Hazards of Baptism
Not so certain

J. David Newman's May 1991 editorial, "Are There Moral Absolutes?" raises some disturbing questions. Newman attacks the denial of moral absolutes by retelling the pallid story of the captive woman who got pregnant by a guard in order to obtain freedom to return to her family. He suggests trusting God would have worked better. Did it solve the problem of the 4,326 (or whatever number there were) other captive women who died in prison?

Ten good hypotheses, one for each commandment, would destroy his support for absolutes. Would he, as a POW, steal food from the mess hall to feed his starving buddies, or would he trust God to fill their bellies? I would steal. Newman would brand my conduct as "always unacceptable." But the world, and, I think, God, would praise me as a hero.—Hal H. Eaton, Mouth of Wilson, Virginia.

I agree that the Ten Commandments are moral absolutes. In fact, I see two absolutes, God's love and God's law. Do we discover tension when we look at these two absolutes? Yes! It is tension that only the cross can resolve.

The cross measures the disaster of sin. It shows how terrible it is to violate the righteousness of God—to disobey God's law. Then the cross measures the love of God: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). The Bible declares that the cross resolves the tension: "He can be just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus" (see Rom. 3:26). "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10, NKJV).

Christ met the claims of God's absolutes. He said, "I have kept My Father's commandments" (John 15:10, NKJV). "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46, NKJV). In becoming our Saviour, He did not have or need a mediator. He lived in dependence on and in union with His Father.

We need, and have, a mediator, the man Christ Jesus. Our righteousness comes from Him, not from the law. It is because He quickens us to life, forgives us, makes us new, and gives us His Holy Spirit and His love that we can obey His absolutes.—David Manzano, pastor, Baytown-LaPorte Seventh-day Adventist Church, Baytown, Texas.

In his May editorial, J. David Newman states: "God never leaves us in a position in which we are forced to break one of the Ten Commandments" and says that these commandments "are absolutes that allow no exceptions." But then he adds: "If there is a conflict between the two [the first four and the last six commandments], our relationship to God must take precedence over all other relationships."

These statements appear to contradict each other.

Since it is true that no one is ever forced to break any of the Ten Commandments, and since these laws allow no exceptions, would it not be more logically and theologically correct to state that there will never be a genuine conflict between the vertical and horizontal relationships God's law requires? Since God is the author of the entire Decalogue, and since this law is a transcript of His consistent, nonconflicting character, there can be no conflict between any of His moral requirements.—Ron du Preez, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Much as I would like to embrace the position taken in the editorial, I believe that it fails to mesh with reality. Even when we accept the Bible as the final authority, we encounter complex problems. Scripture represents God as directing the Israelites to annihilate (murder) whole nations. And it represents Him as directing Israel in the conquest (theft) of land they had left voluntarily and to which they no longer had legal claim. During the Exodus His chief liberator didn't tell Pharaoh of his intention to leave and not return, but merely requested (lied about) a three-day spiritual retreat. Why do we commend Abraham for his willingness to offer his son as a human sacrifice?

I admit that I'm attracted by the simplicity, security, and certainty of the moral-absolutist position. However, it comes with a price—a lack of integrity to real life. While the Ten Commandments lay down eternal principles that are always valid, at times we have to weigh all the principles impacting on a situation and decide which principle or principles will take priority. This approach, while not as comfortable or as tidy as moral absolutism, meshes more nearly with both the biblical record and the historic practice of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.—James Coffin, Warburton, Victoria, Australia.

Biblical light rather than rumor

For about two years now I've been receiving and reading Ministry with interest. I've deeply appreciated some of your articles, both theological and practical. To say "Thank you" is the purpose of this letter—and may God continue your ministry of reaching out.

I feel confident that Ministry has been used of God to help others see you in a biblical light rather than in a context of rumors.—Philard L. Rounds, Minister of Planned Giving, First United Methodist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma.
**First Glance**

**Baptism is serious business**, but it does have its lighter side. You will chuckle and identify with some of the experiences Daniel Walter narrates in "The Mechanics and Hazards of Baptizing."

**Harwood Lockton and John Fowler**, one of the editors, both discuss creation. While some will dismiss the biblical account as myth and confine it to the storyteller’s art, others believe that a literal understanding of the first Adam and the world into which he came is foundational to a correct understanding of the work of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ.

**Internship is no easy task.** I know one young minister who left pastoral work because his supervisor pastor did not believe in days off and insisted that he work seven days a week. I also know of some senior pastors who have requested not to have to train interns because they find the job so difficult. Interns need patience, and senior pastors need compassion. You will not want to miss Lorna Arthur’s "Internship or Internment?"

**And at the end of the day** when you feel worn to a frazzle, drift off to sleep by reading how to "reduce the stress of ministry."

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Cover illustration by Mary Rumford

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_Full text on the following pages._
Editor pastors church

J. David Newman

I have always felt that those who teach and lead in ministry should be involved on the practical as well as the theoretical level. So one year ago I began pastoring a small church (85 members) in the Washington metropolitan area.

My involvement came about in this way: When I found out that the pastor of this church would be retiring, I began wondering if the opening would provide me the opportunity to once again practice my pastoral skills. I decided that if I could find two other persons who shared the same vision, we could, as a team of volunteer ministers, adequately meet the pastoral needs of the church.

