<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWS</th>
<th>OPINION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pastor of Independent Adventist Church in Atlanta Suburb Arrested</strong></td>
<td><strong>Power Disparity and Sexual Abuse in the Church:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Child Sexual Abuse:**</td>
<td>The Christian world continues to chalk up new and glaring incidences of sexual abuse of women. Several great Christian leaders and theologians of the recent past were well known for their illicit sexual behavior, yet their writings are still quoted righteously from the pulpit. Perhaps the Bible itself somehow gives Christian men a pass to lord it over women. An <em>Adventist Today</em> longer exclusive piece by Jeff Boyd....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As more Sabbatarian churches arise in the US, some including &quot;seventh day&quot; in their titles, there has been some confusion about the identity of an elderly pastor arrested for molestation of a very young child....</td>
<td><strong>Zealous for... ummm...:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deadlines Near for Fall 2013 Gatherings Convened by The One Project:</strong></td>
<td>Is zeal always a good thing? Can it be evil? Joan Chittister and Debonnaire Kovacs explore the ramifications of zeal, both good and evil and sometimes mixed....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The One</em> Project convenes Nov. 1 at Newbold College in Great Britain; at Andrews University (November 8) with a first-ever Spanish-language convocation; and with services thereafter (English) at various Adventist universities on the topic &quot;Present Truth&quot;....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
President of Malawi Speaks for Adventist University Graduation, Advocates for Investment in Human Capital:
Yet another African national government went out of its way to commend the Church and its graduates for their investment in education....

Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 21, "When the Beast Comes to Your Church":
Are there idols in Adventist churches? The author lists quite a few, including The Bible (accumulation of Bible knowledge can camouflage a non-existent relationship with God); and Correct Doctrines (legalism, though portraying itself as legal, is utterly illegal because it bypasses the blood of Jesus Christ as the only grounds for our salvation)....

South Central Conference Camp Meeting, 2013:
The latest in AT's camp meeting series takes us to Alabama, to the South Central Conference’s huge 2013 camp meeting. The report includes a personal blog by the conference president, Elder Dana Edmond....

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Pastor of Independent Adventist Church in Atlanta Suburb Arrested for Child Sexual Abuse

By AT News Team, September 1, 2013

Pastor John Pinkston, the 76-year-old founder of the Congregation Church of God Seventh Day in Kennesaw, Georgia, was arrested last week by Cobb County sheriff’s deputies because of an accusation filed by the parents of a six-year-old girl that he allegedly molested at the church between July 17 and August 22 this year. He posted a $35,000 bond as bail and was released pending trial. The story was reported in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution on Wednesday and on the following day by the NBC Television news and CBS Television news affiliates in Atlanta, as well as the Associated Press. Pinkston spent from noon to 8 p.m. on Wednesday in the county jail.

The congregation's Web site states that it is "a totally independent church and is not affiliated with any other organizations" and "was chartered in October 1990." It is very likely that this congregation has no prior history with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, but is among the tens of thousands of independent churches around the world that also keep the Sabbath and have a set of beliefs generally classified as "Adventist." A search of the yearbooks from 1883 to 2012 in the online archives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church finds no listing for a John Pinkston or similar name.

The statement of beliefs on the congregation's Web site is in many ways parallel to Adventist theology, but also includes two items that historically were promoted by Herbert W. Armstrong, the founders of the Worldwide Church of God. It observes versions of Old Testament festivals, scheduled in March, May and September in 2013. Also, "we believe America and Britain represent the two tribes of Israel known as Ephraim and Manasseh [and] that the nations of northwestern Europe are identified as the remaining lost tribes of Israel."

Pinkston has radio and television programs that are similar to Armstrong's in their focus on the fulfillment of Bible prophecy in current events. In addition to Sunday broadcasts on Channel 11 in Atlanta and Fox television in Macon, Georgia, his television program is also released in Chattanooga, Tennessee; Louisville, Kentucky; and Salt Lake City, Utah. The radio program is broadcast on a shortwave station in Nashville and AM stations in New Orleans, San Antonio, Las Vegas and Wheeling, West Virginia.

Armstrong died in 1986 and over the next two decades his denomination went through major theological changes. In 2009 it was renamed Grace Communion International and joined the National Association of Evangelicals. During the 1990s many groups that were affiliated with Armstrong in the past created several new denominations or became independent congregations.

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Deadlines Near for Fall 2013 Gatherings Convened by the One Project

AT News Team, September 5, 2013

The One Project continues to bring together believers who see Jesus as the one most important thing in the Adventist faith. A November 8-10 gathering on the campus of Andrews University (AU) in Berrien Springs, Michigan, is the first in the Spanish language. A November 1-3 event is on the campus of Newbold College in the United Kingdom. The deadline to register for either or both of these events comes up in the next few days. Speakers at Newbold will include Pastor Japhet de Oliveira from AU; Pastor Sam Leonor from La Sierra University (LSU) in Riverside, California; Dr. Laurence Turner, chairman of the theology department at Newbold; Pastor Sam Davis, president of the South England Conference; Pastor Dejan Stojkovic, director of teen ministries, Adventist Volunteer Services and chaplaincy ministries for the South England Conference; Brandy Kirstein, a nurse and Bible worker from Collegedale, Tennessee; Pastor Bjorn Ottesen, who has served until recently as the president of the denomination in Sweden; Pastor Karin Wieczorek from the Stanborough Park Church in England; Pastor David Franklin from Berea Temple in Baltimore; and Pastor Terry Swenson from Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, California. Speakers for the Hispanic event at AU will include Leonor and Oliveira; Pastor Manny Arteaga of Resurrection Seventh-day Adventist Church in West Covina, California; Pastor Jose Cortez, Jr., youth director of the Atlantic Union Conference; Pastor Pedro Trinidad of the Spanish Adventist Churches in Concord and Lodi, California; Pastor Yami Bazan, vice president for student activities at LSU; Pastor Miguel Mendez of the Calexico Church in California; Pastor Jose Medina from the Adventist churches in East Peoria, Chillicothe and Normal, Illinois; and Pastor Dany Hernandez from Life Source Adventist Fellowship in Denver. Four of the Adventist universities in North America are joining the One project this school year in a focus on "Present Truth." This theme will be presented at various worship events on each campus through the year. At Andrews University the entire chapel schedule is focused around "Present Truth." At Walla Walla University the theme will be addressed at vespers during the Fall quarter. Speakers will include Dr. John McVay the university president; university chaplain Paddy McCoy; Pastor Troy Fitzgerald from the university church; Pastor Terry Johnsson, a former member of the Presidential Honor Guard at the White House and chaplain at radio station WGTS in Takoma Park, Maryland; a team from the Geoscience Research Institute based at Loma Linda University; and several students who return this year from serving as student missionaries. The theme "Present Truth" reaches back to the very beginnings of the Adventist movement. "We are focusing on understanding the message that Jesus Christ has for us today," states the One Project Newsletter. "Essentially, we are asking how do our foundational truths about Christ connect with today's culture, language, and context?" New technology, including smartphone, tablet and other portable web-ready devices will be involved in the on-going conversation on this theme. Information about Web access can be obtained by emailing chapel@andrews.edu.
Government of Tanzania grants charter to Adventist university

By Lusekelo E. Mwakalindile for APD, September 1, 2013

The government of Tanzania has granted a charter to the University of Arusha, giving the highest academic accreditation to the institution operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The ceremony took place at the State House in Dar es Salaam on August 20. President Jakaya Kikwete handed the certificate to university chancellor Godwin Lekundayo, who also serves as president of the denomination in the east African nation.

