Keeping Your Wife Happy!
Ten commandments
Moses’ “Thou shalt nots” (Ex. 20:3-17) are incontestably given to Jews, not to Christians. This phrase was taken and is still today used to warn evildoers and lawbreakers. True Christians do not belong in this category.

Paul, the converted Pharisee, said: “The law [of Moses] is not made for a righteous man [Christian], but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners.” (1 Tim. 1:9).

To maintain that even part of Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is based on the Ten Commandments of Moses is at best biased thinking, as is to say that Christianity has its basis in Judaism.—G. Korbacher, Zephyr, Ontario.

Christian Sabbath
Samuele Bacchiocchi’s article (May, 1985) is well written, and I am looking forward to the next three installments. It seems to me that Dr. Bacchiocchi has made a great error in his dividing of the religious history of man. There are three dispensations to be considered. The first was started with the creation of man. It is called the Patriarchal Dispensation, since the father was the leader of the family. When Moses brought the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai and gave them to the people the Law Dispensation came into being. This was for the Hebrew people only. This dispensation lasted until the death of Christ on Calvary, when it was fulfilled. The Christian Dispensation came into being on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ.

If there is so much emphasis put on Sabbathkeeping, what about the keeping of the rest of the law? Why not the sacrifice of animals, burning of incense, tithing as mandatory, and the keeping of the feasts and holy days? How can anyone keep just one small part of it and be justified in all?—Bill G. Grove, De Witt, Arkansas.

“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified” (Rom. 3:20).—Editors.

Your article on the Sabbath in the May, 1985, issue (“Christian Sabbath: New Testament Evidence”) disturbed me greatly by the way you used Scripture. Significant is the lack of key passages such as Romans 14:1-12 and Colossians 2:6-19. I certainly hope that you deal with these passages. And, further, I hope that you allow for the Christian freedom that Paul so clearly expresses in these passages and others.—Peter Dorn, Chickasha, Oklahoma.

Who is reverend?
I have been thoroughly enjoying the articles devoted to helping preachers become better communicators. You are covering areas previously left untouched by most of the journals I receive. And I find myself drawn frequently to the Word after reading your doctrinally oriented material. And that cannot be anything but good for me.

I am wondering about what I view as an inconsistency on your part. Knowing the respect you have for Jehovah, could you explain your willingness to equate man with Him who created us? My address label entitles me as “Reverend.” I reject such titles, knowing that the word itself means “one worthy of being revered or worshiped.” The Word of God reserves the word for Jehovah exclusively. He as God has the right to be revered. But I have always been amazed at the audacity of my fellow preachers to take such a holy title for themselves. Please continue to send MINISTRY to this minister of the gospel, but leave off the lofty prefixes if you will.—Ralph Walker, Concord, North Carolina.

Gladly! As Seventh-day Adventist ministers, we never use the title Reverend either. Unfortunately our computer gets its list from various sources and doesn’t know any better!—Editors.

Kept it coming
Please remove my husband’s name from your mailing list. I should have written this request several years ago when my husband died. I must confess that I let the publication continue to arrive, as I read every issue and often used quotes from articles in my Sunday school class teaching.

I am doing only occasional teaching now and in good conscience can’t let you keep sending it. Please apply the enclosed contribution so someone more active can receive the help.—Mrs. Daniel Huntwork, Erie, Pennsylvania.

I wish to let you know that my husband passed away some time ago. He was receiving two copies of MINISTRY and would share one of them. Now I feel that his name should be taken off your mailing list, and the magazine can be sent to some deserving young minister. There are many fine articles in it. My husband often clipped and used excerpts from it.

I might add that though my husband was a Presbyterian minister, the basic fundamental beliefs were the same. When we lived in Minnesota one of the best Sunday school teachers we ever had was a Seventh-day Adventist. There wasn’t a church of his denomination in our area, so he faithfully attended ours and was a great help.—Valain Blake, Thor, Iowa.

If you’re receiving MINISTRY bimonthly without having paid for a subscription, it’s not a mistake. Since 1928, MINISTRY has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers, but we believe the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share with you our aspirations and faith in a way that we trust will provide inspiration and help to you too.

We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulders, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you cannot use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy; requests should be on church letterhead.
Paul and the Sabbath/4. Is Sabbath observance merely a matter of personal conscience? Samuele Bacchiocchi concludes his four-part series on the Sabbath in the New Testament by carefully examining the message of three passages often cited as evidence that the Old Testament Sabbath has been abolished.

Giving: Essential to Worship/9. Projects, programs, people, materials, buildings. Is this what we give our money for? Mel Rees argues that we will fail if this is our emphasis. Giving is a part of worship!

The Reborn and the Unborn/12. How does God view abortion? Should the church take a stand? What principles are involved? You may not agree with John and Millie Youngberg's assertions, but we hope they will make you think.


Economic Servitude/16. Should Christians charge interest? Should they deposit their money where it will collect interest? Should they even expect to get back the money they lend? John J. Tollefsen asks seldom-heard but important questions.

Keeping Your Wife Happy!/19. What does she really want, anyway? And how can you give it to her? Fran Sciacca's story of discovery can help make both marriage partners happy.

Viewpoint/16
From the Editors/21
Computer Corner/22
Parson to Parson/23
Shepherdess/26

Science and Religion/28
Shop Talk/31
Recommended Reading/32
Paul and the Sabbath

What does Colossians teach was nailed to the cross? What “shadow of things to come” does Paul write of there? Do Galatians 4:8-10 and Romans 14:5 indicate the Sabbath is no longer to be kept? The answers to these questions conclude our series on the New Testament evidence regarding the seventh-day Sabbath. —by Samuele Bacchiocchi

It has been customary to appeal to Paul to defend not only the abrogation view of the law in general but also of the Sabbath in particular. We considered the former in the preceding article in this series. We proceed now to examine the latter. Please note that while Paul constantly refers to the law in his writings, he mentions the Sabbath explicitly only once: In Colossians 2:16 the term occurs in the plural form (in Greek)—sabbaths.

Two other Pauline passages, namely, Galatians 4:8-10 and Romans 14:5, have been cited as alluding to the Sabbath. On the basis of these texts, the predominant historical consensus has been that Paul considered the Old Testament Sabbath no longer binding, especially for Gentile Christians.1

Of the three references, greater importance has been attached to Colossians 2:14-17, since that passage explicitly speaks of Christ’s nailing something to the cross (verse 14) and warns against paying heed to regulations regarding several things, including “a sabbath” (verse 16). So we shall inquire into Paul’s attitude toward the Sabbath by examining primarily verses 14-17 and secondarily Galatians 4:8-11 and Romans 14:5, 6.

The Colossian heresy

Since the observance of “sabbaths” is only one aspect of the Colossian heresy refuted by Paul, we need to ascertain first of all the overall nature of the false teachings that threatened to “disqualify” (Col. 2:18) the Colossian believers. Were these teachings Mosaic ordinances, and are they identified with the written document (cheiropigraphon), which God through Christ wiped out... removed, nailed to the cross (verse 14)? Most commentators define the Colossian heresy as syncretistic teachings that incorporated both Hellenistic and Jewish elements.2 Such false teaching had both theological and practical aspects.

Theologically, the Colossian “philosophy” (verse 8) was competing with Christ for man’s allegiance. Its source of authority, according to Paul, was “human tradition” (verse 8), and its object was to impart true “wisdom” (verses 3, 23) and “knowledge” (verses 2, 3; chap. 3:10) and to assure participation in the divine “fulness” (chaps. 2:9, 10; 1:19). To attain this, Christians were to do homage to cosmic principalities (chap. 2:10, 15) to “the elemental spirits of the universe” (2:8, 20), and to angelic powers (verses 15, 18), and they were to follow ritualistic ascetic practices (verses 11, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22). Essentially, then, the theological error consisted in interposing inferior mediators in place of Christ (verses 9, 10, 18, 19).

Practically, these theological speculations resulted in the insistence on strict asceticism and ritualism. These consisted in “putting off the body of flesh” (verse 11)—apparently meaning withdrawal from the world, rigorous treatment of the body (verse 23), prohibition to either...
By this daring metaphor, Paul affirms the completeness of God's forgiveness. Through Christ, God has canceled, set aside, nailed to the cross, the written record of our sins that was against us.

taste or touch certain kinds of foods and beverages (verses 16, 21), and careful observance of sacred days and seasons—festival, new moon, Sabbath (verse 16).

Christians presumably were led to believe that by submitting to these ascetic practices they were not surrendering their faith in Christ but rather were receiving added protection and greater assurance of full access to divine fullness. This bare outline suffices to show that the Sabbath is not mentioned in the context of syncretistic beliefs and practices advocated by the Colossian "philosophers."

What was nailed to the cross?

To combat these false teachings, Paul extolled the superiority of Christ, who possesses "the whole fulness of deity" (verse 9) and provides full redemption and forgiveness of sin (verses 11-14). In emphasizing the certainty and fulness of Christ's forgiveness, Paul utilizes three metaphors: circumcision, baptism, and the written document (verses 11-14).

Regarding the last, he says that God through Christ has canceled . . . set aside, nailed to the cross . . . the written document (cheirographon—verse 14).

What is the written document—(cheirographon) that was nailed to the cross? Traditionally it has been interpreted as the Mosaic law with all its ordinances, including the Sabbath, which God allegedly set aside and nailed to the cross. This popular interpretation is unwarranted for at least two reasons. First, because as Eduard Lohse points out, "in the whole of the epistle the word law is not used at all. Not only that, but the whole significance of the law which appears unavoidable for Paul when he presents his gospel, is completely absent."

Second, this interpretation detracts from the immediate argument (verse 13), which was designed to prove the fullness of God's forgiveness. The wiping out of the moral and/or ceremonial law would hardly provide Christians with the divine assurance of forgiveness. Guilt is not removed by destroying law codes. The latter would only leave mankind without moral principles.

Recent studies have shed light on the meaning of cheirographon (which in the Scriptures occurs only in verse 14). Its usage in apocalyptic literature indicates that the cheirographon is the "record-book of sins" or a "certificate of sin-indebtedness" but not the moral or ceremonial law. The clause "and this he has removed out of the middle" (verse 14, literal translation) supports this view. "The middle" was the position occupied in the court of assembly by the accusing witness. In the context of Colossians, the accusing witness is the record book of sins that God in Christ has erased and removed out of the court.

By this daring metaphor Paul affirms the completeness of God's forgiveness. Through Christ, God has canceled, set aside, nailed to the cross, the written record of our sins that because of the regulations was against us. The legal basis of the record of sins was "the binding statutes, regulations" (tois dogmasin). What God destroyed on the cross, though, was not the legal ground for our entanglement in sin (the law), but the written record of our sins.

By destroying the evidence of our sins, God also "disarmed the principalities and powers" (verse 15). It is no longer possible for them to accuse those who have been forgiven. Christians, therefore, need not feel incomplete or seek the help of inferior mediators. Christ has provided complete redemption and forgiveness. We conclude, then, by reiterating that the document nailed to the cross is neither the law in general nor the Sabbath in particular, but rather the record of our sins.

Condemnation of Sabbathkeeping?

Paul turns now to some practical aspects of the religious practices of the Colossian false teachers. "Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you . . . " has been traditionally interpreted as Paul's warning against the five mentioned practices. This interpretation is totally wrong. In this passage Paul is not warning the Colossians against the observance of these practices as such, but against "anyone" (tis) who passes judgment on how to eat, to drink, and to observe sacred times. In other words, the judge is not Paul but Colossian false teachers who impose "regulations" (verse 20) on how to observe these practices in order to achieve "rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body" (verse 23).

D. R. DeLacey, writing in the recently released symposium From Sabbath to Lord's Day, rightly comments: "The judge is likely to be a man of ascetic tendencies who objects to the Colossian eating and drinking. The most natural way of taking the rest of the passage is not that he also imposes a ritual of feast days, but rather that he objects to certain elements of such observance."

Presumably the "judge" wanted the community to observe these practices in a more ascetic way ("severity to the body"—verses 23, 21). To put it crudely, he wanted the Colossian believers to do less feasting and more fasting.

Paul, then, is challenging not the validity of the festivals as such but the authority of the false teachers to legislate
In this passage Paul is not warning the Colossians against the observance of these practices as such, but against anyone who passes judgment on how to eat, to drink, and to observe sacred times.

on the manner of their observance. The obvious implication is that in this text Paul is expressing not a condemnation but an approbation of the mentioned practices, which include Sabbathkeeping. This is the conclusion that DeLacey himself draws, in spite of his conviction that Paul did not expect Gentile converts to observe the Sabbath. He writes: "Here again (verse 16), then, it seems that Paul could happily countenance Sabbathkeeping. However we interpret the situation, Paul’s statement ‘Let no one pass judgment on you’ indicates that no stringent regulations are to be laid down over the use of festivals.” 7 In the light of these observations we conclude that in verse 16 Paul expresses not a condemnation but an implicit approbation of practices such as Sabbathkeeping.

**Nature of the regulations**

What is the nature of the regulations promoted by the false teachers regarding the manner of eating, drinking, and observing festivals? Regrettably Paul gives us only some hints. He mentions that they consisted in “self-abasement and worship of angels,” “rigor of devotion . . . and severity to the body” (verses 18, 23) and that they taught: “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (verse 21). These catch phrases indicate that the regulations did not derive from the Levitical law, for nowhere does it contemplate such an ascetic program. Though the nomenclature of the festivals is Jewish, the motivation and manner of their observance stems from a syncretistic ideology.

Eduard Lohse perceptively notes that “in the context of Colossians, the command to keep festival, new moon, and sabbath is not based on the Torah according to which Israel received the sabbath as a sign of her election from among the nations. Rather the sacred days must be kept for the sake of ‘the elements of the universe’ who direct the course of the stars and also prescribe minutely the order of the calendar. . . . The ‘philosophy’ made use of terms which stemmed from Jewish tradition, but which had been transformed in the crucible of syncretism to be subject to the service of ‘the elements of the universe.”” 8

In the ancient world there was a widespread belief that asceticism and fasting enabled a person to come closer to a deity and to receive divine revelation. 9 In the case of the Colossian philosophy, the dietary taboos and the observance of sacred times were apparently regarded as an expression of subjection to and worship of the cosmic powers (elements) of the universe. Paul’s warning against the regulations of the false teachers can hardly be interpreted as a condemnation of the Mosaic laws regarding food and festivals, since what the apostle condemns is not the teachings of Moses but their perverted use by the Colossian false teachers. A precept is not nullified by the condemnation of its perversion.

