We [pastors] depend entirely upon the Spirit of God to produce actual effect from the gospel, and at this effect we must always aim. We do not stand up in our pulpits to display our skill in spiritual sword play, but we come to actual fighting; our object is to drive the sword of the Spirit through men’s hearts. If preaching can ever in any sense be viewed as a public exhibition, it should be like the exhibition of a ploughing match, which consists in actual ploughing. The competition does not lie in the appearance of the ploughs, but in the work done; so let ministers be judged by the way in which they drive the gospel plough, and cut the furrow from end to end of the field.

Charles Spurgeon

The Church is a Spiritual Organization

Running a church on human strength and talent guarantees failure

by Roger Hernandez, Oregon Conference

Church is a spiritual organization - with the emphasis on spiritual. When we try to run a church based on human strength and talent only, three things can happen:

God’s blocks His blessings

One of the fastest ways of stopping your church momentum is to believe your own press clippings. If you sense that momentum has slowed down or stopped in your life, ministry, or congregation, one of the first questions I would ask is this: Is God getting all the glory? One of the texts that brings this out the best is James 4:6 “But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

I have heard people blame the devil for the lack of growth and success, when in fact it could be God who is slowing you down. With all the opposition to the church these days, do we need to add God to that list?

You’ll attract unhealthy people

Like attracts like. When a church is dysfunctional, when it is centered on its own needs instead of the community it serves,
momentum stops. As a result, dysfunctional people are attracted to it.

When I was a younger pastor I had four congregations under my care. It was then that I first recognized this principle in action. Once in a while we had an event where all churches would come together. At those events, I saw gossips gravitate towards gossipers, malcontents got together, those with a critical spirit flocked to one side. When the leadership is healthy, healthy people are attracted. When it's not, you don't get the winners, you get the weird. I like different. But weird? Not so much.

People burn out

As a kid, I loved flying kites. Living in Puerto Rico we were almost never short of wind. Once in a while, however, there was a windless day. On those days, if you really wanted to fly a kite, it was much harder. First you needed to go to a big field. Then, get a running start. Follow that with run, run, and then run some more. Kite flying soon became a chore instead of a pleasant endeavor.

The same thing happens in church. When you have people running around, doing things in their own strength, eventually they'll wonder where all the pleasure of serving the Lord went. The only air in those churches is the hot air coming from the saints' mouths as they complain about how it used to be and how no one wants to volunteer any more. Kites fly with almost no effort when there is wind present. Is there wind in your church?

Talk with Roger about this topic on our Facebook page.

Resources for Pastoral Spouses

Has your spouse seen all of the resources developed recently by the NAD Ministerial Spouses Association? All of the segments of the Keeping It Real TV show are now available to watch online in high definition. They can even be downloaded for future viewing offline. Click the links below to go directly to each segment:

- Jose Hernandez--Embracing Your Identity and Role
- Cynthia Mercer--The Heartbeat of a Relationship
- Martin Weber--Keeping Your Kids Connected
- Daisy and Daniel Quinones--Finding Your Voice for God
- Rhonda Johnson--Healthy Body and Soul
- Deborah Pedersen--How to make a quick healthy vegeburger
- Christina Anderson--Married to a Porn Addict Pastor

Or watch the entire two hour Keeping It Real show with pastoral spouse hostesses Joanne Cortes and Carin Morgan Villalva.

Reading for Pastors

Fat churches: Quote: "In one study of some 5,500 women and men ages 45 to 84, participants were more likely to be obese the more religiously active they were. Each step of the way, from those never attending worship to those attending weekly, greater religious activity was associated with significantly higher rates of obesity."

What good does it do to argue about theology? Dan Reiland thinks arguing theology is the antithesis of leading people to Jesus.

What happens when the treasurer loses the church's money? That happened in Centralia, WA, when the treasurer left the deposit bag on his car and drove off! (Check out this .pdf on handling money from the United Methodist Church.)

According to a recent survey, most pastors believe pornography is a major problem for people in their churches.

Facebook, according to this piece, can do more than make new friends. It lets you eavesdrop on the spiritual lives of your people, so as to address their needs better. Quote: "What happened to me is an example of what some social media experts call 'growing bigger ears', or using social media to become better informed about constituents and what they care about. ... As a ministry tool, the access social networks provide into the lives of our friends and neighbors means we are compelled to see a full picture of them, whether we want to or not." (Along similar lines: according to this infographic, men and women share quite differently on line.)

For you Marilynne Robinson fans, an interview with her on the Duke's Faith and Leadership site. (If you're not familiar with Robinson, she's the author of one of my favorite books, Gilead, a Pulitzer-prize winning novel about a pastor in Iowa.)

Quote: In churches "the issue seems to be, 'Should we imitate others?' and it never seems to be, 'How can we be more fully ourselves?'"

