementing these discourses were lectures by **Bern** Yuot on personal prayer and spiritual development. Amir Ghali also spoke on gaining decisions for Christ and the growth of the church.

"This training has inspired us with new ideas. We have been given a better understanding of our responsibilities as pastors and evangelists to share the gospel in a non-offensive way, yet with power and authority," said **Charles Lagu**.



*Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, by Richard Davidson, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007, 844 pages.

"Our heartfelt thanks goes to those who gave freely of their time and resources to make this training possible," said **Michael Collins,** president of the church in South Sudan. [Michael Collins/TED News]

## Festivals of religious freedom

The years 2008 to 2010 have been designated as three special years to emphasize a new concept of large church convocations known as Festivals of

Religious Freedom. This initiative is the result of a vision by **John Graz**, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church world headquarters.

As a Christian community that endorses and proclaims the conviction that God created all people with the right to choose their beliefs, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is called to promote religious freedom in all countries where it is feasible, and to thereby preserve what has been accomplished through sacrifice and goodwill through the years.

The sincere expression of Thank You for Religious Freedom, expressed in various ways through the festivals, is a positive message to be delivered to public officials, to the community at large, and to all believers who enjoy



the benefits of religious freedom around the world.

Festivals of Religious Freedom will embrace the following:

- Gratitude to God
- Gratitude to country
- Gratitude to public authorities
- Gratitude to institutions and organizations promoting religious freedom
- Gratitude to leaders of this noble cause
- Gratitude in memory of those who died in defense of religious freedom
- Gratitude to those who anonymously have been supporting religious freedom from behind the scene

During the festivals, emphasis will be given to thanking the host country and the presiding authorities who support religious freedom as an extension of justice and respect for human dignity. According to Graz, "Festivals of Religious Liberty have already been organized in many countries, including Romania, South Korea, the Philippines, Brazil, Peru, Ghana, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, Guyana, and the Ukraine. In 2006 the first megafestival was organized in São Paulo, Brazil, with twelve thousand participants. Megafestivals are already planned for 2008 and 2009 in North America, South America, Asia, Africa, and other continents-including the First World Festival of Religious Freedom to be held in Lima, Peru, on November 21, 2009." [Alfredo Garcia-Marenko]



The topics of human sexuality and gender differentiation are very much alive today in academic circles and in society at large. The contribution of the Old Testament to human sexuality is abundant, but there has been a need to look at it in a holistic way, attempting to identify its underlying theological unity. Richard Davidson accepted the challenge and has produced a massive volume on the topic of sexuality in the Old Testament. It is an exciting book, uncovering theological insights of deep significance and, when necessary, taking the reader through the practices found in the ancient Near Eastern religions. RESOURCES

What we find in the Hebrew Scripture, Davidson argues, is to a significant extent unique.

Davidson defines human sexuality as referring to gender differentiation and to sexual endowment, that is to say, the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of sexuality. With that definition in mind, he proceeds to explore the Old Testament materials on sexuality. His methodology is clearly stated from the beginning. He is approaching the text in its canonical form. He accepts insights from other approaches to the text as long as they honor the text as we have it. This means that he will not read against the grain of the text but with it, and that consequently he will not apply to the text the feminist hermeneutics of suspicion and resistance, but rather one of consent. The result is an integrated theology of human sexuality that does not overlook the complexity of the topic and the diversity of materials found in the Old Testament.

As a result of the study of the biblical materials, Davidson has concluded that "the Edenic pattern for sexuality constitutes the foundation for the rest of the OT perspective on this topic" (p. 3). This is most probably the central premise of the book and becomes the evaluative criterion by which the rest of the materials on sexuality are evaluated. This premise will certainly be a bone of contention among scholars who have sustained that Creation theology was a latecomer in Old Testament theology. But in this case the canonical approach demonstrates the high value of Davidson's premise. He has chosen to listen closely to the biblical text and the result is an impressive theology of human sexuality.