**Shadow of the reality**

Paul continues his argument in the following verse, saying, “These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (verse 17). To what does the relative pronoun these (ha in Greek) refer? Does it refer to the five practices mentioned in the previous verse or to the regulations (dogmata) regarding these practices promoted by the false teachers?

In a previous study I argued for the former, suggesting that Paul places dietary practices and the observance of days “in their proper perspective with Christ, by means of the contrast ‘shadow—body.’” 10 Additional reflection has caused me to change my mind and to agree with E. Lohse, namely, that the relative pronoun these refers not to the five practices mentioned but rather to the false teachers’ regulations regarding those practices. 11

Two considerations support this conclusion. First, in verse 16 Paul is warning not against the Mosaic law regarding food and festivals but against the regulations. So it is more plausible to take the regulations rather than the actual practices as the antecedent of these. Second, in the verses that immediately follow, Paul continues his warning against the deceptive teachings, saying, for example, “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement” (verse 18); “Why do you submit to regulations, ‘Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch?’” (verses 20, 21). Since what precedes and what follows the relative pronoun these deals with the regulations of the Colossian philosophy, we conclude that it is the latter that Paul describes as “a shadow of what is to come” (verse 17).

Presumably the proponents of the Colossian philosophy maintained that their regulations represented a copy that enabled the believer to have access to the reality (“fulness”). In such a case, Paul is turning their argument against them by saying that their regulations “are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (verse 17). By emphasizing that Christ is the “substance” [σήμα: “body”] and the “Head” (verses 17, 19), Paul indicates that any shadow cast by the regulations has no significant value. We conclude, then, that what Paul calls a bygone shadow is not the Sabbath but the deceptive teachings of the Colossian philosophy, which promoted dietary practices and the observance of sacred times as auxiliary aids to salvation.

**The Sabbath in Colossians 2:16**

The regulations advocated by Colossian philosophy had to do not only with “food and drink” but also with sacred times referred to as “a festival or a new moon or a sabbath” (verse 16). Commentators agree that these three words represent a logical and progressive sequence (annual, monthly, and weekly) as well as an exhaustive enumeration of sacred times. These terms occur in similar or reverse sequence five times in the Septuagint and several other times in other literature, validating this interpretation. 12

Some view the “sabbaths” (sabbaton) as a reference to annual ceremonial sabbaths rather than the weekly Sabbath (Lev. 23:6-8, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 37, 38). Such a view, however, breaks the logical
Apparently the dispute was over meat that was lawful to eat but because of its association with idol worship was regarded by some as koinos (common), that is, unfit for human consumption.

Any Sabbath observance promoted by the Colossians' teachers—known for their worship of the elements of the world—could only have been of a superstitious type.

Many have maintained that the weekly Sabbath comes within the scope of this distinction respecting days. They presume that the "weak" believers esteemed the Sabbath better than other days while the "strong" treated the Sabbath like the rest of the weekdays.

Can the Sabbath be legitimately read into this passage? In my view this is impossible for at least three reasons. First, the conflict between the "weak" and the "strong" over diet and days can hardly be traced back to the Mosaic law, because nowhere does the Mosaic law prescribe strict vegetarianism, total abstinence from wine, or a preference over days (presumably) for fasting. That the Mosaic law is not at stake in Romans 14 is also indicated by the term koinos ("common"), which is used in verse 14 to designate "unclean" food. This term is radically different from the word akathartos ("impure"), used in Leviticus 11 (Septuagint) to designate unlawful foods.

Apparently the dispute was over meat that was lawful to eat but because of its association with idol worship (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1-13) was regarded by some as koinos ("common"), that is, unfit for human consumption. Thus the whole discussion is not about freedom to observe the law versus freedom from its observance. Rather, it concerns "unessential" scruples of conscience dictated not by divine precepts but by human conventions and superstitions. Since these differing convictions and practices did not undermine the essence of the gospel, Paul advises mutual tolerance and respect in this matter.

Second, Paul applies the basic principle, "observes it in honor of the Lord" (Rom. 14:6), only to the case of the person "who observes the day." He never...
Paul's concern is not to expose the superstitious ideas attached to these observances, but rather to challenge the whole system of salvation that the Galatians' false teachers had devised.

thinking of Sabbathkeeping when he spoke of the preference over days. The debate over days mentioned in Romans presumably had to do with fast days rather than feast days, since the context deals with abstinence from meat and wine (chap. 14:2, 6, 21). Support for this view is provided by the Didache (chapter 8), which enjoins Christians to fast on Wednesday and Friday rather than, like the Jews, on Monday and Thursday. On these matters Paul refuses to deliberate because he recognizes that spiritual exercises can be performed in different ways by different people.

Thus Paul's advice: "Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). It is difficult to see how Paul could, without ever giving an explanation, reduce the observance of holy days such as the Sabbath, Passover, and Pentecost to a matter of personal conviction. Especially since he labors at such great length to explain why circumcision was not binding upon the Gentiles. If Paul had taught his Gentile converts to regard Sabbathkeeping as a personal matter, Jewish Christians would readily have protested his audacity in setting aside the Sabbath law, as they did in the case of circumcision (Acts 21:21). The fact that the New Testament nowhere hints of any such controversy indicates that Paul never discouraged Sabbathkeeping or encouraged Sundaykeeping in its stead.

This passage itself gives additional support to this argument. Paul devotes 21 verses to the discussion of food and less than two verses (Rom. 14:5, 6) to that of days. This suggests that the latter was a very limited problem for the Roman church. If the conflict in the Roman church had been over the observance of holy days, the problem would have been even more manifest than the one over diet. After all, eating habits are a private matter, but Sabbathkeeping is a public religious exercise of the whole community.

In the Roman world there was a superstitious belief that certain days were more favorable than others to undertake some specific projects. The Fathers frequently rebuked Christians for adopting such a superstitious mentality. It is possible that Paul alludes to this kind of problem, which, however, at his time was still too small to deserve much attention. For Paul the important thing is to "pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (verse 19). In the light of the above, we conclude that it is hardly probable that the Sabbath is included in the "days" of verse 5.

The Sabbath in Galatians

In Galatians, as in Romans, the Sabbath is not explicitly mentioned. Paul does mention, however, that some Galatian Christians had themselves circumcised (Gal. 6:12; 5:2, 3) and began to "observe days, and months, and seasons, and years" (chap. 4:10). In many respects the polemic in verses 8-11 is strikingly similar to that of Colossians 2:8-23. In both places the superstitious observance of sacred times is described as slavery to the "elemental spirits of the universe." In Galatians, however, the denunciation of the "false teachers" is stronger. They are regarded as "accursed" (chap. 1:8, 9) because they were teaching a different gospel. Their teaching that the observance of days and seasons was necessary to justification and salvation perverted the very heart of the gospel (chap. 5:4).

Whether or not the Sabbath is alluded to in Galatians depends upon the interpretation of "days" (hēmerai—chap. 4:10). Some critics argue on the basis of the parallel passage of Colossians 2:16, where "sabbaths" are explicitly mentioned, that "the 'days' certainly indicate even the Sabbaths." 15 We do not deny this possibility, but we have shown earlier that the plural "sabbaths" used in Colossians was the common designation not only for the Sabbath day but also for the whole week. Thus the plural "days" of Galatians could well indicate that the Colossians' "sabbaths" are "weekdays" and not vice versa. If Paul in Galatians 4:10 meant the Jewish festivals, why did he not give them their customary names, as he does in Colossians 2:16?

Assuming for the sake of discussion that the Sabbath is part of the "days" observed by the Galatians, the questions to be asked are: What motivated the observance of the Sabbath and of the festivals? Is Paul opposing the observance of the Sabbath and of festivals, or is he denouncing the perverted use made of these religious practices?

It is generally agreed that the Galatians' observance of sacred times was motivated by superstitious beliefs in astral influences. This is suggested by Paul's charge that their adoption of these practices was tantamount to a return to their former pagan subjection to elemental spirits and demons (Gal. 4:8, 9). Apparently, on account of their pagan background, the Galatians "could discern in the particular attention paid by Jews to certain days and seasons nothing more than religious veneration paid to stars and natural forces." 19

Paul's concern is not to expose the superstitious ideas attached to these observances, but rather to challenge the whole system of salvation that the Galatians' false teachers had devised. By conditioning justification and acceptance with God on such things as circumcision and the observance of days and seasons, the Galatians were making salvation dependent upon human achievement. For Paul, this was a betrayal of the gospel: "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (chap. 5:4).

Paul's denouncement of the observance of days and seasons must be understood within this context. If the motivations for these observances would not have undermined the vital principle of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, Paul would only have recommended tolerance and respect (as he does in Romans 14), even if some ideas were foreign to Old Testament teaching. Since, however, the motivations for these practices adulterated the very ground of salvation, the apostle does not hesitate to reject them. In Galatians, as in Colossians, then, it is not the (Continued on page 30)
Giving: essential to worship

Projects, programs, people, materials, buildings. Is this what we give our money for? Mel Rees argues that we will fail if this is our emphasis. Only when giving is a part of worship is it acceptable to God.

Keeping Church Finance Christian □ 11  Mel Rees

any regard giving by church members as a means to an end: the support of churches, ministers, and missions a duty; an assessment; a tax; or, as one member referred to it, “a necessary evil.” He wished he could find a church that had inspiring sermons, fervent prayers, and beautiful music, but none of this money business.

“I have great news for you,” I told him. “Last week I attended just such a service.”

“Oh,” he exclaimed, “where was it?”

“It was a funeral!”

It seemed strange that this successful merchant, who must have recognized that planning, performance, and financial support are inseparable, would think that the church could provide “inspiring sermons, fervent prayers, and beautiful music” without any financial backing. One might consider this an isolated incident if it weren’t so often implied, if not expressed. Frequently one hears references to the “pains” of giving. Why? Here are some reasons.

Lack of commitment

Those who feel some discomfort in their giving are not really committed to the aim and objectives of their church; if they were, they would heartily support it, regardless of the cost. Or perhaps like the man who wanted to attend a moneyless church, they have made their religion convenient by lip service. Ezekiel had some of these folks in his day. “With their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (Eze. 33:31).

Administrative gap

This is a common complaint. Church administration sometimes soars away from its democratic roots, considers itself a separate entity, and sees its constituents as only a support system. This is often the side effect of growth, and it’s common to business, government, and the church. It happens when the governing body isolates itself to the extent that its plans are the desires of a minority without the enthusiasm and support of the majority. In his book Money and the Church (New York: Association Press) Luther Powell puts it aptly: “Hence the institution, rather than a means to a higher end, becomes an end in itself.”—page 65.

Even an ambitious pastor, dissatisfied with the snail-like progress of his people, can be a negative contributor. If he assumes the role of dictator rather than shepherd (directing rather than guiding), he may find himself far out in front without any visible means of support.

One pastor earned the sobriquet of “the church builder.” “I built twenty-three churches during my ministry,” he was often heard to say in his retirement. What probably occurred was that he supervised the construction of twenty-three buildings—not necessarily houses of God. Building a church requires a site, plans, and financing, but the requisites to build a house of God are devotion to God and a spirit of sacrifice.

It would be a miracle indeed if anyone (regardless of his leadership ability) could descend on a congregation and instill in the limited time available these basic principles so essential to a successful endeavor. Often the results of these pressure programs linger on in a
If giving is regarded as an essential part of worship, the quality of the gift and the motive that prompts it must take precedence over the amount raised or the object accomplished.

spirit of disunity and a dearth of spiritual maturity. Unless the building is the direct result of the proper spiritual preparation, it may be just an empty building, a package without the contents, a monument to the ego of its builder.

The wrong voice
Apart from the more visible influences on giving and the problems associated with church support is the possibility that the giver listens to the wrong voice. In our promotion-prone society it is easier to hear the strident voices of men than to listen to the voice of God (the small, quiet sound). A professional man related the following incident.

“When a visitor called at my home to explain the church’s program and the funds needed to finance it, I asked him, ‘What have you got me down for?’ “Nothing,” he said. This surprised me. “Nothing?” I repeated. This didn’t make any sense at all, because I always gave what they had me down for.”

“And you know, I did ask,” he concluded. “I’m giving twice as much as I ever did. Now I am looking forward to next year. I think I can triple it.” It does conclude. “I’m giving twice as much as I ever did. Now I am looking forward to next year. I think I can triple it.” It does make any sense at all, because I always gave what they had me down for.

“Nothing’ was the reply. That’s a sacred area that the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name” (verse 2). The gift was placed in a basket and given to a priest. The donor was then required to recount publicly the marvelous story of the deliverance of his nation from bondage, its establishment in the Promised Land, and the good things God had given him personally (verses 5-11). Even when presenting the tithe, the presenter was to testify that he had not neglected or violated any of God’s requirements before he asked for God’s blessing (verses 11-15).

It is noteworthy that these gifts were not given to the priests (although used for their support), nor were they designated as temple expense (although used for its maintenance). They were given to God. Too many times projects, objectives, and goals replace God as the focal point of the gift. And while these may all be commendable and worthy of support, they must be only the recipients of offerings given to God, never the focal point of the gift.

Sacrifice does not record the people as saying, “Let us go up to the tabernacle to hear Samuel preach” or “to hear David play the harp” or “to hear Solomon pray”; the usual reference is “Let us go up to sacrifice unto the Lord” (see Ex: 3:18; 5:3; 8:8:27; 10:25).

Possibly the reason some people today entertain wrong attitudes toward giving is that they do not understand this vital relationship between sacrifice and worship.

The Bible uses various terms to denote giving. The King James Version uses the word collection to indicate gifts for the repair and maintenance of the tabernacle (2 Chron. 24:6); The New English Bible refers to it as a tax. The same term is used in The New Testament for money raised for the saints (1 Cor. 16:1). In Romans 15:26 this fund is called a contribution (K.J.V.) or a common fund (N.E.B.). However, in the numerous references relating to the giving of money or property to God, the words used are offerings or gifts.

