Are you a day's journey from God?

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Wonderful, thought-provoking article

As someone who is involved in AIDS ministry day in and day out, and as president of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, a church with a special outreach into the gay and lesbian community but with its door open to all, I wish to commend Ministry for the article by Iris Hayden Stober, “AIDS Challenges the Church” (September 1990). What a wonderful, thought-provoking article concerning the Christian response to AIDS. It is so courageous and comprehensive—probably one of the best articles I have read on this very complex issue. —Troy D. Perry, founder, Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches, Los Angeles, California.

Ministry assists

Few articles that come across my desk have the depth, understanding, and compassion I felt in the article “How to Feel Another’s Pain,” by Joyce Rigsby (September 1990). The article gave me assistance in an area I work in almost daily—relating to those who “go through the valley…” The “Commandments for Comforters” is a valuable tool and well written. Thanks for Ministry. It is a fine and useful publication. —Henry F. Speight, senior minister, First Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, Ocala, Florida.

Faith and scientific theories

The problem with Daniel Lazich’s article (“Big Bang—Dying With a Whimper?” September 1990) is its assumption that the death of the big bang theory is a victory for creationists. Anyone who has read Robert Jastrow’s book God and the Astronomers might wonder. Jastrow credited the big bang theory for the conversion of many astronomers to a belief in a Creator.

No matter what scientific theory comes into vogue, scientists will look at the same data and come to opposite conclusions regarding the need for a Creator. Ultimately, faith will have to rest on something beyond the realm of science, on the unseen evidence wrought by the Spirit in the heart.

—William McCall, pastor, northeast Arkansas Adventist churches, Jonesboro, Arkansas.

“Does God Get Angry?”—the author replies

I would like to praise the readers of my article (“Does God Get Angry?” July 1990) for taking the time to write, and I would like to chide them for occasional misrepresentation and for not taking time to look up the texts I cited.

The article is based on the clear testimony of Scripture, not on any logical premise. It was Christ who talked about turning the unforgiving debtor over to torture as an example of what God would do to those who do not forgive (Matt. 18:34; cf. Matt. 22:7; Luke 12:46-48; 19:27). Is Christ Himself guilty of distorting God’s character of love and repeating Satan’s lies?

I know of no biblical support for the position that God is responsible for the first but not the second death. And the theory that the second death is merely a natural reaction of sinners to God’s glory has its problems. It does not explain the destruction of the devil, who evidently survived the full glory of God in heaven even after his rebellion. Nor does this theory relieve God of responsibility for the destruction of the wicked.

God could continue to veil His brightness toward sinners as He has always done.

That quintessential Adventist Ellen G. White wrote: “God is a moral governor as well as a Father... He makes and executes His laws. Law that has no penalty is of no force. The plea may be made that a loving Father would not see His children suffering the punishment of God by fire while He had the power to relieve them. But God would, for the good of His subjects and for their safety, punish the transgressor...”

“[God] can do infinite justice that man has no right to do before his fellowman. Noah would have displeased God to have drowned one of the scoffers and mockers that harassed him, but God drowned the vast world. Lot would have had no right to inflict punishment on his sons-in-law, but God would do it in strict justice” (manuscript 5, 1876). —Tim Crosby, Newbury Park, California.

Revenge, punishment, and indignation are ways that sinners deal with each other. If God used these responses, He could have saved Himself at least 6,000 years of having to watch evil unfold on this planet. He chose, however, to deal with sin by the cross.

The cross was not a temporary interlude to God’s normal way of dealing with evil. It was a revelation to our dark minds of how God deals with sin. To some, Christ’s praying for those who were nailing Him to the cross was cowardice. To others, it has the power of God’s forgiving love. Does Jesus forgive them as an individual and then at some later stage punish them as Lord of the universe? Is Jesus really the revelation of what God is like? —Ian Hartley, Wendywood, South Africa.

Division rather than unity

We have revealed in the wisdom of our denomination in keeping out of the emotional abortion issue. Now, according to the July 1990 issue of Ministry, people are trying to knit together a statement that will express the view of everyone in the church—which is impossible. This issue will make for division rather than unity, especially if these sentiments become coercive. —Brian and Ferne Ellingworth, Watsonville, California.

I appreciate your effort in considering the full spectrum of the problem of unwanted pregnancies in a sinful world. In taking this broad view, however, you may have unintentionally obscured our

(Continued on page 25)
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First Glance

Ministry has a tradition of pictorial covers, some of which have been quite provocative. Among my favorites were the one on stewardship that depicted a deacon collecting the offering with the aid of a pistol and another on the delay of the Advent that showed an old car, long since abandoned, with a tattered bumper sticker proclaiming "Jesus Is Coming Soon!"

Extreme disappointment with some of our covers moved us in 1986 to turn to using mostly "table of contents" covers. But we've screwed up our courage and determination, and have decided to give pictorial covers another try. Not all of them will be provocative, and some will probably flop, but we hope to ring the bell with at least a few.

You'll notice also that we've moved our editorial section to the front of the magazine and that the change in cover style has mandated the return to a table of contents.

Speaking of contents, this issue deals with some of the most important issues that you as pastors face: your own spirituality and your preaching. And the article we've reprinted on screening those who work with the youth in your church may save you much heartache and hassle, not to mention liability.

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Knowing God and knowing His Word

Jerusalem is about to collapse. Babylonians are knocking down its defenses. Enemies from outside, betrayal from within, and confusion from everywhere have turned the city of peace into a center of terror and tragedy. King Zedekiah is under siege, and is not sure whether he is witnessing a plunder by an enemy or a judgment from God. The king secretly summons a neglected prophet from prison and demands of him: “Is there any word from the Lord?” (Jer. 37:17).

Jeremiah thunders: “There is!”

What a confrontation! On the one hand there is the king, who, in search of a prophetic word to soothe his soul and condone his conduct, has found Jeremiah too inconvenient and therefore condemned him to imprisonment and privation. On the other, there is the prophet, conscious of his humble pedigree, frightened by the enormity of his mission, but always sustained by the promise that God would make him a “fortified city” (Jer. 1:18, RSV), even as the world around him collapses into chaos.

When the frightened king and the faithful prophet meet, there is both a sense of siege and an assurance of serenity. The king sees the enemy army closing in. All the wealth, power, and arrogance that he has paraded in Jerusalem cannot aid him in his moment of lostness and despair. He finds himself without God, and discovers that a life without God is a life under siege. A shadow turns into an ominous threat. A turn slips into an abyss. Gentle whispers of a breeze sound like uprooting tornadoes. A pause becomes a period without further movement or promise. Time to walk turns to an urge to run. Reflection on the past becomes an escape from the future. Opportunity to assert friendship slides into a moment of betrayal. And the Zedekiah complex takes over.

But consider Jeremiah’s serenity, even though he had reasons to be otherwise. From the beginning of his ministry, the prophet hardly knew acceptance or success. Every proclamation was met with rejection and ridicule; every witness received abuse or slander. Imprisonment, privation, and personal indignity were his rewards for his faithfulness to God’s calling. Yet he never wavered in his mission. He stood tall, a symbol of courage and fortitude.

How does one account for Zedekiah’s despair and Jeremiah’s composure? Both were called to high office in God’s governance over Israel. One failed; the other succeeded. Why? The answer is to be found in how they related to the source of their authority: God.

Jeremiah knew God, and God knew him. The dialogue between the two in the first chapter reveals an intimacy, a personal acquaintance, and a one-to-one covenant. When God is so intimately known, when He becomes the source of personal power, authority, and mission, life stands on a firm foundation, and an ordinary mortal becomes an invincible child of God. No crisis could overwhelm Jeremiah; no disaster could uproot his mission.

Zedekiah lacked such a personal experience with God; consequently, when the crisis struck, all the king’s horses, all the king’s men, could not put him back together again. The king was conscious of his royal person and power, but little did he know or care that before and beyond his power rested God’s word. Had he realized that he was what he was because of God’s grace and will, he would not have found himself in the predicament he was in. Pride and a defiance of God’s purposes drove him in search of false gods. God’s word became too inconvenient. He didn’t want a message to direct him; rather, he wanted a message to confirm him in his self-delusions. So he sought after his own prophets, and in the process he missed God. Without God or His word, life to Zedekiah became a siege.

Jeremiah, however, discovered early in his ministry that without God he was nothing. By faith he grasped the personhood of God and made Him a reality of his life. His faith lived at God’s call; it allowed no compromise on principles or submission to personal convenience. His faith led him to a ministry in which integrity was not for sale, in which his soul was not for exchange, in which the spiritual was not to be bargained away in preference for the mundane, in which the other was not crushed in order that the I might survive. His commitment was to the ministry of declaring that God is.

That fact—that God is—cannot be argued or debated. Human systems cannot sit around on street corners or in university chairs or in parliamentary halls to...
debate and decide the existence of God. Community, education, and power have a role to play in the affairs of men, but the discovery of God is not one such. Out of the turbulence of the heart, out of the uncertainties of existence, the flicker of faith must dare shine, dispel darkness, and look up and behold God. He comes where faith is, and He comes with His word: “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, . . . to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11, RSV).

So come chaos, come loneliness, come war, the pastor in Jeremiah could always affirm that the Lord is. For he knew Him and His word. —John M. Fowler.

Changes at Ministry

When Ken Wade, associate editor, accepted a call to Singapore to be the ministerial secretary of the Southeast Asia Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, the search was on for a replacement. Since half of Ministry’s regular subscribers live outside North America, we were delighted to find someone who has an international perspective—John M. Fowler, the recently elected ministerial secretary of the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Previously Fowler served as an associate secretary of that division and as its director of education—as well as pastor, evangelist, teacher, and literature evangelist. But his main claim to fame lies in his extensive editorial experience. Beginning as an assistant editor at the Oriental Watchman Publishing House in Poona, India, he became an associate editor there, and ultimately, for 10 years, chief editor.

Fowler also holds impressive academic qualifications: a B.A. in religious education from Spicer Memorial College, India; an M.A. in religion from Andrews University, Michigan; an M.A. in journalism from Syracuse University, New York; and an Ed.D. from Andrews University, Michigan.

His wife, Mary, is a teacher. They have two children, Fylvia, who lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, and Falvo, a student at Columbia Union College, Maryland.

Fowler has published more than 150 articles and is an adjunct professor of religious education at Andrews University. His hobbies include reading, especially English literature, and photography. We appreciate the contribution John is already making to this journal. You can read his first editorial on the opposite page.

Other changes

Ministry is making a number of changes both in style and content. We are returning to pictorial covers and a contents page inside. We are also transferring our editorials to the front of the journal.

In addition, we have made a significant change in our statement of mission. Formerly it read in part: “Ministry is an international professional journal published monthly by the Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is directed primarily to the Adventist ministry, and secondarily, on a bimonthly basis, to clergy of other communions.”

We have now added an extra section to this paragraph: “Because of the intimate relationship between the roles of pastor and elder in caring for the local church, and because in many areas elders provide the primary leadership in the local church, Ministry also addresses local elders—informing them and assisting pastors in training them.”

From time to time we will offer articles addressing the needs of elders and also present material that pastors may use in training of elders.

Change-resistant

Whenever we make changes in this journal, someone is dissatisfied. When we quit the pictorial covers, we received many letters lamenting that change. Now some are decrying our return to pictorial covers.

I am reminded of the letter that Martin Van Buren, governor of New York, wrote to President Andrew Jackson on January 31, 1829.

“The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as railroads. The federal government must preserve the canals for the following reasons.

“One, if boats are supplanted by railroads, serious unemployment will result. Captains, cooks, drivers, hostlers, repairmen, and lock tenders will be left without means of livelihood, not to mention the numerous farmers now employed in growing hay for horses.

“Two, boat builders would suffer, and towline, whip, and harness makers would be left destitute.