With the approval of the church board, Graham Bingham, Derris Krause, and I—all of whom have had pastoral experience—formed the original staff. Unfortunately, before our team could even begin functioning, Graham moved to a new responsibility in Oregon. So it was just Derris (who works for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency International) and I who ended up with the challenge.

We have experienced again the joys and trials of pastoring. We preach, visit, teach, and counsel. We have been awakened to solve marriage crises, have counseled families with money problems, and have visited the inactive and the discouraged. Perhaps the greatest satisfaction has come from working with a church willing to change and adapt so as to be relevant to its own members and to the local community.

During the past year we have made changes in the worship service: we have added more singing (10-15 minutes of it) at the beginning of the service and introduced a meditation period as part of the pastoral prayer. And we are in the process of completely overhauling our adult Sabbath school. (Instead of the traditional program and one large Sabbath school class, we will have small groups that focus on studying the Scriptures and on mission.)

Our worship service continues to evolve as we consider how to make it more inquirer-based. Our music is also changing: we're making both our sound and our words more contemporary. Sentiments that met the needs of seventeenth-century people often don't meet the needs of those who live near the beginning of the twenty-first century.

While tradition is helpful, there is nothing sacred about it. The religious leaders of Jesus' day often challenged Him because He wouldn't blindly follow the traditions of His church. He taught His disciples how to discover what is relevant and how to determine what should be discarded.

Don't lose your job

So how do you go about changing the status quo in your church without being changed for another pastor? Very carefully!

Develop a relationship. Before you, as the pastor, can make any change, you should develop a trust relationship with your church members. This relationship is nurtured when your people sense that you have at heart their best interests rather than your own. The members also need to see that you have a passion for people, for whole people—that you are concerned about their worries, their joys, and their development as complete persons in Jesus Christ.

Demonstrate a need. Once relationships have been developed, you must demonstrate a need. People do not change, churches do not change, if they feel no needs. Use your pastoral skills to develop a "divine" discontent. You can do so by sharing informally and formally what is happening in other churches, by asking questions about why this is done and why that is done, and by listening to and highlighting the questions that your members themselves raise.

Surface and process solutions. Once you have made the church aware of the need, you then work through small groups to bring solutions to the surface. Processing these solutions, these changes, is very important. Do not bypass the established structure, the boards and committees. If you do, you will soon discover some unhappy people.

Evaluate the changes. Whenever you introduce change, convey the message that it is temporary, or conditional. Few people will object to change when you tell them that it is not permanent, that if they don't like it they can always go back to the old ways.

When we changed our worship service, we told the congregation that we would implement the changes for one quarter and then evaluate the changes. At the end of the quarter 41 persons filled out a three-page evaluation form that asked questions about the changes and that made room for their own comments as well. The responses showed wide acceptance of the changes.

One great advantage of an evaluation system is that it tends to quiet those who resist change no matter how much the
church needs to change. The data such an evaluation provides often allows you to counter their arguments that “most of the people are against this” and “it really isn’t working.” It gives you information that can be the basis of open discussion, providing an opportunity for clarifying misconceptions and misunderstandings. As this dialogue continues, the church will continue to change.

If you take it slowly, one step at a time, one item at a time, you will be surprised how easy it is to bring about growth in your church.

This past year has given me a new appreciation for the readers of this magazine—the pastors who read and implement what we publish. I now look at Ministry from two perspectives—those of producer and of consumer. May Ministry continue to become ever more relevant to your needs as pastors.

Confessing God as Creator

John M. Fowler

The eternal gospel proclaimed by the angel of Revelation 14:6 calls for the worship of “him who made heaven and earth” (verse 7). As a pastor committed to the proclamation of this gospel, I find this call more than a reminder of our origin: it is a call to confess that God is the Creator.

Can one be truly Christian without such a confession? An agnostic could dismiss the Genesis account as a fable that requires no particular response. A scientist could look to “an accidental collocation of atoms” for the origin of life. A philosopher might turn to a first cause. And a poet could talk of life as a “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” But the Christian cannot but begin with a faith affirmation in a Person: “In the beginning God created . . .”

Why is the continual affirmation of Genesis 1 so important to Christian faith and ministry?

The Christian apex

First, to affirm God’s creatorship is to acknowledge that the sovereign Lord is at the apex of the Christian’s worldview. Because God is, a Christian can say, “I am. Without Him, I am not.” “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. . . . Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.”

The Christian perspective of history, time, and space finds its origin and meaning within the contours of Genesis. To Christians God constitutes the ultimate reality. He is the cause and designer of life. His personal God guarantees life’s structure, purpose, and order: “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). As Schaeffer points out: “The strength of the Christian system—the acid test of it—is that everything fits under the apex of the existent, infinite-personal God, and it is the only system in the world where this is true. No other system has an apex under which everything fits. . . . Without losing his own integrity, the Christian can see everything fitting into place beneath the Christian apex of the existence of the infinite-personal God.”

The Genesis proclamation “Let us make man” and the attendant details of the Creator’s involvement in the shaping of human life make it clear that the Creator of the cosmos is not a distant, impersonal, absolute force or idea or mind, but a person.