One may conclude that whether these acts of giving are called collections, contributions, common funds, or any other term, they were, if given from the right motives, gifts to God. This would certainly harmonize with the repair and maintenance (or construction) of God’s house. Paul supports this reasoning in his reference to gifts for the poor. “Through our action such generosity will issue in thanksgiving to God, for as a piece of willing service this is not only a contribution towards the needs of God’s people; more than that, it overflows in a flood of thanksgiving to God” (2 Cor. 9:12, N.E.B.).

It follows then that any act of giving, whether it be for the physical or spiritual needs of another human being or for any project that will further the work of God on earth, is giving to God (if rightly motivated). Therefore, giving is an act of devotion or worship.

Quality can make a difference
One must be careful here. If money is the primary object of the church, it would be relatively unimportant how it is obtained. However, if giving is regarded as an essential part of worship, the quality of the gift and the motive that prompts it must take precedence over the amount raised or the object accomplished. The quality of the gift makes the difference.

It must (1) represent a heart experience (2 Cor. 8:5); (2) be free will (Ex. 25:2); (3) be the first appropriation (Matt. 6:33); (4) be perfect (Lev. 22:21); (5) represent some sacrifice (Mark 12:43, 44); (6) be proportionate (1 Cor. 16:2); (7) not be a substitute for obedience (1 Sam. 15:22).

One may sing praises, pray, or study diligently, but only in the act of sacrificial giving does one truly express love and devotion. An offering is not merely something external, but the outward expression of the heart. And while praise, prayer, and study are all necessary and laudable, only in sacrificial giving do these find body and substance. Giving permits a person to transmit his inner feelings into an outward expression. God translated His everlasting love for us into a tangible form by the gift of His Son, and in His constant provision for our
This is religion. It must not be an exercise in programs or rituals, but a people imbued with Pentecostal fever, a people who can say with Paul, “For the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor. 5:14).

physical and aesthetic requirements. It is possible to give without loving, but it is impossible to love without giving. This is a divine principle.

One minister disagreed with this principle of giving to God rather than to specific projects. He said that it was pie-in-the-sky idealism and that it wouldn't work because people need some tangible, "seeable" objective to motivate them.

I wish he could observe a pastor friend of mine whom I regard as one of the most successful fund-raisers I have ever seen (he wouldn't appreciate this title at all). His churches can complete building projects, pay off debts, pave parking lots, put in sprinkler systems, refurbish, repaint, and decorate. They have money for public address systems and landscaping. Besides, there always seems to be financial support for an aggressive soul-winning program (possibly they do this first).

He wouldn't allow any of the popular money-making schemes the time it would take to explain them, and still he never mentions financial needs from the pulpit. Plans, yes; money, no. When I asked him for his magic formula, he laughed.

"I don't have a formula as such," he explained. "I just hold up before my people the unfathomable love of God in expressing and satisfying is evident in the familiar example of the poor widow who cast her very living into the Temple treasure chest (Mark 12:41-44). Then we have the paragon of a woman who brought "an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head" (Mark 14:3). Add to these the heroic example of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, who dedicated her little boy to the Lord before he was born (1 Samuel 1, 2). In none of these is any other motive for giving indicated than an ardent love for God and the consuming desire to express it regardless of the cost.

Relaxing during a break in a busy seminar agenda, some pastors were discussing the sacrificial element in giving and its relationship to worship. One man listened attentively to all the pros and cons, then related this experience.

A little girl shopping with her mother one day saw the most beautiful doll in a store window. My, how she wanted that doll, but her mother said, "I know, honey, how much you would like to have it, but right now we can't afford it."

Martha knew her daddy had been sick and out of work for several months. Trying not to sound too disappointed, she said softly, "I know, Mama . . . I know—but isn't she beautiful?" Every time they passed the store her eyes would stray to that lovely dolly.

Some months passed. She had almost forgotten her dream wish when, to her unbelievable surprise, the little doll came to live with her. She was so excited she could hardly eat her birthday cake. "Suzanne" went with her everywhere—to the market, to school, even to church. This was her "favoritest treasure" as she expressed it.

One Sabbath, while sitting with her parents in church, she listened as the pastor told about the love of Jesus—how He left His beautiful home and came down here to help mammas and daddies, little girls and boys. As Martha thought about this, she wished she could give Him something to show how much she loved Him, but her little purse had only one penny. How much love could one show for a penny?

All week long she thought about it. The flowers, the clouds, the birds, her nice home—all reminded her of His love. Then it was church time again.

Her father and mother couldn't believe their eyes when they saw Martha put Suzanne on the offering plate. People just stared as the plate passed along the pews with the doll on top.

Every day she missed her doll. The hurt was bigger when she climbed into bed at night; sometimes there was a tear, but then she would think of Jesus and everything would be all right again.

About suppertime one evening the pastor dropped by ("just a social call," he said) with Suzanne tucked under his arm. "Here, Martha," he said, "I brought your dolly back to you." Martha seemed transfixed at the sight of that doll. She didn't move.

"Go ahead, take her," smiled the pastor. "I'm giving her back to you."

Only the look in her eyes betrayed how much she wanted to take Suzanne and hold her tight. Then, brushing away a tear, she said, "I can't . . . I can't take her."

"But why?" asked the pastor.

"B-b-because . . . I didn't give her to you."

A church has been variously described as an architectural design, an institution, or an organization. In reality, a church is people, a body of believers who have banded together to accomplish common aims and objectives. Christ's church, then, is a body of believers who have dedicated themselves to the spreading of the good news to all the world—the "Go" people. Every plan, every program, every endeavor and outreach will be only some aspect of this "Go" commission. This is religion. It must not be an exercise in programs or rituals, but a people imbued with Pentecostal fever, a people who can say with Paul, "For the love of Christ constraineth [controls] us" (2 Cor. 5:14). This must be the only focal point, the only motivator.

The thought that only by giving can the feelings of the heart be fully expressed and satisfied is evident in the familiar example of the poor widow who cast her very living into the Temple treasure chest (Mark 12:41-44). Then we have the paragon of a woman who brought "an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head" (Mark 14:3). Add to these the heroic example of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, who dedicated her little boy to the Lord before he was born (1 Samuel 1, 2). In none of these is any other motive for giving indicated than an ardent love for God and the consuming desire to express it regardless of the cost.

Relaxing during a break in a busy seminar agenda, some pastors were discussing the sacrificial element in giving and its relationship to worship. One man listened attentively to all the pros and cons, then related this experience.

A little girl shopping with her mother one day saw the most beautiful doll in a store window. My, how she wanted that doll, but her mother said, "I know, honey, how much you would like to have it, but right now we can't afford it."

Martha knew her daddy had been sick and out of work for several months. Trying not to sound too disappointed, she said softly, "I know, Mama . . .
number of articles and editorials on abortion have appeared in Seventh-day Adventist publications. Some of these have alleged that since the Bible does not say anything definite about elective abortion, the church should leave the issue to the realm of individual conscience rather than take a stand on it. Some articles have called for religious liberty and toleration in this matter, apparently on the basis that no absolutes are involved. This contribution does not presume to be the final word on this delicate subject, but we offer it as a part of the ongoing dialogue as we search together for God’s way.

The Scriptures do contain principles relevant to this decision. If these principles are clear and well understood, then it is not essential that the specific rules that are subsets of those principles be explicitly stated in Scripture in order to realize God’s instruction. Let us consider abortion within the framework of the following greater themes or propositions. Although one or more of these propositions may not be all-persuasive when taken alone, their combined weight may be able to enlighten us as to what is God’s will in this sensitive area.

1. The proposition of the adequacy of Scripture

The argument has been put forth that we do not know enough about Biblical anthropology to define the subtleties of when life begins. We consider our theology in the vanguard of Christian thought about what happens when life ends. Is it logical then to plead that divine revelation has been insufficient to enlighten us about when life begins? To say this is ultimately to malign God Himself, for how could He leave us in such darkness that we are unable to make intelligent choices that involve life and death?

2. Two propositions based on the character of God

a. The proposition of cosmic abortion

What do we do when things go wrong and we face the possibility or probability of shame, affliction, and suffering because of past events? God created a world, but it went wrong. The prospect was long-term shame, the maligning of His name, suffering, death to His Son, and the separation of the Son from the Father. The Lord of the universe could have called for cosmic abortion. He could have aborted the human family but a short time from the inception of the race. He could have blotted out Adam and Eve and started over. We say He could have, but really He could not have, for that is not like His character. He chose not cosmic abortion, but cosmic sacrifice.

b. The proposition of agape love

The fundamental characteristic of God as presented in the Bible is love, self-sacrificing love. The new commandment that Christ gave is “that ye love one another; as I have loved you” (John 13:34). We should treat the unborn child as God would treat him or her. He wants His love to be communicated through us. More than that, the way we treat the unborn child is the way we would treat Jesus. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

3. The proposition of Creation

In the Christian worldview God is seen as the ultimate Creator. Humans who “create” life do so only by delegated privilege from God. Abortion makes sense within the context of a materialistic or evolutionist worldview whose philosophy denies God as the ultimate Creator and chooses to believe that the stronger may sacrifice the weaker.

4. The proposition of creativity

If sexual intercourse, conception, and pregnancy are among the most creative activities in which a man and woman can participate, then what does this say about abortion? If the one dimension is the epitome of creativity, then the other would represent the epitome of destructiveness.
The Lord of the universe could have called for cosmic abortion. He could have aborted the human family. He chose not cosmic abortion, but cosmic sacrifice.

5. The proposition of redemption

The unborn child has been redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. Is death the reward Christians should give to the purchase of Christ's blood? (Theologically we believe that the babe in the womb has already been redeemed. Some may object. For these we could word our proposition, The unborn child is redeemable.)

6. The proposition of the lordship of God

The secular press has made the whole abortion issue center on the rights of the mother versus the rights of the unborn child. Upon closer reflection, however, we see that this viewpoint rotates around the human rights of two parties. No divine dimension is even mentioned. How about God's rights? Does He not have inalienable rights over His relationships with His creatures?

Some may argue that a woman has a right to do what she chooses with her own body. The Bible answers, “What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Frail humanity may think that it knows the whole situation, whereas the only One really knowing that is God Himself. Are we to usurp the divine prerogative of life and death? By virtue of what “perfect” knowledge can we take upon ourselves this responsibility?

7. The proposition of the primacy of reverence for life over the freedom of choice

The power of choice is God-given and is certainly of great importance. However, this principle does not exist in solitary splendor in the universe. There are other universal principles. Here we have a classic example of a moral dilemma. Two universal principles are pitted against each other. In this case the freedom of choice must give way because its sphere is not absolute and its God-given purpose was never that we have the option of taking the life of an individual who has committed no acts against God or man. We maintain that reverence for the sacredness of life is of higher priority than freedom of choice. Indeed, the destiny of the chooser may be at stake. The Bible says: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deut. 30:19). Ultimately the freedom that God grants as our legitimate right is not the freedom to take innocent life, but to choose who will be our master, Christ or the evil one.

8. The proposition of the distinctiveness of Seventh-day Adventism

We hold that elective abortion violates the fundamentals of any Bible-believing community of faith, but it is particularly serious to Seventh-day Adventists. Acquiescence to abortion undermines two pillars of our distinctive theology: (1) It denies the essence of the Sabbath, and (2) it leaves us in an ambiguous position on the doctrine of the nature of man.

Let us start with the second question first. Many religions hold that at some undetermined time the “soul” infuses the fetus. Thus perhaps in the second trimester (or whenever) the fetus, which up to that time was basically animal, is infused by a divine entity that makes it truly human and in God’s image. The same logic calls for this entity to depart at death and float off to its eternal existence with God or to the fires of everlasting torment. Adventism believes in “man the indivisible.” Therefore, that developing Godlikeness is present from conception, and abortion is the destruction of that Godlikeness and a crime against the Creator Himself.

The Sabbath finds its meaning in recognizing God as Creator. The observance of the seventh day in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12 is based on recognition of the creatoryship of Him who made heaven and earth. To the point that abortion denies the lordship and creatoryship of God over one of His creatures, it is denying the essence of the Sabbath.

Can we as Christians afford to be noncommittal regarding a practice that finds its origin and historical development in pagan cultures and that finds its justification in a worldview that denies the creatoryship of God?

We close these thoughts with a plea for a redemptive attitude toward the erring. Among us are those who have practiced abortion. God’s mercy is great. He forgives us for Christ’s sake. A great unresolved problem in our church is that many times it is more socially acceptable to get an abortion than to be an unwed mother. To turn this around, our churches and conferences will have to address the issue and search for alternatives. Caring members will have to turn from their own pursuits and become involved in the lives of others. With tender hearts we must reach out to those in crisis, providing love and acceptance as well as practical help. Perhaps some will open their personal homes to an unwed mother. Perhaps we need homes specifically built and staffed for this purpose and strategically located. Certainly caring counselors are needed to help both the father and mother as well as their extended families work through their feelings and make necessary decisions, be they for marriage, adoption, single parenting, or placement of the baby in the home of an immediate family member. Programs like Adventist Adoption and Family Services (6040 SE. Belmont Street, Portland, Oregon 97215; telephone: 503-232-1211), which provide counseling, moral support, and an understanding heart as well as professional legal and medical care, deserve our support and encouragement.