“We thank God for this development and pray that the university will continue to uplift the name of God and the Adventist Church,” said Andrew Mutero, education director for the denomination’s East-Central Africa Division, based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Representatives from a total of eight universities participated in the ceremony and received a charter. Twenty of the country’s 50 universities are now formally licensed by the national government. President Kikwete challenged the representatives of the institutions to increase the number of students who graduate with advanced degrees and grow the number of students who might later return as university faculty.

President Kikwete urged the universities to also consider recruiting international teaching staff as a temporary strategy. He said this would reduce the number of professors teaching in more than one university at the same time. "University professors should have permanent areas so that they can concentrate and produce quality professionals who will compete in the global market," he said.

The University of Arusha began in 1974 as Arusha Adventist Seminary, which offered ministerial courses and health courses. In 2003, then known as Tanzania Adventist College, the school was permitted to become the University of Arusha and start the process of full accreditation. In 2007 it was given provisional status by the Tanzania Commission for Universities.

Today the university serves more than 2,700 students and offers both undergraduate and master’s degrees. Besides its main campus at Usa River, it operates the Arusha Extension Centre in Arusha City and Buhare Extension Centre in Musoma, in the northern part of the country. It is also accredited by the Adventist Accreditation Association.

Tanzania has a population of 46 million with a very high percentage of poverty, low levels of education and a significant incidence of HIV-AIDS. The Adventist Develop and Relief Agency (ADRA) has a number of projects in Tanzania. There are more than 2,000 Adventist congregations in the country and more than 450,000 church members, although outside sources indicate that about one million people can be considered Adventist adherents. The Adventist Church operates 11 secondary schools and 18 community clinics in Tanzania.

Arusha is a metropolitan area of 1.3 million and the location of the denomination's national office. For years the government has encouraged the denomination to expand the clinic it operates in Mwanza, the country's second-largest city to help meet the need for quality medical care in a metropolitan area with 2.8 million people. The church has taken up the challenge to build a hospital on land adjacent to the medical clinic, and funds an offering taken in congregations around the world on the last Sabbath in June, 2013, will help finish this hospital.
President of Malawi Speaks for Adventist University Graduation, Advocates for Investment in Human Capital

By Lusubilo Sichali, September 2, 2013

President Joyce Banda spoke Sunday (Sept. 1) at the graduation ceremony for Malawi Adventist University Lake View campus located in Ntcheu. “My coming to attend this ceremony today is meant to demonstrate my personal belief and that of my government that we cannot achieve poverty eradication unless we invest in human capital,” she said. “To you all graduating students, I say: congratulations! Well done! The many hours of hard work have culminated in attaining these qualifications.”

She told them that graduation was just a beginning, because “your family members, parents ... and indeed your country are looking forward to the same dedication and hard work that you demonstrated over the years leading to this auspicious occasion. The awards that you are getting today will remain a piece of paper unless it results in a positive impact on those that surround you; be it in your family or at the workplace,” she said, urging them to continue upgrading their knowledge.

President Banda said she recognizes the urgent need to increase access to higher education in Malawi. She disclosed that reforms are underway in the education sector to achieve this objective. She said the government is aware of the challenges facing the education sector, including poorly equipped and supervised public universities, colleges and schools; wide geographic disparities in access and outcomes; limited capacity and relevance; lack of participation of the poor in post basic education; irregular and untimely transfer of approved funds to educational institutions; and very severe management gaps.

“This government, therefore, is keen in developing strategic partnerships between government and private universities to explore opportunities for expanding intake into tertiary education,” she said. The government, she added, is also considering links between secondary schools and a cluster of primary schools as a way of expanding intake from primary into secondary education.

The Malawi leader disclosed that the National Council for Higher Education, a body that will be responsible for accrediting institutions of higher learning, has begun operations. “I am pleased to note that the Council has already gone far in developing the standards and accreditation framework that will ensure that we are providing high quality tertiary education to our young men and women for the benefit of our nation,” she disclosed.

University chancellor Frackson Kuyama thanked President Banda for attending the graduation ceremony, saying it signified the importance she attaches to education as a catalyst for the country’s development. He stated that the Seventh-day Adventist Church will continue to partner with the government in the effort to make the lives of the people better and asked her to help facilitate the approval of the university’s application for accreditation.

Malawi Adventist University is an institution focused on the religious, intellectual, social and physical development of students. It also provides association with young people who accept or are willing to abide by the moral and ethical standards of the Christian faith as understood by the Adventist Church.
The university offers the four-year degree programs of the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton in Kenya. It has two campuses. The Lake View Campus in Ntcheu offers degrees in education, business administration and theology and the Malamulo College of Health Science in Thyolo offers programs in nursing and midwifery, lab technology and clinical medicine. It has a total enrollment of about 325 with a faculty of 21.

There are more than 400,000 Adventists in Malawi among a total population of 16 million. With nearly 1,500 congregations and a ratio of one church member to every 40 residents, the Adventist Church has a very strong presence in this small African nation. In addition to the university, the denomination operates five secondary schools in Malawi.

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Adventist Today

Power Disparity and Sexual Abuse in the Church

By Jeff Boyd, September 5, 2013

I humbly acknowledge that I am slow to encounter a significant cultural artifact. Last week I finally watched *Half the Sky*, a documentary about oppression that women around the world are fighting to overcome. The film is based on a book of the same title by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (2010). In the first major segment of the film, Eva Mendes and Nicholas Kristof visit Sierra Leone, where they meet Hulamatu, a 14-year old girl who was raped by a pastor (PBS).

Hulamatu's story covered ground I've been reading about recently—power disparity and sexual abuse in the church. Specifically, Anabaptist writers have been discussing the sexual abuse perpetrated by a leading Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder (1927-1997).

While I was studying at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), I heard stories about John Howard Yoder's abuse back when he had been a professor at the school more than a decade earlier. In classes we spoke at times about the process of intervention by the seminary and by his congregation. For some time after the abuse came to light, the seminary refused to use his books. As arguably the most noted Mennonite theologian, his works are again read in classes, but now through a more critical lens.

Naturally, I was quite disappointed to learn about Yoder's actions, to say the least. Enthusiastic supporters of Adventist preacher and writer Samuel Pipim likely felt the same way when they learned of his sexual abuse (we'll return to him shortly). We rightly expect our spiritual leaders to *walk the talk*. Yoder's academic and spiritual focus was on the ethical claims of discipleship, yet here was a glaring failure on that very theme. While it is reported that Yoder did not rape anyone, investigators have stated that he abused 36 to 40 women.

I was not alone in my confusion and disappointment. Yoder was widely read and respected, teaching at Notre Dame after leaving AMBS. In 2000 *Christianity Today* ranked his book, *The Politics of Jesus*, number five in their list of top ten religious books of the twentieth century. Closer to home, Doug Morgan shared in that reading *The Politics of Jesus* was one of the first steps leaders took during the formative period of the Adventist Peace Fellowship.

I am encouraged to see the Mennonite community addressing issues of equality and justice today in the context of Yoder's legacy (see articles listed below). Because the Adventist community is not immune to these bitter realities (CEASE), are there lessons that we can learn from recent Mennonite efforts to confront this?

Interestingly, in all three of these stories—Yoder, Pipim and Hulamatu—the same power differential existed between spiritual leaders and laypeople. Amie Kande, head of the Rainbo Center in Sierra Leone, explains in *Half the Sky* that "the root cause of violence against women and girls" relates to "power and control." John Hamlin, who teaches sociology of rape at the University of Minnesota, makes the same point. "Most rapists have access to a sexual partner," he writes. However, they choose to rape because "gratification comes from gaining power and control and discharging anger" (List of Rape Myths). Speaking specifically about Hulamatu, Kristoff notes the power the rapist had in their social setting. "For a teenage girl at the bottom of the social spectrum to challenge and accuse a man, more-or-less at the top of that local social spectrum is an incredibly gutsy thing to do."