In saying that the Creator is personal, we are not ranking God’s nature relative to our own. At the least we are saying that God cannot be less than the human person, and this at once destroys human pretension to create its own god. At the most we are saying that the incomprehensible and infinite God has revealed Himself in a kind of relationship that could only be described in terms of personhood. What is not personal is obviously less than personal, and this is not the biblical concept of God.

The personhood of God, however, is not to be understood in terms of the limitations inherent in human personality, but rather in possibilities of relationships that involve love, fellowship, communication, and historical and existential purposes. Hence we could talk of God as entirely the other and at the same time approach Him as immediately near. He is both the transcendent and the immanent one.

The other and near

The second reason why Christian proclamation must remain committed to the Genesis account is that only that account maintains the Creator’s distinction from creation while yet relating Him to it. The point is crucial in facing the twin temptations constant in human history: that of identifying the Creator with creation (common to pantheism and most Eastern mysticism) and that of isolating the Creator from creation (such as the attempt of platonics and secular humanism to explain nature and human potential without a personal God).

So the biblical insistence on a creation ex nihilo shows that the God of the Bible is transcendent over and independent of creation and is truly free. At the same time, this God is personal in that He is capable of relating to His creatures. In other words, God creates, but He is not dependent for His creation on any preexistent substance. He relates, but for His relation He is not reliant on any external motivating force. Both the will to create and the will to relate are internal to Him. He is entirely the other, absolutely Himself. It is this exclusivity of God that leads the Christian proclamation to deny any potentiality within the creature to become God. Any pretension to such potentiality is foreign to a Christian perspective of life, and hence Christians are always called upon to reflect upon their limitations. Yet the power of grace allows them to accept their finitude courageously.

(Continued on page 29)
The mechanics and hazards of baptizing

M. Daniel Walter

Snakes, electric eels, and disappearing baptizers—you’ll never again take baptism for granted!

I was on the riverbank with the congregation, while our mission president conducted the baptism. He had just stepped up to a candidate and was about to raise his right hand in prayer when I noticed a 10-foot bushmaster—an exceedingly poisonous and aggressive snake—swimming toward him. Repressing my panic, I got his attention and pointed to the approaching serpent. With baited breath, I waited to see what he would do. Deliberately, he cupped his right hand and skimmed it over the surface, sending a strong spray into the snake’s face. It stopped, turned about, and then fled.

A hundred such hazards await pastors and candidates who dare to enter the murky Amazonian waters for baptism ceremonies. Piranhas, candirus, crocodiles, leeches, and a host of similar dangers are always lurking in that river. Electric eels of considerable size poked their heads up like periscopes to witness the first baptism I conducted. To shoo away the stingrays that lay in wait for any bare foot that would dare step on or near them I learned early to tap about with a stick as I entered the water. The Lord controls natural hazards. Yet He does leave a few things for pastors to figure out!

Caught away by the spirit?

One inexperienced pastor conducted a baptism near the shore of the Amazon on a dark night. He lowered the first candidate downstream into the water and lost his grip as he tried to raise him up against the current. In the darkness, the “spirit” caught the candidate away—into eternity! Lesson: Beware of nocturnal baptisms in murky waters, and never immerse a candidate downstream. When one baptizes upstream, the current helps one raise the candidate to his or her feet.

Rivers have provided me a number of baptismal adventures. Once the only location I could find suitable for baptizing a group of 20 or so candidates was a submerged rock ledge near the river’s edge. All went well until I came to the end of the line. As I backed toward the last candidate, I stepped off the ledge and into deep water. Lesson: When baptizing near deep water one must know how to swim!

Steeply sloping river channels gave me fits at first. Then I learned to make steps for my feet by pressing them into the mud while entering the water. Fixing my feet firmly in the mud when I reached a point at which the water was well above my waist, I would call for the candidates one by one. Facing them downstream, I would immerse each of them against the current and then allow the current to help me raise them up again. By keeping them between myself and the bank, I maintained more control—preventing them from being “caught away.”

Such circumstances sometimes required me to raise my left hand instead of the preferred right hand for the prayer. In some cultures the left hand is considered unclean. To avoid offending anyone, I sometimes had to shift my hands around a bit between the prayer and the immersion.
On one occasion I held a baptism at a church built on a log raft that floated on the Amazon. At one corner of the raft the church members had constructed a wooden cage that was partially submerged, a ladder reaching down to the cage floor. On Friday afternoon I climbed into the “baptistry” to check the condition and depth. It was all just right.

At the hour of the baptism on Sabbath the whole congregation crowded toward the baptistry to watch—and their weight tilted the raft, sinking the cage so deep that the water covered all but my head and arms! Rather than having the shorter candidates tread water to survive this baptism, I had each descend the ladder to the rung that was the right depth and baptized that candidate at that level.

While shallow water does not threaten to submerge pastor and candidates, it does pose a problem to those who baptize by immersion. I generally solved that problem by having the candidates sit on the river or lake bottom with their legs stretched out in front of them. Then by kneeling down beside them, I could easily lean them back and submerge them fully while maintaining their dignity.

Once I had a six-foot-tall candidate who insisted on being baptized “right now.” But a very strong windstorm was toppling trees and breaking heavy branches along the road and on the bank of the river where the ceremony was usually performed. At the counsel of the local church members, we avoided that place, proceeding instead into the thick virgin jungle, where the trees offered one another some protection from the wind. We followed a stream not more than a foot deep until we found a place where it flowed over a large root. There the water had carved a small pool just deep enough for baptizing.