We are in the world, but our conduct must not be of the world. Let us look prayerfully at the ethical dilemmas that confront us and be sure that our standards are not based on a split decision of the United States Supreme Court in 1973, but rather on the weight of evidence from the great Bible themes.
A letter to a student of divinity

Although John Newton is best remembered for the hymn “Amazing Grace,” his face-to-face counseling may have been his greatest achievement while he lived (1725-1807). The former English slave trader, whose dramatic conversion is recounted in his autobiography, maintained an active ministry in the lives of the high and the low who sought him out in his churches near London. Among these were William Cowper, the poet, who became a close friend, and William Wilberforce, who is best remembered for his role of banishing the slave trade from the British Empire. Needless to say, Newton contributed to Wilberforce’s passionate convictions on the slavery issue. Here we read John Newton’s counsel to a theological student. Though couched in the style of the eighteenth century, the letter demonstrates the model of balance Newton exhibited between spirituality and learning in the life of the minister. □ by John Newton

though I am no enemy to the acquisition of useful knowledge, I have seen many instances of young men who have been much hurt by what they expected to reap advantage from. They have gone to the academy, humble, peaceable, spiritual and lively; but have come out self-wise, dogmatical, censorious, and full of a prudence founded upon the false maxims of the world. I have been ready to address them with that line of Milton, “If thou beest he; but O how fallen!” I do not mention this as the necessary fault of the institution, but as the frequent effect of notions too hastily picked up, when not sanctified by grace, nor balanced by a proportionable depth of spiritual experience. I am therefore glad to hear that, notwithstanding the advantages you have had in the pursuit of your studies, you feel an inward conviction that you still need something which you cannot receive from men or books in order to complete your fitness for the ministry; that you may be a ‘workman that needeth not to be ashamed,’ and enabled rightly to divide (to distinguish and distribute) the word of truth... The chief means for attaining wisdom, and suitable gifts for the ministry, are the Holy Scriptures and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water, the other the bucket with which we are to draw. And I believe you will find, by observation, that the man who is most frequent and fervent in prayer, and most devoted to the Word of God, will shine and flourish above his fellows. Next to these, and derived from them, is meditation. By this, I do not mean a stated exercise upon some one particular subject, so
I am glad to hear that, not withstanding the advantages you have had in the pursuit of your studies, you feel an inward conviction that you still need something which you cannot receive from men or books.

much as a disposition of mind to observe carefully what passes within us and around us; what we see, hear and feel; and to apply all for the illustration and confirmation of the written Word to us. In the use of these means, and an humble dependence upon the Lord in all the changing dispensations we pass through, our spiritual experience will enlarge; and this experience is the proper fund of our ministerial capacity, so far as it may be considered inherent in us (see Prov. 16:23; Matt. 13:52; 1 John 1:3).

These means are of universal importance. The wisest can do nothing without them; the weakest shall not use them in vain. There are likewise subordinate means, which may be helpful, and should, in general, be attended to. Yet they ought not, I apprehend, to be considered as a sine qua non in a minister's call and fitness. The first preachers had them not, and some in the present day are enabled to do well without them. Under this head, I principally intend all that comes under the usual denomination of literature. A competent acquaintance with the learned languages, history, natural philosophy, et cetera, is very desirable. If these things are held in a proper suberviency, if they do not engross too much of our time, nor add fuel to the fire of that self-importance which is our great snare, they may contribute to increase and enlarge our ideas, and facilitate our expressing ourselves with propriety. But these attainments (like riches) are attended with their peculiar temptations; and unless they are under the regulation of a sound judgment, and a spiritual frame of mind, will prove (like Saul's armor to David) rather cumbersome than useful in preaching. The sermons of preachers thus qualified are often more ingenious than edifying, and rather set off the man than commend the gospel of Christ.

As you desire my advice with respect to your future studies, I shall comply without hesitation or ceremony.

The original Scriptures will deserve your pains, and will richly repay them. There is, doubtless, a beauty, fullness, and spirit in the originals, which the best translations do not always express. When a word or phrase admits of various senses, the translators can only preserve one; and it is not to be supposed, unless they were perfectly under the influence of the same infallible Spirit, that they should always prefer the best. Only be upon your guard, lest you should be tempted to think that because you are master of the grammatical construction, and can tell the several acceptations of the words in the best authors, you are therefore and thereby master of the spiritual sense likewise. This you must derive from your experimental knowledge and the influence and teaching of the Spirit of God.

Another thing which will much assist you in composing, and speaking properly and acceptably, is logic. This will teach you what properly belongs to your subject, and what may be best suppressed; and likewise to explain, divide, enumerate, and arrange your ideas to advantage. A lax, immethodical, disproportionate manner is to be avoided. Yet beware of the contrary extreme. An affected starchness and over-accuracy will fetter you, will make your discourses lean and dry, preclude a useful variety, and savour more of the school-lamp than of that heavenly fire, which alone can make our meditations efficacious and profitable either to ourselves or our hearers. The proper medium can hardly be taught by rule; experience, observation, and prayer, are the best guides. . . .

I should be very glad if any thing I have offered may afford you satisfaction. The sum of my advice is this: examine your heart and views. Can you appeal to Him, who knows all things, concerning the sincerity of your aim, that you devote yourself to the work of the ministry, not for worldly regards, but with an humble desire to promote the Redeemer's kingdom? If so, and His providence has thus far concurred with you, trust Him for your sufficiency of every kind, and He will not disappoint you, but will be near to strengthen you, according to your day. Depend not upon any cisterns you can hew out for yourself, but rejoice that you have liberty to come to the fountain that is always full, and always flowing. You must not expect a mechanical sufficiency, such as artificers acquire by habit and exercise in their business. When you have preached well nineteen times, this will be no security for the twentieth. Yea, when you have been upheld for twenty years, should the Lord withhold His hand, you would be as much at a loss as at first.

If you lean upon books or men, you will be in fear and in danger of falling continually. But if you stay yourself upon the Lord, He will make good your expectations.

If you lean upon books or men, or upon your own faculties and attainments, you will be in fear and in danger of falling continually. But if you stay yourself upon the Lord, He will not only make good your expectations, but in time will give you a becoming confidence in His goodness, and free you from your present anxiety.

One more thing I must mention as belonging to the subject: that a comfortable freedom for public service depends much upon the spirituality of our walk before God and man. Wisdom will not dwell with a trifling, an assuming, a censorious, or a worldly spirit. But if it is our business and our pleasure to contemplate Jesus, and to walk in His steps, He will bless us; we shall be like trees planted by a constant stream, and He will prosper the work of our hands.
Economic servitude

Should Christians charge interest today? Should the church charge interest? Is it possible to live and work without the use of interest? Author Tollefsen shares Scriptures that are easier to read than to fulfill.

Viewpoint □ John J. Tollefsen

The message of Jesus is liberty and freedom (John 8:31-36). Not only freedom from sin but also from worldly entanglements. Many forms of slavery have been abolished, but at least one remains—the servanthood of debtor to creditor. Certainly the debtor prisons are gone. Creditors no longer may take the children of debtors as slaves for payment of debt. We have the most liberal bankruptcy laws since the law of Moses. But the reality of economic servitude remains.

A typical life in the U.S.A. goes something like this: During childhood our minds are bombarded by television, printed advertisements, and pressure from our culture to consume. As children, we are taught to covet Cabbage Patch dolls and robot toys that our parents cannot afford. As we mature we require designer jeans and automobiles. We marry and buy our house with 10 percent down. We can't wait for furniture. We want microwaves and video recorders. Credit cards are given to us freely.

After a few years we are trapped. Our monthly payments are high. Both of us must work. A loss of job creates great pressure on our marriage. As we approach retirement we still have not paid for our home, and our debts are large because we cannot be content with the things we have (Heb. 13:5). Economic freedom remains just out of reach. The only total escape is bankruptcy, a course exposing us to contempt and disdain in our success-driven culture.

If we forgive our debtors, we cannot pay our creditors. Paul's suggestion that it is better to be defrauded than to sue (1 Cor. 6:7) seems outrageous.

Is our debt-based society just? If the presence of the Spirit of the Lord results in liberty, how does God view the burden of debt in our culture?

Biblical perspective

God wanted His people to lend and be able to borrow when in need. He abolished interest or increase (Deut. 23:19, 20). He required those with money to lend to those without (chap. 15:7-10). The entire nation of Israel went through a form of bankruptcy every seven years. Debts were extinguished, and pledged property was returned to its original owners. Loans were required even though the Sabbath year was close at hand (verse 1-9). God considered the Sabbath year a time to proclaim liberty (Jer. 34:14, 17).

The business of borrowing and lending (“banking” as we know it) could not exist under these rules. So Rabbi Hillel changed this (perhaps with King Herod's encouragement) by reducing the Sabbath-year limitations. Israel then developed a Temple bank (later condemned by Jesus), much as other nations had. In more recent times, Protestant reformers and other theologians have provided Christians with justifications for charging interest in business contexts.

Human perspective

Interest has enticed men and women...
Although physical slavery no longer exists, economic slavery occurs because the borrower must work a certain number of hours per day to repay the debt. The borrower's time belongs to another.

ever since money replaced the barter system. Those who owned money or controlled the creation of money often had the ability to charge interest. Interest is attractive because it creates power. Money's power is increased if a debtor relationship can result from a loan. A certain percentage of debtors are certain to default. The default gives new powers to the lender: Under ancient law, a defaulting debtor literally became the slave of the lender. Modern servitude of debtors is more subtle but still very real.

Historically, two means have been used to control the concentration of wealth and power resulting from lending. First, laws were passed to reduce or eliminate interest rates. The human conscience seemed more sensitive to the interest issue in ancient times. The Roman Twelve Tables (451 B.C.) defined usury for more than nine hundred years. Some laws disallowed charging interest, or exempted certain people from having to pay it. An ancient Babylonian fragment of a letter suggests that interest not be charged because gentlemen didn't charge interest in transactions between themselves.

Scripture evidence
Looking at the Scripture references to lending with interest, we must first acknowledge that we do not approach the issue with unbiased minds. Although passage after passage condemns interest, we cannot help believing that there must be an exception. This is no doubt more true in our culture than in others. We realize that condemning interest would condemn our lifestyles of mortgaged homes, car loans, money-market accounts, savings accounts, and pension plans.

The least controversial verses deal with the nation Israel and the poor. Israel would be rewarded for its obedience by becoming a lender and not a borrower (Deut. 28:12), but disobedience would turn the nation into a borrower (verse 44). Scripture repeatedly explains money holders' obligation to lend to the poor for any of their needs (chap. 15:7-11). We are not to charge interest to the poor or even make a profit on food we sell them (Lev. 25:35-37).

We are not to consider ourselves creditors when we deal with the poor, and we must return pledges before sundown (Ex. 22:25, 26). When we lend to the poor we lend to Yahweh (Prov. 19:17).

The remaining Scripture references to interest and usury become more controversial as they begin to threaten our lifestyles. We are told that the righteous don't lend with interest (Ps. 15:5; Eze. 18:8). Jesus tells us to lend expecting nothing in return, not even the principal (Luke 6:35). Those who are kind to the poor will receive what those that charge interest accumulated (Prov. 22:8).

Avoiding the status of a borrower is also a theme that is repeated in Scripture. "The borrower is the slave of the lender" (verse 7, R.S.V.). Although physical slavery no longer exists, economic slavery occurs because the borrower must work a certain number of hours per day to earn the money to repay the debt. The borrower's time belongs to another. Paul tells us to owe no one anything except love (Rom. 13:8).

Jesus interprets God's law broadly regarding borrowing and lending. His teaching on who is our "neighbor" implies that a Christian should not charge interest to anyone, even though the Israelite could charge interest to foreigners. We are not to refuse those who want to borrow from us (Matt. 5:42). Jesus' driving the bankers out of the Temple may be an indication that He disagreed with Hillel's interpretation of the Sabbath-year law. Jesus realized that His disciples would not live in societies that forgave debts every seven years. Therefore it is better to avoid creating debtors. We should lend without expecting the money back (Luke 6:35).

Rationalizations
If we admit that we are biased and if we want to open our minds to God's Word, it may be helpful to review our rationalizations.

1. Restrictions on interest do not apply today. Rules for an agrarian society, 3,500 years ago couldn't be intended for a modern industrial state. Besides, aren't we under grace and not the law? Parts of the Mosaic laws, we agree, are timeless because they express moral principles built into Creation. Why did God condemn interest? How can He list charging interest with robbery, murder, adultery, and idolatry as worthy of death (Eze. 18:10-13)?

The key to understanding God's anger with charging interest is understanding God's economy. God usually does not provide His children's needs directly. He provides primarily through human distribution channels. Should we refuse the one who wants to borrow from us by reminding him that our God will provide all his needs? Jesus says that we should freely give because that is the way God provides for others. We tend to think that we have earned the right to consume or keep our resources as we wish. God will provide for everyone else. Jesus' teaching on stewardship demands that we acknowledge that our wealth is to be used for God's purpose.

2. The scripture on borrowing means don't borrow and not repay. Only God knows if we can repay. Merely because we have stored up our grain in barns doesn't mean that we are going to be able to repay a debt tomorrow. Borrowing is mortgaging the future. Borrowing is gambling on the future. It is a form of servitude. It can interfere with God's plan for our future.

"The wicked borrows, and cannot pay back" (Ps. 37:21, R.S.V.). Does this mean that if we are unable to pay our debts we are unrighteous? Or does it mean that those who make a practice of borrowing will eventually find themselves unable to repay the debt and therefore become in the position of the wicked? In either case, is borrowing worth the risk?

3. Scripture prohibits only excess interest charging. This interpretation is so prevalent that even translators seem to follow it. The Hebrew word tarbish, which means "multiply" or "increase," occasionally is translated as "usury." Usury is an English legal word meaning charging...
The banking institutions have become insulators between our money and the moral dilemmas involved; thus, we rarely experience the suffering caused debtors by our banks.

excess interest. There is no usury unless there is a maximum interest rate. Scripture does not decry unreasonable, or “usurious,” interest rates. There was no maximum interest rate in Hebrew law, and therefore no concept of “usury.”

4. To “not owe anyone” refers to past-due or unnecessary debt. This is a good example of cultural bias influencing our interpretation of Scripture.

5. People have to borrow, so they might as well have a Christian lender. This rationalization is clearly handled by Scripture (Neh. 5:3-13). God's people were borrowing from their brothers in order to pay taxes and to eat because of famine. They had mortgaged their houses and vineyards, and some were losing their properties through foreclosure. Nehemiah denounced this evil, and the people repented. The fact that the lenders were fellow Jews made the sin worse.

6. Interest prohibitions apply to people, not businesses. Strict application of interest prohibitions would keep Christians out of business and therefore cannot be applicable to business, some argue. How could these rules apply to corporations? Some of the confusion results from the difficulty of distinguishing debt from equity. There seems to be no scriptural prohibition preventing the pooling of resources for business purposes and the dividing of revenues according to agreement. As the pooling agreements become more restrictive, we approach what we call debt. A reasonable scriptural distinction between debt and equity could be whether or not a personal guarantee is involved. There is no economic servitude where there is no personal liability.