Senator Lieberman thinks a day of rest is a good thing - we can assume that he'd prefer the same one we do, fortunately

To the Point

Outreach Magazine recently asked nine influential pastors this question: "If you could go back and do one thing differently in the early days of your ministry, what would it be?"
Worry less about what people thought. I tried to make a lot of people happy.
- Bob Coy, Calvary Chapel, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Ask the church to elect elders earlier to provide greater covering, accountability, and guidance.
- Steve Stroope, LakePointe Church, Rockwall, Texas

Be clearer about the vision of the church. I often said it verbally from the pulpit, but I didn't put it in writing.
- Don Wilson, Christ's Church of the Valley, Peoria, Arizona

Build deeper relationships with other pastors outside of my church.
- Troy Gramling, Potential Church, Cooper City, Florida

Appreciate the people who were present during those tough years.
- Kevin Myers, 12Stone Church, Lawrenceville, Georgia

Be more patient with people in the church, with other ministers and schools of thought.
- Matt Chandler, The Village Church, Flower Mound, Texas

Take time to play; enjoy my family more.
- Brian Tome, Crossroads, Cincinnati

Not be so dogmatic and blunt.
- Robert Emmitt, Community Bible Church, San Antonio, Texas

Make sure from the first day that I was apprenticing other campus pastors and church planters alongside me. It was nine years before we reproduced a campus or a church. That is pathetic!
- Dave Ferguson, Community Christian Church, Chicago

**News, Ideas & Reminders**

- **Humor:** [What happens when Siri gets sick of your dumb questions.](#)

- **Adventist Ministries Convention, Jan 15-18:** [save $50 by registering early.](#)

- **Are you planning a meeting?** AdventistMeetings is a service of AdventSource to help you plan events and keep it in your budget. Also, if you’re a musician or lecturer, you might want to register your services here with the Adventist Meetings Speaker Registry. (This link takes you to the log-in screen; you must set up an account.)

- **Ron Cluzet’s Prophecies Decoded now available,** on line or other media.

- **Check out the World Life Expectancy website,** about SDA’s lifestyle and longer life.

- **The ONE project, coming to Seattle** Feb. 13-14, 2012. Registration ends soon.

- **Adventist Family Ministries has a Facebook page** - check it out.
• REACH North American Resources Guide now available online.

• Previous resource links:
  o Andrews Study Bible
  o The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
  o iFollow website
  o NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): by email, or on a web page.
  o Back issues of REACH North America News
  o Adventist Parenting e-newsletter
  o The one Project
  o Facts with Hope, evidence-based health messages for bulletins
  o NAD Volunteer Screening Guidelines and Screening Form
  o InMinistry fall classes in NAD
  o The Andrews Study Bible is now digital

Got a tool, resource, site, article, idea or seminar that you like a lot? Share it with us at BestPractices@ameritech.net.

Upcoming NAD Events

Do you have an event you’d like to invite NAD pastors to? Send details to BestPractices@Ameritech.net.


Welcome Home Sabbath.

Nov 26, 2011, Division Wide. Let's get serious from the start. Programs don't win people back to church, people do! That's why a contact from someone in your local church is vital to getting inactive members engaged in church life again.

Welcome Home is a user-friendly guide for personalizing invitations to Homecoming Sabbaths to reach and reconnect with former and missing church members. Phone: 800-328-0525. For more information, email: service@adventsource.org

World AIDS Day.

Dec 1, 2011, Worldwide. Each year, ADRA, along with the worldwide community, commemorates World AIDS Day to show its support and involvement in the global effort to stop AIDS. The fight to halt the spread of this deadly disease is one of the biggest challenges the world has ever faced. ADRA is working to stop AIDS, and we invite you to take up the challenge, too. Phone: 800-424-ADRA. For more information, email: info@adra.org

Bible Sabbath. Dec 3, 2011, Division Wide.

Pastoral Evangelism and Leadership Conference.
Dec 4, 2011 - Dec 6, 2011, Oakwood University Seventh-day Adventist Church, 5500 Adventist Boulevard, Huntsville, AL 35896. “Pentecost II: Walking in the Rain”. Come for a confluence of powerful worship, incredible teaching, transformational experiences and ultimately, seeking a “soaking” in the “rain” of Holy Spirit. For more information, email: lindsay@adventsource.org

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Stop arguing theology and lead people to Jesus.

Is this dangerous theological minimalism or wise practical leadership?

It’s easy to say that it’s possibly or probably both. But that doesn’t get at the real tension. I think the tension resides in why we argue and whether or not we lead people to Jesus.

If you argue about your theology from defensiveness or ignorance, that isn’t helpful. If you argue because of pride and you like to win, that isn’t helpful. But if you argue because you genuinely want to learn and help others understand what God thinks, more than what you think, that seems to me to be heading in the right direction.

Personally, I enjoy a little systematics smack down; and a good rumble in the doctrine dojo is kind of fun now and then. Unless it goes from conversation to conflict to combat, then I’m tapping out. I want to learn and grow, not fight. I want the Kingdom to advance, not take sides. Which leads to the next part of the opening statement – lead people to Jesus.

If people are saying yes to Jesus, experiencing genuine spiritual conversion and changed lives are obvious, it’s hard to argue about that regardless of your theological bent or bias. If a church is leading people to Jesus and lives are changed based on biblical truth, I’m a fan of that church, regardless of their theology.

Theology is important. It’s the foundation of how and what we believe. But what’s more important, what we believe or what we do? They should never be separate, but they often are. That’s where practical leadership comes in. As leaders we must live out our faith and inspire others to do the same.

So, argue or lead? That’s the question for today.

4 Responses to “Arguing Theology”

1. Neal MD November 15, 2011 at 5:53 pm

My brother and I were discussing this very issue, last night. He’s a PCA minister & I’m a non-denom.

The main point we came to was that it’s not our theology or even our faith that saves us…Christ alone.

Thanks for the blog.
Sure you are aware but this post is currently under discussion at Todd Rhoades blog. [http://t.co/8ZWtjSYQ](http://t.co/8ZWtjSYQ)

I agree with you that the debates need to be to help others understand God more so they can follow Him better.