“Three, canal boats are absolutely essential to the defense of the United States. In the event of the expected trouble with England, the Erie Canal would be the only means by which we could ever move the supplies so vital to waging modern war.

“As you may well know, Mr. President, railroad carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by engines that, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock, and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed.”

What would he say today? Change is inevitable. We can choose whether to shape it or let it shape us.—J. David Newman.
“Are you a day’s journey from God?”

Ben Maxson

The impediments to and dimensions of that spirituality without which no one can be a successful pastor.

“I haven’t prayed privately for months. My only prayer life has been the prayers I prayed in public as pastor of my church.” With these words a weeping pastor explained how he lost his hold on God and plunged into immorality. Now he stood facing the emptiness that had brought him to the end of his ministry.

At times in the experiences of each of us, our human sinfulness erupts, threatening to destroy our ministries. Our service loses its power, its focus, and its joy. Feeling that we are ministering in a spiritual desert, we wonder how we got there and whether we will get any help.

The explanation of the frustration with their ministry that many pastors feel lies in these words of the Adventist Church’s leading light on spirituality: “The reason why our preachers accomplish so little is that they do not walk with God. He is a day’s journey from most of them.”

We need not forget our dream of God using us for His cause. But to realize that dream our ministry must find its strength in a life strongly rooted in a living spirituality. We must anchor ourselves firmly in a personal intimacy with the Creator.

Members truly respect their pastor as the reality that Christ indwells the pastor’s life and ministry confronts them. Credibility grows as the pastor unveils the beauties of a Saviour who meets the challenge of a contemporary society gone berserk in self-fulfillment and the sensational.

Defining pastoral spirituality

To find pastoral spirituality, we must first understand spirituality itself. Spirituality has a private dimension before it has public influence.

Spirituality is a response to God’s initiative, a movement of the entire person toward the God who first loved us. It leads us to center ourselves in Him—to be open to God and to submit totally to His will. Christ becomes the passion of our lives—a passion fueled by intimacy with Him.

The experience of salvation is the basis of our spirituality. Only as we accept the gospel are we equipped to grow in the likeness of Christ. His compelling love conquers our doubts and fears. The fact that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8) strikes at the very roots of our self-centered lives.

An ongoing struggle makes up another part of spirituality. Although there is peace in Christ, continued growth in Him comes as the result of a continual struggle with self. In the words of Paul, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27).

Maintaining a disciplined Christian life is part of the battle. Both the surrender to Christ and the walk with Him result from a disciplined, intentional focus.
of the life in following Him. The call to pastoral ministry is first a call to spirituality. We can share in Christ's ministry only as far as we share in His spirituality. In one of its primary forms the public dimension of pastoral spirituality creates dynamic spiritual preaching. On the other hand, preaching that has no roots in a personal spirituality quickly disintegrates into pompous exposition of cold theory, neither touching nor transforming the heart.

Pastoral spirituality also involves one's example. The spiritual pastor models a humble, authentic, and intimate walk with God. This modeling becomes one of the key elements in teaching spirituality. Ultimately, the most important role of pastoral ministry is that of forming men and women in the image of God. While this is the work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual formation is most often effected through human instruments.

**Barriers to spirituality**

I have found six common barriers to a growing spirituality. The first is thinking that one cannot have intimacy with God today. John, a fellow pastor, could not believe that God wanted to have the same type of experience with him that He had shared with Enoch. When someone talked of an intense experience with God, he discounted it as some form of mysticism. This denial closed the door to deeper encounters with God. As John opened that door, growing in the use of spiritual disciplines, his life turned around. Spiritual vibrancy blossomed as he discovered that intimacy with God was not some mystical impossibility.

The second block to spirituality is busyness—the intensity of our schedules and lifestyles. I find it easy to be so intensely involved in ministry that I have no time for God.

Ellen White warned: "As activity increases and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the Word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the merit of Christ, will in the end prove to be efficient for good." 2

Far too often our busy schedule results from our own needs, not God's will. As Eugene Peterson says: "It is far more biblical to learn quietness and attentiveness before God than to be overtaken by what John Oman named the twin perils of ministry, ‘flurry and worry.’ . . . Flurry dissipates energy, and worry constipates it." 3

Ignorance of spirituality—its ingredients and dimensions—is a third common barrier. Many of us live for years with a strange yearning for more of God that we can neither identify nor satisfy. We must face the tragic reality that we have not developed many ways to intentionally find intimacy with Christ. Too often we don't realize we can do some things to foster a deeper experience with God; we assume it will just happen.

While there will always be a mystical dimension to our walk with God, there are specific skills and experiences that open one's life to Him. Integrating an expanded prayer life, meditation, fasting, devotional Bible reading, and other disciplines into my devotional life has revolutionized my relationship with God.

Often sheer laziness forms a fourth barrier to a growing experience with God. One must work hard to experience spiritual growth and a consistent devotional life.

Inconsistency is a fifth impediment to a flourishing experience with God. Bob, another pastor, shared the typical story of a spiritual walk with God filled with highs and lows. The climb to the mountaintop seemed too rare, and the plunge to the depths too sharp and too fast. As I listened to him, I saw in my devotional life a mirror image of his experience.

I found that my own concept of success is often a sixth barrier to spirituality. This insight came during the most painful moment of my life. I discovered I had shut God out of control of my life by trying to determine just how I would work for Him. I had my own picture of what success in ministry would be. As I sought to achieve that "success" I repeatedly ran ahead of God, racing down detours and finding only pain and frustration. Learning to trust God to control my spirituality and to define my success was an unforgettable experience of freedom and faith. This struggle cannot be won once for all time. We must fight the battle again and again.

**Dimensions of pastoral spirituality**

Four basic dimensions of the personal life form the foundation without which pastoral spirituality cannot stand. The committed and submitted life is the first of these dimensions. We must submit to the will of God and place Him first in our lives and ministries. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness is a basic principle of the kingdom to which we belong. Submitting self is so difficult and painful that Paul described it as dying—as being crucified. Yet to the degree in which self remains in control, to that degree we fail to grow spiritually and be effective in God's hands.

Commitment results from a relationship and grows into a passion for Him to whom we commit ourselves. While commitment is not an end in itself, the passion for Christ must be one of the controlling dimensions in the spiritual life. This passion for Christ grows to be greater than any other passion. It is this commitment that leads us to focus all that we do on Him.

The disciplined life is the next dimension of spirituality. It is through spiritual disciplines that we regularly open ourselves to God. Disciplines such as prayer, fasting, study, and meditation help attune us to God. They become tools through which He transforms us into His image.

Disciplines also involve consciously choosing to develop God's lifestyle in contrast to that of the world.

We find the third dimension of spirituality in lifting up Christ. As we focus on Him, He draws us to Himself. And the only way we can get others to change is by lifting up Jesus Christ, through the
ministry of the Holy Spirit. He said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32).

The ministering life is the final dimension of pastoral spirituality. True Christian spirituality can never retreat into monastic isolationism. It bears fruit in ministry modeled after that of Christ. In fact, in the context of pastoral spirituality, our ministry is an extension of Christ's. As our connection with Christ grows, He leads us to lives of service. He transforms our ministry so that we focus on Him instead of on functional or institutional goals and purposes.

Fostering spirituality

We can never find spirituality in ourselves. Instead, it is rooted in and empowered by the presence of Christ. His presence is nurtured in the devotional life—prayer, meditation, and study of Scripture.

"All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. . . . We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. . . . This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God." 4

This intimacy comes through openness and authenticity as we enter God's presence. The intimate knowledge of God and His way with man puts our sinfulness in the context of His saving grace. We grow in trust as we immerse ourselves in His Word. Through meditation on Scripture, we become familiar with those who have walked with God in the past ages, and we see how He wants to walk with us now.

"With the Word of God in his hands, every human being . . . may have such companionship as he shall choose. In its pages he may hold converse with the noblest and best of the human race, and may listen to the voice of the Eternal as He speaks with men. . . . He may dwell in this world in the atmosphere of heaven, like him of old who walked with God, drawing nearer and nearer the threshold of the eternal world, until the portals shall open, and he shall enter there. . . . He who through the Word of God has lived in fellowship with heaven will find himself at home in heaven's companionship." 5

Walking with God can be an exciting adventure. He has made us for Himself. He longs to have the intimacy of father and child with us. More than anything else, He wants to help us become all that He created us to be—His children, made in His image. We can meet the challenges of ministry successfully only as we center our lives in Him.

"With the risen, victorious Jesus at the center of your life, you win. That was all the early Christian community had against Jerusalem, Rome, Athens—and the Christians won. That's not rhetoric; that's history. They had only Jesus and we keep thinking that we need something else." 6

Let's nurture our hunger for God. He promises to satisfy us: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). When our hearts hunger for Him more than for anything else, we will find Him. He longs to fill our lives with His presence.

To learn more about how to develop spirituality, see Biblio File for the books on this topic that Ben Maxson, the author of this article, recommends. Maxson has prepared a continuing education course on this topic—see the advertisement for Pastoral Spirituality on page 29.

Translated into practice

Ministry editors asked Ben Maxson to describe his devotional life.

My goal—which I don't always attain—is to spend two hours a day nurturing my walk with God.

Though I am a night person, I have found that I need to start my day with God. When my morning is full and my time limited, I focus on devotional Bible reading and prayer to help me center on Him. Then I take additional time throughout the day to expand my devotional life, including extensive reading of a variety of authors and works.

Using some form of structured prayer has become especially meaningful to me. The ACTS format (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication) is one of my favorites. I divide supplication into intercession for others and petition for myself. A written prayer list helps to keep my intercessory time focused.

Practicing the presence of God is a key skill that I am seeking to expand. And I have been finding it increasingly important to spend an hour per day in meditation. Often this time is divided into three or four segments. I try to strike a balance between meditation on Bible stories, content passages, and contemplation of God Himself. I do a great deal of my meditation while driving long distances around the conference.

I've been journaling two to four times a week and doing some in-depth Bible study on a particular topic or passage every week as well. In addition to these weekly activities, I try to schedule a day of solitude once a month. On this day, on which I may fast, I focus my entire attention on God and my relationship with Him.

I have found that without structure and discipline, I wouldn't have a devotional life. But these qualities must be counterbalanced by flexibility. I enjoy the freedom of allowing God to direct my devotional life; the serendipitous experiences He provides are especially rich. So throughout each day, I strive to be sensitive to His surprises. Openness before God is the secret to spiritual growth.

—Ben Maxson.
The distinctive frame that holds together the picture of biblical truth as taught by Seventh-day Adventists is their understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. In these prophecies the Adventist people have found their times, their identity, and their task. Jesus Christ is at the center of the prophetic Word and its dynamic in the Adventist faith (John 14:29; 2 Peter 1:19).

Seventh-day Adventists arrived at their interpretation of Bible prophecy by employing the principles of the historical “school” of prophetic interpretation, sometimes called the historicist method or the continuous historical method. The historicist method accepts the assumption that the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are intended to unfold and to find fulfillment in historical time—in the span between the prophets Daniel and John, respectively, and the final establishment of God’s eternal kingdom. The year-day principle (a symbolic day equals a literal year) is an integral part of the method insomuch as it functions to unroll the symbolic time periods so that we are able to locate the predicted events along the highway of history.

Jesus employed the historicist method when He announced the time of His ministry as a fulfillment of prophecy (Mark 1:15; cf. Dan. 9:25), and later, when He referred to the prophesied ruin of Jerusalem and the Temple (Matt. 24:15; cf. Dan. 9:26). The Millerites, our immediate forebears, were historicists, as were also the sixteenth century Protestant Reformers.

In its endeavor to meet Protestant interpretations, the Roman Catholic Church introduced preterism and futurism as counter methods of interpretation. These methods are the roots of two schools of present-day interpretation of Daniel and Revelation. The preterist/historical-critical position regards the prophecies of Daniel as meeting fulfillment in the times and events of second century B.C. Palestine and restricts Revelation to the first centuries A.D. Futurism slices off the seventieth week of Daniel’s 70-week prophecy, placing it at the end of the age, where it also expects the fulfillment of most of the book of Revelation.