This power discrepancy also existed in Yoder's case. One woman addressed the power dynamic: "To confront Mr. Mennonite, a man of John's stature in the church, is terrifying. When you're dealing with a woman lay person in the church and John Howard Yoder, there is no way mediation will work because there is a gross imbalance of power" (Jesus Radicals). Charletta Erb reveals that "many victims feared for their own professional credibility, or their grades from him in seminary. Women feared him until his death, especially with the rumor that he still possessed a key to the seminary" (MCUSA, Women in Leadership).

And we find the same in Pipim's rape of Nandipa (a pseudonym), who we later learned was not his only victim. Jennifer Jill Schwirzer (counselor, CEO of Michael Ministries & board member at The Hope of Survivors) shared Nandipa's experience in a 2012 interview with Advestist Today. Here are excerpts: "Dr. Pipim had been invited there [Botswana] by a church young adults' organization for a week of
vulnerable to this man of God who she so looked up to. ... Nandipa asked him for counsel regarding some scars from her life before meeting Jesus. He invited her to his hotel room. To Nandipa, he was an awesome, larger-than-life spiritual figure. Others were going to his room for counsel. It didn’t cross her mind that she should be afraid. So she innocently went into his “counseling office.” After talking awhile, he began to touch her. Nandipa wasn’t sure what the touches meant. She didn’t want to accuse a man of God of impropriety, yet he appeared noticeably aroused. That encounter ended when another counselee came. She left in a state of confusion. ... He came to her later telling her to come to his hotel room again, that he wanted to give her a sermon on CD. [When she returned] she did take what she felt was a precaution: she rode to his hotel the second time with a Seventh-day Adventist chaplain, thinking that she’d get the sermon and she’d leave with the chaplain, as he was her ride. Instead, Pipim sent the chaplain away, saying he’d send her home in a cab. Essentially, he then violated her while she protested in tears. Before he sent her away he gave her $100 and some of his books."

Schwirzer address the power dynamic at work in this situation. "I pray people will understand the psychology here. She’s a struggling girl. ... When you’re new to the faith, young, and female, you don’t question someone like Dr. Samuel Pipim. He was a hero, especially in that part of the world. ... There’s a power imbalance. She did what women in her situation typically do: she pled for him to stop. He didn’t."

Amazingly, some people still do not want to call Pipim's action “rape.” When a woman protests and the man does not stop, this is, by definition, rape. Sex without consent is rape. Jaclyn Friedman calls us to protect women by setting the standard at “enthusiastic consent” (Ebony). She clarifies, “We assume guys don’t understand what consent is and that they don’t understand what they are doing and then we let them off the hook. They likely know they don’t have consent, even though they may not identify what they are doing is rape.” While extra-marital pastoral affairs are serious, I am here focusing on factors relating to abuse, and for that consent is critical.

Culpability

Since blame is a central aspect of this issue, I want to address it directly. Who is to blame in cases of pastoral abuse, or in cases of rape or sexual abuse more generally? All too often the victim is blamed. It is said that she wore the wrong clothes, went to the wrong party, or was out too late. In the case of Hulamatu in Half the Sky, she bore the disgrace that came on the family. Hulamatu's father forced both her and her mother out of the house, even as the perpetrator was released from jail and seemingly received no punishment. In response, the three activists—Mendes, Kristoff and Kandeh—repeatedly told Hulamatu that it was not her fault, she was not to blame, she had not done anything wrong.

Rather than blame the victim, should we point a finger at theology? Because this is such a broad question, we can limit our response to the three cases presently being explored—Hulamatu, Yoder and Pipim. Of these three, Yoder is the easiest to study in this regard because I know little about Pipim's theology other than his opposition to women's ordination, and I know nothing about Hulamatu's attacker theological background. Focusing on Yoder, some have questioned whether his theology of “radical subordination” is at the root of his continued abuse. In chapter 9 of The Politics of Jesus, Yoder analyzes biblical teachings on subordination (Col. 3:18-4:1; Eph. 5:21-6:9; 1 Peter 2:13-3:7). Hannah Heinzekehr, a Mennonite writer, points out the following quote as especially troublesome: "The subordinate person becomes a free ethical agent in the act of voluntarily acceding to subordination in the power of Christ instead of bowing to it either fatalistically or resentfully. The claim is not that there is immediately a new world regime which violently replaces the old; rather, the old and the new order exist concurrently on different levels. It is because she knows that in Christ there is no male or female that the Christian wife can freely accept that subordination to her unbelieving husband which is her present lot. It is because Christ has freed us all, and slave and free are equal before God, that their relationship may continue as a humane and honest one within the framework of the present economy, the structure of which is passing away." (The Politics of Jesus, p. 186)

Heinzekehr responds to Yoder by noting the limits of his thought. “While he in no one way directly condones abuse, he certainly doesn’t offer a way out of violent patterns either. And, given this logic, one could even argue that it’s part of our Christian duty to remain in these harmful spaces. Yoder and I may share the same project, which is to suggest that Jesus Christ implies a re-ordering of structures and a doing away with unjust systems of oppression. However, I fundamentally disagree with the suggestion that acquiescing to these systems now, willingly or not, is an acceptable way to live and function” (The Feminite).

This is a difficult point to address, both because of the biblical material presently under review and because of the way these themes transfer into other conversations such martyrdom or the debate between nonviolence and the “responsibility to protect.” I will only briefly address the first difficulty here. Looking to the biblical passages Yoder references in chapter 9, I continue to be impressed with his interpretation of the radical nature of these passages as compared to the Stoic teachings and wider social realities of Paul's time. For example, Yoder writes: "That the call is to subordination is reciprocal is once again a revolutionary trait. If this acceptance of the existing
social order and the call to those who are subordinate to remain there were all that was said, then it might be correct when Lutheran tradition sees in these texts a reaffirmation of the creation order, which has about it the authority of revelation because God has made society thus. ... But the Haustafeln [rules of subordination] do not consecrate the existing order when they call for the acceptance of subordination by the subordinate person; far more they relativize and undercut this order by then immediately turning the imperative around. For a first-century husband to love (agapao) his wife or for a first-century father to avoid angering his child, or for a first-century master to deal with his servant in the awareness that they are both slaves to a higher master, is to make a more concrete and more sweeping difference in the way that husband or father or master behaves than the other imperative of subordination would have made practically in the behavior of the wife or child or servant" (p. 178).

I continue to find this to be both a radical and well-reasoned argument. I don't see Yoder's theology calling for male domination with unquestioning obedience, but a mutuality of love and respect. The fact that Yoder did not live this theology does not debase the theology itself in my mind. As I continue to study, I could be convinced otherwise—my journey of understanding these issues continues—but at this point I don't think Yoder is entirely wrong. Rather, I see a division between Yoder's thought and his actions. However, I believe that Heinzekehr's uneasiness with this teaching raises important issues. I agree that we need to remain vigilant in our awareness of the outcomes of theological statements. If a certain interpretation or belief leads to the denial of biblical values (e.g., treating others as we want to be treated), then the belief itself demands communal reappraisal.