So, argue or lead? That’s the question for today.

Both. 😊

Theology is what I know and believe about God. Churches with “bad theology” can be leading people to the “wrong” Jesus. The Biblical example would be Acts 15 and a recent one would be the debate on Mormonism and whether they are Christian.

MikeB
@g1antfan

Nailed it. In my Comparative Religions studies I learned a phrase from Judaism. They refer to themselves as "a people about deeds not creeds". The point being, it doesn’t matter what you are “boldly” professing from the mountaintop with your bullhorn if your actions keep people from discovering a relationship with the amazing Creator of the universe. I love theological discourse but if that’s all it is….. epic fail.

Jonn McDaniel

Neal, Mike and Jonn, love your thoughts. Thank you for your input. It’s not an easy subject, so much passion from both sides. Thanks again. Blessings . . .

Neal, Mike and Jonn, love your thoughts. Thank you for your input. It’s not an easy subject, so much passion from both sides. Thanks again. Blessings . . .

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Safely Depositing Weekly Collections

One church nearly loses $7,000 in offerings.

A church in Centralia, Washington, lost nearly $7,000 from its weekly collections recently when a staff member accidentally left the bag containing the collected funds on top of her car and headed to the bank.

Fortunately, a man driving in this small community located about an hour south of Tacoma spotted the bag and picked it up. The man told KomoNews.com, which reported on the incident, he contacted the church and returned the funds because an honest mother and son returned his lost wallet some 40 years earlier.

"I could have done a lot with it, but I couldn't bring myself to do that," he told the outlet.

Until electronic giving and mobile giving options become the dominant methods for transactions among members and visitors, churches of all sizes will handle varying amounts of cash and checks every week. Although the risk is small, the opportunity exists for these offerings to get lost or stolen. If a weekly trip to the bank is necessary, make certain to have two people (preferably unrelated) go together during daytime business hours (in 2009, a couple was robbed while making a night deposit on behalf of a South Carolina church).

Churches also should look into remote-deposit capture technology offered by many financial institutions. A device provided by a bank will scan checks and send the information electronically; churches usually pay for the scanner and a monthly service fee based on volume.

For more help on this topic, check out Safe Ways to Handle Your Church's Money from ChurchSafety.com.

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Managing Your Church: Safely Depositing Weekly Collections http://blog.managingyourchurch.com/2011/11/safely_depositing_weekly...
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Managing Your Church: Safely Depositing Weekly Collections

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Safeguarding Church Funds

Proper handling of money given to local churches is a critical responsibility. Since money is more often given in the form of cash or checks, it is subject to theft or misappropriation. Collection of most local church funds via the Sunday offering presents unique problems for ensuring the proper and secure handling of these funds. Collection plate offerings, frequently processed by volunteers, contain checks, currency and loose coins. They are collected outside of banking hours and generally are counted and secured during or following a Sunday morning or holiday service and stored until they can be deposited.

The existence of large amounts of cash may tempt persons facing financial difficulties, to “borrow” some of this money. Embezzlement or theft of local church funds can create a crisis of confidence in the ability of the local church to ensure that funds donated to and through it are used for the purposes intended.

Most of the “rules” for avoiding mishandling of local church funds are based on common sense.

- Two unrelated people should always handle the collected offering. Their relationship should be devoid of any potential conflicts of interest or incentives for collusion.
- Staff and volunteers handling church funds should be bonded. Churches can purchase a blanket fidelity bond, similar to the one GCFA maintained for annual conference treasurers and certain other conference officers. Such bonds are standard in the PACT program.
- Receipt and disbursement functions should be handled separately and assigned to different individuals.
- Church funds should not be taken to anyone’s private home. Checks should be stamped “For Deposit Only” before they leave the church. Funds should be counted, verified and placed in secured bags for bank deposit, or placed in the church safe for deposit as soon as possible.
- Financial statements should be audited on an annual basis and detailed monthly reports should be kept and reviewed. At least three unrelated individuals should be responsible for the separate functions of check writing, monthly bank statement reconciliation and the yearly audit.

A large number of dishonesty cases involve the misuse of checks or long-term deposits. The annual audit should include a review of every check issued during the year, a comparison of each check to the check stub, bookkeeping entry and, if possible, the bill being paid. Processes should be established to make such an annual audit easy to accomplish. Bank statements should be audited with a comparison of both the checks written and the deposit slips, to be certain they balance. Long-term deposit accounts should be audited to note withdrawals and deposits and to ascertain the reasons for such activity.

These guidelines can be utilized for developing detailed instructions for those persons assigned the responsibility of collecting, counting, and depositing the local church offering and for disbursing local church funds.

“Careful and competent handling of church funds is critical in maintaining confidence among church members that their donations will be used as intended for the ministries of their congregation.”
Comparison of Procedures

Churches may wish to compare their guidelines for handling church collections with the following:

- Immediately after the collection has been completed, two unrelated persons should take the offering to the church office. There, the unopened offering envelopes and different monies should be placed in a money bag by the church secretary and treasurer and carried by them to be locked in the church safe.

- Counting should take place in the church office, never at home.

- Two unrelated persons should always be present.

- Remove any notes or letters intended for the pastor and deliver them accordingly.

- One person should count while the other observes, and then the observer should recount while the original counter observes.

- The offering totals should be recorded in ink on a cashbook sheet and initialed and dated by both counters.