From the structural point of view, the book forms a literary envelope. Davidson begins with the theology of sexuality depicted in the narrative of the Garden of Eden and closes the book with the restoration of that theology in the book of Song of Solomon. There we again find a couple deeply in love in the setting of a garden. There is a final chapter on the New Testament, but it is almost an appendix. He persuasively demonstrates that the theology of the book is indeed a return to the Creation theology of human sexuality. Between those covers, he takes the reader on a journey throughout the Old Testament materials dealing with human sexuality after the Fall in the Torah, Prophets, and the Writings. He carefully deals in a balanced way with topics such as heterosexuality and homosexuality, transvestism, monogamy versus polygamy and concubinage, and questions related to the submission of woman. Other topics that do not escape his attention are prostitution, masturbation, mixed marriages, female impurity, adultery, and premarital sex.

Throughout the discussion Davidson is constantly able to demonstrate that the Edenic divine design for human sexuality was not totally lost in Israel. He acknowledges that human sexuality was distorted by sin and men abused and exploited women for their own interests. But he also affirms and demonstrates that such distortions were not condoned by the Lord. In fact, he argues that in the Old Testament women enjoyed a high status in religious and civil affairs. The Lord instituted a number of laws whose purpose was to set limits to the male abuse of women in Israelite society.

Unquestionably, the book reaches it climax in Davidson's analysis of the book of Song of Solomon. This is an exquisite, tasteful, and yet vivid description and theology of human sexuality in all of its purity, reflecting the divine intent. The reader will be greatly enriched by a careful reading of the discussion. Davidson employed the theological elements of human sexuality found in the Creation narrative to structure the theology of Song of Solomon. However, he does not force on the book a theology that is foreign to it. On the contrary, he demonstrates that such theological parallel is provided by the text of the book itself.

The title of the book was taken from Song of Solomon 8:6c (NASB): "[Love is] the very flame of (Yahweh)." This means that "if the blaze of love, ardent love, such as between a man and a woman, is indeed the flame of Yahweh, then human love is explicitly described as originating in God, a spark off of the Holy Flame. It is therefore, in a word, *Holy* love" (p. 630).

Readers may argue with Davidson about the interpretation of particular passages, but they will probably acknowledge that he did not hastily reach his conclusions. He carefully went through the scholarly literature and submitted all suggestions and conclusions to the scrutiny of Scripture. Having said that, allow me a suggestion or two. Davidson argues quite convincingly that the Shulammite was the first wife of Solomon, and most probably an Egyptian princess. If that is the case, we are dealing with a mixed marriage. The Edenic theology of human sexuality found in the book seems to require a couple committed to the Lord. We know that in cases of political marriages the bride came accompanied by their maids and that her religious convictions were to be respected by making provision for her to worship her gods. Do we have any evidence for the opposite in the case of the Shulammite? Did she become an Israelite? I missed that discussion (perhaps it is there and I simply overlooked it). It is here that a valid pastoral concern surfaces that may need some attention. I also missed any discussion related to circumcision. It would be difficult to argue that the rite did not have sexual overtones.

This book is highly recommended to professors, pastors, family ministries personnel, and those interested in human sexuality.

—Reviewed by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ThD, director of the Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

## The miracle of working God's way

A nillustrated Bible story caught my attention. The artist had taken dramatic license in the rendition of a hatchet that had sprouted hands and feet with little fins—the swimming ax head.

Subsequently, I've discovered this story is much more instructive of God's leadership principles than mere entertainment.

**Define your need.** "And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, 'See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us' " (2 Kings 6:1).\* The need was self-evident—"this place is too small." They had insufficient room for their expanding group. Analysis of current reality is essential, for you cannot possibly go where you would like until you thoroughly understand where you are. Evaluate your situation until the need becomes self-evident to the majority of your team.

**Design your plan.** " 'Please, let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell' " (2 Kings 6:2). The young men brought Elisha a clear, detailed plan. A site had been selected, necessary resources had been identified and located, and a strategy had been developed for everyone's task. With planning considered essential, the more detail available the better. To develop ownership, the planning process becomes even more important than the final draft.

**Defer to God's will.** "So he answered, 'Go' " (2 Kings 6:2). With God's endorsement, success was guaranteed. When you advance, certain that you are following Heaven's will, you have the assurance of success. Scripture says, "We should make plans—counting on God to direct us" (Prov. 16:9, TLB). You will discover no better basis for moving forward than assurance of God's approval. Prayerfully await God's permission. Then boldly venture where you otherwise would fear to go. James A. Cress



**Determine your support.** " 'Please consent to go with your servants.' And he answered, 'I will go' " (2 Kings 6:3). When you have carefully designed your plan and prayerfully deferred to God's will, you are ready to enlist the support of others. Recruit your team. Seek counsel from your leaders and request their active participation. Your efforts, combined with Heaven's approval and your leaders' involvement, guarantee success.