Experience teaches us that a percentage of Christians who guarantee business loans will suffer under the yoke of economic servitude. Does this mean that God was unfaithful or that the business was not founded on God's principles? Or does it merely show that Christians are not immune to the ups and downs of life (Matt. 5:45)? With careful planning, business can be conducted without personal guarantees. Business finance and God's economic system do not have to be incompatible.

Corporate banking institutions are so much a part of our lives that it is hard to be objective about them. What's wrong with putting the church's funds in a savings account guaranteed by the United States Government? The banking institutions have become insulators between our money and the moral dilemmas involved; thus, we rarely experience the suffering caused debtors by our banks. Banks are not in the business of being charitable to debtors who are in need. When a friend loses his job and eventually his house is foreclosed, we forget that we are a part of his suffering by our relationship with the bank.

Those of us who want to allow interest in business contexts take comfort from the parable of the talents. The unfaithful servant is told that it would be better to get interest at a bank than to hide his talent (Matt. 25:23; Luke 19:23). We interpret this to mean that interest from a bank is OK. There is another interpretation. The unfaithful servant accuses his master of reaping what he did not sow. The master does not answer this ridiculous accusation, but judges the wicked servant by his own standard. Why not put the money in the bank, where there is reaping without sowing? This parable cannot be used as a proof text for charging interest.

7. Adherence is difficult. We live in a time of mankind's greatest achievement in the use of debt and interest. All indications point to even more advancements. Our government is setting new records. In this setting we are naturally looking for compromises. Under grace, each of us must make our own choices, knowing that failure to do what is right is sin (James 4:17).

We could choose the path of no debt. We could refuse to support the world's system by avoiding interest-bearing accounts. We could refuse to assume or guarantee loans personally. Most of us can justify the home mortgage because there is no ultimate personal responsibility—we can choose to lose the home.

We may justify only the loans that are fully collateralized even if a distress sale is required. We need daily to fight the battle to be good distributors of God's wealth as we choose between conflicting obligations such as whether to give to our brother or to the children's college fund or to our own retirement fund. Yes, it is true; the path is difficult.

An Interpretation

God wants Christians to lend to one another—without interest and without expecting the money back. This is the key to God's economic system. If we fail to obey, we are causing suffering to the body of Christ by blocking distribution channels.

If we believe God will supply our needs, we must be very careful when we borrow. Circumstances may require us to borrow. However, borrowing mortgages the future by requiring us to spend future time to repay the past. Borrowing may be rebelling against God's plan for our future. We sometimes borrow from fear of the future or fear of man. We borrow to maintain our lifestyle. Our lifestyle becomes so habitual that we don't believe we can live with less. We borrow to fulfill our ambitions. If we believe that God does not want us to borrow, we must accept the consequences—loss of our homes, our businesses, our lifestyles.

Since the Biblical principle is to lend freely and yet not to be in debt, we also have an obligation not to create debtors. Jesus says lend and expect nothing in return. Jesus recognizes that wealth will not be evenly distributed. We will always have the poor with us (Matt. 26:11). They will need to borrow for survival. When we lend, we must not place ourselves in a position where we are forced to collect the debt. When we lend, we are not to be creditors, and the person who borrows from us is not to be a debtor.

When we come into harmony with God's will we will be able to pray without hypocrisy, "Lord, forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Then we will be free.
Keeping your wife happy!

On what kind of love will your wife thrive? How can you avoid becoming part of the sad statistics on broken marriages? Three Biblical passages describe, at least in part, the ideal love of a Christian man for his wife.

by Fran Sciacca

Both secular and Christian marriage counselors are increasingly concluding that the leading cause of our divorce epidemic is not problems with finances or sex or even "incompatibility." It's neglect. Couples are breaking up for what they've failed to do right more than for what they've done wrong. Paul's comment

about the cause-and-effect principle of sin certainly rings true in the arena of human relationships: "A man's harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows" (Gal. 6:7, Phillips). The arresting truth here is that "sowing" implies a future harvest. By sowing neglect now, we have nothing to reap later.

Many couples, blinded by the illusion of unity created by the task of raising children, find that after their kids are grown they are strangers to each other. They have no harvest because they neglected to sow years earlier.

This is compounded by the fact that while a man's need for intimacy seems to be strongest at this time in his life, his wife's major personal need at this point is for significance and self-worth. If the husband has neglected her need for intimacy in the early years when they were greatest, it is doubtful that he will be interested in meeting her need for significance now. The resulting conflict of needs and wants may lead to infidelity or divorce in the absence of the common task of child rearing, which once held the couple together.

What can the concerned Christian husband do? In the New Testament we find clear and profound commands directed to the Christian husband and to the Christian male who aspires to marriage.

Loving sacrificially

First of all, a husband's love is to be sacrificial. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy" (Eph. 5:25, 26). This means that our love for our wives is to be costly and active. It's not a token—not just a paycheck or a new car. It's not really even an emotion! Agape love, the love this verse speaks of, is not a feeling. It's an active, costly service to our wives. It means laying our personal goals at the feet of the priority of loving her, meeting her needs, and helping her become what God wants her to be.

Jesus laid down His life for the church. That's the husband's charge, and just as Jesus' love for His church is not dependent upon what He sees in its members, so we are to love our wives simply because they are our wives—not because they are always lovable and beautiful, but because we are commanded to lay down our lives for them. This command is not for "committed" husbands only. It is God's charge to any married man who names the name of Christ.

How can a husband fulfill this command? By regularly laying aside his own personal desires to meet his wife's immediate and long-term needs. When our second child arrived, our firstborn was about 2 1/2. I was in my first year of teaching school, and this addition to our family brought extra demands upon the time I had for designing and preparing my curriculum. But my wife's needs were accelerating too. Finally one evening she said, "I need to get away from these kids, or I'm going to snap! I'm going out alone for breakfast tomorrow." I'd like to boast that this was my idea, flowering from my sensitive, godly character, but I had been oblivious to her need.

She went out that next morning for food and refreshment while I fed on feelings of bitterness and hostility. It's my day off, I stewed. Why should I be baby-sitting? All in all, it was a long morning! When Jill appeared in the doorway two hours later, the glow on her face—the obvious fruit of this brief excursion—melted when confronted with the sour countenance of her husband.

We persisted in the new routine, but...
The one thing that has ministered most to my wife is our weekly date. For eight years I have taken her out each week, alone. We were faithful to this adventure even when money was scarce to nonexistent.

my inner struggle continued for about three more weeks before I began to be convicted by this passage in Ephesians. Slowly a sense of joy grew, and the times alone with my two boys became a highlight of my week, not to mention the ministry of refreshment these breaks brought my wife.

More than that, I think her self-esteem was nourished by the fact that her husband really cared enough for her to “give up” two or three hours for her every week. When I look at the insignificance of this sacrifice, I am embarrassed at the self-centered egotism that encased my first response to her suggestion. Three years and two more children later, Jill still goes out for breakfast on one of my weekly days off. And I’ve grown some too: Now I baby-sit four children, dust the house, do two loads of laundry, and clean both bathrooms while she’s gone!

These special mornings are a tradition now. It’s my boys’ “morning with Dad.” The opportunities for loving and teaching them during these times are priceless. But even though my convictions in this area are pretty well settled, I still struggle periodically.

I’ll never forget a recent occasion when a friend caught me in rubber gloves while I was cleaning the upstairs toilet. He was on his way to a local fitness center for a two-hour workout. His passing comment—“You make a good housekeeper”—rooted itself in my heart and festered like an open sore. Soon I was convinced by this passage in Ephesians. More than that, I think her self-esteem was nourished by the fact that her husband really cared enough for her to “give up” two or three hours for her every week.

A husband’s love is also to be sensitive. It should deal with the wife at the level of her feelings. I now call my wife at least once each day just to find out how she is. It’s like a pressure valve for her, and it also keeps our worlds from becoming polarized.

I also fight the “call of the sirens” that lures me to the couch when I walk through the door each night. I walk to wherever Jill is, give her a cordial kiss, and talk with her about the events of her day. Helping set the table or getting the beverages ready serves to make dinner a pleasant time to talk, even with four children. We also have a “tea time” immediately after supper; we dismiss the boys, and then Jill and I can talk more.

Learning to listen

A husband’s love should also be sensitive. “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (Col. 3:19). A husband’s love is not to be loud, demanding, or abrasive.

I was an analytical chemist for more than five years. My job required me to discover answers to problems quickly, logically, and efficiently. That’s a tremendous asset if you’re a chemist, but it can be an awesome liability for a Christian husband. When my wife was ready to sell the kids to the gypsies or put the dog in the food processor, the “answer man” was on the spot with a smorgasbord of solutions to her problem!

A husband’s love should also be considerate. “Husbands, the same way you consider your own body, consider your own wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Peter 3:7). The words be considerate translate a prepositional phrase that literally means “according to knowledge.” It speaks of insight, a studious awareness of who your wife is and what is involved in the marriage relationship.

Getting to know your wife—taking an avid interest in who she is and in how God made her unique—is the single greatest method of building or repairing self-esteem. But doing this requires creativity, and I have about as much creativity as a snowbank!

I’m learning, however, that creativity is contagious. Once I start trying to be considerate and thoughtful, God is faithful to show me new areas where I can serve my wife. One morning as I was folding a load of laundry I suddenly realized that all of my underwear and socks were inside out, just the way they had landed in the laundry basket when dirty. It took considerable time and hassle to reverse them all. I purposed from that day on that I would make sure they were right-side out before they went into that basket!

Another inconsideration at which I am a “professional” is cluttering up our home. With little difficulty you could reconstruct my evening’s activities by the “landmarks” I leave: lunch bucket by the door, shoes by the couch, socks in the den, mail by the chair. They all add up to work for someone. My wife likes to have the house straightened before bed each night so that when she arises for her devotions the next morning she isn’t greeted by a load of housework. I’m making an effort now to support her spiritual life by reducing that load each night.

When Jill was pregnant with our twins

(Continued on page 25)
How to feel thankful

God appreciates our gratitude in return for what He has done for us. But false gratitude may be evasive, and demands for gratitude are often manipulative. How can we cultivate genuine, spontaneous gratitude?

When Matthew Henry, the well-known churchman and commentator of eighteenth-century England, was robbed by highwaymen, he wrote in his diary: “Let me be thankful, first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

Gratitude is an important element in the Christian’s life. Scripture admonishes us to have it, we benefit from it, and God appreciates it. But are our expressions of gratitude always genuine?

In his book Theological Dynamics ([Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972], p. 48) Seward Hiltner speaks of two faulty forms of gratitude. The first he calls pseudogratitude. It involves professing thankfulness for something for which one is not really thankful. He says it is an attempt to focus attention away from the problem—both the attention of the person himself and the attention of others. Hiltner says pseudogratitude is a dynamic stratagem of concealment, although it is rarely conscious and deliberate.

Hiltner terms the second problematic form of false gratitude reactive gratitude. With it one begins with honest feelings of thankfulness and a focus on the gift that has been given. But later one tends to feel resentful about the power of the giver and thus to depreciate the gift.

Christians may be threatened by either of these distortions of gratitude. Paul admonished the Ephesians that they be “always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father!” (Eph. 5:20, R.S.V.). Some believe this means we are to give thanks for everything that happens to us, no matter how fraught with evil. It seems to me that they make a real mistake here. We can find some good in almost any situation, no matter how terrible. But to say that everything that happens to us is good and something for which to be thankful is not to accept the reality of evil in our world. As Hiltner says, this is pseudogratitude; a strategy—whether conscious or not—for denying, ignoring, or concealing a problem.

Reactive gratitude holds its own dangers. It says, in effect, “You had better kowtow to me, because I am in the position to withhold something of importance to you.” As Hiltner notes (pp. 49, 51), people have often required gratitude of others as a means of reminding them of their inferiority. So those in positions of power have often expected gratitude of society’s less powerful groups—adolescents, blacks, workers, and women, for instance.

Since the Fall man has had an innate drive for independence from God. While we may be initially grateful to God for what He has done for us, we may come to resent His power in our lives. We may come to believe that upon entering His service we lost our independence.

Genuine gratitude must come to terms with the power of the giver in the life of the receiver. How can we avoid developing resentment and reactive gratitude toward God? I believe the answer lies in properly understanding His character and the reason for His giving. While in one sense we are totally dependent upon God for life and salvation, in another sense He has given us real independence. Even as “slaves” of His, we are to use our own minds to think and our own wills to choose. And His gifts come because of His unconditional love. They are not attempts to manipulate us into servility. As Jesus said, “He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45, R.S.V.).

To be genuine, gratitude must arise spontaneously. How can we cultivate “spontaneous” gratitude? Not by willing or manipulating ourselves into this emotion. Since genuine gratitude arises when we clearly see God and what He has done for us, we nurture it as we reflect on His character in general and His goodness to us in particular.—D.C.J.

Change: pulpit or pew?

When a church is not making progress, the membership may feel that it needs to change preachers. But the real need may be a radical change in the congregation. The Word must become flesh in the pastor, but it must also become flesh in the congregation. The Word must be clothed by the lives of the congregation if it is to be taken to the slums, to stores, to the office, to the world that stands in desperate need of a word from God. Talk about love for God may be just empty mouthing unless members of the congregation express their love for God, not only in the church but also in the world.

Two major barriers tend to stand between the modern organized church and the world of which it is a part. One is sociological, and one is psychological. Sociologically the churches are coming increasingly to be identified with middle-class, white-collar attitudes, standards, and values. There are exceptions, of course, but in the main, the lowest economic group is largely untouched. Likewise, the chief executives and the wealthy persons are by and large unreached. The church must break out of the middle-class, white-collar shackles in its concern to minister to all people of all classes.