- Sort the envelopes numerically and break by hundreds (or fifties in smaller churches). Each envelope should be opened separately, the amount counted and written on it. Loose checks should be put in an envelope, which indicates the contributor's name and amount given. Each group of envelopes should be proved by the double-count method. After this, the proved section may be merged with the loose-plate cash.

- Deposit slips should be made out in duplicate following the bank's instructions. Both individuals should make the deposit. Both should reconcile the cash and checks to the deposit slip and initial the copy of the deposit slip and the duplicate tape of checks.

- The Monday following church services, the financial secretary should complete the records of contributions and reconcile them with the entries in the cashbook.

Mail containing cash or checks, should be counted by the financial secretary and an assistant. The totals should be entered in ink in the cashbook, checked and initialed by both parties.

A pre-numbered duplicate receipt book should be kept in the church office to be used for monies turned in or delivered there by individuals. A receipt should be completed for each transaction and the original given to the person delivering the money. The duplicate should remain in the receipt book and be available for audit.

Those persons involved in the local church collection and accounting process must be instructed on the importance of keeping any financial information confidential. The counting committee should be made aware of their sensitive role in maintaining confidentiality with regard to the giving levels of various members.

In smaller churches, the treasurer is generally responsible for preparing and signing checks. In these cases, the monthly financial report should include each check, the amount, and to whom and for what purpose it was written. Each church should review its process regarding how many persons must sign checks on behalf of the church.

In larger churches, a financial secretary will prepare the checks and a treasurer will sign them, or both will be required to sign checks prior to issuance. Blank checks should never be pre-signed. A process for approval of bill payments should also be established, generally involving designation of an authorized person to review and approve payment of bills for church expenses.

Conclusion

Careful and competent handling of church funds is critical in maintaining confidence among church members that their donations will be used as intended for the ministries of their congregation. The establishment of appropriate safeguards and procedures for handling church funds will assist persons responsible for those funds and also protect the work of the local church in general.
Pastors: porn a big problem among members
By David Roach
Nov 10, 2011

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) -- Most pastors believe pornography has adversely impacted the lives of their church members, but almost half cannot estimate what percentage of their congregation views porn.

That is the finding of a newly released survey by LifeWay Research of 1,000 American Protestant pastors.

When presented with the statement, "Pornography has adversely affected the lives of our church members," 69 percent of pastors surveyed agree. That includes 42 percent who strongly agree and 27 percent who somewhat agree. Nine percent somewhat disagree and 8 percent strongly disagree. Fourteen percent do not know or preferred not to answer.

"Most pastors know pornography's poisonous effects," LifeWay Research President Ed Stetzer said. "They've seen it destroy marriages, wreck lives and warp America's moral compass when it comes to sexuality."

When asked to estimate the percentage of men in their congregations who view pornography on a weekly basis, 43 percent are unable or unwilling to respond. Of those able and willing to estimate, a majority (62 percent) say less than 10 percent, 24 percent say 10-24 percent, 10 percent say 25-49 percent and 4 percent say 50 percent or more.

*Story continues below graphic*
The results are similar when pastors are asked about the women in their churches. Forty-four percent are unable or unwilling to estimate the percentage of females in their congregations who view pornography on a weekly basis. Of those who are able and willing, 87 percent say less than 10 percent. Ten percent say 10-24 percent, and 3 percent say 25-49 percent. Zero percent say 50 percent or more.

Statistics from other studies, however, suggest that pastors may underestimate pornography’s effect on their congregants.

According to data compiled by the Education Database Online, 43 percent of people who use the Internet visit pornographic websites. Some 40 million Americans are regular visitors to porn sites, with pornographic downloads representing 35 percent of all Internet downloads. Of the 40 million regular visitors, 33 percent are women. A full 70 percent of men age 18-24 visit porn sites monthly.

"Though pastors know generally that pornography is harmful, many may not realize that it is coming into the homes of their members," Stetzer said. "Large numbers of church attendees are included in the nearly half of all Internet users who visit porn sites. We were surprised that so many were unable or unwilling to estimate considering how pervasive pornography is inside the church. If a third think that less than 10 percent of the men are looking at porn and almost a half aren’t sure, we may very well have a lack of awareness of porn’s presence. Studies show that committed Christians engage pornography less, but the issue is still a big one that the church must face."

"The church has been given all that is needed to address sexuality from a biblical perspective," Stetzer recently
wrote in a blog at EdStetzer.com where he shortened an article he wrote for the Assemblies of God Enrichment Journal. In that series, called "pornification," Stetzer called for more awareness and clear biblical teaching on the issue. "Scripture clearly teaches God's plan for sex. Yet we stumble awkwardly past the issues. If the church refuses to address the issues, not only do we become irrelevant, but we leave the conversation open to others who feel more free to do so."

The poll was conducted in October 2010.

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David Roach is a pastor and writer in Shelbyville, Ky. Get Baptist Press headlines and breaking news on Twitter (@BaptistPress), Facebook (Facebook.com/BaptistPress) and in your email (baptistpress.com/SubscribeBP.asp).

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Original copy of this story can be found at http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=36528
Holy Eavesdropping: Why Facebook is Great for Ministry

Just after midnight on an ordinary night one Fall, I came across a very intriguing conversation between two female college students – one I knew personally, the other I did not. They were talking about a guy both had known in high school and who went to the same university as the young women I knew. I changed the names, of course. “Nicole” is the student I knew from my work on campus. It went something like this:

Emma: Tom invited me to his church [when we were in high school]. I thought I would go and check it out (I really wanted some God), but found that it was just too clique-ish for me, and they didn’t do much learning…more singing. And he never asked me about it again. Like… if someone came with me to my place of worship, I’d follow up!