Heinzekehr adds an additional thoughtful point. “It’s not that this theology mandates this sort of inappropriate behavior, but perhaps the problem is that, nowhere in it, does it stop these abuses of power from happening.” This is an important observation regarding chapter 9, and I believe it is why chapter 10 needs to be read along with it. In chapter 10, “Let Every Soul Be Subject.” Yoder digs deeper into the meaning of subordination. Although the spotlight moves from familial relationships to that of the Christian and the State (Rom. 13), the theme of subordination continues. Here Yoder discusses the difference between obedience and subordination: 'It is not by accident that the imperative of 13:1 is not literally one of obedience. The Greek language has good words to denote obedience, in the sense of completely bending one’s will and one’s actions to the desires of another. What Paul calls for, however, is subordination. This verb is based upon the same root as the ordering of the powers of God. Subordination is significantly different from obedience. The conscientious objector who refuses to do what government demands, but still remains under the sovereignty of that government and accepts the penalties which it imposes, or the Christian who refuses to worship Caesar but still permits Caesar to put him or her to death, is being subordinate even though not obeying.' (pp. 208-209)"

Applying this distinction between obedience and subordination to a consideration of personal relationships may not be easy or obvious, but I feel it is an important aspect of both debates (interpersonal relationships and citizen-state). Just as honoring parents (the commandment) does not always mean obeying them, so subordination to a state or spouse does not inherently mean obedience. It is quite possible that Yoder's desire to sketch out the difference between obedience and subordination in the context of the state rather than in the home or other relationships is an example of his own personal attitude toward women influencing what he choose to make explicit and what he left implicit and then ignored in his personal relationships.

Civil disobedience, which becomes theologically possible when one understands the difference between subordination and obedience, is an important thread in Christian thought and history. This is radical subordination. We see that Peter obeyed God rather than man (Acts 5:29), Ellen White told Adventists to disregard the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and Martin Luther King Jr taught nonviolent civil disobedience during the U.S. civil rights movement (Adventist Activism). By combining chapters 9 and 10 in The Politics of Jesus, I feel that we at least have the seeds of resistance to injustice (civil disobedience) that Heinzekehr is looking for, even if the tree is not fully grown. That is to say, even though I do not believe Yoder's theology is necessarily sexist, I agree with Heinzekehr that Yoder left some critical issues unexplored in The Politics of Jesus.

Taking a step back, rather than focusing on blaming Yoder's reading of the biblical material (or Pipim's), should we blame the Bible itself? Is the book so patriarchal and misogynistic that the error lies in its pages rather than in the pages of commentary written by people like Yoder and Pipim? I have read biting analysis along these lines, and I hope this critique makes male Christian theologians and pastors pause long enough to at least consider what portions of the Bible are prescriptive for our time and what sections are merely descriptive of a long and bitter historical are bending toward justice, to borrow King's imagery.

Rather than address this criticism comprehensively (something I do not claim to be qualified to do), and instead of addressing more obvious portions of scripture dealing with female-male relations, I will simply address one of Jesus' statements that I believe is relevant to this discussion of pastoral sex abuse and is often misunderstood—“turn the other cheek.”
Jesus taught his followers, both his male and female followers, that they should turn the other cheek when struck. Does this mean we accept all abuse passively? Does this teaching of Jesus in conjunction with Paul's admonition to subordination leave victims with no biblical options but to experience continued violence? The abused wife, girlfriend or child is merely to accept the pain and give the perpetrator more opportunities for abuse? Walter Wink draws out the cultural depth of Jesus teaching and reveals it to be much more than is sometimes presumed.

First, we note that Jesus is specific about where the victim is struck—“whoever slaps you on your right cheek” (Matt. 5:39b, NASB, emphasis added). Wink points out that the “only way one could strike the right cheek with the right hand would be with the back of the right hand” (Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way, pp. 14). He continues, “A back-hand slap was the normal way of admonishing inferiors. Masters back-handed slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews. We have here a set of unequal relations, in each of which retaliation would be suicidal. The only normal response would be cowering submission” (p. 15).

The laws of the time demonstrate the significance of the slap. The punishment for back-handing a peer was one hundred times greater than for striking a peer with a fist, but for back-handing someone lower in status, there was no penalty at all. We see that Jesus is teaching about a situation of significant social disparity, the same conditions in which pastoral abuse occurs.

What are the social and moral implications of turning the other cheek as Jesus describes? “Why...counsel these already humiliated people to turn the other cheek?” Wink asks. “Because this action robs the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, ‘Try again.... I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you’” (pp. 15-16). Said another way, “You can strike again, but now you cannot back-hand me, I insist that I am your equal. I refuse to accept the power differential you are attempting to hide behind.”

It makes this statement because the turned-head presents a new situation to the aggressor. Wink explains, “He cannot use the backhand because [the victim's] nose is in the way. He can't use his left hand regardless. If he hits with a fist, he makes himself an equal, acknowledging the other as a peer. But the whole point of the back of the hand is to reinforce the caste system and its institutionalized inequality.... This response, far from admonishing passivity and cowardice, is an act of defiance” (p. 16).

The teaching to turn the other cheek is just one of the ways Jesus taught to respond to evil (also, go the extra mile, strip down, etc.). I do not believe these are intended to be three specific laws detailing what to do in these specific situations, but are three examples of the many ways that followers of Jesus can respond to evil in the world. They are intended to spark the prophetic and moral imagination. We gain principles and insights into unusual ways of responding consistent with the way of Jesus. In the teaching to turn the other cheek, I see a significant principle that applies to pastoral abuse—radical equality. We are gifted by the same Spirit to play different parts in the body, but we are of equal value in our relation to our head, Jesus Christ (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:1-16). If someone tries to abuse another person, the victim needs to know that they are in fact of equal status with the perpetrator. We should have no room for rock-star leaders; we have one person to look to: Jesus, who taught us not to build up people with titles. “But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. (Matt. 23:8-11; NASB).

Jesus taught radical equality, and as the body of Christ, the church is called to embody this equality. One aspect of Jesus' good news (his "gospel") is that the differences we tend presume to be so determinative are actually illusions. We turn the other cheek because we insist on being treated as we deserve, that is, as equals, because we are indeed equals. We accept no other valuation (Gal. 3:28).

I am going to here forgo the important work of moving from principles (Jesus' teaching on equality) to application (what victims should do in cases of abuse). I choose not to enter this important conversation now for a number of reasons. First, I find it burdensome when men claim to have all the answers to what others, especially women, should do to prevent abuse and rape (both before and within a given situation). Men should first direct their deep wisdom to other men. Male pastors are the ones perpetrating this violence, and men should speak directly to this side of the issue. To slightly alter a line by Bob Newhart, “Pastors, stop it!”

Second, every case of rape is different, and there is no one simple answer. Factors include whether or not the perpetrator and victim know each other, the presence of a weapon, the mental and physical state of the victim, the likelihood of escape or death, and other dynamics. Any advice that begins with, “All you have to do is...” is necessarily ignoring the complexities of abuse and rape.

Third, I believe that the Holy Spirit has a significant role in teaching us how to apply principles of the Bible to our lives and our situations. This principle can be applied in unlimited ways, depending on unlimited variables. As long as we are committed to equality, the Spirit will help us (both men and women, because both are abused and raped) know how to embody this teaching. We must each turn to God to know
what we should do, to learn our duty. Ellen White writes that “we are not to place the responsibility of our duty upon others, and wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend for counsel upon humanity. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else” (The Desire of Ages, p. 668).

In the scripture instructing us to turn the other cheek, we have seen that a deeper understanding of the text makes what appears passive into something deeply proactive. I believe that if we dig into other controversial portions of scripture relating to gender relations and peacemaking, we will continue to find buried treasuries of God's goodness and justice. Therefore, I do not blame the Bible for pastoral abuse. The Bible is replete with guidance for love, respect, equality and compassion. It is a sufficient guide for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

So far, I have asked if we should blame the victim, theology or even the Bible itself. There are two more potential culprits that I wish to note.

I readily admit that I have not addressed each of these first three questions comprehensively. There are many theologies or biblical interpretations I have not addressed, multiple verses of import I have not attempted to exegete, and there is some remote possibility that in some instance of taunting, a victim played a part in inviting abuse. I simply hope that I have demonstrated that the victim, the Bible, and general theology are not where we should focus our attention most directly when assigning blame.