The psychological barrier is related to the “official ministry.” When the
preachers speak, when they visit, when they witness, there is always the conscious or unconscious awareness on the part of the recipient that they are "paid to do it." Their ministry undoubtedly is fruitful, but its effectiveness is limited by this perception. The solution to both these problems is the ministry of our members in the world. The only way to overcome these difficulties "is to decentralize the life of the church... If... we force Christian people to engage their Christian 'capital' in living together with those outside the church, e.g., their colleagues at work, their partners in business, their political friends, their fellow members in professional associations, instead of clinging together with their Christian brothers five evenings a week, we shall help them not only to be witnesses of the gospel to those who do not know it but also to overcome for themselves the peculiar atmosphere prevailing in the church and to be Christians breathing the air of modern life." 2

Two questions beg to be asked: How well is the church fulfilling its ministry in the world? and How well qualified is the laity for carrying out its ministry? On the first question there would undoubtedly be overwhelming agreement that the modern church is not in any adequate measure "in the world" through its laity in those spheres of the world (factories, shops, schools, government agencies, etc.) where the real issues of the faith are being fought today. "The field is not the church but the world... There are practical overtones for this truth in the deadly struggle of Christianity with communism. Communism got its start and derives its strength from a ghetto Christianity. When Karl Marx said that religion was the opiate of the people, he meant that religion, by wrapping men's minds in the mists of otherworldliness, insulated men from the struggles and problems of our common life together in the world. When people say, 'Let religion stay out of politics,' 'Let religion stay out of business,' and 'Let religion stay out of everything but a little narrow corner of things which we will gladly assign to it'—when people say such things, they are giving voice to the communist interpretation of the function of religion in society. To constric the function of the Christian faith in the world in this fashion would fatally wound our witness and falsify the mission which we have been given." 3

Yet, unfortunately, this is what is happening in the modern church. There are those who say the church should be concerned only with "spiritual" matters, and by this they mean that the church is to be concerned only with man's relation to God. Man's religion is to be expressed (Continued on page 29)

Computer corner [ ] Kenneth R. Wade

Are you computer compatible?

Whether or not a computer is a wise investment for your church may be as much a question of your personality as the church's needs.

Among the multitude of letters I have received from computer-using pastors, two in particular stand out—perhaps because they were the only ones that included negative comments. Both negative pastors felt that their computers cost time and caused problems rather than helping.

The day I brought my computer home from the store I had two conflicting visions competing for space in my imagination. On the one hand, I could see myself plugging the thing in and sitting down to merrily reorganize my entire filing system and library overnight. On the other hand, a phrase I had heard from a friend kept playing through my mind: "A computer will cost you time for the first year, but after that it will save you time."

Which viewpoint is closer to reality? Personally, the computer began saving me time on certain projects within a week. It also helped me do many tasks that were impossible without it. In other areas I found myself spending more time than I had anticipated to accomplish seemingly simple tasks. I spent countless hours learning to use a data-base program to organize membership lists. I'm sure I could have handwritten the lists backward, forward, and in Arabic by the time I got the program to do what I wanted it to. But ever after that, list updating and generating were a snap.

But those two examples illustrate only two sides of what is really a many-faceted issue. Whether a computer will save or cost you time is very much a function of your own personality and of the type of system you purchase. For every letter from a pastor who is frustrated at the way his computer gobbles up his precious time, I have a dozen from happy hackers who love every minute they spend with their machines.

That's where the compatibility question becomes very important as you decide whether a computer is a wise investment for your church. If you are inclined to tinker and fool with things until you get them to work, you may find the time you spend getting the office computerized relaxing and enjoyable. You may even find that you have to discipline yourself strictly to keep from spending too much time communicating with bits and bytes and too little with flesh and blood. But if you're the type who has difficulty remembering how to turn on your electric typewriter and who would rather buy a new toaster than find out what's wrong with the old one, chances are that a venture into computer country would prove only a frustration and waste.

The day may soon arrive when truly turnkey programs—programs that require no computer knowledge at all—will make the computer a handy tool for everyone. Perhaps you're already familiar with church-related software like that. If so, please write and tell me about it. Or if you've developed such a program yourself, send me a copy to try out. MINISTRY will soon begin publishing reviews of software. Ease of start-up and use will be a chief criterion we apply in choosing programs for review.

After all, God called you to shepherd people, not microchips.
I know that Scripture says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” but the giving is getting to me. I pastor a small rural church and work full-time to support my family and ministry. Every time the Lord blesses us financially, it seems everybody knows—and comes to our house with his hand out, having hard times. We love the Lord and give liberally in addition to tithing. Where can I draw the line and not feel guilty?

Compassionate screening

After pastoring for twenty-eight years, now at one of the most accessible churches in the city, I can empathize with my brother. Perhaps what hurts the most is the fact that I know I have been used, taken, and lied to, and on occasion, my family has been deprived of resources it needed. Still, I do not want to become calloused or fail to entertain angels unawares.” Here is the process I use, and it seems to be effective.

1. If you have a local Salvation Army, ask it to help you by serving as a clearinghouse for people in need. Assure the organization that you will help meet the needs, but that you need its help in clearing the person and getting to the bottom of the need. A good percentage of people will not ever go to the Salvation Army for clearing.

2. Have the party fill out an information sheet. This sheet should have all the vital information concerning the person, family, job, and the nature of the need. See if this is a one-time need (emergency) or if it is a recurring need. I have determined to help people “catch fish”—I cannot give them fish all the time. If the need is recurring, they may need advice in financial planning. If I help meet their need, they will be obligated to me, so I can counsel with them in budgeting their income. A good percentage of people will back off from this. They want only money—not lasting help.

3. Express the need to the congregation. Benevolence should be a ministry within the church. Elect a layman to serve as Benevolence Chairperson. Provide guidelines for this person and give him or her emergency powers to meet certain needs.

4. Don’t shut up your bowels of compassion. It is better to be taken than to become bitter, cold, and uncaring. As a Christian, go the second mile in doing your share. However, as a good steward, be wise, and guard your heartstrings well. Remember, there are “pros” who can play a very sad tune on the caring pastor’s heartstrings.—Russell L. Quackenbush, Senior Pastor, First Assembly of God, Bloomington, Indiana.

Prioritize responsibilities

I believe that many of your guilty feelings could be resolved if you ask yourself a number of important questions:

1. Am I fully meeting the needs of my family and myself? By “needs,” I am referring not only to those issues such as food and raiment but to all those costs incurred in a pastorate that churches may not supply—retirement benefits and recreation being but two examples. Many marital difficulties would be solved if we were wiser stewards of God’s money. The Scriptures tell us that if we do not take care of our own families, we are worse than infidels.

2. If I am fulfilling my responsibilities with the money that God has given me, the next questions I must ask are Who are the ones at my door? Are they always asking for handouts? Are they being personally responsible in work and finance? Will my contribution encourage or discourage their taking personal responsibility for their life before God? People expect us to give because of our commitment to Christ, but this must be kept in balance with the issue of wise stewardship. As Christians, we must be concerned with the well-being of others, but we must not support another’s irresponsibility.


4. We must make a clear distinction between true guilt (when I have sinned against God or another human being) and false guilt (when I feel guilty but have not incurred true guilt). We must stand on the truth of God’s written Word. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1, R.S.V.). The issue is the will of God for me—keeping in mind responsibility, wise stewardship, and the needs of others.—Donald Richmond, Pastor, Gillam, Manitoba.

Church emergency fund

It seems to me that when Peter told the cripple, “Silver or gold I do not have” (Acts 3:6, N.I.V.), he did not mean that he and John were impoverished, but that they wanted to go beyond simple philanthropy and address a more basic need than money. Such an attitude should characterize Christian charitableness instead of the guilt-inducing thought that it is wrong not to give what someone wants.

The church I serve has recognized, however, that there can be legitimate monetary needs and that these should not have to be met out of a pastor’s pocket. An emergency account of $1,000 is budgeted each year for pastoral disbursement. When that amount is exhausted there is no more “silver and gold,” and that is the bottom line without apology or embarrassment. The pastor on a limited personal budget need not feel guilty for not filling every need advice in financial planning. If I

MINISTRY/NOVEMBER/1985 23
First of all, the brother should realize that the poor are not totally his responsibility. Our Lord gave this obligation to the whole church. Attempt to make this charitable work a congregational project.

1. Ask your members to contribute to a pantry with gifts of canned goods. You can still be responsible for the distribution.

2. For those who wish to contribute cash, you can effectively distribute this by purchasing gift certificates in small denominations ($5) at a local grocery store and marking them for food only.

3. Make it a policy not to give out cash to anyone. If you feel compelled to give out a minimum amount, make it $2 to $3.

Those who are truly in need and hungry will come for food. Those not so needy who are asking for cash only will stop coming for such a small amount. Many who come asking for money do this professionally, and the word gets around.—L. H. Schroeder, Pastor, Lutheran Church, Canoga Park, California.

Who is responsible?

There are numerous passages in the Old Testament that encourage generosity in the treatment of the poor (cf. Lev. 25:35; Deut. 15:7; Ps. 41:1; Prov. 19:17; 21:13).

The New Testament also abounds with reminders to be compassionate in helping the poor. Jesus told about the sheep/goat judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 and gave the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 to emphasize the importance of ministering to those in need. We read in 1 John 3:17, “Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

But there are other principles to keep in mind besides generosity on the part of the giver. For example, the receiver is not to be lazy or dishonest. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul wrote, “If any would not work, neither should he eat.” (See also Eph. 4:28.) Of course, poverty is a complex problem with many contributing causes that vary all the way from war to tax and from acts of God to attacks from Satan (cf. Gen. 47:13-16; Job 1; Jer. 5:26-29; and Luke 15:14-20). Thus Jesus’ words in Matthew 26:11, “For ye have the poor always with you.”

I have come to the conviction that my primary responsibility is to my own family and my local church—not to the transients that come by asking for help. First Timothy 5:8 makes it clear that “if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

As a result, I acknowledge my human limitations and point them to the unlimited resources of God. I never promised to supply all their needs, but God has, in Philippians 4:19. I never promised I could give them the wisdom to face life’s complexities, but God has, in James 1:5, 6. I never promised I would be their ever-present companion, but Jesus did, in Matthew 28:18-20.

So when I have done the best I can and have exhausted my meager reserves I do not reject or abandon folks with a spirit of indifference or contempt, but I deposit them into the care of a loving heavenly Father and urge them to find out for themselves that His promises are indeed true.—Jim McLeroy, Pastor, Baptist Church, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Teach the church to give

When you feel that “the giving is getting to me,” it’s time to reassess the situation. In the first place, how is your practice of private giving to those in need helping your church to accept and grow to maturity in the grace of generosity? As their pastor, you need to teach and demonstrate that your people should do their giving through their local congregation. Without any question, then, you must cease giving privately to those who come to your door.

Second, you need to lead your congregation in setting up an official “church family” way to respond to those in need. In my church we have a deacons’ pantry for canned goods and deacons’ fund for finances. The people of your church need to set apart some of their own possessions and money in order to help the poor through their own—not just your—chosen “church family” method of response.

Third, lead your congregation in developing rules on what and when to give from these congregational pantries, closets, and funds. In my congregation we have some very sensible and practical guidelines: 1. We always check with the local social services “clearinghouse” before agreeing to help. 2. We never turn away anyone who wants canned goods from the deacons’ pantry, although how much we give will vary according to the situation and also according to how much is there. 3. We never give money to the person seeking help; instead, we will agree to pay part of a utility bill or medical bill or some other charge, and we send our church check directly to the company or utility. 4. We prefer that the person’s welfare case-worker or other social agency worker contact us, explain the situation, tell us what other agencies or churches are helping, what the follow-up will be, and precisely what we are being requested to do.

Fourth, you must learn to say No gently but firmly—and without feeling guilty.

And fifth, to return to your own personal giving, you need to discuss with your spouse and family how much you believe God is asking you to give. I myself believe in the tithe as the basic building block in God’s program of church and mission support, so I am happy to see your statement that you “give liberally in addition to tithing.” But don’t give beyond the tithe on the basis of whim or how “guilty” someone can make you feel; have a family conference and choose 11 percent or 13 percent or 18 percent or whatever, and stick to that percentage.—David Robert Black, Pastor, Calvary Presbyterian Church, Warren, Ohio.

Hope Center

As to the individuals and families who come to the door for handouts, we in our tiny community have gone through several plans leading to a very successful ministry.

The first idea was to arrange with the local diner and cheapest motel to accept vouchers on our letterhead for certain services and to allow us to pay later. This prevented the handing out of cash, which is easily abused, and still allowed us to help the transient person in need. The only trouble came when we realized...
that people were seeing other pastors in nearby churches and receiving help for several days or meals in a row.

The next addition was to cooperate with sixteen area churches in a twenty-mile area to pay for an answering service. It kept cards for us. Whenever a person came to a pastor for help, the service was called and the name and Social Security number of the person was read. This way we knew whether the person was receiving duplicate help. If not, we would tell the service to make a new card for this person with the name, Social Security number, and the service we were giving, together with the date. This eliminated duplication and improved our stewardship. We further agreed that because of the location of certain churches, some would have more visitors at their doors than others. We shared in the payment of the common fund, which paid for the vouchers, as each church could afford.

The chief remaining problem was guilt. Was it actually helping to give someone a meal or a night's stay without taking the time to find the root of the problem? None of the pastors had sufficient time to speak to these people and help. Education has to come with the help, or the problem causing the need continues.

A little more than a year ago that same group of churches formed the Hope Center. With a little help from a businessman, who owned an empty store, we pay a person a minimum wage to operate the center for five days a week, two hours a day. In addition, we have volunteers from the churches. The Hope Center spends time with each person needing help and also seeks to advocate for those people with Social Services and other agencies that can help a chronic problem. The Hope Center has successfully reduced emergency situations by helping people deal with the basis of their difficulties. Sometimes a volunteer may go shopping with a person to help him or her know what to buy. Where the agencies of the government cannot dictate what will be bought with food stamps, for example, we can.

Each pastor still has bags of quick and nutritious snacks to hand to a person just passing through in the middle of the night but not wanting help with his or her problem. Some nights are paid for at the local cheap motel for emergency housing of transients. However, one night at a motel will buy a lot of food. Therefore, if the person has a car and is young and healthy, we will not give lodging. If he or she is a hitchhiker, we will not give lodging on warm, clear nights. But, without exception, those who use our services are sent to the Hope Center to deal with the seeds of despair in their lives.—Roger P. Howard, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Milford, Pennsylvania.