Today, Seventh-day Adventists virtually stand alone as exponents of the historicist method. The Daniel and Revelation Committee wishes to reaffirm again to our world church the validity of the historicist approach to these two apocalyptic books as the only sound method to use. Our pioneers did not follow “cunningly devised fables” when they searched and preached the truths of these prophecies. They have passed on to us a rich heritage. We call our members to a renewed study of these grand prophetic books that continue to give certainty and stability to our personal faith in Christ and His coming and to the worldwide outreach of the Advent people in this solemn era of God’s judgment activity in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 14:6-14; Dan. 7:9, 10, 13, 14).

Not all segments of Daniel and Revelation are as clearly understood as others. There is a tendency for some earnest per-
sons to focus on the lesser understood portions to such an extent that they miss the grand sweep of the clearer passages and the important theological truths they present for our times. It is the desire to unlock these obscure portions that prompts the tendency to alter method and to employ unsound principles in order to find satisfactory solutions. Two sections of Revelation fall into this category especially: the seals (Rev. 4:1-8:1) and the trumpets (Rev. 8:2-11:17). While the church may never fully understand these portions of the larger prophecy, we can learn important lessons from them, and we would discourage no one from study.

The committee at present has not developed a satisfactory interpretation of these prophecies that solves all the problems inherent in them, but it has come to agreement on some general principles and some specific insights. If we would preserve the truth and secure a true interpretation of these challenging prophecies, our study must be within the parameters of sound principles of interpretation. The committee agrees on the following points and submits them to our pastors and members for their prayerful consideration.

General principles

The committee agrees that . . .

1. The literary structure of the book of Revelation divides it into two major sections: (1) a historical section (Rev. 1-14) that emphasizes the experience of the church and related events during the Christian Era; (2) an eschatological (end-time) section (Rev. 15-22) that focuses particularly on end-time events and the end of the world.

Although Bible students differ on the precise point where the dividing line should be placed, serious study by Adventist scholars such as Kenneth A. Strand (Interpreting the Book of Revelation, 2nd ed., 1979), C. M. Maxwell (God Cares, vol. 2, 1985), and W. H. Shea (various articles in Andrews University Seminary Studies) fully confirm this literary division and its consequent effect on interpretation.

2. The series of the seals (Rev. 4:1-8:1) and trumpets (Rev. 8:2-11:17) occur in the historical section of Revelation. Consequently their fulfillment should be sought for in historical time, the Christian Era.

3. The prophecies of the seals and the trumpets have only one prophetic fulfillment.
   a. The Daniel model of apocalyptic prophecy is clear on this point: each metal, beast, and horn has only one fulfillment (even the "little horn" that Daniel 8 used as a symbol for Rome in its two phases has only one fulfillment: Rome). There is no contextual evidence that the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation should be given dual/multiple fulfillments. This proposition was examined at length and rejected by the Sanitary Review Committee (representatives from the world divisions) in 1980 (see "Statement on Desmond Ford Document," Ministry, October 1980) and by the Daniel and Revelation Committee ("Fulfillments of Prophecy," The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy, pp. 288-322). Neither are dual/multiple fulfillments of Daniel/Revelation supported by Ellen White (See BRI tract: "Ellen G. White and the Interpretation of Daniel and Revelation").
   b. Dual fulfillment may be present in some general/classic prophecies in which there are contextual markers indicating such (for example, the prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Joel 2; the prophecy of the virgin birth, Isaiah 7). But no such markers are present in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Furthermore, there is no biblical support for holding a symbolic "day" to equal a literal day in an alleged dual fulfillment in these books.
   c. In regard to the trumpets, Revelation itself makes an end-time application of the language of the trumpets in its description of the seven last plagues. It is therefore an unnecessary pressing of these scriptures to place both the trumpets and the plagues in a simultaneous post-probation fulfillment.

Seals—Revelation 4:1-8:1

The committee agrees that . . .

Setting:

1. Revelation 4 and 5 are a unit and describe the same scene (Rev. 4:2; 5:1).
2. Revelation 4 and 5 portray a throne scene in the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Rev. 4:2, 3; 8:3).
3. The emphasis of the throne scene is upon Christ's atoning death, His accomplishment at the cross (Rev. 5:6, 9, 12).
4. The throne scene is not the investigative judgment of Daniel 7:9, 10.
   a. The Revelation scene is not designated a judgment; the Daniel scene is (Dan. 7:10, 26).
   b. The Revelation scene has only one book; it is in the Father's hand; it is closed and sealed; no being in the universe except the Lamb can open it; the book is never opened in the vision.

By contrast, in the Daniel scene there are two or more books; they are open; it is implied that they were opened for the Ancient of Days by the attending holy beings (verse 10).

Time frame:

1. The throne scene stands at the commencement of the Christian Era.
   a. John is shown (by the sequential opening of the seals) "things which must be hereafter" (Rev. 4:1; cf. 1:1, 19).
   b. The Father's throne (Rev. 4), the overcoming of Christ (Rev. 5:5), and His joining the Father at His throne (verse 6, cf. Rev. 3:21) are central themes in this throne scene (Rev. 4, 5). The victorious redeemed join the throne scene in Revelation 7 (verses 9, 10). Between these two throne scenes lie the seal events of Revelation 6. Thus the seals of Revelation 6 are to be located between the cross-victory of Christ and the victory of the redeemed, that is, in the Christian Era.
   c. The terrestrial and celestial signs of the sixth seal (earthquake, sun, moon, stars, Rev. 6:12, 13) occur in historical, probationary time at the end of the age to forewarn of the Second Coming (cf. Matt 24:29). This suggests that the events in seals 1 to 5 occur in historical time between the cross and these signs.

General observations on the seals:

1. The imagery of the four horses and their colors is drawn from Zechariah 1:8-11; 6:1-6; 10:3, but is employed by John to symbolize a different message than that conveyed by Zechariah.
2. The seals are sequential, representing succeeding events across the Christian Era. This is evidenced by the order of the vision: the seals are broken one after another, not all at the same time (Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 8:1).
3. The seals offer a general progression of history rather than a detailed chronology; their interpretation, therefore, is not bound specifically to the prophecy of the seven churches.
4. The seals appear to be a parallel development of Matthew 24 and 25 (the Synoptic Apocalypse). This link is another evidence for their fulfillment in the Christian Era:

a. Preaching of the gospel (Matt. 24:14)
   a. First seal: white horse (Rev. 6:2)

b. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes (Matt. 24:6-8)
   b. Second-fourth seals: war, famine, pestilences (Rev. 6:4-8)

c. Period of great tribulation persecution (Matt. 24:21)
   c. Fifth seal: cry of martyrs to be avenged (Rev. 6:10, 11)

d. Signs in sun, moon, stars (Rev. 24:29)
   d. Sixth seal: earthquake, signs in sun, moon, stars (Rev. 6:12, 13)

e. Second Coming (Matt. 24:30, 31)
   e. Sixth seal: "The great day of his wrath is come" (Rev. 6:14-17)

   f. Seventh seal: "silence in heaven" (Rev. 8:1). Possibly millennial or executive phases of the final judgment (Rev. 20:4, 11-15)

5. While there are similarities between the seals and the synoptic apocalypse (Matt. 24; 25), there are also differences. In some instances the symbolism appears to extend the meaning beyond a simple repetition of Matthew 24. For example:
   a. If the first seal symbolizes initially the apostolic outreach with the gospel (cf. Zech. 10:3), then the changing colors of the horses (white, red, black, pale/green) suggest progressively deepening apostasy.
   b. The physical signs such as wars, famines, and pestilences would be transmuted by the symbolism to portray the additional features God's people would have to live through: unrest because of religious differences; famine for God's truth; severe persecutions of Christians by Christians.
   c. Since Christian apostasy appears to be present in seals 2 to 4, the unhappy events depicted in these seals may reflect the imagery of the covenant woes/curses predicted to occur when the covenant is broken (cf. Lev. 26:14-39).
   d. While each of the first four seals has an initial beginning, the action once begun may continue on with varying degrees of intensity.
      a. First seal. Although begun by the apostles, the preaching of the gospel continues across the era. The martyrs under the fifth seal are told that more will yet be killed (Rev. 6:11).
      b. Apocalyptic models for this kind of symbolism: (1) The lingering influence of the four beasts after an initial sequential rule (Dan. 7:12); (2) the sequential messages of the three angels continue on after their initial announcement (Rev. 14:6-12).
   7. The first seal represents the gospel message beginning in the first century (Rev. 6:2). The fifth seal represents the persecutions of the Middle Ages (verses 9-11).

The sixth seal relates to the signs of Christ's Second Coming (verses 12-17).

The seventh seal relates to some event of cosmic significance after the Second Coming (Rev. 8:1).

8. The sealing activity of Revelation 7:1-8 is included in the time frame of the sixth seal and is the response to the question: "The great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17).

9. The earthquake, sun, moon, and stars of the sixth seal are literal, and the opening of the sixth seal begins with the Lisbon earthquake.

10. The celestial signs in the sixth seal may have natural/physical causes (cf. opening of the Red Sea, Ex. 14:21); nevertheless, they are significant events because they occur at the right time in connection with the 1260-year period of persecution (cf. Mark 13:24).

Trumps—Revelation 8:2-11:17

The committee agrees . . .

1. The trumpets are sequential as evidenced by their occurring one after another in the vision.

2. The trumpets appear as warnings or announcements of adverse events to come (cf. Num. 10:1-10).

3. A particular trumpet event may occupy an extensive period of time (Rev. 9:5, 15; 10:7).

4. Revelation 10:1-11:13 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets (just as Revelation 7 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals) and belongs under the sixth trumpet (other than the flashback to the 1260-year period, Rev. 11:3).

5. The trumpet events occur in historical, probationary time.
   a. Introduction (Rev. 8:2-6): Functioning as an announcement of the upcoming seven trumpets, verses 2 and 6 are markers to form a literary inclusio around the two processes described in verses 3-5: (1) The ongoing intercessory ministry of Christ (verses 3, 4). (2) The cessation of Christ's intercessory ministry and the close of human probation (verse 5; cf. Zech. 10:1-7).
   This literary device, an inclusio-introduction, definitely ties the trumpet event series to the era of Christ's high priestly intercession, probationary time.
   b. Seventh trumpet: The sounding of the seventh trumpet is linked with the finishing of "the mystery of God" (Rev. 10:7). "The mystery of God" is the gospel and its proclamation (Eph. 3:4; 6:19; Col. 4:3; Rom. 16:25, 26). If the seventh trumpet is tied to the closing up of the gospel work, the gospel dispensation, then the preceding six trumpets must of necessity sound during probationary time.
   c. Golden altar: Reference to the golden altar of incense at the commencement of the sixth trumpet is a marker in the prophecy, indicating that Christ's priestly intercession is still in process (Rev. 9:13; cf. Rev. 8:3, 4).
   d. Interlude (see No. 4 above; cf. Rev. 9:12; 11:14): Gospel work is carried on under the sixth trumpet. (1) The church (symbolized by John) is to preach "again" to "many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (Rev. 10:11). (2) People can repent and give glory to God (Rev. 11:13; cf. 16:9).
   e. Time periods: The presence of a time period in the fifth trumpet (and possibly in the sixth) is a marker indicating that these trumpets appear in historical time before the close of human probation.
Sexual molestation of children by church workers

Richard R. Hammar

What your church can do to reduce the risk.