Nicole: (laughter) He doesn’t believe in God AT ALL anymore!

Emma: WHAT?! What a change? Wow. That’s amazing. In high school he was all “Goddish” …whoa! I guess people really do change. I mean, look at me! (laughter)

Nicole: I know, right?? He had NO problem at all just going up to me and being like “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?” and now he’s supposedly hardcore atheist. And I heard he got a SUPER deep depression because like he
I was campus minister at the time and this conversation was a goldmine on so many levels. I knew immediately I was getting a rare, unfiltered glimpse into the personal life and the spiritual life of the students I worked with. Given the fact that I was a campus minister and that my professional association with God had a way of eliciting stock answers from students who assumed I was there to make sure they were “following the rules”. (For the record, I was not.) Most students were not likely to share with me so openly their doubts about their beliefs and faith.

Perhaps, by now, you’re thinking that my act of eavesdropping on this private conversation, no matter how useful to my work it was, crossed an ethical line or at least a social one. I would agree with both allegations had I strained to overhear the dialogue at a coffee shop. The truth is I came across this conversation on my Facebook News Feed. Something posted by “Nicole” led me to her profile where I discovered the hour-old dialogue between her and Emma right there, out in the open, in public for any of Nicole’s friends to see, including me and, potentially, the guy they were talking about.

Being privy to this type of exchange and countless others like it on a daily basis proved to be a very valuable tool for ministry. What happened to me is an example of what some social media experts call “growing bigger ears”, or using social media to become better informed about constituents and what they care about. The concept highlights social media’s unique two-way quality. That is, social tools are not intended to simply broadcast a message out into the world. Instead, what separates social media from all other forms that came before it is its unique capacity to facilitate an ongoing, real-time conversation among the people it connects. Therefore, the value that social media offers to anyone in ministry resides precisely in its capacity to create a feedback loop. As a ministry tool, the access social networks provide into the lives of our friends and neighbors means we are compelled to see a full picture of them, whether we want to or not. The insight I got into the lives of my students was often sobering and, sometimes, it even ran counter to the picture of them I had formed from the minimal tidbits of information I gleaned from our brief church-related encounters. But it always prepared me to be a better campus minister. It made sure that I treated students as individuals and not walking demographic statistics.

The key to harnessing the power of social media for faith communities is understanding the opportunity it gives us to listen before we speak. It is not simply a new way to promote something to an audience. That’s what traditional media does. New media that is social allows us the ability to “eavesdrop” on conversation that provide deep insight into the lives of those with whom we are connected. Therein lies the promise of social media to transform how faith communities connect its members and invite other to participate.
How do you use social media to listen… really listen to those you serve?

Thanks to Jerry Reynolds for photo via Flickr

One comment


I’ve spent some time reading the opinions, comment and thoughts of professional and interested amateurs discussing Christianity and religion. Whilst I still think they’re a valuable source of learning, I now also think, thanks to your insightful article, the conversations and thinking of lay people isn’t given the attention it deserves, especially if we hope to bring them into a deeper relationship with God.

Thank you.

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He Said, She Said: How Men & Women Are Sharing Differently Online

brought to you by Proust.com

Everyone has stories to share and memories to reminisce about. But it turns out that men and women tend to take different paths as they stroll down memory lane! We crunched the data, looking at the number of answers recorded by men vs. women across all of Proust.com’s more than 100 chapters and 1,000 questions. We got a kick out of the results and thought it would be fun to share them with you. While where we differ as men and women might not always shock you, you’ll no doubt enjoy seeing just how wide the disparity is when it comes to discussing certain topics.

Men vs. Women – the Breakdown:

- We took a sample of over 2,000 people who answered questions from Proust’s “Love Songs” chapter and found there to be 8 times as many female respondents as male respondents.
- When asked to share the love song that makes them the most teary-eyed or what song represents love to them, men were significantly more likely to take a pass on the question, while women were happy to share their answer. Surprised?
- When we looked at the gender of respondents to questions in Proust’s “Nerd Alert” chapter we found that men were overwhelmingly (10 to 1) more likely to record an answer than women; for the most part women steered clear of sharing “In what ways are you nerdy?” effectively ceding the term “nerd” to the men.

These are just a few examples from the data we dug up, and we encourage all ladies & gents to check out the full battle of the sexes infographic below. Finally, in the spirit of sharing, we’d love to hear from you – what piece of information most surprised you?

Happy storytelling,
The Proust Team.
WOMEN LIKE TO DISH ABOUT...

LOVE SONGS

Women are eight times more likely to share their favorite love songs than men.

PARTYING 600%

Women are 600% more likely to share the deets on what happened at parties than men!

REMINISCING

Women love their girlfriends, and are six times more likely to reminisce about the good times they spend together.

SWEET TOOTH

When it comes to candy, women have more to share about their sweet tooth addictions by a factor of four! Whether it’s picking a favorite candy or sharing their most common craving, men just aren’t as inspired to confess their favorite confections.
Mainline churches should stop trying to imitate others and should ask themselves, “How can we be more fully ourselves?” said author Marilynne Robinson.

“What people need in this culture is truthfulness, dignity and aesthetic quality,” Robinson said. “Not everything in the world, but many things are depleting exactly those aspects of life now.

“The churches are in a position to give people what they urgently need and give them something that is only consistent with their dignity as human beings.”