God is the supplier

Philippians 4:19: "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

This suggests a two-way street to me. The first way addresses this supply. It seems to me that if my God shall supply all my need, I shouldn't have to worry about what I give out. Someone once said that God has promised to supply our needs, not our wants. I should look at my priorities and see whether they are in line with what God wants for me. Let's face it; no one goes into the ministry for profit. We are not laying up treasures on earth.

The second way addresses the ones with their hands out. The Bible tells us in Psalms that He shall take care of the needy. If God desires to use you as His instrument in this area, praise the Lord; but if God is using you for His glory, you should have peace and God's joy.

My suggestion is to look at the needy and see whether you are supplying needs or merely wants.—John Picard, Englewood, Ohio.

Keeping your wife happy

From page 20

she was confined to bed for ten weeks, two of which she spent in the hospital. During that time I learned volumes about her daily tasks as a mother and homemaker. I vividly remember a near nervous breakdown one morning when the pancakes, eggs, and toast were all done at the same time! With blue smoke billowing out of the toaster, my sons' chorus of "I'm hungry" did not have the same effect on me as Handel's Messiah!

The one thing that has ministered most to my wife is our weekly date. For eight years I have taken her out each week, alone. We established this tradition long before we had children. We were faithful to this weekly adventure even while in seminary, when money was scarce or nonexistent. (In those days, stopping at a deli for a little extra after supper at home ministered to us just as much as going out for a delicious meal.)

Now we usually go out to eat, and then for a walk. We share our hearts the most during these times, laughing and sometimes crying, praying and planning. It's an indispensable cure for the exhaustion and defeat that "life in the fast lane" with four preschool children produces.

I've learned through my mistakes that most of us men believe two myths about taking our wives out. One is that they have to go to some really nice place. I've found that Jill enjoys a place with an atmosphere conducive to talking much more than a place that leaves the prices off the menu.

The other myth is that going to dinner with another couple or going to some program constitutes a "date." I've discovered that my wife wants to be with me—to talk to me, see me, interact with me. Programs and friends are great for social events, but they don't develop intimacy in marriage. If you're going to take your wife out, make it count. Being considerate, in the final analysis, requires a thoughtful assessment of what will minister to her the most.

The passage in 1 Peter also speaks of the married couple as "joint heirs of the grace of life" (R.S.V.). That's really the proper perspective. It's a partnership, a joint effort to convince the watching world that in Jesus Christ marriage is the most mutually exciting and fulfilling adventure on earth.

The charge to believing husbands—to love their wives sacrificially, sensitively, and considerately—is no easy task. Scripture says that the children of the homemaker will "rise up and call her blessed" (Prov. 31:28, R.S.V.). But I don't believe this will happen unless they continually find those words on the lips and in the actions of their father.

* Unless otherwise noted, all Bible texts in this article are from The New International Version.

MINISTRY/NOVEMBER/1985 25
God has a ministry for you to fulfill. And the talents, interests, and opportunities He has given you help to define your unique niche in His work.

But I'm me. Do I have to sublimate all my desires, push me underground, and become someone else because my husband is the pastor? Just who am I? The pastor's wife? Or Karen?

The truth is that I can be myself because I am the pastor's wife. My position as pastor's wife should be personalized. No one will ever fill this position the way I do. She shouldn't even try. I am not competing with anyone else but, with my own special uniqueness, filling the role God has given me. Trying to live up to my husband's, my mother's, or any other church member's expectations of what I should be is wrong.

My uniqueness is my contribution to the team. I am part of the pastoral team because I am married to the minister, but how I function on the team is my own choice. I can do as little or as much as I wish; I can add to or detract from the team.

Immediately my own talents, likes, and dislikes press forward. My talents may be large or small—it does not matter. God gave me the abilities necessary to fill the role He has for me. I need to nose around and find my ministry as part of the team.

A niche is a place where one fits comfortably. That is what each pastor's wife needs to find—a niche, her niche. Finding one involves soul-searching. What can I do as a team member? Marriage has given me a place on the team regardless of my personality traits. I want my husband's church members to contribute to the team, and do it. Be yourself.

**Niches I have known**

I know one pastor's wife blessed with secretarial skills. She clips articles for her husband's resource file, makes phone calls for him, and generally organizes him. She also searches out young mothers in the church and helps with their children during the services or prayer meetings so the mothers can listen. This is her niche.

It is not mine. I am still wrestling with my own children—I'm not ready to handle anyone else's. I have secretarial skills, but were I to organize my husband, Walter's, time, he would be unhappy. And we react so divergently to the same things that I could never begin to clip articles for his file. I couldn't fill that niche. I'd drive my husband up the wall, and I'd be very frustrated.

Another pastor's wife I know is a physical fitness nut. I call getting up in the morning exercise. She jogs, swims . . . Just listening to her wears me out. However, her team contribution is great. A couple of mornings a week she leads the ladies of the church in swimming laps at the high school pool. She conducts aerobics classes in the church and stresses spiritual as well as physical fitness. She has a unique ministry that reaches out to like minds in the community as well as the church; her contacts open up avenues for her husband and the church at large. Her husband attends some of her aerobics classes and, once acquainted, follows a step-by-step process from Five-Day Plans through cooking schools to evangelism. The possibilities snowball.

Many pastors' wives work nonstop as Bible instructors, knocking on doors and hunting for people interested in studying the Bible. Some are able to train church members to lead out in the Bible studies they've arranged; others are happier conducting the studies themselves. Regardless, they thrive in their niches like flowers in the sun.

Music has traditionally been considered an integral part of the role of the pastor's partner. People often expected her to sing like Del Delker, play the organ like Norm Nelson, lead choirs and children's groups in music, et cetera. I know a pastor's wife who blossoms in this area. But music is a unique talent, not a gift given to every pastor's wife. It's a wonderful niche, but it is not mine.

I have sung when necessity ordered. I have played the piano, even though I don't read music. (I learned two hymns and the doxology by rote and played them every Sabbath until my husband baptized a lady who could play. What a relief!) All of us need to be adaptable and willing to attempt, but we can't all do the same thing.

On the other hand, all of us can do something.

But I work, you say. I've got half a dozen children (it only seems that many) in church school. I can't be part of the team. How can I have a unique ministry with my husband if I work full-time?

Let me let you in on a secret. All of our church members face the same priority problems. Your involvement will depend on your energy level, family obligations, and career expectations.

**My niche**

I work full-time too.

So, what is my niche? How do I contribute as a team member to my husband's ministry? This is my niche alone, but perhaps sharing it will spark some creative possibility thinking.

1. Sabbath sermons. Walter and I preach together. Walter prepares his sermon as he ordinarily does, typing it with extra space between his points so I
can add what I wish to say under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We stand side by side, presenting the message together. Preparation and presentation draw us nearer to each other, and our congregations have enjoyed the change as well.

2. Interim welcoming. There is always dead time between Sabbath school and church. I use this time to circulate through the pews, greeting everyone—members and visitors. Later when I stand beside my husband after church I can introduce him to visitors and prospective members. No one has ever accused me of irreverence, and everyone seems to enjoy the special attention. (I leave this job to the official greeters: It’s too easy to get wedged into a group and be unable to leave. In the pews my visits are of necessity brief, and since I am initiating them, I can make them as long or short as I wish.)

3. The children’s story. I tell a children’s story right before the preaching service every week or once a month—I’m flexible. I try to coordinate the stories with my husband’s topics, but this is not always possible. I have also spread a continuous story over as long as a ten-week period, building toward a special occasion such as Christmas. The older folks as well as the youngsters enjoy the stories.

4. Sabbath school. In the past the Sabbath school departments occupied part of my niche, but although I still fill in occasionally, they no longer hold a major position. (Because I teach church school full-time—grades 1 to 3—I prefer not to teach those same children on Sabbath.) This is a niche just waiting for the Mrs. Pastor with artistic ability and a love for children.

You may have noticed that the roles I’ve mentioned so far seem to be centered on the Sabbath hours. Pastors’ wives who work need to utilize the Sabbath hours fully to feel a real part of the ministerial team.

5. Hospitality. My towels may be mismatched and I may serve you a burnt offering, but I’ll be delighted to see you. I love having my husband hold his meetings at our home: Care Committee, elders’ meetings, prayer groups. Be it a carry-in salad supper or a snack I provide, I enjoy having people come to our home. I cannot visit members with my husband as I did when our family was new. Like every other mother, I have to juggle car pools, music lessons, housework, cooking, laundry, and career. And after working all day, I need to touch home base. I don’t like leaving again, and having others come into our home makes me feel a genuine part of the team. That’s important to me. Working away from home can make a wife feel isolated from her husband’s calling. It’s easy to feel that I am a pastor’s wife on only one day of the week. However, there are still parts of my niche to fill.

6. Ladies’ prayer group. This group meets every other week. At one time we met during the day, and the moms brought all their preschoolers. Now we meet in the evening without the children. When I was not working I led out. Before I started working I prayed for another leader, and that prayer was answered. Now I attend not as leader but as a participant. Time may not allow me to organize and prepare, but the shortness of earth’s time dictates my presence there.

7. Visitation. My church member visitation is confined mostly to the groups in the church. However, another woman in the church has communication expertise for reaching backsliders. She and I visit others once a month. If neither of us worked, we might visit more often, but at least this gives me an experience with another Christian and a bit of outreach.

The second form of visitation involves my husband. Before I began working I was his Bible instructor. Now my husband and I visit Bible study prospects, evaluating them and passing along those that seem more promising to our church folks while I keep the others. My pastor and I like to do things together.

8. Miscellaneous. Many little pet projects of mine stuff my niche. My husband and I organize the church into social groups, not only to become better acquainted with the members but also to invite other folks, members and non-members, to participate and become involved.

(Continued on page 30)

Prayers from the parsonage

A father’s prayer

“You have been chosen by God himself—you are priests of the King, you are holy and pure, you are God’s very own” (1 Peter 2:9, T.L.B.).

How easily I have assumed this calling, I’ve even asserted myself as priest of the family. But how am I doing as a mediator for my family?

On paper my priorities are perfect: (1) God, (2) spouse, (3) children, (4) pastorate, (5) community. Perhaps because my job is a calling that reaches the hearts in this home. May my wife and children be secure in my love. Make me sensitive to their joys and disappointments and responsive to their needs. Help me to make time for them and to think of ways we can work and play as a family.

I want to be an active participant rather than a visitor, an objective judge rather than a heavy, an understanding counselor rather than a critic. I do not want goals, deadlines, and things to do separating me from the people I love.

I am (1) son, (2) husband, (3) father. With these positions comes awesome responsibility. Keep me focused on what is most important.

Even my time with You, Father, often serves a dual purpose. I find myself reading the Bible to prepare a sermon, praying about members’ problems.

What am I doing to know You personally so that I am strong in faith?

What intercession do I provide in the conflicts that are part of day-to-day living?

What am I telling my family about religion?

Teach me, I pray, how to bind the hearts in this home. May my wife and children be secure in my love. Make me sensitive to their joys and disappointments and responsive to their needs. Help me to make time for them and to think of ways we can work and play as a family.

Cherry B. Habenicht
How science discovered Creation

Does science have anything to say about Creation? Physicists are propounding new models of the origin of the universe that are startling in their implications. The authors share the very latest in research.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This statement was long regarded as merely the philosophical musing of the ancients, who had never sat in a high school physics class and learned the laws of conservation. But in recent years it has taken on new credibility with some of the most advanced theoretical physicists in the world.

While theologians have contented themselves to debate whether or not the Genesis account even implies fiat creation out of nothing, scientists pressing their quest for apprehension of our universe to the edge of human understanding are beginning to find their own answers to the riddle of beginnings. And what the scientists have found may come as a surprise to those theologians who have abandoned the idea of fiat creation in favor of a more "scientific" view. While they have been preaching the big bang theory and gradual evolution of our universe, theoretical physicists have stolen their march and arrived at the very gates of Creation.

How has the revolution in scientific thought about the origin of our universe come about?

For many years the big bang theory has been regarded as the ultimate explanation of the beginning of the universe we see around us. Supporting this theory were astronomers' observations of the rate of travel of various galaxies and stars. Their observations indicated that the entire universe was expanding at a phenomenal rate. And of course the natural conclusion from this observation was that at some point about 15 billion years ago all the matter of the universe must have been concentrated in a primordial hot soup, which finally exploded in a "big bang."

The big bang theory adequately explains all the observed phenomena around us, as long as you don't look too closely and don't ask too many questions. But it is the nature of scientists to ask questions of their theories. And as physicists began pressing their quest for knowledge of universal origins farther and farther back, a certain disquietude began to spread among them.

The one-second problem

The problem was that as long as no one asked what the universe was composed of when it was less than one second old, all the pieces fit together perfectly.

The standard big bang model of the universe was based on several assumptions: 1. The laws of physics do not change with time, and the effects of gravitation are correctly described by the general theory of relativity. 2. The early universe was filled with an intensely hot gas of elementary particles almost perfectly uniform and expanding in thermal equilibrium. 3. Any change in the state of radiation and matter was negligible.

But this model began to collapse instead of explode when mathematicians tried to explain what happened in the first 99/100 of a second of the universe's existence. Mathematically, the model's predictions just did not work; they could not explain the large-scale uniformity we observe in the universe today.

In search of a better explanation of our universe, scientists have now turned to what they call the grand unified theories, which are an attempt to unite all of what we know about our physical world under one set of theories. A little background should prove helpful here.

There are four fundamental forces in nature: electromagnetism, weak nuclear force, strong nuclear force, and gravity. Classical physics requires four separate sets of mathematical equations—one for each of these forces—to explain and describe the physical world. But logic dictates that at some point there must be a correlation between all of these and that if we understood their interrelationship properly, we would need only one set of laws and one equation to explain all physical phenomena.

The unified field theory, which shows considerable promise for being the key that fits all the universe together under one system, significantly modifies the big bang theory. The modifications remove the mathematical obstacles that caused the original big bang theory to be discarded on the trash heap of intrinsically flawed ideas.

This theory is able to explain the phenomena of nature clear back to a point only one tenth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second that's the number 1 preceded by a decimal and 42 zeros) after its origin. But perhaps the most amazing thing about this theory is that it describes the creation of all the matter of the universe from nothing in less than a second's time!