In recent years, hundreds of churches have been sued as a result of the sexual molestation of minors by church workers on church property or during church activities. While such cases often involve molestation of boys by male youth workers, they also have involved molestation of both male and female adolescents by youth pastors, camp counselors, and Sunday school teachers. In most of these cases, the victim alleges either or both of the following two theories: (1) the church was negligent in hiring the molester without adequate screening or evaluation; (2) the church was negligent in its supervision of the molester.

Incidents of molestation can occur in any church. Most churches are perfectly willing to select, without any screening process whatever, anyone expressing an interest in working in a volunteer capacity with minors. Churches are by nature trusting and unsuspecting institutions, and it is these very qualities that have made them targets of child molesters.

Obviously, a single incident of abuse or molestation can devastate a church. Parents often become enraged, the viability of the church's youth and children's programs is jeopardized, and sometimes church leaders are considered responsible for allowing the incident to happen. But far more tragic is the emotional trauma to the victim and the victim's family, and the enormous potential legal liability the church faces.

There is good news, however. Church leaders can take relatively simple yet effective steps to significantly reduce the likelihood of such an incident occurring. This article will (1) summarize the legal theories that victims use when suing churches as a result of an incident of molestation, (2) review some of the more significant reported court rulings, and (3) provide churches with forms that can be used to screen those church workers (both compensated and volunteer) who will have custody over minors.

One final word. No one understands or appreciates risk better than insurance companies. Risk evaluation is their business. As a result, it is very significant to observe that a number of church insurance companies are reducing significantly the insurance coverage they provide for child abuse or molestation, and in some cases are excluding it entirely. Some companies are suggesting that such incidents are excluded under the provision in most policies excluding damages based on intentional, criminal conduct (most acts of sexual molestation involve criminal activity). Your church board should immediately review your church liability policy to determine whether you have any coverage for acts of molestation occurring on your property or during your activities, and if so, whether your coverage has been limited in any way. Many churches will discover that they either have no coverage whatever for such incidents, or that the policy limits have been significantly reduced. If you fit within either category, the procedures recommended in this article are of even greater relevance.

Not only will this article apprise you of this significant and tragic source of church liability, but it will also help you...
to reduce the chances that such a tragedy will occur in your church.

Theories of liability

As noted above, most of the lawsuits filed against churches for acts of child molestation have alleged that the church was legally accountable either on the basis of “negligent hiring” or “negligent supervision.” The term negligence generally refers to conduct that creates an unreasonable risk of foreseeable harm to others. It connotes carelessness, heedlessness, inattention, or inadvertence. It is important to recognize that churches are not “guarantors” of the safety and well-being of children. They are not absolutely liable for every injury that occurs on their premises or in the course of their activities. Generally, they are responsible only for those injuries that result from their negligence. Negligent hiring simply means that the church failed to act responsibly and with due care in the selection of workers (both volunteer and compensated) for positions involving the supervision or custody of minors. Victims of molestation who have sued a church often allege that the church was negligent in not adequately screening applicants.

Let’s consider your church. If you are like most other churches, you have been selecting just about anyone who has expressed an interest in working in a volunteer capacity with the youth in your church (e.g., boys’ or girls’ programs, Sunday school, children’s choir, nursery, teenagers, camp). Even applicants for compensated positions are not extensively screened.

Let’s assume that an incident of abuse occurs at your church, and that the senior minister is asked to testify during the trial. The victim’s lawyer asks, “What did you or your staff do to prevent this incident from occurring—what procedures did you utilize to check the molester’s background and suitability for work with children?” What would your minister say? If the answer is “Nothing,” you can well imagine the jury’s reaction. The only question in the jurors’ minds is the size of the verdict.

Note that a church may exercise sufficient care in the hiring of an individual, but still be legally accountable for acts of molestation on the basis of negligent supervision. Negligent supervision means that a church did not exercise sufficient care in supervising a worker. Clearly, both theories of liability are important. However, the focus of this article will be on negligent hiring.

Court rulings

In one of the most significant reported decisions, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled that a church and its pastor could be sued by a mother whose child was sexually assaulted by a church employee. In 1985, a mother sued a Baptist church and its pastor, alleging that her 10-year-old daughter had been repeatedly raped and assaulted by a church employee. She asserted that the church and minister were legally responsible on the basis of three separate theories. First, she claimed that the church and minister were liable on the basis of “negligent hiring”—i.e., they failed to exercise reasonable care in the selection of the employee. Specifically, she alleged that when the employee was hired, the church and minister either knew or should have known that he had recently been convicted of aggravated sexual assault on a young girl, that he was on probation for the offense, and that a condition of his probation was that he not be involved or associated with children. Despite these circumstances, the individual was hired and entrusted with duties that encouraged him to come freely into contact with children, and in addition was given keys to all of the church’s doors. The mother alleged that the employee in fact came into contact with her daughter on the church’s premises, and had sexual intercourse with her on numerous occasions.

Second, the mother alleged that the church and its pastor were liable on the basis of their “negligent supervision” of the employee. Third, the mother alleged that the church and its pastor were legally responsible for her daughter’s injuries because of their failure to warn parents of the employee’s previous criminal and sexual history.

The church and pastor sought a dismissal of the suit, arguing that churches were immune from liability under Virginia law, and also that the employee’s probation and parole were controlled by the Commonwealth of Virginia and could not be delegated to a church. A trial court agreed with the church’s contentions, and dismissed the case. The mother appealed to the state supreme court, which ruled that the church and its pastor could be sued on the theory of negligent hiring. The theories of negligent supervision and failure to warn were not addressed by the court, since the mother’s attorney abandoned them on appeal.

The state supreme court rejected the church’s contentions that the theory of negligent hiring either was not recognized under Virginia law, or was not recognized in the context of church employers. It cited earlier decisions in which it had recognized the theory of negligent hiring in the context of charitable employers. The court also rejected the church’s contention that it could not be responsible for criminal acts of employees: “To say that a negligently hired employee who acts willfully or criminally thus relieves his employer of liability for negligent hiring when willful or criminal conduct is precisely what the employer should have foreseen would rob the tort of vitality.”

The court also rejected the church’s claim that it could not be liable since the alleged conduct of its employee was not within the “scope of employment”: “This argument demonstrates that [the church] is confusing the doctrine of respondeat superior with the tort of negligent hiring. . . . The two causes of action differ in focus. Under respondeat superior, an employer is vicariously liable for an employee’s tortious acts committed within the scope of employment. In contrast, negligent hiring is a doctrine of primary liability; the employer is principally liable for negligently placing an unfit person in an employment situation involving an unreasonable risk of harm to others. Negligent hiring, therefore, enables plaintiffs to recover in situations where respondeat superior’s ‘scope of employment’ limitation previously protected employers from liability.” Ac-
CONFIDENTIAL
APPLICATION FOR CHILDREN/YOUTH WORK
First Church

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. It is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities.

PERSONAL

Date: ____________________________
Name: __________________________

Last First Middle

Present address: ____________________
Number Street City State Zip

Home Phone: _______________________

What type of children/youth work do you prefer? __________________________

On what date would you be available? __________________________

Minimum length of commitment: __________________________

Marital Status: Married ___ Single ___ Engaged ___ Separated ___ Divorced ___ Remarried ___ Widowed ___

Have you any physical handicaps or conditions preventing you from performing certain types of activities relating to youth or children's work? ___ Yes ___ No If Yes, please explain: __________________________

Have you ever been convicted of child abuse or a crime involving actual or attempted sexual molestation of a minor? If so, please explain: __________________________

CHURCH ACTIVITY

Name of church of which you are a member: __________________________

List (name and address) other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

List all previous church work involving youth (identify church and type of work):

List any gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you for children/youth work:

PERSONAL REFERENCES
(not former employers or relatives)

Name: __________________________ Name: __________________________
Address: _________________________ Address: _________________________
Telephone: ________________________ Telephone: ________________________

APPLICANT'S STATEMENT

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give you any information they may have regarding my character and fitness for children/youth work. I release all such references from liability for any damage that may result from furnishing such evaluations to you, and I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Constitution and Bylaws and policies of First Church, and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

Applicant's Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

Witness __________________________ Date __________________________

Accordingly, the church's contention that "proof that the misconduct was within the scope of the wrongdoer's scope of employment is misplaced." The court remanded the case back to the state trial court for a trial on the issue of negligent hiring.

What activities on the part of the church would prevent a finding of negligent hiring? Unfortunately, the Virginia Supreme Court did not address this issue, other than to refer to earlier decisions in which it had concluded that (1) an employer need only exercise "due care in the selection and retention of employees," and once this duty is discharged, it cannot be liable on the basis of "negligent hiring" for injuries caused by its employees, and (2) an employer was responsible for injuries caused by an employee who "got dangerously angry from slight provocation" since "no one made inquiry concerning his past record, habits, or general fitness for the position" (had it done so "it probably would not have offered [him] the job") (J. v. Victory Baptist Church, 372 S.E. 2d 391 [Va. 1988]).

In two cases, state courts concluded that churches were not legally responsible for acts of sexual molestation. A California state appeals court ruled that a church was not liable for repeated acts of sexual assault on a minor by a Sunday School teacher. Here are the facts. A volunteer Sunday School teacher began picking up a second-grade boy each Sunday morning and evening allegedly for church services, and on Thursday evenings to participate in a church visitation program. This relationship continued for two years, during which time the teacher frequently molested the boy. The boy's mother had no suspicion that her son was being sexually abused by the teacher. On the contrary, she felt the teacher was an ideal adult who was fulfilling the role of "second father" for her son, whose real father was suffering from a serious illness.

Eventually, the teacher was arrested and charged with 47 counts of child molestation, including 9 counts against the boy in question. Thereafter, a lawsuit was brought against the church, alleging assault, battery, and infliction of emotional distress. The state appeals court began its opinion by observing that an employer can be liable for the misconduct of employees or volunteers only if the misconduct was committed "within the scope of the employment." The court continued: "Certainly [the teacher] was not employed to molest young boys.
There is no evidence the acts occurred during Sunday School. . . . There is no evidence to suggest that [the teacher’s] conduct was actuated by a purpose to serve [the church]. Rather, the acts were independent, self-serving pursuits unrelated to church activities. Finally, [the teacher’s] acts of sexual molestation were not foreseeable “in light of the duties he was hired to perform.” There is no aspect of a Sunday School teacher’s or member’s duties that would make sexual abuse anything other than highly unusual and very startling. We conclude [the teacher’s] acts against [the boy] were neither required, incidental to his duties, nor foreseeable. They were, therefore, not within the scope of this employment.

The court based its decision in part on an earlier California appeals court ruling that had dismissed a lawsuit against the archbishop of the Los Angeles Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church for the alleged sexual molestation of a 16-year-old girl by two priests. The court in the earlier case had similarly concluded that “it would defy every notion of logic and fairness to say that sexual activity between a priest and a parishioner is characteristic of the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church. There is simply no basis for imputing liability for the alleged conduct of the individual priests . . . to the archbishop” (Scott v. Central Baptist Church, 243 Cal. Rptr. 128 [4th Dist. App. 1988]).

In the second case, a Washington State appeals court ruled that a church-operated school was not legally responsible for damages resulting from an alleged sexual relationship between a teacher and a student. The student’s parents had sued the school and church for “negligent hiring” and “negligent supervision.” The court rejected both allegations. With regard to the school’s alleged negligent hiring, the court observed that “the hiring process employed by the school suggests it took reasonable care in hiring [the teacher]. . . . The process appears sufficient as a matter of law to discover whether an individual is fit to teach at [the school].” With regard to the school’s alleged “negligent supervision,” the court agreed that “schools have a duty to supervise their students,” and to take precautions to protect students from dangers that may reasonably be anticipated. However, “at some point the event is so distant in time and place that the responsibility for adequate supervision is with the parents rather than the school.” Such was the case here, concluded the court, since the alleged misconduct occurred off school property during noninstructional hours. The court also rejected the argument that the school had breached an implied promise to provide a “competent and morally fit faculty” (Scott v. Blanchet High School, 747 P.2d 1124 [Wash. App. 1987]).