Next, should we blame the institutions that employed these men? This question has surfaced in relation to both Yoder (Associated/Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) and Pipim (Michigan Conference and Lake Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church). Were both men confronted as soon as infractions were known by immediate supervisors and area leadership? Did victims have their voices heard throughout the investigation process? Were timely and appropriate actions taken? Was the safety of the community addressed by the actions taken? These questions are difficult to answer and demand significant institutional reflection and planning. I do not feel qualified to answer these questions in either instance, but simply wish to voice them as pertinent to this issue. If institutions failed in any of these areas, then they do bear some of the responsibility for any on-going abuse. Church institutions owe their members and Christ himself effective procedures for caring for every member, especially those who may be more vulnerable for any number of reasons. Interested readers can follow-up on these questions (Resources: Pipim: AToday 1 and AToday 2; Yoder: MCUSA Women in Leadership).

Finally, the last area of blame to consider is the perpetrator. Here I believe we can safely lay the blame. The perpetrator must take responsibility for his actions. There is no room to hide behind theology, one's holy book or one's institution. We are morally culpable for our actions. And when we remove theology, religion, institutions and victims from the analysis (at least for a moment), we are able to see that the problem of power and abuse transcend all of these boundaries or categories. For example, Pipim and Yoder are not the only abusers within their denominations. I surmise that not all of these other abusers entirely agree with the theology of either of these met, and yet they abuse nonetheless.

More broadly, abuse occurs in all faith communities. Andy Alexis-Baker gives a few pointed examples of this breadth in a 2012 article at Jesus Radicals. "What is all the more sobering is realizing that Yoder is not alone in his abuse of power. Indeed, there is a long list of dominant male thought-leaders who have used their influence to engage in sexual misconduct both within and outside of the church. Karl Barth, whose theology is unparalleled in Protestantism, had a mistress that he fraternized with openly and whom he did not credit for her written contributions to his thought. Paul Tillich, a brilliant philosopher, was well known for his womanizing. Stokely Carmichael, a pillar of the Black Power liberation movement, explicitly stated, 'The only position for women in SNCC is prone.' Martin Luther King, Jr.’s exploits with women other than his wife are as much a part of his legacy as his tireless work for Civil Rights.

This power issue extends beyond one religious body; it is not merely a Mennonite problem, an Adventist problem, a Catholic problem, or a religious problem. Furthermore, it transcends economic and geographical boundaries. Michelle Bachelet (Executive Director, UN Women) points out in Half the Sky that this is not solely a localized phenomenon within previous war zones such as Sierra Leone. “You see violence against women in rich places, in highly educated families, in very low income families, in all regions of the world.” Sheryl WuDunn bluntly states, “Rape and domestic abuse happen everywhere.”

Zainab Salbi (founder, Women for Women International) also emphasizes this point. “This is not a third-world/first-world issue.” Salbi shares in Half the Sky that world-wide three out of five women are abused in some way, which demonstrates that respect for women is still severely lacking.
Action

Instead of merely asking, “What should women do to be safe?” we need to ask, “What do I need to do? What does my congregation and denomination need to do?” Clearly, our work as Christians, as Adventists, remains. We must contribute to the safety and equality of our local congregations, our broader faith communities and our societies. No single action or policy is sufficient. Not coincidentally, approaches to combating pastoral abuse are also beneficial to relationships within the church more broadly.

At the personal level, do I consistently demonstrate equality and respect in my words and actions? What is my response when people around me show a lack of respect toward others?

Collectively, we can work to create an egalitarian church culture, where all are truly seen as equal in Christ. For instance, when I enrolled at AMBS, I struggled a bit to adjust to Mennonite culture, which is much flatter than Adventist culture. For example, all seminary students, professors and administrators are on a first-name basis. Some time passed before I was comfortable calling my adviser simply Ted, even though he had an MA and PhD from Harvard. Listening to the Mennonite conversation today regarding Yoder, I see that the community continues to work toward an even more thoroughly egalitarian culture since existing disparities in the past worked to enable Yoder's behavior. For instance, both the president and academic dean at AMBS are now women. Admittedly, reputation and institutional position will inevitably continue to create power differentials, so more is needed than a flat culture.

In our families and other learning environments, we need to promote emotional intelligence in our children, which includes respecting others and seeing them as equals. More specifically, in the area of education, Zerlina Maxwell describes five things men (and teens) need to be taught: the concept of legal consent, respect for women's humanity, healthy masculinity, believing women, and bystander intervention (Ebony). My wife points out the difficulty of teaching about consent in conservative cultures that take an “abstinence only” approach to sexual education. While I do not feel the need to argue against abstinence outside of marriage, a potential short-coming of “abstinence only” education is a lack of training about dealing with and expressing one's sexuality in healthy ways. This also ignores the reality of rape within marriage. Sex without consent is rape, regardless of a legal marriage certificate.

Addressing an issue that impacts at least two of the issues raised by Maxwell—consent and intervention—Jennifer Chappell Deckert emphasizes that parents need to teach their children to speak up, both for their own needs and for the needs of others. Deckert, who is a Mennonite pursuing a PhD in social welfare, says, “Speaking out as an advocate gives power to people and situations that have been marginalized, and it is our responsibility to do so. When you feel something is wrong, speak up for a change” (The Femanite). How can we incorporate these lessons into the ways we raise and educate Adventist young people?

Finally, as we work to make our organizations and relationships non-hierarchical, and as we train young people how to communicate and how to treat others, we also need to have visible and meaningful disciplinary action for perpetrators. A culture of impunity must be avoided. There must be a fair and timely response process with significant implications for those found to be harming others.

May the world see in the church a body of loving disciples who treat others how they wish to be treated (Matt. 7:12) and who are servant leaders rather than hierarchical leaders, using power to take advantage of others (Luke 22:24-26).

Discussion Questions

1. Whether directly or indirectly, intimately or at a distance, have you ever been involved with a case of pastoral abuse? What do you think about the way it was handled—reporting, response, due process, outcomes?

2. What do you think about the conclusions given in this article regarding who is to blame in cases of abuse or rape? What other categories or entities would you include, and how do you evaluate their culpability?

3. When discussing these topics, it is easy to focus on others (other denominations, other religions, the other gender, etc.). How might Jesus' teaching about removing the log and the speck give us wisdom when addressing sexual violence (Matt. 7:1-5)?

4. The Bible gives us a record of faith leaders' failures and sins—David, Abraham, Moses, Peter and so many more. What role does authenticity rather than glorification play in our growth as Christians and in the health of the church? How have you used your past failings to encourage growth, both in yourself and others?
5. When have you seen examples of servant leadership from a pastor or some other religious leader?

6. Have you seen leaders who seemed to think themselves higher or more important than others? How did this affect their ministry? How did you or others respond or intervene?

7. Given biblical teachings on equality (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11), the sinfulness of all people (Jer. 17:9), the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5-9) and the importance of not showing favoritism (James 2), why do Christians so often view charismatic leaders in the same way that the world views entertainers and athletes? What does this say about the human condition and the “good news” God is still trying to convince us to accept?