Robinson is the author of the novels “Housekeeping,” “Gilead” (which won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2005) and “Home,” and the nonfiction works “Mother Country: Britain, the Welfare State, and Nuclear Pollution,” “The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought” and “Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self.”

“Housekeeping” was included in The New York Times “Books of the Century” and listed as one of the 100 greatest novels of all time by the Guardian Observer (U.K.). In 1998, Robinson received a Strauss Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

She currently teaches at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and lives in Iowa City. She was born and raised a Presbyterian and is now a Congregationalist.

She spoke to Jason Byassee about holding on to our histories, how the mainline Protestant tradition fell silent, and seeing the image of God in others. The video clip is an excerpt of the following edited transcript.

**Q: Could you talk about what you admire about the Calvinists who moved to the edge of civilization in the 19th century and started colleges and hospitals?**

I think they understood that what was at stake was a huge conflict of civilizations. The shorthand within our culture is pro-slavery versus anti-slavery. But slavery itself was sort of an extension of serfdom and class circumstance -- impoverishment of the working class and so on -- that had occurred everywhere in Europe for centuries and centuries of time.

The response to that, the antidote to it, was education. They were very serious about the fact that the more literate people were, the more they were able to secure their own liberty.

So they were abolitionists, but they understood as essential educating the populace that would arrive there. They were very early at educating women and Native Americans and black people on exactly the same basis.

**Q: Is it conceivable that we could recover that kind of founding impulse?**

One of the things that’s very impressive about these colleges that were founded by the abolitionists that moved west is that they are still very fine colleges. Oberlin, Grinnell -- the list is very long and very distinguished.

They’ve in many cases literally forgotten their origins, but they have not forgotten their ethos as far as humane and ambitious education is concerned.

There are origin narratives that are important for people to help them cohere as a civilization. I think we’ve forgotten many of our most important narratives.

People talk about being conservative now, but it seems to be without content, except maybe they took something from a Western movie. I don’t think there would be any problem at all reanimating that aspect of culture if people were simply more conscious of it.

**Q: How do people reawaken to a lost version of their story?**

The question has this sort of intrinsic interest for me. I did not know until I started doing certain kinds of research that that kind of forgetfulness was possible.

I came to Iowa from Massachusetts. You are very aware of at least major parts of Massachusetts history simply by living there. I came to Iowa and would say, “What is the history of this place?” and they would say, “It doesn’t have one.”

I knew that couldn’t be true, and so I started doing research into 19th-century sources of various kinds. I found out there was a glorious history, not just for Iowa, but for Illinois and Ohio and Kansas and Michigan and Minnesota. It was a huge phenomenon.

**Q: What would you wish in terms of holding on to history for those who inhabit an office like that of a bishop, someone whose work is in Christian administration?**

Something we tend to forget is that these institutions exist because they fill human needs.

Educational institutions and pastoral offices are ancient. And often the feeling, at least in institutions, is that they are supervisors in a negative sense of the word, that their function is more to control than to assist.

To the extent that thinking tends in that direction, it creates an adversarial environment that does not conduce to anyone’s happiness or good functioning.
Civilization and its offices are human creations that accommodate human needs, and everyone has to respond to them from that point of view.

Q: So it’s not that we can just do away with institutions and still be human beings that work.

I can’t imagine it, certainly not in our civilization. We tend very much towards institutionalization of things, and in many cases, fantastically positive things are the consequence of that.

This culture -- or any culture, perhaps -- is oddly at war with itself. The things that are most precious in it seem to come under particular pressure. And maybe it all balances in some way.

But I do think that it would be a good thing if we could step back and appreciate the human value of things we’re much too much in the habit of criticizing and taking negative attitudes toward.

Q: You’ve written in Harper’s Magazine about institutions whose deepest roots were radical. Can you talk about that notion of a “radical institution”?

Of course, I identify very strongly with the mainline Protestant tradition and its history, its music -- everything. And as far as I’m concerned, what happened to it was that it fell silent.

I don’t know quite -- I think that after the Civil War, there was an enormous shock when the realization of the cost of the war sank in. And I’m talking about blood and about the fact that even soldiers that survived the war would come home and their families would fall sick and die from diseases they brought home from the camps and so on.

Every war is horrible, but it was a horrible war, and it was a great trauma for the country to have hundreds of thousands of its own people dead on its own landscape.

What are called now the mainline churches were very much in the vanguard of the anti-slavery movement. They truly were radical in the terms of the time, and ahead of their time -- good women’s rights advocates and acting out their beliefs within their own communities and so on.

I think they were -- a lot of people turned against them because they tended to be blamed for the war, as if getting rid of slavery were only one option. And they lost their courage, I think.

And I think they are radical institutions in their deepest impulses, but that they have been stereotyped as the archetypal conservative institutions. Not simply in terms of what they believe, but what they personify -- the original sort of WASP aspect of the civilization.

They don’t like this characterization. They don’t think past it. And they’ve been very much intimidated by these kinds of things.

I think that they would be very well positioned to assume an important place in contemporary culture. For them, the issue seems to be, “Should we imitate others?” and it never seems to be, “How can we be more fully ourselves?”

Q: You mentioned courage. This phrase you use in “Gilead” of “prevenient courage” is close to the heart of Methodists, because we talk about prevenient grace that God gives us so that everybody can indeed respond to grace. Why do you describe courage this way?

For me, prevenient courage means, for a Christian person, that you understand that difficult demands might be made on you and that you are furthermore obliged to be attentive enough to know when a demand is being made.