Many churches conduct Scouting programs for boys’ and girls’ groups. Such programs present unique risks. While no reported case deals specifically with the Scouting programs of churches, a number of rulings address the liability of the Boy Scouts of America for incidents of molestation occurring during Scouting activities. Consider the following two decisions. In one case, a Boy Scout sued a regional organization of the Boy Scouts of America alleging that he had been emotionally and physically damaged by the intentional homosexual acts of a first aid attendant at a camp operated by the regional organization. The victim alleged that the regional organization was liable on the basis of “negligent retention and supervision” and the theory of “respondeat superior.” The court rejected the first theory of liability, since an organization “must have had constructive or actual notice of the employee’s unfitness to work as a first aid attendant at the camp to be liable for negligent retention and supervision,” and there was no evidence that the organization had any notice of the attendant’s unfitness to work with youth.

However, the court concluded that the regional organization could be liable on the basis of “respondeat superior.” Respondeat superior is a well-established legal principle that imputes the negligent acts of employees to their employer, if the acts were committed within the scope of employment. Thecourt acknowledged that the acts in question were intentional rather than negligent, but it concluded that even intentional acts of an employee can be imputed to an employer if “the employee’s misconduct occurred within the scope of the employment” or if “the employee was doing what his employment contemplated.” However, the court observed that “there is no liability [on the part of the employer] when the servant steps aside from his employment to commit a wrongful act to accomplish some purpose of his own.” The court held that “generally the
jury should resolve the question of whether an employee was acting within the scope of this employment.” And, since the trial court had ruled in favor of the Boy Scouts without letting the case go to the jury, the appeals court remanded the case back to the trial court for a jury trial on the issue of respondeat superior. Obviously, this is an important decision for any organization (including churches and denominations) that operates a scouting or camping program (M. V. v. Gulf Ridge Council of Boy Scouts of America, Inc., 529 So.2d 1248 [Fla. App. 2nd Dist. 1988]).

In the second case, a California state appeals court ruled that the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) was not responsible for the homosexual molestation of two young boys by a Scoutmaster. The mother of the two boys learned in 1984 that her sons had been repeatedly molested by the Scoutmaster during the course of scouting activities. She sued the BSA, alleging that it (1) was responsible for the conduct of the Scoutmaster on the basis of the “respondeat superior” theory, and (2) it was negligent in failing to discover that the Scoutmaster “had been discharged from the Air Force for improper sexual conduct and had also been convicted . . . of child abuse in another situation.” A trial court dismissed the case against the BSA, and the mother appealed.

A state appeals court affirmed the trial court’s order dismissing the case. It acknowledged that “under the doctrine of respondeat superior, a principal or employer is liable for the wrongful acts of its agent or employee committed . . . within the scope of the employment.” However, it noted that for the conduct of an agent or employee to fall within the “scope of employment,” the conduct either had to be “(1) required by or incidental to the duties of the agent or employee and hence not a substantial deviation from those duties for personal reasons, or (2) could reasonably have been foreseen by the principal or employer in any event.” The court concluded that a Scoutmaster’s homosexual assaults upon young boys satisfied neither of these tests. The court cited approval by the Federal Appeals Court for the position that “the conduct had to be (1) required by or incidental to the duties of the agent or employee and hence not a substantial deviation from those duties for personal reasons, or (2) could reasonably have been foreseen by the principal or employer in any event.” The court observed: “Sexual misconduct between a Scoutmaster and his charges is so unusual and startling that it is equally unfair to hold BSA liable under the doctrine of respondeat superior for damages caused by that activity.”

The court likewise rejected the mother’s claim that BSA was liable for failing to adequately investigate and supervise the Scoutmaster. While such facts may have rendered the BSA liable to the victims, they did not render the BSA liable to the mother. And, since the mother was the only party named as a plaintiff in the case, the court had no alternative but to dismiss this allegation as well. In other words, the court left open the question of whether or not the actual victims of sexual molestation could sue the BSA on the basis of its alleged failure to adequately investigate or supervise Scoutmasters who had a history of molestation and deviant sexual conduct.

The fact that this critical issue was left unresolved reduces significantly the comfort that this case otherwise might have brought to church and denominational Scouting programs in California (and to some extent in other states). Churches and denominational agencies that operate Scouting programs must continue to exercise extreme care in selecting and supervising workers (both volunteer and compensated) (Cordts v. Boy Scouts of America, Inc., 252 Cal. Rptr. 629 [Cal. App. 3rd Dist. 1988]).

Screening forms
Churches can significantly reduce their risk of legal liability for negligent hiring (and thereby the likelihood that an incident of abuse or molestation will occur) by having every applicant for youth work (volunteer or compensated) complete a “screening application.” A sample form accompanies this article for your consideration. The application should be completed by every applicant for any position involving the custody or supervision of minors. The application should also be completed by current employees or volunteers having custody or supervision over minors. Having an individual complete the form is in itself not enough to protect a church and its members. Significant protection only occurs if the church takes the following additional steps:

1. If an applicant is unknown to you, confirm his or her identity by requiring photographic identification (such as a state driver’s license). Child molesters often use pseudonyms.

2. Contact each reference listed on the application and make a written record of each contact. Show the date and method of the contact, the person making the contact as well as the person contacted, and a summary of the reference’s remarks. A sample form for use in recording references’ comments is reprinted with this article. Such forms, when completed, should be kept with an applicant’s original application.

3. Contact each church in which the applicant has indicated prior experience in working with youth. Provide a written report of all of the information contained in the preceding paragraph. A sample form is reprinted with this article.

4. Be sure your entire staff (volunteer and compensated) is aware of the child abuse reporting requirements in your state. You will need to check with a local attorney for clarification and guidance.

5. Be sure you are aware of any additional legal requirements that apply in your state. For example, a number of states have passed laws requiring church-operated child-care facilities to check with the state before hiring any applicant for employment to ensure that each applicant does not have a criminal record involving child abuse or molestation. Again, you will need to check with a local attorney for guidance.

6. Finally, the church must treat as strictly confidential all applications and records of contacts with churches or references. Such information should be marked “confidential,” and the church board should enact a policy restricting access to this information to as few persons as possible.

Conclusions
As your church board considers the implementation of a screening procedure, keep the following considerations in mind:

1. The screening procedure should apply to all workers—both compensated and volunteer. Acts of molestation have been committed by both kinds of workers.

2. The screening procedure should apply to new applicants as well as current workers. Obviously, churches need to use some common sense here. For example, if your fourth grade Sunday School teacher is a 60-year-old woman with 25 years’ teaching experience in your church, you may decide that reference checks are unnecessary. The highest risks involve male workers in programs that involve overnight or unsupervised activities. Persons in this category should
be carefully screened.

3. If the screening application and reference forms seem overly burdensome, consider the following:
   a. One insurance company executive has described as "an epidemic" the number of lawsuits that have been filed against churches as a result of acts of sexual molestation.
   b. Your church liability insurance policy may exclude or limit coverage for acts of child molestation. If so, you have a potentially enormous uninsured risk. Reducing this risk is worth whatever inconvenience might be generated in implementing a screening procedure. Just ask any member of a church in which such an incident has occurred.
   c. The screening procedure is designed primarily to provide a safe and secure environment for the youth of your church. Unfortunately, churches have become targets of child molesters because they provide immediate and direct access to children in a trusting and often unsupervised environment. In order to provide some protection for the youth of your church against such persons, a screening procedure is imperative.
   d. The relatively minor inconvenience involved in establishing a screening procedure is a small price to pay for protecting the church from the devastation that often accompanies an incident of molestation. Just ask any member of a church in which such an incident has occurred.

4. Think of the screening procedure in terms of risk reduction. A church is free to hire workers without any screening or evaluation whatever, but such a practice involves the highest degree of legal risk. On the other hand, a church that develops an extensive screening procedure and that utilizes it for all current and future workers has the least risk.

5. The forms reprinted with this article are guidelines. Your church board may wish to make modifications to adapt them to your particular circumstances, or it may wish to develop entirely different forms. In any event, your final product should be reviewed by a local attorney to ensure compliance with state law. It is also advisable that your final forms be shared with your church insurance agent for his or her comments. You also may wish to share them with a local office of your state agency that investigates reports of child abuse.

6. Your church can further reduce the risk that an incident of molestation will occur by adopting a policy restricting eligibility for any position involving the custody or supervision of minors to those persons who have been members in good standing of the church for a minimum period of time (e.g., six months). Such a policy gives the church an additional opportunity to evaluate applicants, and will help to repel potential molesters seeking immediate access to children.

7. Remember that the screening procedure is designed to protect the church against the charge of negligent hiring. Your church may exercise sufficient caution in hiring a worker, but can be sued for "negligent supervision" if it inadequately supervises him or her. Overcoming a charge of negligent supervision requires the implementation of procedures designed to provide reasonable supervision of youth workers while at the same time minimizing if not eliminating the opportunity of an adult to have access to one or more children without another adult being present. The question of negligent supervision is not addressed in this article.

8. Some churches that have developed a close relationship with a local police agency are permitted to obtain criminal record checks as an additional means of screening applicants for youth work. Obviously, common sense needs to be used. Such an extraordinary procedure should be employed only for high-risk positions or perhaps to verify information shared by a reference. State agencies responsible for investigating reports of child abuse sometimes will perform the same service.

9. Every state has enacted a statute requiring specified persons to report actual or reasonably suspected cases of child abuse. This subject will be the focus of a feature article in a future issue of Church Law & Tax Report.

10. A number of denominations have been sued as a result of incidents of molestation occurring in affiliated churches or in denomination-sponsored activities. As a result, denominations should consider encouraging affiliated churches and programs to implement a screening procedure. This will enable them to materially assist their churches and programs while at the same time reducing their own risk of liability.

11. Should a church hire an applicant for youth work who has been guilty of child molestation in the past? Occasionally, such persons freely admit to a prior incident, but insist that they have since

12. The screening application form reprinted with this article is designed for use by persons at least 18 years of age. If your church employs minors in positions involving custody or supervision of children, then the form will need to be modified to include a signature of the applicant's parent or guardian, plus whatever additional modifications your church considers appropriate under the circumstances.

13. This article has been written to apprise church leaders of the legal issues associated with incidents of child molestation. Of course, the real trauma is experienced by the victim. Churches must take an aggressive stance in protecting children and youth from molestation, and in reducing the risk of legal liability to the church and to its leaders. Forms, such as the ones suggested, can assist that process.
The (wo)manly art of preaching

Thomas W. Goodhue

Ministers who base their sermon delivery upon masculine models only may never reach their full potential for preaching the gospel.

Most preachers, homiletics professors, and writers about sermon preparation are male. Even the women in pulpits today have studied primarily under men and had male role models. How has male experience shaped our proclamation of the Word?

Growing up male, I discovered that our society expected me to

• think analytically and dispassionately,
• know the answers—or at least pretend to know them,
• be strong,
• initiate, and
• be “one of the guys.”

Women, on the other hand, have been expected to show “femininity” by

• thinking intuitively,
• admitting ignorance (or pretending it!),
• being “emotional,”
• nurturing others’ growth, and
• being sensitive to and empathizing with others.

Taking a broader view

Thinking analytically. Men are expected to be analytical; my seminary emphasized analytic thought in exegesis. Scholarly analysis is valuable—but it is not always much help in preparing sermons. How many of us left the seminary with critical tools but little idea of how to move from text criticism to interpretation? To understand our experience, we must venture into the realm of feeling—and for many men, this is foreign territory.

Our most powerful proclamation of the Word is almost always an eyewitness account: telling what we ourselves have seen and done and experienced. My best sermon on evangelism, I am told, was my most personal one: the tale of how my home church showed courage in the face of political harassment—and I chose Christ over the surrounding culture.