Resources

Pipim (chronological)

- Samuel Koranteng-Pipim Cancels Speaking Appointments and Resigns from Michigan Conference (Alexander Carpenter, Spectrum, 31 May 2012)
- Receiving the Bird: Samuel Koranteng-Pipim Seeks Rebaptism This Sabbath (Alexander Carpenter, Spectrum, 6 June 2012)
- Rape allegations surface in the Samuel Pipim kerfuffle (Mary Hilde, ADVindicate, 6 June 2012)
- Pipim Sexual Abuse Victim: The Story from a First-person Observer (Loren Seibold, Adventist Today, 7 June 2013)
- Pipim Rebaptism Canceled, Another Victim Identified (Alexander Carpenter, Spectrum, 8 June 2012)

Yoder (alphabetical)

- "Can Subordination Ever Be Revolutionary? Reflections on John Howard Yoder" (Hannah Heinzekehr, The Femonite, 9 August 2013)
- The Elephants in God’s Living Room (Volume Three): The Mennonite Church and John Howard Yoder, Collected Essays (Ruth Elizabeth Krall, N.D.)
- "John Howard Yoder and Sex: Wrestling with the Contradictions" (Andy Alexis-Baker, Jesus Radicals, 24 May 2012)
- "John Howard Yoder: A symbolic tip of the iceberg of sexism" (Charletta Erb, MCUSA Women in Leadership, 20 August 2013)
- “John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Misconduct—Part One” (Ted Grimsrud, Peace Theology)
- “Mennonite Theologian Disciplined” (Religious News Service/Chicago Tribune, 28 August 1992)
- "Revisiting the Legacy of John Howard Yoder" (Sara Wenger Shenk, Practicing Reconciliation, 25 July 2013)
- “Yoder the Sinner” (Nathan Hobby, An Anabaptist in Perth, 18 April 2011)
- "What’s to be done about John Howard Yoder?" (Barbra Graber, Our Stories Untold, 17 July 2013)

Additional Sources Services & Agencies

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Joan Chittister points out in *The Monastery of the Heart*, chapter 24, “Good Zeal,” that the Rule of Benedict was written in the 500s, when the religious climate was tending toward an asceticism “more given to personal self-denial than to the discipline of community building.” We know from the testimony of reformers such as Luther how desperately people practiced that zeal, trying to be good enough for God, and how it only led to more helplessness. Just reread Luther’s paens of praise when he finally discovered the simple and glorious truth that one could live (only) by faith, to see the tears of joy and relief that come when one gives these practices up.

What’s that got to do with us? We don’t beat ourselves anymore, or fast for days and weeks on end, or try to spend hours and hours in Bible reading and prayer... do we?

Benedict said there was a “good zeal” and an “evil zeal.” He didn’t invent this concept. Jesus tried again and again to convince his followers that calling down fire on those who disagree is ungodly, or to convince Pharisees—who were totally zealous, like Saul of Tarsus—that zeal in itself is not what we seek. God is what we seek.

Is it possible that (as shown forth in particular clarity in this week’s chapter of *Victory Over the Beast* here), we can be so zealous for good works, so zealous in pointing out the mistakes and incorrect ideas of others (in our opinion, that is) that we, as Chittister says, mistake this zeal “for the very thing [we] seek: the conversion of heart that attunes a person to the will of God for the world”?

*Drained of mercy*

*and sapped of spirit,*

*they lose contact with*

*the very God of love*

*for whom, they say, they search.*

Instead, the Rule says, (repeating the Bible) we must be zealous in *love.* The all-consuming, unconditional love that comes only from God.

Most of the time, these zealous people are only trying to do their best to obey Jesus’ injunction in Matt. 5:48 to be “perfect as God is perfect.” Heavens! As perfect as God?? If you want to know what he meant by that, simply look up the parallel passage in Luke 6:36. These are both records of what we call the Sermon on the Mount, and the context makes it clear that these verses are intended to be interchangeable. Here Jesus says, “Be merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful.”

Mercy. Love. Those are the measures of perfection.

*Visit Joan Chittister's website at [www.joanchittister.com](http://www.joanchittister.com)*

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The Hiding Places of the Beast

The Scriptures have plainly foretold that just prior to the second coming of Jesus there will be an overpowering deception by the antichrist, portrayed in the book of Revelation as the beast. Because you desire with all your heart to be prepared for this event, you have perhaps tried to stay updated on end-time events – wars in the Middle East, the energy crisis, rumors about Sunday-law legislation, bio-chip implants in the brain or hand, and the possible infiltration in churches and institutions of individuals operating there as “plants” for the historical beast power. How are you to determine fact from fiction? And how effective will this kind of preparation truly be in preparing for the end-time appearance of the anti-Christ? Could it be that our primary protection must take place on the internal level?

Is it possible that the Babylon and beast viruses may already have infiltrated or invaded on the experiential level of the lives of many believers, but few are aware of this, and even fewer care? At the time of Christ, the Jewish people were on high alert against any attempts by the Roman government to subvert their religion. But the presence of the beast virus in their own lives had significantly blinded them to the presence of the real Messiah, Jesus Christ. Instead of accepting Him with joy and faith, they sought His elimination through death by crucifixion. Remember, the enemy seductively seeks to steal Christ’s identity by masquerading as a genuine messenger of heavenly origin and invested with the very authority of God. Next, the enemy seeks to steal your identity, that is, your security as a child of God, and thus your built-in protection against Satan’s devices will be compromised.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 4, you will find in the Sabbath incident in the Nazareth synagogue a manifestation of the presence of the beast. As Jesus publicly declared His identity as the promised Messiah, there was an outbreak of beastly behaviors among the attendees as they tried to murder Jesus in, of all places, the hometown where he had grown up. The beast had actually invaded their church, but most worshipers were oblivious to this.

The Beast in the Synagogue - A Case Study in Identity Theft

Imagine a gathering of believers in Jesus’ hometown synagogue worshiping together on the Sabbath day. What would make this group become incited with such rage that they wanted to murder Jesus? What would motivate such an outburst of anger?

- The identity of Jesus – challenged in the synagogue. In the wilderness temptations, Satan had personally challenged Jesus’ identity by his statements, “If you are the son of God...” prove it to me – and to yourself that you really are who you say you are. If you perform some miracles, we will certainly know the truth about your identity!
During the Sabbath worship service in Jesus’ hometown synagogue, Satan again challenged Jesus’ identity, not in person but through the worshipers present there. Did the people in the synagogue know the identity of Jesus? Certainly. They had watched Him grow up right there in Nazareth. They knew Him as Mary’s son, but also as the son of the carpenter, a term used in derision about his apparent illegitimate birth. “Yes, we know all about you, and Joseph is not your real daddy!”

On this particular Sabbath Jesus was invited to publicly participate in the worship service in the reading of the Scriptures. It is of intense significance that He chose a passage from the Old Testament, Isaiah 61:1, 2, which specified prophetically the identity and calling of the Messiah.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ So all bore witness to Him and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’” (Luke 4:18–22).

This was not just another Scripture reading. The problem arose, not because Jesus read that text, but because He applied it to Himself and thus asserted His own identity. “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The audience had heard reports about the miracles that Jesus had performed in Capernaum and other locations and Jesus was fully aware of their expectations, “How about doing a few miracles for us, your friends and relatives, here in Nazareth? Prove to us that You really are who You say You are. We only know you as the carpenter’s son. Besides, the words you read about us being captive, poor, blind, and brokenhearted—that doesn’t apply to us. We want some miracles so we can know who you really are.

Jesus challenged the identity of the worshipers in the synagogue. As Jesus started to deliver His sermon, He intuitively knew what they were thinking, and He told them so: “You will surely say this proverb to Me, “Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country” (Luke 4:23). Jesus’ reply was something like this: So you think that you as God’s special people deserve miracles. But have you forgotten about those incidents in Old Testament history when God performed miracles outside of nation of Israel? Then in a subtle, yet unmistakable way, Jesus proceeded to challenge their identity. “But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah…but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zaraphath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:25–27). When Jesus said this, a Satanic-inspired pandemonium broke out in the synagogue as the worshipers attempted to murder Him by throwing Him over a cliff. Attempted murder on the Sabbath – a different style of Sabbath-keeping. What went wrong? How had He offended them?