Lessons: It is often wise to listen to the local people’s advice about dangers you may never have thought of—and a study of hydrodynamics may help you find a baptismal pool!

Beauty has its hazards

The natural pool at the foot of a waterfall provides a beautiful setting in which to baptize. But beauty often has its hazards. You must be careful not to slip on wet or mossy stones. And there is perhaps an even greater difficulty—that of speaking loud enough above the roar of the waterfall so that more than celestial ears can hear what you are saying!

Baptisms in the sea can be very beautiful and solemn if you can find a clean sandy beach that slopes gently into the sea and if the waves are not strong or high. But often the situation is not ideal.

Preparations for baptism

Some candidates, particularly those who have witnessed a baptism previously, may harbor fears that the ordeal will border on drowning. Others think they have to hold themselves like stiff mummies, and still others are concerned about water going up their noses—the list of fears and frightening anticipations could go to infinity. Spending a few minutes with the candidates in some “dry-run” demonstrations will do much to quell the fears and accompanying embarrassment.

At the prebaptismal briefing, especially where baptismal conditions are not ideal, might also include instructions on the type of clothing to be worn during the baptism—particularly where no baptismal robes are available. I have at times been embarrassed by candidates wearing T-shirts with inappropriate slogans, advertisements, pictures, etc. on them. If the candidate has nothing else at all, perhaps you might ask that he at least wear such a shirt inside out.

Ladies also sometimes need to be reminded to wear something that will keep them modest—for example, sinkable skirts, concealing underwear, etc.

When robes are available, a prior inspection may avert embarrassment by alerting you to missing weights and fasteners (buttons, hooks, etc.).

Preparing candidates for baptism

I noticed a 10-foot bushmaster—an exceedingly poisonous and aggressive snake—swimming toward him. I pointed to the approaching serpent.

Others think they have to hold themselves like stiff mummies, and still others are concerned about water going up their noses.

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sheltered water or to wait for conditions to improve.

Small bays often produce other phenomena that one must compensate for: reflected or crosshatch waves and shifting currents. When you must baptize in rapidly shifting currents, try to position the candidates so that when immersed, they will be approximately crosswise to the current—preferably with the current pushing them toward you. Fix your feet firmly on the sea bed, and be aware that the currents will tend to wash the sand out from under them. You may have to change your position frequently when baptizing several candidates.

Sea baptisms pose two possible disadvantages. First, if the waves are breaking at all, you may find it difficult to talk above the noise they make. And second, if the tide is out and the slope is gradual, finding water deep enough in which to baptize may require you to go so far out that the congregation cannot be part of the ceremony in any meaningful way.

Other suggestions to make the service more meaningful or to help it progress smoothly:

- In large group baptisms, as in baptisms of smaller numbers of people, you can make the service more meaningful by having each family or husband and wife enter the water together and then baptizing them in immediate succession.

- When there are several candidates, have all of them enter the water at the same time and stand side by side a few feet apart, facing the congregation on the shore. This allows the candidates to get used to the temperature of the water before their turns come.

If baptizing alone, begin at one end of the line and move along to the other end. If two or more are baptizing, station yourselves in positions that equally divide the candidates, and alternate praying as you proceed.

- When some of the candidates are significantly taller than others and the

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**Designing a baptistry**

Should you ever have the opportunity of designing or assisting with the designing of a baptistry:

1. Do not locate the baptistry under the platform. Often when it is placed there, the congregation cannot see the shorter candidates during baptisms. And the sight of those who have been baptized climbing out of the baptistry with clothes or robes soaking wet, sticking tightly to their bodies, and dripping water all over as they trample across the platform to the exit offers embarrassment for all.

2. In addition, the tank cover tends to be a noisy drumming board when the tank is not in use. Uncovering the tank is also often very disruptive to the Sabbath program. And draining such a tank after the baptism may prove difficult.

Instead of building the baptistry under the platform, locate it just behind the platform or, alternately, on one side of the platform. The bottom of the tank should be level with or higher than the platform floor.

3. Plan the stairway(s) into the baptistry so that the candidates’ descent into the water is concealed behind walls or curtains. Then they can correct misbehaving skirts or robes before the congregation sees them, and their exit will also be concealed.

4. Put in a 10- to 12-inch-high glass section along the upper edge of the front of the baptistry to aid the congregation’s view of shorter candidates. Be sure the glass is installed properly so that it won’t leak.

5. In areas where piped water is available, install permanent plumbing for filling the tank. Don’t depend on garden hoses from neighboring sources. A tap in one corner, above water level, is very convenient and ideal. (Those who live in warm climates where water heaters are not taken for granted are most likely to be tempted to save the expense of installing this convenience. Resist the temptation!)

6. Put in a good drain. I have often seen baptistries with a section of pipe stuck through the bottom wall somewhere and a stick and a rag pounded into one end of the pipe to act as a plug. Invariably the water pressure makes such a primitive plug leak or pop out, bringing embarrassing disaster. It is better, much better, to screw or glue on a proper gate valve—an inexpensive item. Such a valve can be easily controlled, and does not threaten surprising loss of water at the wrong time.