One female pastor told Lynn Rhodes that she initially received complaints about her sermons being too emotional and too personal, but she said that she “continued to preach that way until the people in my congregation began to see that what I was doing was affirming their right to reflect seriously on their own faith experiences.” Soon 20 of her parishioners mustered the courage to preach.

Knowing the answers. School—and cross-examination in debate—taught me the power that knowing the answers conveys. Whether we are delivering a Communion meditation or teaching a Bible study class, we clerics often see our role as giving answers to the assembled. In Changing Male Roles in Today’s World Richard P. Olson wrote that in our society the five hardest things for men to say are “I don’t know,” “I made a mistake; I was wrong,” “I need help,” “I am afraid,” and “I am sorry.”

For at least a year after graduation from seminary I dutifully played the part of Scripture expert every Sunday morning. I told what the Greek text “really meant.” I pointed out the historical background “essential” to understanding each passage. I must have bored my congregation silly.

Then one week I wrestled with a pas-
sage that baffled me. After thorough exegesis I could not make heads or tails of it. The morning that I was to preach, my ultimate nightmare confronted me: 9:00 a.m. and a sermon in shambles. When I entered the pulpit, I—with great trepidation—admitted to my congregation, “I am not sure that I have figured out what this passage means.” That got their attention! I shared what few bits of background seemed helpful, offered tentative stabs at what the story might be about, invited them to share their responses to the text, and sat down. I was greeted not by disappointment but by appreciation—I had given them permission to wrestle with the meaning of Scripture.

Barbara Brown Zikmund has noted that women use language that suggests openness to examination. According to linguistic studies, in conversation they ask questions more often than men do and qualify their statements with tags such as “Don’t you think?” Homiletics professors coached many of us to avoid this sort of hedging so as not to “weaken” our message, but Zikmund contends that “when the preacher shares her journey and vulnerability she may speak more directly to the needs of average believers.”

Could our proclamation of the Word be strengthened by admitting our weakness? The editors of Leadership tell potential writers, “Our readers expect to share disappointments and struggles as well as triumphs. Each article must balance ‘what went well’ and ‘what didn’t go so well.’” We’ve found this gives the writer credibility and allows our pastor/reader to identify more readily with the situation.

Isn’t it possible that our flocks appreciate this kind of openness too? Being strong. In our society men are expected to be strong—which too often means insensitive and rather self-centered. Women are the ones trained to empathize. But all preachers would benefit by learning to reason with empathy for others, to think with feeling. I once saw a preacher get himself into a great deal of trouble by saying “Genesis shows us that marriage between a man and a woman is the paradigm of Christian life.” He was genuinely shocked by the uproar his sermon provoked. Perhaps greater empathy could have helped him realize that he should proceed with respect for the feelings of the widowed, unmarried, abandoned, and otherwise single—who made up 70 percent of his congregation.

Native Americans taught their children to “walk in another’s moccasins” before criticizing. Maybe we preachers should apply that advice before we try to tell others anything.

Initiating or responding. We clergy, especially those of us who like to see ourselves as strong leaders, often fall into a typically male trap. We tend to see ourselves as the ones who initiate all reflection, dialogue, and action, rather than as those who share their response to God’s Word and who respond to concerns raised by parishioners.

For years I wondered why my entreaties to Christian compassion produced more guilt than grace. Only recently has it dawned on me that I have been calling for compassion but not embodying it. I am on much firmer ground, I now realize, and more likely to be heard, when I preach not as an expert on justice but as a shepherd who feels distress for the pain of my flock. I don’t need to be able to answer every legal issue surrounding obscenity to see that porn hurts the men who buy it. Nor do I need a special call to speak about peace, only compassion for the victims of war.

Laypeople tend to be suspicious of the prophetic word anyway. Perhaps they recognize how seldom God calls prophets and how often those who claim that role are mistaken.

Being one of the guys. And then there is the pressure to be “one of the guys.” Face it, ours is not viewed as the most manly of professions, and this perception takes a toll on male egos. One senior pastor coped with this pressure by appointing himself “chaplain” of the high school football team and salting every fall sermon with gridiron references. (How his congregation must have rejoiced after the last game of the season!)

More subtly, most of us prepare our sermons by consulting the words of men and seldom present the writing, lives, or wisdom of women. Take a quick survey of your library. Who wrote most of the books you consult as you prepare for preaching—men or women?

Doesn’t this neglect of the experience of women make our preaching more repetitious and more irrelevant to most of our parishioners? And does not the need to appear strong and “cool” make it harder for us to reveal our frailty and brokenness from the pulpit?

Getting it together

Does all this seem too one-sided?
First-person preaching

Richard O. Stenbakken

This mode of preaching not only brings variety to your worship services; it is powerfully persuasive.

The setting: an Easter worship service. In answer to the question of the morning hymn—"Were you there when He rose up from the dead?"—a voice cries out, "Yes, I was there! In fact, I was in charge of the guards at the tomb that morning. Let me tell you what it was like. You see, it all began when I was assigned to duty in Jerusalem..."

The congregation turns and watches as a soldier strides toward the platform, red cape flowing, bronze helmet gleaming, leather breastplate and steel sword signifying that he holds the rank of centurion.

This Roman officer describes the final scenes of Jesus' life: The triumphal entry—"We thought we might have a rebellion brewing, so I told the soldiers to watch closely." The capture in the garden—"I wasn't in charge that night, but I heard a strange story about how He loosed His ropes and healed a severed ear." The Crucifixion—"It was my turn to pull the execution detail."

The centurion tells how his life was unalterably changed by the events of the Crucifixion. He recounts the glory of the Resurrection as he experienced it, and confesses that when he looked into the eyes of the resurrected Christ he knew he was worthy of death. He relates how guilty he felt, how tortured by shame—and how the compassionate Christ looked at him with love and walked by, allowing him to live.

Continuing, the centurion says that now he knows what forgiveness is, that Christ not only spared his life but gave him real life. He invites the congregation to find the life, the dignity, the forgiveness he has experienced by accepting Christ as Lord.


Part of the genius of Scripture lies in the drama of the events portrayed in the lives of people—people whose emotions, experiences, and needs parallel ours. The Master Preacher often used the vehicle of the dramatic story to illustrate truth. Think of the parables of the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, the good shepherd. Each portrayal taught a deep lesson as it captured the imagination of the listener.

A first-person sermon/dramatic monologue builds on the same visceral and visual stimulation, reinforcing them by the use of biblical costuming and appropriate props. In a first-person sermon, the congregation experiences the biblical story rather than merely hearing the preacher talk about it. They wince as the centurion uses a rawhide mallet on wood to reproduce the sound of the nails being driven into the Lord's hands. They become agitated as he picks up the crown of thorns with the point of his spear and thrusts it toward an uncomfortable congregation whom he has asked to feel the circled points of pain.

Sermons for the TV generation

Today's congregations have grown up with TV, so they are very visually oriented—they respond to visual imagery. A dramatic first-person sermon from the centurion makes a greater impact and is more memorable than a sermon about the...
To preach a first-person sermon

You need only a few props to make the character real. You can have a costume made (McCall's pattern number 2066 for biblical characters can be modified to suit many different personalities), or you can rent one from a costume shop, theatrical company, or school drama department.

Use your imagination to weave reality from parts of narrative stories in Scripture. For example, you might think of the Father's Day sermon that Ethan, the father of Mary Magdalene, would give.

Visualize his joy at the birth of his darling baby daughter; his pride as she grows into her teens—a beautiful girl; his heartbreak as she descends into sin and rebellion; his pain and anguish as he sees her destroying herself in prostitution; his absolute joy when she meets Jesus and experiences His grace and life-changing, restoring power.

Was Mary's father's name Ethan?

Does it really matter? We have no idea who he was, but we know what he must have gone through. His story reveals the power of God, and that is the good news we want to communicate.*

Bibliographical help


*To avoid misunderstandings and possible offense, in such a sermon you might want to indicate that while the sermon conveys biblical truths, the narrative comes from your imagination and not from the Bible. —Editors.

The advantages of first-person preaching

First-person preaching offers many advantages. Here are just a few:

1. Because the content is basically a story, it is easy to give, to follow, and to remember. It captures the attention, interest, and imagination of your congregation.

2. Because it is a story, congregants of all ages can and will follow it, so there is no need to have a children's story that may or may not fit with the sermon.

3. The emotional involvement brought about as the biblical character speaks of his experience allows, invites, even compels the congregation to consider their relationship to the topic.

4. The first-person sermon adds variety to the worship service and to the preaching schedule.

5. It models how people may experience the Bible in an entirely different modality. As they read Scripture they can put themselves in the place of a principal character in the story—seeing the events through the eyes of a participant.

6. First-person sermons are fun to preach!

almost by accident. I had been assigned to “present the Christmas story in a unique way” to a group of chaplains and spouses at a Christmas dinner gathering—in other words, to present the most familiar theme of the New Testament to an array of clergy families in a way that would keep their attention and have meaning. It was like being asked to give a description of the universe with three examples in 25 words or less!

Looking for inspiration, I began scanning materials. I ran across a sermon by Frederick B. Speakman entitled "The Sequel to Bethlehem." In this sermon Jesse Benhadad, the old Bethlehem innkeeper, tells—in vivid retrospect—of the night Christ was born. Well, I thought, this has definite possibilities! So, borrowing my wife's red-and-white-striped caftan and using a sheet as a sash, a rope as a belt, a simple cloth with a headband as a headpiece, and a theatrical beard to add realism, I became Jesse the innkeeper.

At the end of the presentation (I didn't think of it as a sermon at the time), one of the chaplains came up to me with tears shining in his eyes and said, "I've heard that story all my life,
but tonight I was there! I was part of what happened, and it hit me as never before. Please come to my chapel tomorrow and give this sermon for both worship services.”

I was hesitant to do so because I thought it might be too “theatrical” and not really a sermon for a worship service. He insisted and I gave in, and the next day I preached to 400 or more Army basic trainees in two separate services. Those young men had been running, doing push-ups, and generally working hard all week. They tended to experience immediate and massive drowsiness upon sitting down. Keeping them awake was a challenge of major proportion. But they listened intently to Jesse! They paid attention!

The experience moved me even more than it did them. Here I was, telling the age-old story of Christ’s birth, and they were involved with the sermon, listening to the good news with interest shining in their eyes—not with the glazed look of “Oh, yeah, I’ve heard this one a thousand times before . . . ho-hum.”

Since then, I have been a variety of biblical people, among them the centurion; Daniel; Joseph with the many-colored coat; Lazarus; one of the Wise Men who traveled to Bethlehem after studying the Old Testament prophecies; Jonah; Solomon—the wise guy who became a wise man; and the soldier of Ephesians 6 (using modern military gear to illustrate the Christian armor).

I have seen first-person preaching change how people listen to sermons. I have seen it provide them a banquet from the Word in a way that penetrates the ho-hum exteriors many wear to worship. I’ve learned that first-person dramatic monologues are a powerful vehicle for the delivery of life-changing truths.

Studying for and delivering first-person sermons has touched me personally as well. It has deepened my understanding of Scripture and how God works with people. As well as changing my preaching, it has fed my soul.

I believe first-person sermons can work for you, too.

“Who, me? I am Ethan, the father of Mary Magdalene. I used to hide the fact that she was my daughter. We were so ashamed of her and what she had become. We wanted to disown her. But then she met Jesus and . . .”

David Marshall

How shall we recapture the enthusiasm of our first love?

Night clouds at dawn


b

liss was it in that dawn to be alive!” said Wordsworth of one of the great beginnings of modern history. When great movements begin there is a vigor and an elation that juggernauts through obstacles and shakes the world. This was true of the post-Pentecost Christian church. G. K. Chesterton said that the early church was “a winged thunderbolt of everlasting enthusiasm.” The Lord was risen indeed, and had ascended to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

With that knowledge burning within them the apostles—who had run from Gethsemane to bolt-holes and were, at first, unwilling to believe the Resurrection—could outface magistrates, councils, judges, even Caesar himself. From an intensely heated center of burning zeal, a vast field of lava was thrown out to the limits of the Roman world. “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive!”