The clash of identities in the synagogue. What went wrong in Nazareth on that Sabbath
day? Not only were the worshipers troubled when they heard the carpenter’s son announcing His real identity, but when He challenged their identity a riot erupted. A worshiping congregation in a few moments became a murderous mob.

While pretending to worship God they were in effect worshiping their own idols—evidenced by the fruit of religious elitism, narrowness, bigotry, and exclusiveness. They worshiped an idol, custom-designed in their own image, and placed in a box they had made. Idolatry is to reduce the greatness of the Creator God by worshiping a lesser god of our own making. Idolatry is to put God in a box, worship the box, and protect it against all intruders.

The Ultimate Deception of Idolatry: Working for God…like the Devil

Whenever we worship anything or anyone other than the living God who created heaven and earth, we are idolaters. Such worship is never harmless, because every idol imprints its image in the character of the one who worships it. We may become like the idols we worship—defensive, retaliatory, and angry toward anyone who does not respect our idol, and thus challenges our insecure man-made identity.

The most dangerous idolatries are often the hardest to detect. No Christian in his right mind would bow down to worship a tree, a rock, or a carved piece of wood. Yet, we may be totally unaware that by our defensiveness of some of our most cherished religious pursuits, we are elevating something to a greater position than Jesus Christ. Idolatry is when anyone receives more glory than Jesus Christ.

Threats to our idols can trigger outbursts of the beast inside us. Like Nebuchadnezzar, we may start preparations to punish anyone we believe is a threat to our own custom-designed pet idols. Even religious idolatry sooner or later opens the doors for the operation of demons in our lives. In the wilderness temptations, Satan showed up in person. In Nazareth’s synagogue the enemy worked through demons hiding in the lives of the worshipers, and exhibiting their murderous traits in beast-like ways. When Jesus exposed these demons, they came out of their hiding places and showed their true colors by their intensely violent desire to incite the worshipers in the synagogue to murder Him. Hidden demons always claim that they are doing God’s work for Him.

- **Demons do not doubt the identity of Christ.** On a later occasion when Jesus in the Capernaum synagogue directly confronted the unclean spirit of a demon, this spirit instantly confessed the truth about the identity of Jesus. “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!” (Luke 4:33, 34). In the demonic world, demons tremble before Jesus, because they know His identity and His authority over them. Note Ellen White’s comment that “the same evil spirit that tempted Christ in the wilderness, and that possessed the maniac of Capernaum, controlled the unbelieving Jews. But with them he assumed an air of piety, seeking to deceive them as to their motives in rejecting the Saviour. Their condition was more hopeless than that of the demoniac, for they felt no need of Christ and were therefore held fast under the power of Satan.” [1]
In the religious world demons are often in hiding. In the religious world, demons will often do their work through professed worshipers. Remember, it was card-carrying, Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying religious people who hounded Jesus to the cross. The most dangerous deceptions will often come from religious people who under a self-generated, make-believe identity are masquerading as God’s helpers when in reality they are working against Him. “Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.” [2]

Babylon and the Beast Viruses in the Church Today

Have you ever heard recurring rumors that the church is being infiltrated by agents of the beast power, and because the church’s leaders don’t know it and don’t warn people against it, the people are being led astray? If you read the New Testament closely, you will discover that the agencies of Babylon and the beast are not just end-time phenomena, and that they were actively present in the 1st century, and they are present in today’s church. In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul observed the presence of beastly behaviors. “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another” (Galatians 5:15). To the believers in Philippi, Paul wrote, “Beware of dogs!” (Philippians 3:2). And in the Letter of James, James addressed the presence of the Babylon virus in the local congregation. “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:1-5). To be prepared for the end-time manifestations of Babylon, seek first to detect and overcome all conflicts in your local congregation, for they are all rooted in the virus of Babylon, which is do-it-yourself religion which says that your own alertness to rumors will help save you.

The Babylon principle is spiritual adultery, manifesting itself in the beast-like specific idols we custom-design to make a name for ourselves. The presence of these principles in your church or in your own life now, will greatly increase your susceptibility to the enemy’s end-time deception.

The methods of the beast. Christ uses loving persuasion, but the beast is known for his tactics of force, fear, threats, control, coercion, intimidation, and manipulation – whatever we think is necessary to protect our make-believe sense of identity and self-worth.

Consider these observations from Ellen G. White:

“Any man, be he minister or layman, who seeks to compel or control the reason of any other man, becomes an agent of Satan, to do his work, and in the sight of the heavenly universe he bears the mark of Cain.” [3] “There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the Spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work,
Religious Idolatry

Jesus continually challenged the religious idolatry of His people. Once he said, “Someone greater than Jonah is here…Someone greater than Solomon is here…Someone greater than the temple is here” (Matthew 12:6, 41, 42). Religious idolatry occurs when anything connected with the service of God at some point becomes greater than God. Here are some possible examples of religious idolatry, which can become hiding places for the beast virus in our own lives and churches. Satan is a master at disguising our good works so we are unable to see the potential for evil in them. Idolatry most often consists in taking the use of good things and perverting such into something abusive, by elevating their status to something or someone greater than God.

- **Past church history and church leaders.** Thank God for His guidance in our past history, but do not limit, unduly exalt, and idolize the persons whom God has used.

- **The church, its organization and its institutions.** Jesus is always greater than the church, because He is the Lord of the church. Be ever so careful, lest in our attempts to loyally defend the church, that such loyalty becomes idolatry.

- **Bible study disconnected from the person of Christ.** The Bible was not just given for our information but primarily for our transformation. The accumulation of correct Bible knowledge can camouflage a non-existent relationship with God.

- **Doctrines.** Doctrinal statements and positions, even when correct, can become idols to which we cling as if our understanding of them is the ultimate and final expressions of God’s will on a subject. Far too often our doctrinal discussions can become an arena for the display of our grasp of the intricacies of doctrine in order to impress others with our knowledge. Or, we may start a campaign to “cleanse the camp” from heresy, when in reality it may only be a veiled method of self-exaltation. You can detect the presence of the spirit of idolatry here by asking this question – do I faithfully use only godly methods to deal with those who think or act differently than I do?

- **Exclusiveness and elitism.** Notice on how many occasions Jesus challenged the people of His day to think and live outside the box of their elitism. He told stories of harlots, publicans, and deliberately said positive things about Samaritans, a Canaanite woman and a Roman army general.
• **The drive for success.** Do we ever look at our performance in these areas, the numbers of converts and baptisms, as the source of our self-worth? Do we ever idolize certain methods of doing God’s work as the only ways in which God works? When we use people for our own exaltation, are we not in the business of *abusing* them? Do we really love the members of our church, or do they merely exist to enhance our own self-worth built on our need to have them help us become successful? What then is failure? It is to succeed at something that really doesn’t matter.

• **Church standards** should not become crosses on which we crucify sinners or weak and immature Christians because they are at a different stage of growth than we are. Legalism is far more than the attempt to earn salvation by our own works, but is also adherence to standards for the purpose of self-exaltation. A personal experience illustrates the danger of legalism. In the 1960s, as a college student, I worked at a denominational campmeeting site. My main responsibility was the maintenance and repair of all restroom and shower facilities. There was a most genuine desire among many people to *keep* the Sabbath day holy, which desire expressed itself in the culturally stated maxim that, during the Sabbath hours, no one should take a shower. Here was a golden opportunity to display my own concern for “genuine” Sabbath-keeping. At sunset time on a certain Friday, I went to the boiler room of the shower facility, and at the appointed time I turned off the hot water valve. You should have heard the sound effects coming from both the women’s and the men’s facilities as individuals were blasted by streams of cold water. While not preventing them from taking showers, they should certainly be duly punished for their Sabbath-keeping transgressions! But, the greatest sin, unknown to me at that time, was the tremendous pride and delight I took in telling others about my zealousness for upholding these standards. How I enjoyed receiving the approbations from so many that I was a real reformer, standing up for truth, standards, and righteousness.