7. Occasionally you may need a temporary tank, for instance in tent evangelism or inside a prison. If the candidates are not too big you can use a 50-gallon (190-liter) drum. You must, of course, remain outside and instruct the candidate to bend their knees and submerge themselves at the appropriate time.

Another alternative is to build a wooden box of sufficient size, line it with waterproof plastic or canvas, and wrap it tightly with steel bands or stout ropes to bear the water pressure. Make sure the box has adequate support underneath—a cubic meter (1.3 cubic yards) of water weighs approximately a ton. A baptismal tank 4 feet wide by 8 feet long with 3 feet of water in it weighs nearly 3 tons!

You can drain such a tank most easily by siphoning the water out. Use a garden hose long enough to reach easily from the bottom of the tank up over the edge and down the outside to a point below the bottom of the tank.
baptism is in a river, lake, or other site with a sloping bottom, arrange the candidates by height before leading them into the water. By placing the taller ones at the head of the line, you can leave the shorter ones in the shallower water.

In some places one cannot obtain handkerchiefs or other cloths for covering noses and faces during the baptism. Under such circumstances, have each candidate face your outstretched left arm and grip your left forearm securely with his left hand. Then have the candidate lay his right forearm in your upturned left hand, and grip it near his elbow, leaving his right hand free so that he can pinch his nose closed. Positioned like this, you can push him under the water with your left hand to assure full submersion, and easily raise him again with your right hand, which you place on his back.

Bare feet work best at a baptismal site with a mud or sand bottom, and tennis shoes on stones or coral. A pastor I worked with tried using boots at a baptismal site that had a muddy bottom, but the boots got stuck in the bottom and stayed there! Then he tried some smaller boots, but they practically had to be cut off his feet. Both standing and being in water tend to make one’s feet swell.

When a baptismal candidate is slightly ill, baptize him or her last so he or she will not be wet long and become chilled.

You can generally find some way to support candidates who are too weak to stand while being baptized. On one occasion while I served in the Amazon, a bedridden old man wished to be baptized. Two young men cut a stout pole and fastened the ends of the old man’s hammock (his bed) to it. Then as he sat securely in his hammock, they carried him to the right depth in the river, where the pastor baptized him face forward.

A more usual variation of this approach involves carrying the candidate into the water on a chair. From this position, depending on the candidate’s physical condition, he or she may be immersed either forward or backward.

When our Lord commanded us “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them,” He left us the job of finding the best ways of doing so. Baptize your candidates in the nearest suitable water—but don’t let the “river spirits” snatch them away downstream, especially at night!

The neglected message of the creation story

Harwood Lockton

The doctrine of creation is more than an account of origins; it speaks to contemporary problems of poverty and environmental disruption.

Harwood Lockton is senior lecturer of geography and chair of the Department of Humanities, Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

Apathy rules, OK?” read the graffiti on the city wall. Underneath someone had scrawled: “Who cares?” This reflects the attitude of many toward life today. “Who cares?” and “So what?” are, unfortunately, common responses to the great problems that confront our world.

Such an irresponsible posture is not limited to any one segment of society. It is a pervasive outlook that challenges us as Christian ministers and teachers to relate our faith and understanding to the contemporary world. The issue is relevance.

Nineteenth-century society had a concern for propositional or intellectual truth, and our Adventist pioneers produced a whole body of answers to the question “What is truth?” But that is no longer the problem raised by today’s secular person. The question has shifted from “What?” to “So what?”; from propositional to relational truth: What does Christian faith have to do with me and how I live? What does it mean in practical terms to be a Christian in a secular, amoral, technological, and materialistic world? We ignore these issues only at our peril.

In Papua New Guinea Seventh-day Adventists are often referred to as “Seven Day” Christians. This Pidgin English corruption of the church’s name conveys a fundamental truth: the need to relate our Christianity, seven days a week, to the everyday tasks of living in the world. Too often we know our doctrines but do not live them.
One crucial area in which our faith must inform our living relates to the environment. Within the past 30 years we have seen photographs of our small planet. Taken from far out in space, they picture a jewel against the blackness of the universe. For the first time we have come to appreciate the vulnerability and fragility of our planetary home. The greenhouse effect, the depletion of the protective ozone layer, the rapid deforestation of the vitally important tropical rain forests, and the continued degradation of the life-sustaining soils threaten the existence of all people, both rich and poor. What does Christianity in general, and Adventist belief in particular, have to say about the destruction of our Father’s world?

The creation ethic

Adventists have a “high view” of creation. The Genesis record has particular significance to us; it sets out humanity’s origins and is integrally linked with the Sabbath and the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. Our church has invested considerable time, money, and personnel in searching out scientific support for our belief in a literal reading of Genesis 1. But is it possible that creation is a neglected doctrine among Seventh-day Adventists? Have we concentrated exclusively on the veracity of the creation account and thus failed to see the significance of that creation?

We have used the creation doctrine as a basis for propositional truth but have largely neglected its relational and ethical aspects. An emphasis on the ethical aspects of the doctrine does not negate its significance as propositional truth but on the contrary enhances it by bringing out its relevance in the context of the contemporary environmental predicament.