In the midst of it all some were untouched. The Sadducees pursued power and, in matters of faith, adhered to the “higher criticism.” The Pharisees were legalistic perfectionists and, as always, split hairs. The Zealots were inward-looking, unable to see beyond their mind-shuttered cult. Vespasian and Titus waited with their legions.

But the unlikely heroes redeemed the time, preached Christ and Him crucified. And the world was changed.

Peril from within

In the age after Vespasian and Titus had done their work, it was the church
that began to undergo a change. As the witnesses of the first dawn died at their posts their successors prepared earnestly to "contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." John wrote his three letters when the bliss of the first great dawning had all but died out. He wanted the church to know that the real peril she faced was not persecution from without, but seduction from within.

The church had grown its own Sadducees, pursuers of power with a cynical disregard for faith. It had grown its own Pharisees, legalistic perfectionists trying to make it to the kingdom on all fours, unwilling to accept the white garment of righteousness "which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9). It had grown its own Zealots, closed-minded, exclusivistic exponents of a cult.

In addition, for good measure, the church had also thrown up the Gnostics, who wanted to make Christianity "intellectually respectable." They broke into two wings: one expounding celibacy and perfectionism; the second, libertinage—the flouting of the law of God! the taking of God's grace for granted!

The dawning was long past. Night clouds were lowering.

But "the winged thunderbolt of everlasting enthusiasm," the spiritual dynamic of Pentecost, lived on in the minds of some. God had His pure spirits in every age. Within this tradition the Advent awakening exploded in the early nineteenth century and threw out the "winged thunderbolt" of the church we hold dear.

Elatedly, our pioneers searched the Scriptures. Old truths were rediscovered. New truths—truths preserved to be discovered in the end-time—came to light. They found that the great prophecies of Scripture fitted into a beautiful mosaic; an intricate, syntactic whole. They found that the theology of salvation—grace, law, justification, sanctification, glorification—was another beautiful whole and all symbolized by the messages of three angels. "Bliss were it in that dawn to be alive!"

The fading of the dream

Approximately 130 years later Gordon Bietz wrote that the dream of Adventism "has faded as too many days have come and gone. . . . [It] has waned as generation after generation is born into a church without experiencing its message. . . . [It] has been dissipated by argument over doctrinal nuance."

Have we spawned our Sadducees of power hunger, our Pharisees of legalism and perfectionism, our Zealots of nostalgia, closed-minded cultism, and our Gnostics of libertinage? Are they bringing the night clouds to our dawning, their arguments destroying our dream of a finished work—shading in the nuances of theology when the vast majority of the millions seething in our cities have not so much as accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour? Nor even been called upon by us to consider doing so?

In the first great dawning at Pentecost, as in the Advent dawning of the past century, the great "this above all" was "communicating the good news, bringing souls to their Saviour. The stale crusts of obscure theological chatter are no substitute for the Bread of Life that a man may eat and never die. Why, the very vocabulary, the language used by the combatants in theological debate, is entirely unintelligible to the vast majority of our neighbors who have yet to accept Christ.

The gospel does not belong to theologians. It is not an academic discipline. It is the power of God unto salvation. But it is in danger of being lost under a mountain of very long words. In the hands of Jesus the gospel was sublimely simple, simply sublime. We could do worse than keep it that way.

In the early church—of the first or nineteenth centuries—no one fulfilled the function of witchfinder general. No one was commissioned to creep around the church placing upon all those whose views disagreed with his own the stigma of "heretic." Peter didn't always agree with Paul, and the Jewish Christians didn't always see eye to eye with the gentle Christians. For all that there was unity: a unity of purpose, of mission, in the face of which any differences of view, any clash of personalities, was of no relevance whatever.

Likewise, in the excitement of the early Advent movement there were differences of view, even clashes of personality. But it mattered naught. They had a unity of mission and purpose, an all-important message that overrode all else. And they went forward mightily!

Renewing the vigor

This is not the time to withdraw into defensive isolationism. It is not the time to withdraw into a cocoon of comfort, but unintelligible, theological language and debate. It is not the time for the church to look inward upon itself—it's problems, its differences, its divisions. It is the time for it to look outward and once again to glimpse the challenge of an unfinished work, a mighty message that has yet to reach the ends of the earth!

The greatest want of the church is not the want of power-pursuing, high-critical Sadducees; not that of legalistic, perfectionistic, nit-picking, minds-at-ground-level Pharisees; not of inward-looking, chauvinistic zealots who would make of the cause of Jesus Christ no more than another mind-shattered cult.

The greatest want of the church is the want of men and women who will say, "Lord, take my mind, my voice, my hands, my feet, my will, my heart, my life, myself—and I will be ever only all for Thee."

When there is that kind of commitment, the Spirit will work, and work mightily. Bliss were it in that dawn to be alive—for the day that it ushers in will know no nightfall.

Sermon introductions

Floyd Bresee

A sermon is a little like a horse. Each has three basic parts: a head (introduction), a body, and a tail (conclusion). It’s easy to see why a horse needs a head, but why does a sermon need an introduction?

Sermon introductions should fulfill at least five purposes. Perhaps you don’t need all five in every sermon, but you should have all five in your mind every time you prepare a sermon.

1. An introduction establishes audience rapport. Sensitive speakers begin their speeches by making friends with the audience. Establishing good audience rapport is extremely important because your impact as a speaker is determined less by what you say than by what your listener thinks of you while you say it.

As a pastor, your sermon introduction should be shorter than the introductions used in other speaking situations. First, because the early parts of the worship service should already have warmed and united the listeners, putting them in a worshipful frame of mind. Second, because as pastor, you have already established your rapport through every sermon previously preached, every marriage performed, every funeral conducted, every ministry done for your congregation.

The introduction should not likely comprise more than 10 to 15 percent of your sermon. Don’t spend so much time setting the table that there’s no time left to eat.

2. An introduction gains attention. The young preacher asked, “What’s the best way to get the attention of your congregation when you stand up to preach?” The old preacher answered, “Give them something to attend to.”

Never stand up until you know exactly what your first and last sentences will be. And make that first pitch right across the plate, belt-high. If you don’t get your listeners’ attention in the first 60 seconds, you may never get it.

3. An introduction arouses interest in your topic. I heard a minister whose topic was legalistic religion begin “Nineteen hundred years ago there was a religious group who kept all the Ten Commandments, paid a faithful tithe, was most faithful in every detail of religious life—and they murdered Christ!” Now, there’s an introduction that aroused interest in the topic.

The introduction is the first part of the sermon presented, but it should be one of the last parts of the sermon prepared. It’s important to know something about persons before you introduce them to others. And it’s necessary to know a great deal about your sermon before you decide how to introduce it to your audience.

4. An introduction gives your theme. Most speakers give their subject in the introduction, but few clarify their theme. The subject is much less interesting than a good theme, for the subject merely says what you’re going to talk about. The theme tells what you’re going to say about it. It is your sermon in a sentence. Don’t say “I’m going to talk about attitudes.” Rather, say “The thought I would like us to think through together this morning is this: We see things, not as they are, but as we are.”

Some don’t want to give their theme in the introduction because they want to maintain an air of expectancy. But a good theme can awaken interest and make the rest of your sermon easier for listeners to understand.

A few days ago I stood where Abraham Lincoln gave his famous Gettysburg Address. At the traditional site from which he spoke in dedicating this American Civil War cemetery there is now a monument to freedom. It has a large figure at the top. Four other figures, symbolizing four aspects of freedom, surround the base.

Walking around the monument, I viewed it from the east, then south, west, and north. From each side I saw the freedom symbol, but the additional figures below helped me understand more completely what freedom means.

Let the large freedom figure symbolize your sermon theme. The smaller figures are the other parts of your sermon. Your listeners will get more out of your theme if you let them see it first, then see it better as you approach it from its various sides.

5. An introduction presents a pre-summary. If you’ve seen the whole picture, a jigsaw puzzle is a lot easier to put together. If your introduction gives a little overview of your sermon, the congregation will find it a lot easier to put together as they listen. For example, you might tell them, “First we’ll talk about why we ought to love; then we’ll learn how to love.” Or: “Let’s look at Jeremiah’s background, his message, and his reward.”

I wouldn’t suggest that every sermon needs a pre-summary. But fear only simplistic ideas, not simple organization. You can’t hit people between the eyes while you’re preaching over their heads.
Letters
From page 2

basic stand on this issue. I think that the majority of Adventists would take the stand that we cannot condone abortion for women with a normal pregnancy and who are physically and emotionally healthy.

Of course, in many countries abortion is used as a means of population control. Since we should not coerce people to observe Christian standards through government legislation, we should not seek to debate the issue of abortion at the political level.

You may be interested to know that I am a missionary physician working in a hospital in which we have about 100 deliveries per month. There is only one abortion done every few months here, and it is always for very clear-cut medical reasons. —Roland Ostring, Tsuen Wan Adventist Hospital, Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong.

The case study method

I certainly agree that the case study is a good method of applying theological learning to actual life situations (“A Case for the Case Study Approach,” September 1990). It is too bad that the author did not refer to the fact that theological education has been using the case method for a considerable time. There exists an Association for Case Teaching, which is open to case teachers and to institutions and is concerned only with theological and church education. The executive codirectors are Alice and Robert Evans, P.O. Box 243, Simsbury, CT 06070. A bibliography of available cases, Cases in Theological Education, was last published in 1981. A new one is in preparation. The association also publishes regularly the Journal for Case Teaching. The first issue appeared in the fall of 1989.

The director of the Case Clearing House, Stephen Peterson (Yale Divinity School Library, 409 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06510), can give further information on these publications. Also, there are a number of books containing cases and further background information. —Wilhelm C. Linss, professor of New Testament, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

Home school article disturbs

I was more than a little bit disturbed by your article “Home Schools Have Their Place” (September 1990) for two reasons: First, I am surprised that one who appears to be knowledgeable of what Ellen White says on the age for school entrance wouldn’t also know that she made that statement because there were no church schools available (see Selected Messages [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980], book 3, p. 216). On page 218 of the same book she praised a kindergarten with children as young as 5 years old in attendance.

My second concern is that in a sense you promote home schools in a magazine that goes to all of our ministers, many of whom already have a problem supporting our church schools. How can our ministers “home-school” and still portray a spirit of cooperation and support for our church schools, academies, and colleges? The two don’t mix.

I wonder how it would go over with the ministry if we encouraged our teachers and their families to “home-church.” I believe I could agree with you that “home schools have their place,” but only where “home church” has its place —where no other Adventist option is available. —Daniel Peters, associate superintendent of schools, Kansas-Nebraska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Topeka, Kansas.

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MINISTRY/JANUARY/1991 25
Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality

Western society faces a paradox—an increasing spirituality and a decreasing involvement in organized religion. Given the assaults on religion's credibility over the past 150 years, anyone could have predicted the public's abandonment of religious organizations. However, Leech does not find the situation completely negative. People have worshiped many gods over the centuries, and we need to lay some of them to rest. Leech states, "To hold to a false and inadequate view of God is more serious an obstacle to faith than atheism, and so the abandonment of false views is a necessary purifying element."

The author, an Anglican priest, has written two previous books on spirituality. In Experiencing God he attempts to help the layperson discern pathways that lead to the true God. He writes specifically for people who hunger for a God-centered spirituality yet have little knowledge of how others experience Divinity. By targeting this audience, the author has produced a readable and moving introduction to the God who longs to be known by us. The reader will crave a reading introduction to the God who longs to be known by us. The reader will crave a reading.