• **Salvation by our own works.** Legalism, though portraying itself as legal, is utterly illegal because it bypasses the blood of Jesus Christ as the only ground for our salvation. Legalism is the most dangerous idolatry because it leaves the heart unchanged and blinds us to our true condition. Worst of all, we tend to treat as enemies those who do recognize our ‘good works’ or who do not adhere to our standards. After all, we cannot permit others to sin differently than we do. We are only trying to help God do His work!

Ask yourself, what are the religious idols that currently are operating in my own church, and even in my own life? Try naming a few of your own. How long a list can you come up with?

*The practical application of Jesus’ sermon in Nazareth: Your God is too small.* All idolatry is rooted in a loss of our God-given identity. Idolatry seeks to establish a new man-made identity.
by our trust in our own works, believing that our own ways of thinking and our religious fervor are sure signs of our loyalty to God. Idols are always lesser idols, and those who make them become the children of their own man-made lesser gods.

Instead of just looking for a beast “out there,” why not look for the manifestations of the beast closer to home? The only way to win the victory over your beast is to accept the identity that God gives you, based on Christ’s redemptive work as the Lamb of God. We must then replace our own self-generated, self-certified, performance-oriented identities with His very own identity, “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God” (1 John 3:1).

God’s Secret to Victory – Embrace the Identity He Gives You

When you embrace the identity that Jesus gives you, your life will then be open to receive the benefits of that identity found in the good news that Jesus can heal your broken heart, deliver you from the prison-house of idolatry, and take away blindness caused by the addictive wine of Babylon.

Life Applications

Questions to Ponder

1. If Jesus came to your church next Sabbath, in what ways would He apply the principles of Isaiah 61:1–3 to your church? How do these principles apply to your life?

2. Why are religious idols so seductive? Can you name any in your own life today?

3. Are there religious activities or traditions you depend on, in an addictive fashion, to maintain your identity as a follower of Christ?

4. If no one ever watched and applauded your performance, how would this change your performance? If God was the only one whose approval ultimately mattered, what would you tell Him as a reason why He should save you?

Text to Remember:

“Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Christ Jesus to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:5, 6).
Endnotes

South Central Conference Camp Meeting, 2013

By Elder Dana C. Edmond
with introduction by Debbonnaire Kovacs
September 4, 2013

This is a continuation of our summer series on camp meetings in the North American Division. This week we’ll look at a more traditional camp meeting, one of the biggest. According to Tim Allston, Director of Public Relations at Oakwood University in Huntsville, AL, “Since 1946, Oakwood has hosted the annual Camp Meeting for the South Central Conference of Seventh-day Adventists - a 10-day spiritual/educational/recreational retreat accommodating 8-10,000 attendees, from the conference's 33,000+ predominantly African-American members from Alabama, northwest Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee.”

This camp meeting was held May 31-June 8, this year. It’s theme was “When My People Pray.” Its flyer was printed in both English and Spanish. Speakers included Dr. Leslie Pollard, president of Oakwood, Elder Myron Edmonds, an Ohio pastor, Elder Kenneth Manders of Bermuda, Dr. Gene Donaldson of Capitol Hill SDA church in Wash., D.C., and Elder William Winston, president of South Atlantic Conference.

In looking for details about this camp meeting, I ran across the “president’s blog,” written by South Central Conference President Dana C. Edmond. He graciously gave me permission to reprint selections from his two blogs about camp meeting, so here is one, and the other will be posted next week. I found it particularly interesting because of the personal reflections and remembrances, and hope you will, too. To see the blogs in their entirety, as well as other topics and archives about past camp meetings, go to the link at the bottom of the article.

Here is President Edmond’s blog:

South Central Camp Meeting, 2013

I am a hopelessly old-fashioned, dyed-in-the-wool Seventh-day Adventist, who grew up in this church attending camp meeting. My parents would take their vacation time, every year, and spend it at camp meeting at the old Allegheny Conference.

I have been around so long, I remember the days before Allegheny East and Allegheny West divided and there was just the Allegheny Conference. Camp meeting was on the campus of Pine Forge Academy.
Pretty much everybody stayed in a tent in those days, as did my family—all 4 of us children, 2 parents, and sometimes, my grandmother. I have no idea how we managed, but we did manage. In fact, we managed so well that all of us looked forward to going to camp meeting every year.
The last few years of our camp meetings in Allegheny, we “moved up,” graduating from a tent to staying at the home of Elder and Mrs. Walter M. Starks. Elder Starks later became the first President of Allegheny West and after a few months, became the first (I believe) Stewardship Director for the General Conference.

Now that I look back on the experience, staying with the Starks’ was probably an even more amazing feat than managing in a tent. My parents had 4 children—which seems now like an enormous number of children to me, especially since my mother did not work outside the home for many years and all 4 of us were in church school (how did they do that?). But the Starks had an even bigger family, I think they had seven children! And, the Starks opened their home to another family, besides us, for camp meeting!

It is a wonderful tribute to the graciousness of the Starks’ that, until now, I never even thought about how difficult it must have been to have that many people in your home for almost 2 weeks(!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!), in a house that already had a zillion people in it and NEVER give the slightest hint that it was a bother.

We must have eaten in shifts, gotten dressed in shifts, I have no idea how we managed. But we had a wonderful time.

Elder Starks is gone now, along with both of my parents, but “Aunt Dorothy” (Mrs. Starks, one of the sweetest people you will ever meet) is still alive. I hope she reads this in fact, I am going to send it to her and give her a big “Thank you” for being the most gracious host in history.

The point is, I have been going to camp meeting forever (I almost started to say for how long), but I cannot remember being more blessed than I was at this past camp meeting in the South Central Conference.

Lest that sound immodest, please let me be very clear: I am not, taking any credit, I cannot take any credit whatsoever for anything good that happened at this past camp meeting. I did not preach a single sermon or sing a single song or give a single seminar.

That is not to say that a lot of work did not go into camp meeting, to the contrary. From my position, camp meeting is a grueling, exhausting, expensive endeavor. We give our staff the first 2 days after camp meeting off. The first day and a half after camp meeting this year, once I arrived back home, every time I sat down, I fell asleep. The Pastors, the office staff and everyone affiliated with putting together camp meeting, worked very hard. I am very proud to have been associated with them in this endeavor.

But I am very clear that it was God’s working and not our work that made camp meeting special—at least, special to me. To give just one example, Sabbath service the first weekend. If you were
there, or if you saw it over the Internet, was there any doubt that God visited the Oakwood University Church that day?
If our planning could make what happened that day (and throughout camp meeting) happen, then, we would make it happen all the time. You can’t plan that, you can’t schedule that, all you can do is to thank God for that. And I do. I really do.

I had the privilege of being at another camp meeting on last weekend, I shall share that wonderful experience in our next article next week. I was amazed at how many people came up to me there and told me that they were either at our camp meeting or they watched it over the Internet and they were blessed.
For me, camp meeting was a “mountain top experience,” the preaching, the music, ordination, etc., what a wonderful blessing it was. I hope that it was for you as well. That was our prayer, and if we learned anything during camp meeting, we learned that things really do happen “When My People Pray”.

But more than blessing your soul, I hope and pray that Camp Meeting, 2013, changed your life—all of our lives—at least, in some way. For, at the end of the day, that is what camp meetings are all about.

To read more, go to http://www.scc-adventist.org/, and click on “president’s blog.”