So the courage is not triggered spontaneously by the moment. It is in fact something that, if you believe in God, will pre-exist the circumstance in which courage is required.

Q: So it’s something you could practice before that sort of moment?
Yes. When Calvin says, “The only true knowledge of God is born of obedience,” he’s saying you have to be very alert to the occasions in which God lets you understand what obedience might be. And in that context, obedience and courage are simultaneous.

**Q: Say more about that alertness. How do you inculcate a habit of paying the right sort of attention?**

I’m pure Calvin. He might stand and say, “No, you’re not, lady.” In any case, he also says at greater length that when you encounter anyone, the question you have to ask is, “What does God want from this encounter?”

And he writes very beautifully about the notion that any encounter with another human being is an encounter with an image of God.

If it’s someone offending against you, it is someone that God is waiting to forgive for his offense. And so it’s a sort of triangulation where you’re not in the trenches at war with some other person.

You are thinking, “This person is sacred to God. What is God asking of me in my encounter with him or her?”

Calvin does insist that when you see a human being, you are seeing an image of God. He says that the beauty of the image should override everything and leave you with only the will to embrace that person and help them to the fullest extent of one’s means.

The idea of a human adversary is something that he virtually eliminates as a concept that is possible to a Christian person.

And when you consider that he himself was under threat of death or his whole city was under the threat of death for decades and decades and decades, he was not speaking loosely. He was talking about a time when the Inquisition was very active all around them.

So for him to say you cannot legitimately call another human being your adversary is a very, very major statement.

**Q: This sounds like an enormously fruitful posture for an institutional leader.**

One of the things that bothers me very much about a lot of the public version of Christianity -- what you see in the press and everything now -- are people who actually define themselves against adversaries. They look for enemies. And they split hairs to find enemies. This is very anti-religious behavior.

**Q: Your writing draws upon Calvinist theology. How do you situate your own enthusiasm about Calvin against those who champion him but may have other agendas at work than yours?**

I would like to know if they’ve read him. I went through a very long period when I read things that other people talked about as if they had read. And you find out that Marxists had not read Marx. And many of these people that call themselves Calvinists have not read Calvin.

I think that the great modern Calvinist was Karl Barth. There are earlier people of interest, but for the most part I don’t accept the Calvinism of many of these people who claim him. For them, it just means some sort of bare-knuckle self-righteousness. You could refute it a thousand times just from his own language.

**Q: People speak of your fiction using adjectives like “luminous” and “gentle” and “tender.” But your essays, such as “The Death of Adam” or “Absence of Mind,” have a different level of intensity. How do you think what tone to use in your writing?**

Physiologically speaking, it does seem to come from different parts of my brain. I love gentleness. I feel that it’s very much under attack.

Things like humility and self-questioning, things that are really the refinements of high civilization, and really just
civilization, are being dismissed, unlearned, scorned. So in a certain sense, I ponder them in my fiction and I try to defend them in my nonfiction.

One of the rules that I have for myself, which is just to make writing possible for me -- I only write about characters I love. A character is entirely vulnerable to his or her writer. And it seems cheap to me to demonize them or dismissively destroy them.

When I write polemically, as people say -- I don’t really think of myself as a polemicist -- but it’s ideas that I’m going after. It’s not human beings.

Q: In “Gilead,” you write, “I hope you will put yourself in the way of the gift.” Can you talk about “the way of the gift”?

The depth of religion is the product of study.

And whether that’s academic study or the study of human circumstance, it is not in my tradition and it’s not in my habit of thought that people go through sudden conversions and that everything is basically settled after they’ve crossed some threshold.

I think that we’re given many, many rich means to access greater and greater understanding. Things like music and arts and books and all kinds of things, and experience. And seeking them out is putting oneself in the way of the gift.

Q: You have rejected the notion that some people are religious and some are not, and that our culture has drawn a line between them. Talk about that.

I think that many, many people are religious whether or not they have some outward expression of religion that they can have access to or participate in.

It’s an insult to people to say that they are hostile to religion. This is an assumption about other people we have no right to make. And even if they are at some particular stage in their life indifferent or hostile, that doesn’t mean they always will be.

We have to consider people to be on their way somewhere, and we have to consider people to be precious to God whether they understand themselves as religious. I think that drawing of the line is an offensive act in the first place.

We know that 40 percent of the [U.S.] population is churchgoing on a weekly basis. There’s nothing else like this in the Western world. If 40 percent of the population bought a book that you wrote, you would be one of the best-selling authors of all time. People conjure this phantom other that they can scare themselves with.

If it happens that a social commentator makes a remark about the stupidity or the crudeness of something that is done in a religious setting, I think that commentator is giving that religion useful advice. And it should be accepted just as Ezekiel and Isaiah were accepted. They’re being told something that they need to know.

What people need in this culture is truthfulness, dignity and aesthetic quality. Not everything in the world, but many things are depleting exactly those aspects of life now.

The churches are in a position to give people what they urgently need and give them something that is only consistent with their dignity as human beings.

Instead of that, many of the churches are imitating the cheapest effects that come out of the mass culture -- which are all, by the way, commercial products of corporations and not by any means popular art.

So I count it among my blessings -- although this is something that people are sometimes surprised by -- that I have spent my life, most of it, in a great big secular university surrounded by people who are in themselves, in any number of ways, religious or nonreligious, whom I utterly respect and would never offend by saying they’re somehow in some
outer, wailing darkness.