Leech presents God in such alluring terms in this book that while reading it I often felt my spirit soar to reach Him. Leech's inspirational and nontechnical writing style gives us much to digest. Occasionally the reading becomes tedious because of detail and references to what others have written. One senses this is because of the author's desire not to overlook anything that might make the message clearer.

Conservative Christians will not agree with all Leech writes in this volume. Some will differ with ideas found in the chapters on the eucharistic God, God of the abyss, and God the mother. Others will question some of Leech's resources. But these few differences should not detract from the integrity of the book's message and the author's ability to speak to both the intellect and the heart.

The postscript includes 13 summary statements that bring the material together and provide the final focus for a renewed spirituality. The last statement concludes with this vision of spirituality: "In the struggles for a more human world, a renewed spirituality will come to discern the face of God, the holy and just One, and to share in the peace of God which passes all understanding." Leach succeeds in stimulating a desire for spiritual renewal.

Presence and Power: Releasing the Holy Spirit in Your Life and Church

Bauman, a Mennonite pastor, has been actively involved in the Holy Spirit renewal movement in the Mennonite Church since the 1970s. In this thought-provoking study, Bauman explores the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church and the varied experiences of "baptism with the Spirit" recorded in the New Testament. He approaches the subject in a thoroughly biblical manner. Bauman rejects the two-stage theology of Wesley and affirms that God intends that believers experience baptism with the Spirit at the time of conversion.

Why then do so few believers experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives? Bauman suggests that these believers have been taught a truncated gospel. They understand salvation as the forgiveness of sins, but have not been taught to claim the gift of the Holy Spirit as God's power and presence. Therefore, they limit the Holy Spirit's activity in their lives. Some resist yielding themselves to the Holy Spirit's control because they are afraid that God will work in ways too dramatic for them.

Bauman traces the history of the Holy Spirit renewal movement and observes that a "third wave" renewal movement is bringing new life and vitality to some churches. Joyful fellowship replaces borrowing, impersonal church attendance; warmth and vibrancy make cold, formal worship obsolete. Quite distinct from the "first wave" Pentecostal movement, and the "second wave," charismatic movement, this movement emphasizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit and allows more freedom in worship, but without the manifestation of speaking in tongues. Some Seventh-day Adventist congregations in North America feel the impact of this "third wave" Holy Spirit renewal movement. They are experiencing new life in the Spirit. Others condemn the Holy Spirit renewal movement within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, pointing to a few extremists. But wasn't this the same kind of mistake the Reformers made when they condemned the Radical Reformation? We must look beyond the extremes and consider the possibility that the Holy Spirit moves in some of these churches.

The questions that Bauman raises are vital for each one of us: Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Do you know the Holy Spirit as God's presence and power in your life? Could it be that we make the Holy Spirit part of our doctrine without inviting Him into our lives and worship?

I suggest that you read Presence and Power to your reading list. It will challenge your thinking and may well make a difference in your ministry.

Journeys Toward Narrative Preaching

The six contributors to this interesting book tell how they developed their skills in narrative preaching. With each essay they also provide an illustrative sermon. As a pastor, your appreciation of the book will depend on your initial position. If you are determined to avoid narrative preaching and stick to "rational exposition of truth," then you probably won't read it. Yet this might be the book you need to broaden your style.

Robinson makes a good overture in
the introduction, but his recognition of narrative form in the Bible, faith, worship, and the liturgical year is not developed in the rest of the book.

In an excellent essay, "Retelling Biblical Narratives as the Foundation for Preaching," Richard L. Thulin reflects on his surprise at the effects of narrative preaching: "I found myself worried about the fact that I may have discovered the nonbiblical story only to lose the Bible's. Such a trade might make for enthusiastic listening, but it would not necessarily provide for Christian proclamation." The writers clearly point out that storytelling as preaching is fundamentally biblical; otherwise much of the Old Testament and the Acts of the Apostles would be meaningless. Thulin's sermon demonstrates very well how a nonbiblical story can cast new light on the biblical text.

Seeking to define the parameters of the style, Lucy Rose tells the story of "Christina." But the result is disappointing—a rather forced mix of theory and story.

Robert G. Hughes's essay "Narrative as Plot" is not uninteresting, but his sermon "From Ashes to Alleluia" is compelling.

Eugene L. Lowry, writing about personal experience with narrative preaching, brings in many fresh ideas. For example, he says that, like a jazz musician, the Black preacher "understands that for the sermon to happen, it must move to a final celebrative event—a denouement." Lowry proceeds with a commanding and poetic sermon on Nicodemus.

Robinson (the editor) writes the fifth essay. His example of the Samaritan parable is unimpressive. But he does make some useful comments on good moralistic preaching and the need for careful biblical scholarship in these types of sermons. I wish he had developed both of these topics more.

The last contribution, Michael E. Williams' "Preaching as Storytelling," is interesting but original. He provides another sermonic interview with Job.

The book contains a reasonably full bibliography, though I noticed some recent publications missing. I found the volume worth studying and would recommend it for use in ministerial workshops.

The Quotable Spurgeon
ommends exercises for devotional periods. For best results, the reader needs to read carefully, reflect upon, and apply what the author offers.

Spiritual Friend—Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction

Edwards, an Episcopalian priest, provides the reader with an excellent resource for spiritual direction. He explores the traditional methods of spiritual direction and also warns of possible problems. Edwards devotes a major portion of the book to finding a qualified spiritual director, being one, and preparing those who are called to this ministry.

A History of Christian Spirituality

In this volume Holmes gives us one of the most comprehensive overviews and introductions to Eastern and Western spiritual writings available. It is primarily a textbook with information on the historical context and development of spirituality.

The Naked Church

Jacobsen gives us a challenging look at the state of spirituality in the modern Christian church. Basically he applies the Laodicean message to the contemporary church. Jacobsen calls the church back to intimacy with God and presents practical help for the process. I believe this one is one of the best books currently available on the subject.

Pastoral Spirituality—A Focus for Ministry

Johnson calls pastors back to being persons of God as the basis for doing ministry. This excellent book examines the minister’s work from a spiritual perspective and includes exercises for applying what it teaches.

Soul Friend—The Practice of Christian Spirituality

This work explores spirituality from the dimension of spiritual formation and working with a friend or director. Leech gives a good survey of the history of Christian spirituality and examines psychological growth. The author, an English Anglican priest, has written extensively on spirituality. Even if you don’t agree with all it contains, this book can help you evaluate your own spirituality and assist you in guiding others.

Liberating the Leader’s Prayer Life
Terry Muck, Christianity Today, Carol Stream, Illinois, 1985, 176 pages, $10.95, hardcover.

Muck’s book is the result of his research on the devotional lives of contemporary Christian leaders. His greatest contribution lies in the wealth of alternative ideas he presents for broadening and enriching one’s prayer life.

The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality

This work provides a wealth of material on spirituality in dictionary format. I found the text easy to read and understand. The book contains concise information on almost any topic, theology, philosophy, or name associated with spirituality.


Richard Foster says this is “the book of the decade.” It offers an excellent theological and theoretical base for Christian disciplines. Willard believes that we will be able to respond as Christ did in life’s crises only as we learn to live as He did in complete daily dependence on God. I believe that this is one of the best books available on the disciplined life. It focuses on the dynamics of the spiritual disciplines and their capacity for transforming those who practice them.

The Contemplative Pastor, Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction

This book, by one of my favorite authors, inspires and challenges the reader. It also gives suggestions for implementing priorities and finding focus in ministry. “The Unbusy Pastor” and “The Subversive Pastor” chapters give a clear call for a ministry that will find power in personal relationships with God and man. Peterson’s strategy is to change society from within rather than through destructive confrontation. He exhorts pastors to pray, preach, and listen—relevant advice for a ministry that often seems rootless and suffering from role confusion.

The Struggle of Prayer
Donald G. Bloesch, Helmers and Howard, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1988, 192 pages, $7.95, paper.

Though it has already been reviewed in Ministry, I want to mention this volume again because it offers one of the better theologies of prayer and spirituality. Bloesch distinguishes between evangelical and mystical traditions. He sees prayer as the constant struggle to take hold of God’s outstretched hand, which calls for a response of obedience.

Recently noted

Many devotional books do not emphasize the importance of obedience in the spiritual life. This one does. Palms, editor of Decision magazine, centers his writing on knowing Christ and the peace it brings. God reinforces our commitments with results. Palms covers a wide range of problems that rob us of joy in our spiritual lives. There is something here for everyone.


Founder and former editor of Christianity Today, Henry expounds on theological social issues confronting all Christians. Organized alphabetically into 37 subjects, this work affords readers a taste of the best writing of one of the great evangelical thinkers of this century.
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The nation rejoiced when the brave boy Peter pushed his finger in the dike to hold back the ocean. To bolster one of the weakest points in the training of pastors the Ministerial Association has prepared the Manual for Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Interns and Intern Supervisors.

This manual has two objectives. The first section of eight chapters assists supervisors in understanding and fulfilling their responsibilities. Topics here include "Supervision Defined," "Qualifications of Supervisors," and "The Four Tasks of Supervisors: Talk, Show, Assign, Evaluate."

The last four chapters deal with the 50 ministerial functions with which the intern should be acquainted. These functions fall into seven categories: "Personal Growth," "Personal Relationships," "Evangelism and Church Growth," "Lay Training," "Preaching and Worship," "Pastoral Care and Nurture," and "Organization and Administration."

The manual also includes several evaluation instruments.

You can obtain the manual from the Ministerial Supply Center, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600, for US$11.50. For more information, call (301) 680-6508.

Keeping those "to do" items current

Several years ago as I dug through a stack of papers to find that note about Mrs. Schmidt's surgery (when was she going to the hospital and to which hospital was she going to be admitted?), I came across the single most helpful hint I have ever found.

Begin with 26 suspension file folders. Label them as follows: "This Year," "Next Year"; a folder for each month ("January," "February," etc.); a folder for each of the five weeks in a month ("Week One," "Week Two," etc.); and a folder for each of the days in the week ("Sunday," "Monday," etc.).

Keep the folders in your desk file drawer, the day-of-the-week folders behind the appropriate week-of-the-month folder (e.g., "First Week"), behind the appropriate month folder (e.g., "January"), behind the "This Year" folder, with the "Next Year" folder at the back of the group of folders.

As you come across items you need to remember at a specific time, slip them into the appropriate folders. Items to be done later this week go into one of the day-of-the-week folders. Items to be done later in the month go into the folder for the appropriate week of the month. And items to be done in succeeding months or next year go into the corresponding folders.

When you are finished with Monday's file in the first week of January, slip it behind "Week Two." When you begin the second week, separate the "Week Two" file's contents into "Sunday" and "Saturday." Likewise, when you begin a new month, move the week files behind that month's folder, and the day files behind the "Week One" file.

Then place the items in that month's file into the appropriate folders. In this way you have a perpetual reminder file. Just pull up the proper folder when you get to your desk, and the necessary "To Do" items are there for you.

Can't answer that letter on Tuesday? Drop it in Wednesday's file. Find a great Christmas sermon starter? Drop it in December's file. Yes, and there in Thursday's file is the note about Mrs. Schmidt's hospitalization.

This technique will encourage a clean desk top. But more important, it will give you more time by providing an immediate "To Do" list. It will also keep you in contact with the important events in the lives of your parishioners.–Donald W. Sandmann, Mountainside, New Jersey.

Helping pastoral visitation

Early in my last pastorate a retired lady offered to help me with my pastoral visitation program. We divided the parish into 32 geographical areas. On the morning of visitation day she would call and set up appointments for the lay visitor and me in one of those areas. In the afternoon, then, we would make seven to eight calls. This program enabled us to make more than 400 calls in a year.–Henry E. Riley, Jr., Farmville, Virginia.

The program is designed for persons who wish to improve their pastoral care and counseling skills for parish ministry or to obtain certification in specialized ministry such as hospital chaplaincy.

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