The unified field theory's version of the big bang scenario was first propounded by Alan H. Guth, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in 1980, and is called the inflationary universe theory. The inflationary model improves the standard big bang model by postulating that the universe began with the creation of space-time literally out of nothing. And thus far it is the best scientific model that has been advanced for describing all the observed phenomena of the universe and their logical and mathematical extensions back to a beginning.

Space and time

When you enter that part of the realm of theoretical physics where theorists try to understand the relationship of space and time, you approach the very edge of human understanding. While Einstein's general theory of relativity succeeds in explaining the relationship between space and time at the atomic level, it is
totally inadequate to explain phenomena at the subatomic level. In that realm you need the laws of quantum mechanics.

But the essence of the matter all comes down to one point: Time and space are so inextricably intertwined as to be inseparable. Indeed, it can be proved that space cannot exist without time, and time cannot exist without space. Time truly can be viewed as a fourth dimension that exists along with, and never apart from, the first three dimensions—length, width, and height.

Reasoning from that point, it becomes obvious that neither matter nor energy can exist in the absence of space and time. So the initial event that physicists such as Guth envision as the origin of our universe is an expansion of space and time out of nothing. Mathematical calculations indicate that space began expanding in time, out of nothing, at an enormous rate that shortly thereafter slowed to the rate at which the universe can be observed to be expanding today. This initial expansion liberated an enormous amount of energy, and from that energy all matter was formed. The mathematical model predicts that matter as we know it appeared approximately \(10^{-30}\) seconds after the initial expansion.

Guth and Paul J. Steinhardt wrote in Scientific American, May, 1984: "In the course of this stupendous growth spurt all the matter and energy in the universe could have been created from virtually nothing. . . . Recently there has been some serious speculation that the actual creation of the universe is describable by physical laws. In this view the universe would originate as a quantum fluctuation, starting from absolutely nothing. . . . If grand unified theories are correct in their prediction that baryon number is conserved, there is no known conservation law that prevents the observed universe from evolving out of nothing. The inflationary model of the universe provides a possible mechanism by which the observed universe could have evolved from an infinitesimal region. It is then tempting to go one step further and speculate that the entire universe evolved from literally nothing."

The inflationary model postulates that the observed universe, which is approximately 20 light-years in diameter, is a bubble that formed in a much larger universe of perhaps \(10^{200}\) light-years' diameter. A further implication of this model is that universes like our own could be arising out of nothing continuously! And furthermore, unlike the original big bang theory, this model predicts that our universe can continue expanding eternally and will never collapse into primordial soup again.

This model is propounded and accepted by physicists on the very leading edge of what is popularly called the new physics. Today it can be said without fear of contradiction that the most significant advances in understanding theoretical and particle physics are being made by those researchers who are not afraid to base their work on the assumption that the universe was created out of nothing and without known cause. The voice of nature is coming through with ever-increasing clarity. And it is proclaiming, "In the beginning God created . . ."

Of course, it would take a long leap of logic to move from the point where physicists are willing to believe that the universe was created from nothing to a point where they would assume that the Genesis account is an accurate description of the origin of life on our earth. Really, there is no direct correlation between acceptance of fiat creation of the universe and acceptance of Genesis. Except at one important point.

The inflationary theory has literally opened the door of science, at least a crack, to consideration of the possibility that our universe originated by fiat. And if that is the case, then there is also the possibility that a creator was the one who issued that fiat. And if everything in the universe just may have been made by an intelligent being, who is to say that that same intelligence did not also create the orderly forms of life we see on earth.

So the door stands ajar. But there are other important questions which must be answered before we can move from the realm of a theory that everything came from nothing to the assumption that someone somewhere made it all happen. The questions have to do with the matter of causality—is there a cause for the existence of the universe? And is it an intelligent cause? Here again physicists exploring the microcosmic world of the atom are finding evidences that may shock some religionists who have consigned Genesis to the mythological dustbin. But that is the subject for the second half of this article, which will be printed in our January issue.

---

2 Baryon number is +1. It implies that protons are conserved. Recent developments in subatomic physics have shown that baryon number may not always be conserved at 1/1.
Paul

From page 8

principle of Sabbathkeeping that Paul opposes. Rather he condemns the use of cultic observances as a way to salvation, a way dependent on human achievements rather than divine grace.

Several conclusions emerge from this study of Paul's attitude toward the law in general and the Sabbath in particular.

First, the three texts generally adduced as proof of Paul's repudiation of the Sabbath (Col. 2:14-17; Rom 14:5; Gal. 4:10) deal not with the validity or invalidity of the Sabbath commandment for Christians, but rather with ascetic and cultic practices which undermined the vital principle of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, in the crucial passage, Colossians 2:16, Paul's warning is not against the validity of observing festivals as such but against the authority of false teachers to legislate on the manner of their observance. Paul implicitly expresses approval rather than disapproval of their observance. Any condemnation had to do with a perversion rather than with a precept.

Third, Paul's tolerance with respect to diet and days (Rom. 14:3-6) indicates that he would not have promoted the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday observance. If he had done so, he would have encountered endless disputes with Sabbath advocates. The absence of any trace of such a polemic is perhaps the most telling evidence of Paul's respect for the institution of the Sabbath.

In the final analysis, Paul's attitude toward the Sabbath must be determined not on the basis of his denunciation of heretical superstitious observances that may have influenced Sabbathkeeping, but rather on the basis of his overall attitude toward the law. Many have failed to understand that Paul rejects the law as a method of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard of Christian conduct. This failure, in turn, has been the root of much misunderstanding of Paul's attitude toward the law in general and toward the Sabbath in particular. It is our fervent hope that this study will help to remove this misunderstanding and to reemphasize Paul's position, that "the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully" (1 Tim. 1:8).

Shop talk (p. 31) has a special offer of Dr. Bacchiocchi's books on the Sabbath.

* Scripture quotations not otherwise specified are from the Revised Standard Version.

2 For an extensive list of commentators holding to a syncretistic nature of the Colossian heresy, see From Sabbath to Sunday, p. 343, n. 13.
3 Eduard Lohse, A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (1971), p. 116. In a similar vein, Herold Weiss emphasizes that in Paul's argument (Col. 2:8-19), the law "plays no role at all" ("The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 34 [1972]:311).
4 For bibliographic references and discussion see From Sabbath to Sunday, pp. 349, 350.
5 Martin Luther, "Wider die himmlischen Propheten," in his Sammtliche Schriften, ed. by Johann Georg Walch (1890), Vol. XX, col. 148.
7 Ibid., pp. 182, 183. (Italics supplied.)
8 Lohse, op. cit., p. 155.
11 Gunter Bornkamm emphasizes this view when he writes: "Paul mentions New Moon and Sabbath (Col. 2:16), days, months, seasons, and years (Gal. 4:10), i.e., in each case days and seasons that do not stand under the sign of the history of salvation, but under the sign of the periodic cycles of nature, i.e., corresponding to the movement of the stars" ("The Heresy of Colossians," in Conflict in Colossians, ed. Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks, SBL Sources for Biblical Study 4 [1973]:131).
12 Texts and discussion are found in From Sabbath to Sunday, pp. 173; and p. 243.
13 Jewett wisely acknowledges that "if Paul had introduced Sunday worship among the Gentiles, it seems likely Jewish opposition would have accused his temerity in setting aside the law of the Sabbath, as was the case with reference to the rite of circumcision (Acts 21:21)."—"The Lord's Day," p. 56.
14 For texts and discussion, see From Sabbath to Sunday, pp. 241-269.
16 Rordorf, op. cit., p. 133.

My place

From page 27

better acquainted.

I started a prayer chain, a small organization that never meets. When special prayer requests come in, the first lady on the list is called, and she prays with and calls the next lady and so on down the line. A monthly newsletter holds this group together, informing the members of prayers answered. I send out the newsletter, but my name is not on the top of the phone list.

I enjoy holding small cooking schools in homes, sometimes once a week or every once in a while four nights in a row.

Another woman and I are planning to hold a communications seminar during prayer meeting time. My husband and I are also planning a parenting seminar for that same time slot.

Needless to say, when Walter has an appeal for folks to show up I do, but I have those special areas that make up my niche. We are like a two-pronged action team, utilizing our individual special gifts apart and together. I feel comfortable with these labors of love.

Each pastor's wife needs to find her niche, her special place. We are not competing to outshine one another. We are using what God has given us to hasten His coming.

The fact that my niche comprises these areas now does not mean I will not or cannot change. I am sure I will, for my niche has evolved as family obligations and career demands have changed.

There are other parts of me—the part that writes short stories while the child is at the swimming pool and the part that exercises three times a week at Elaine Powers', but my team ministry "me" expresses "me" just as surely as my peculiar voice inflections and accent do.

Be yourself—the best "you" that you can be. Don't worry about what anyone else has done; glorify God by being the person He meant you to be.
365 thoughts to inspire

From Aristotle to Zig Ziglar, words of wisdom, quotes to challenge, and ideas to inspire are found in a unique 1986 page-a-day calendar. This multiuse calendar features daily quotations on giving, charity, love, volunteering, and stewardship. Each page reveals a fresh perspective on giving. "Charity begins at home and usually dies from lack of outdoor exercise" is just one example of the type of bulletin, newsletter, and sermon resources you'll find here.

The 4½" x 4½" 1986 calendar with swing-out stand is available to MINISTRY readers for $5.95 from Philanthropic Service for Institutions, Adventist World Headquarters, 6840 Eastern Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20012. Price for multiple copies available on request.

Bacchiocchi books

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, author of the four-part series on the Sabbath that concludes in this issue, has made his three books on the subject available to MINISTRY readers at a special price.

From Sabbath to Sunday and Divine Rest for Human Restlessness (regular price $12.95 and $9.95) are available for $7.95 each. His newly published Sabbath in the New Testament, which expands the MINISTRY articles is available for $6.95. All prices postpaid.

Order from MINISTRY Services, Box 217, Burtonsville, Maryland 20866.

Federal depository libraries

Free information from the federal government is available to you at more than 1,380 depository libraries across the country. Congress established the Federal Depository Library Program in 1814 to provide free access to government information. To find the federal depository in your area, contact your local library or write to the Federal Depository Library Program, Office of the Public Printer, Washington, D.C. 20401.

Software information packet

MINISTRY has collected information about numerous church-related computer programs. We have compiled a packet consisting of about one hundred pages of information from various producers of church-related software, and lists of companies producing such software. The packet is available for $3 (overseas add $1 postage) from: MINISTRY Software Packet, 6840 Eastern Ave., NW., Washington, D.C. 20012. Software producers who would like to have information included in the packet are invited to submit one 8½" x 11" descriptive sheet for inclusion in the packet.

Ministry Professional Growth Seminars

October-November-December, 1985

New York
October 29, Albany
October 30, Rochester
October 31, Buffalo
For more information call Nikolaus Satelmajer
(315) 469-6921

Maryland
November 4, Takoma Park
For more information call Joseph Blahovich
(301) 891-5265

Utah
November 6, Salt Lake City
For more information call Skip Maccarty
(801) 484-4331

Nevada
November 7, Las Vegas
For more information call Bill McVay
(702) 646-2221

Minnesota
November 12, Minneapolis
For more information call Don Burgeson
(612) 545-8894

California
November 20, Riverside
For more information call Charles Sanderfur
(714) 359-5800

Canada
November 25, Moncton, N.B.
November 26, Halifax, N.S.
November 27, Toronto, Ont.
December 2, Saskatoon, Sask.
December 3, Calgary, Alba.
December 4, Edmonton, Alba.
December 5, Kelowna, B.C.
December 6, Vancouver, B.C.
For more information call Bill Bornstein
(416) 433-0011

Each all-day seminar is designed for pastors and church workers. Ministry's commitment to Biblical authority, professional competence, and spiritual enrichment will prepare you for more effective ministry in today's world. Clergy of all faiths testify that Ministry seminars are an exciting opportunity for personal growth.

Participants Receive Continuing Education Credit

Topics Include:

Preaching
- Narrative Preaching
- Parabolic Preaching
- Preaching From Revelation

Counseling
- Grief Recovery
- Conflict Management
- Short-Term Marriage Guidance

Evangelism
- Church Growth
- Lay Apostolate

Leadership
- Leadership Styles

Archaeology
- Ebla and the Patriarchs
- The Exodus
Divorce and the Faithful Church


How should the church relate to divorce and divorced persons? Bontrager argues that not to take them seriously is, in our culture and times, to fail to minister to a third or more of those for whom Christ died. The author's central theme might be simply stated, “Divorce is a forgivable sin.” He examines the main Old and New Testament passages and concludes that while permanence in marriage is God's ideal, the Lord has been flexible and long-suffering in His dealings with man's failures.

This is a serious study of the issues facing Christian congregations who wish to be Bible-centered, to uphold God's ideal without compromising, and yet be sensitive to human needs. One cannot read this material without pondering perhaps more carefully than ever before the central heart and role of the church. What is the meaning of the church as community? What is its responsibility to those who falter and fail in their covenant of marriage? What is the role of God's law with respect to the covenant of marriage? What is the role of grace? Are there more effective ways of maintaining Biblical standards of marriage and family without dealing negatively and harshly with couples?

While you may not agree with all of Bontrager's conclusions, you won't be able to dismiss lightly his challenge to lift high God's grace and make it foremost in dealing with those who have known the emotional trauma and hurt that comes from the death of their marriage.

Recently Published

Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church. Elgin Moyer, revised and enlarged by Earle E. Cairns, Moody Press, Chicago, 1982, 449 pages, $19.95. If you knew that Cyrus Hall McCormick invented a reaping machine but didn't know that he was a devoutly religious man whose contributions helped found McCormick Theological Seminary, or if you didn't know that Francis Scott Key was influential in the beginning of the American Sunday School Union, you'll find fascinating reading here. If you can't remember who Carpocrates was, or would like to know how Dwight L. Moody got his start in church work, you'll find this a valuable ready reference. Lists more than two thousand names of religious leaders and others connected with the church. A twenty-four-page “Chronological Index and Outline of Church History” in the front is a helpful bonus.