This is not a judgment for me to make.
BY MARK A. KELLNER

Two days before the tenth anniversary of the largest-ever terrorist attack so far on American soil, the September 11, 2001, hijackings that led to the deaths of 2,977 innocents, Senator Joseph Lieberman, Independent-Democrat of Connecticut, sits in his office calmly conversing with a visitor.

Forget his Sunday schedule of many television interviews related to his work as chair of the Senate's Homeland Security Committee. Forget the classified briefing he was about to receive on potential September 11 anniversary-related terrorist threats. Forget the many demands on the time and attention of a member of one of the world’s most exclusive “clubs,” as the United States Senate has been called.

Instead, one source of Lieberman's calm is the approach—about eight hours after our meeting—of the weekly day of rest known as the Sabbath. An Orthodox Jewish believer, Lieberman—with the exception of issues involving the preservation or saving of a life—will not vote in the Senate on the Sabbath; if he either goes home after sundown Friday or has to be on the Senate floor during Sabbath hours, he’ll walk to and from his home in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C., usually accompanied by U.S. Capitol Police officers as bodyguards.

When he became the first Jewish-American to run on a national political ticket—he was then-vice president Al Gore’s running mate in 2000—he did not campaign on the Sabbath, something he’s maintained throughout his political career. Lieberman’s running mate, the Tennessean who at one point was a student at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, was “very understanding” of Lieberman’s Sabbath commitment, the senator said. In fact, the Gores celebrated Sabbath with Lieberman and his wife, Hadassah, more than once after the campaign ended.

Such dedication is not often seen in the halls of Congress. The sixty-third chaplain of the United States Senate, Barry C. Black (USN Ret.), is a Seventh-day Adventist, and in the House of Representatives, Representatives Roscoe Bartlett (R-Md.) and Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-Tex.) are church members. But among many of his colleagues, including some of his Jewish brethren, Lieberman stands almost alone in his dedication to keeping the Sabbath day holy, as Scripture commands (Ex. 20:8-11).

A Message for Today

Lieberman, referencing famed Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, calls the day “a sanctuary in time.” He said the Sabbath “began as a command, but it really is a gift.”

That view—of the Bible Sabbath as a gift from a loving God to all creation—suffused our conversation. Over the summer Lieberman published The Gift of Rest: Rediscovering the Beauty of the Sabbath (Howard Books), a volume that has been endorsed by figures as diverse as Cecil O. Samuelson, president of Brigham Young University, and Archbishop Timothy Dolan, leader of the Roman Catholic Church in New York City.

Book industry leader Publishers Weekly declared: “This deeply sincere and highly readable composition is certain to help people rethink their concept of Sabbath and prod them to rest.”

Lieberman said his rabbi “pushed” him to write the book, curiously enough the seventh volume he’s published, the senator noted with a smile. He said he is familiar with the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Sabbath, and sees that there would be understanding by Adventists of his position. He’s discussed Sabbath matters with Chaplain Black, who is the first Adventist to serve as Senate chaplain.

Asked why the Sabbath is important, he responded, “How is it not important? That day reminds me of the opportunities and responsibilities I have in the other six days.” He added that the Sabbath commandment includes the directive “six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Ex. 20:9). And indeed, Lieberman’s book includes a chapter on attitudes...
toward work during those six days.

Lieberman thinks that observance of the Sabbath, while not a point in his book, might help some in political circles to lower the tone of rhetoric seen in today's overheated environment.

The Sabbath, he said, “encourages humility” by making people disconnect from the normal routine. “If the world needs to find you, it will find you,” he said, adding that “one of the things [about Sabbath] is that it gets you off the treadmill.” And by taking time for family, a worship community, and nature, “you hear things you don’t hear otherwise.”

This promotion of the Sabbath is a far cry from the legislative actions of another, much earlier, senator from the northeastern United States, H. W. Blair of New Hampshire. It was Blair, in 1888 and several subsequent years, who introduced a “national Sunday law,” calling for Americans to respect the first day of the week as a day of rest. Blair’s bills died in committee, but his actions were enough to galvanize the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to begin work on religious liberty that continues today.

Returning to the Creation question, Lieberman said he wasn’t at all concerned about politicians expressing their beliefs, as several potential Republican 2012 presidential contenders have. However, he said, affirmations of faith must stop at any attempt to breach the establishment clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibits the creation of a “state religion.”

Mark A. Kellner is news editor of Adventist Review and Adventist World magazines [Photo: Astrid Riecken]. This article was published November 10, 2011.
Welcome!
You are invited to participate with ministry leaders from all areas of the North American Division at the Adventist Ministries Convention in Innisbrook, Florida. Don't miss this chance to attend seminars, connect with exhibitors, network with other ministry leaders, and enjoy the facilities at the Innisbrook Golf & Spa Resort.

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Twice every five years, more than 500 Seventh-day Adventist leaders who serve as conference and union denominational executives meet for professional growth, inspiration and fellowship. Many are pastors who now serve other pastors as administrators. Others specialize in training church leaders in ministry to youth, young adults, men, women, children, families, singles, health, outreach, philanthropy, prayer, reclaiming, community services, etc.

Most attendees wear several hats, are consultants to over 4800 churches serving one million Adventists in Canada, the United States and Bermuda (we will also have international attendees). The convention offers 70 seminars in 20 ministry tracks, and other forums to share news trends and recognize excellence with awards and presentations. Publishing executives, university resource centers and other providers will also attend, representing about 80 exhibits.
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