Genesis 1 and 2 present a series of paradoxes. First, the earth is the Lord’s and yet it was made for humanity. Second, humanity is part of creation and yet is apart from it. On the one hand, humanity, made on the sixth day from the dust of the earth, is part of the created order as are the stars, the trees, and the animals. On the other, humanity, made in the image of God, a little lower than the angels, is separate from the rest of creation.

A third paradox lies in what humans are to do with the creation. God gave humanity domination over nature to rule it and subdue it. In Hebrew, the message is even stronger: to tread down, to trample as when a conqueror places his boot on the neck of the vanquished.

However, this forceful command is balanced by another. God charges Adam to till and to keep the earth; in the Hebrew, to serve, to watch, and to preserve it. The divine command was given not only for the benefit of humanity but for the sake of the earth. Thus humanity’s dominion is to be exercised so that it preserves the created order. Humanity is to be both master and servant in the same way that Christ was both master of the universe and a servant to humanity. Our dominion is in the context of our creation in the image of God; we are representatives of and not replacements for Him.

The idea of human dominion over nature has been so one-sided and pervasive in history that some writers, like the American historian Lynn White, have attempted to blame the Genesis command for the current ecological problems of the world. White argues that the Judeo-Christian ethic legitimized the plunder and abuse of the earth because “it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.”

Of course, other religions and civilizations outside the Judeo-Christian realm have not been without their ecological problems. Nevertheless, many Christians have acted in the way described by White because they have forgotten the balance God requires between using and serving nature. God does not ask us to destroy what He has created. As Westermann notes: “A God who is understood only as the God of humankind is no longer the God of the Bible.”

So what does the doctrine of creation say to us in the late twentieth century? As Adventists we need to take a perspective that goes beyond the geology of Genesis and includes a concern for the ethics and relationships that the Creator would have us display toward His creation. The earth was given to us in the sense of leasehold, not freehold. We are God’s stewards and custodians. We can use the property, but we are to care for it. Unfortunately we have viewed earth as freehold and have abused it.

The biblical concept of stewardship is much broader than finance (tithe and offerings) and time (the Sabbath). “Ecology,” “economics,” and “stewardship” all have the same Greek root, oiko, meaning habitat or environment.
unjust. Even here, Adventists have cause for reflection. For too long we have focused on the individualistic, unhealthy aspects of food rather than the social and ecological aspects. Both these dimensions are valid and essential, but neither by itself can reflect God’s ideal. The Creator’s pattern of stewardship not only looks after the created order but shares nature’s gifts with all. Hence the need to become more sparing, more caring, and more sharing in the use of God’s creation.

The Sabbath call

The relevancy of the creation account in Genesis to the contemporary ecological crisis may also be seen in another way: the call of the Sabbath to turn aside from six days of our work to think of God’s work. The Sabbath is an integral part of the creation sequence. For six days each week we are involved in our work using the creation, but on the seventh day we are reminded of God’s work of creation. During the six days we are subjected to a constant barrage of “the values, pressures, and seductions of an idolatrous age.” 13 Indeed the exercise of dominion over nature has deteriorated into a ruthless attitude toward the created order, resulting in an antithesis to God’s original purpose. One result is that humanity is now more interested in the things they make than in the things created by God. This attitude also infects the Christian: materialism is high on the personal agenda.

As Seventh-day Adventists we need to sense far more keenly the idolatrous nature of our materialistic society. Because we live in a culture dominated by technology and materialism, we tend to accept it as the norm. Yet it is just as anti-god and anti-spiritual as is any atheistic culture.

Andrew Kirk has noted very perceptively our participation in materialism: “Many Christians, in all honesty, are playing the game in deadly earnest, personally committed to its success, even when this may endanger our health and cause suffering, for we are literally and metaphorically up to our eyes in debt to the system. . . . Development, progress, and the whole future of man are seen in terms which relate almost exclusively to man’s possession and manipulation of things. Affluence has dulled our ability to look critically at the ideology of the modern state and its political mentors and made us vulnerable to the propaganda indiscriminately flung at us with their blessing.” 14

Materialism is addictive. How true is the wise man’s statement: “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. . . . As goods increase, so do those who consume them.” 15 The richer we become, the greater our impact upon the environment. The more materialistic our lifestyle becomes, the more we deplete earth’s resources.

Against this tragic context, consider the significance of the Sabbath. It shifts our attention from man-made things to God and His creative work. It invites us to worship the Creator. It provides us with one day each week when we can escape the materialistic pressures and values of our culture. It is a bulwark against materialism. It is a perpetual reminder that God wishes to liberate us.16

And God does liberate us from the consequences of the Fall. The Fall resulted in broken relationships: the spiritual (with God), the social (with fellow humans), and the ecological (with the environment).17 These relationships interrelate to each other. This is clearly seen in the link between poverty (the social) and environmental abuse. The people of the First World (about one quarter of the world’s population) consume such a large share of the planet’s resources that it will never be possible for the rest of the world to catch up with their high living standards. There are simply not enough resources available. The rich act as if the world’s resources, or God’s creation, are on offer at some kind of a global clearance sale.

Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania, once said: “We say man was created in the image of God. I refuse to imagine a God who is poor, ignorant, superstitious, fearful, oppressed, wretched, which is the lot of the majority of those He created in His own image.” 18

In part the poor, the ignorant, and the wretched remain so because the rich nations are able to maintain their affluence at the expense of both the poor and the environment. Yet God’s purpose in creation was that the earth’s bounty be shared by all of humanity. Some may feel that their wealth is not a result of exploitation but of hard work. Even so they will still not escape God’s wrath any more than did the rich man in the parable who was condemned not for exploiting Lazarus but for his shameful indifference toward the poor man.19

God’s purpose in creation was that the earth’s bounty be shared by all humanity.

Responsible stewardship of the environment and a moral obligation for the poor are thus inherent in the true understanding of the Christian calling. In the face of crises of global proportions involving human poverty and environmental disruption, the creation account demands that we be interested not only in the definition of origins but in the delineation of living here and now. Genesis is a timeless statement, and its neglected message demands the attention of those who call themselves creationists.

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1 Fundamental Belief 6 (“Creation”) states that humanity was “charged with responsibility to care for [the earth].” See Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), pp. 69-77, for a brief account of the purpose of creation.


3 Gen. 1:26, 27.

4 Ps. 8:5.

5 Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:6

6 Gen. 2:15.

7 John 1:14; Gen. 1:26, 27.


11 Ex. 23:10, 11.


13 Snyder, p. 78.


15 Eccl. 5:10, 11, NIV.

16 Deut. 15:13.

17 Gen. 3:18, 19.


Jonathan Barrett

Two simple charts offer you more control of your work and time, and more satisfaction with your ministry.

My memory is certainly not my greatest asset. With all the demands that are common to the Christian ministry, it has caused me problems at times! Compounding this situation, I tend to feel stressed when faced with a heavy workload.

To be more efficient and to survive the pressures, I have had to organize my ministry in simple but practical ways. I have found that by using two charts—a Things to Do chart and a visitation chart—my ministry has become more effective and I generally feel more in control than I used to.

I compile my Things to Do chart every Sunday morning. I look at last week’s chart to see what I did not get done, and at my diary (appointment book) for the two weeks coming. Then I write on the current chart what I need to do during the coming week. The chart’s six sections cover almost everything I hope to achieve during the week (see chart 1).

The Work heading covers what I will be working on during the time I spend in my study. To keep the chart a manageable size, I do not include everything here. For instance, I have to prepare for a number of individual Bible study appointments. Preparing for these normally does not take much time, so rather than listing them on the chart, I allow the appointments in my diary to remind me each day what I need to prepare for that day.

One exception in the current week is the listing “Trinity” under the Work heading. I have listed this study there because a contact has asked me about the Trinity and I need to do some extra reading in preparation for this appointment.

Under the Buy heading I list things I need to buy either this week or fairly soon. The listing may include stationery for my study, personal items, items for one of the church buildings, etc. I have even listed “estate agents” here—though I do not intend to buy an estate agent’s office! Rather, because I am considering setting up a church retirement home in the area, I need to remind myself to find an estate agent who deals with suitable property. I generally look at the Buy list before going into town, so it seemed a suitable place to post the reminder.

The Phone and Write columns, headings 3 and 4, should be self-explanatory. They merely list people and organizations I need to telephone or write to during the week.

Under the two Visit columns I list the names of members and contacts that I intend to visit before the week is out. (More on this later.)

Planning the day

Having my Things To Do list before me, I can decide at the beginning of each day what I need to do. Then it takes me only two or three minutes to jot down in my desk diary my tasks for that day.

I also find it extremely helpful to assign priorities; after making my list in the desk diary, I place either a 1 or a 2 after each task listed. A 1 means I must at least start the task that day. A 2 means that the task could wait, but if time permits I would do well to make a start on it.
I have found that this prioritizing forces me to concentrate on what really needs to be done, and ensures that I do not spend too much time on less important things. Before following this system, I used to slip into doing things that were relatively easy and that gave an immediate satisfaction such as writing letters. There never seemed to be enough time for the big projects that were difficult or that seemed not worth starting because of their size and the large chunk of time required to make any progress with them. I now spend my best hours—for me, between 8:00 and 10:30 a.m.—doing the most taxing tasks. It is amazing how soon they get done even when I do only a little of each every day.

Another reason I used to concentrate on things that were of secondary importance was my bad memory. I replied to all the letters I received as soon as the postman brought them so that I would not forget to reply at all. This approach has brought them so that I would not forget to reply at all. This approach has brought me every day.

Incidentally, I have found true the advice given by time management experts that a large task is accomplished more easily by breaking it into small segments. Rather than trying to do all of the preparation for my weekly sermons and seminar lectures in a day or two, I do a little work on each every day. This way I stay fresher and get a sense of satisfaction from having pushed the task forward, if only a little.

So in any one week, in addition to preparing the sermon for the coming Sabbath, I am also working on the sermon for the following Sabbath. Doing so stops that feeling of panic that comes on a Sunday morning when there are effectively only five days—assuming one day a week is taken off—in which to get a whole sermon together.