**Direct your actions.** "So he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees" (2 Kings 6:4). What a prescription for success: careful preparation immediately followed by diligent work—vision transformed into activity. Israel had previously been to Jordan but hesitated to cross into the Promised Land. They had set up camp and even held a prayer meeting, but nothing happened until the spiritual leaders moved the people forward. Once you have made your plan and sought God's will, go to work! Seize the initiative. Be about your duty.

**Describe your trauma.** "But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, 'Alas, master! For it was borrowed'" (2 Kings 6:5). Even a God-endorsed project does not eliminate difficulties. In this life the reality of tragedy will repeatedly focus our attention on the wider view of God's promised new creation. If we could achieve a trouble-free existence here, we would not long for the blessed hope. However, differentiate between tragedy and trauma. This was not a tragic loss of life or serious injury. The trauma was loss of a borrowed tool by an embarrassed student loath to face the owner. Help your people understand God's interest in our concerns, large and small.

**Delight in your miracles.** "So the man of God said, 'Where did it fall?' ... and he made the iron float" (2 Kings 6:6). Imagine the young man's relief. I'm certain there was rejoicing by the Jordan and I'm certain the story was retold hundreds of times by those who witnessed the event. Miracles generate ongoing testimonies of what wonderful things God has done. Sharing the story multiplies the powerful reassurance that if God is with us, who can be against us!

**Designate your responsibility.** "'Pick it up for yourself'" (2 Kings 6:7). Our response to a miracle means acting upon God's providence. The ax head floated, it did not swim to shore and jump up on the bank. Elisha's instructions were clear, "Pick it up for yourself!" Do what you can do. When God does His part, we must do our part. Cooperation with providential opportunities guarantees ultimate victory. When Jesus sent Peter fishing for Caesar's tax, the coin was already in the mouth of the fish. But the miracle was only accomplished when Peter followed instructions.

**Decide to obey.** "So he reached out his hand and took it" (2 Kings 6:7). Each of us has a choice. Obedience is a decision. The student could have observed the floating ax head and never retrieved the miracle. He could have heard the instructions but refused to participate. When God opens an opportunity, we must cooperate. When we decide to obey, miracles move from possibility to reality.

This powerfully illustrates the miracle of working God's way! M

<sup>\*</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the NKIV.

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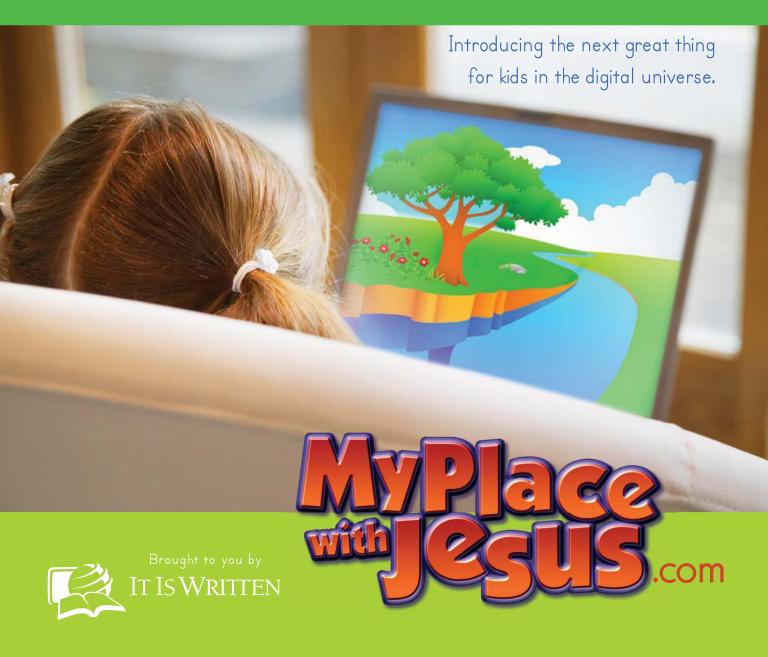
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