**Chart 1—Things to Do This Week**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Buy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check Sabbath walk</td>
<td>Swim trunks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare sermon</td>
<td>10&quot; by 7&quot; envelopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest sermon</td>
<td>6&quot; by 4&quot; file</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Sabbath school</td>
<td>Estate agents: retirement home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torquay board agenda</td>
<td>Exeter church: wood glue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion sermon</td>
<td>varnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity study</td>
<td>blackboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check route camp</td>
<td>WRITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHONE</td>
<td>Owen: rest home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goff (builder)</td>
<td>Insurance claim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith: rest home + walk</td>
<td>Matthew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen: college address</td>
<td>Ministry article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hodgkinson</td>
<td>VISIT—TORQUAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services: registration officer</td>
<td>Guymer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VISIT—EXETER</td>
<td>Hopkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blundell</td>
<td>Newbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsley</td>
<td>Pike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthews</td>
<td>Stevens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearce</td>
<td>Turner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Windsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have found that this prioritizing forces me to concentrate on what really needs to be done, and ensures that I do not spend too much time on less important things. Before following this system, I used to slip into doing things that were relatively easy and that gave an immediate sense of achievement—such as writing letters. There never seemed to be enough time for the big projects that were difficult or that seemed not worth starting because of their size and the large chunk of time required to make any progress with them. I now spend my best hours—for me, between 8:00 and 10:30 a.m.—doing the most taxing tasks. It is amazing how soon they get done even when I do only a little of each every day. Board meetings also used to stress me because I worried that I would forget to do some of the items that needed attending to before the next meeting. Now I simply put all these items on the list of things to be done so that they are before me every day. Incidentally, I have found true the advice given by time management experts that a large task is accomplished more easily by breaking it into small segments. Rather than trying to do all of the preparation for my weekly sermons and seminar lectures in a day or two, I do a little work on each every day. This way I stay fresher and get a sense of satisfaction from having pushed the task forward, if only a little. So in any one week, in addition to preparing the sermon for the coming Sabbath, I am also working on the sermon for the following Sabbath. Doing so stops that feeling of panic that comes on a Sunday morning when there are effectively only five days—assuming one day a week is taken off—in which to get a whole sermon together.

**Chart 2—Torquay Members Visiting Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sep</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benson</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boswell</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corbett</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodridge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers under the “frequency” column indicate how often I plan on visiting that particular person or family: once every six months, four months, three months, etc. Those under the “Month” columns simply indicate on what date during that month I visited the family.

To arrive at this list, I use a visitation chart. This chart tells me at a glance how often each person needs visiting and when he or she was last visited. Such charts are, I believe, readily available from conference offices, which is where I got the idea for mine—although I have adapted it a little to suit my needs. A section of one such chart appears below.

By using narrow columns I get a chart with space for about three years’ visiting. This means I don’t have to keep making up new charts, as that in itself can be time-consuming! After each name I place a number that indicates how often I would like to visit the individual or family, whether it be every six months or whatever. With two churches in my care, I have found it possible to aim to visit each member no less often than every six months. I stick to this minimum, even if I have chatted with a member in church on Sabbath or taken him or her to prayer meeting and spoken with him or her on the way just a couple days before a scheduled home visit.

In my opinion, people need and appreciate the personal attention, the prayer, and sometimes the opportunity to express a grievance or problem that visitation provides. Yet both before and since I entered the ministry I have been saddened to hear many members complain that they have not been visited for years. I feel that there is no excuse for this. Yes, ministry is hectic and pressures come from all sides, but if years pass before an individual is visited, then something is desperately wrong in either
our level of ministerial care or our planning. I have sought to prevent such negligence in my ministry by the use of charts such as the one described here. It helps me avoid long-term oversights.

Admittedly, in my two churches combined I have only about 80 members to care for, so I can more easily make frequent visits than can ministers with larger churches. However, visiting plans and charts can be adapted so that members receive a visit at least once a year or every 18 months. That may sound hardly worth bothering about, a goal not worth setting. But if time really is in short supply, I believe it is better to set a goal that is practical and attainable than to just give up and visit as emergencies occur or “as the Spirit leads.” There certainly is a place for the Spirit’s impressing upon a minister the need to visit a certain member, but surely, using the brains the Lord has given us to plan our visitation program is not beyond reason.

In the first year or two of my ministry I wanted to be “fair,” so I visited everyone at exactly the same interval. I think I was rebelling against the idea that I had heard so often that 5 percent of the members take 95 percent of the minister’s time! I now realize that some members do need more attention than others. Some are isolated and are unable to get to church because of distance or age. I aim to visit these either every six weeks or every two or three months, depending on their particular need. Others who need a visit more often than most are the spiritually wavering and those who have recently joined the church.

One does not need to follow this visitation program to the letter, and indeed, the nature of ministry makes that an impossible goal. Evangelistic programs, seasonal holidays, etc., will mean that at times some members will be a few weeks overdue for a visit. That does not worry me unduly. As long as I have the visitation chart to check each week, I can ensure that the months do not run into years!

Some of us respond to charts and timetables and organization better than do others. I am one of those who need a certain amount of structure and routine in order to function well. These “helps to efficiency” have made my ministry more effective, more satisfying, and more enjoyable.

Don Fothergill

Pastors are not mechanics to maintain churches in good repair. Their call involves equipping the saints for the ministry.
present. During his tenure, however, Sunday morning worship attendance had dropped from 175 to 115.

After 14 months of work, the search committee proudly presented George Evans to the congregation for approval as their new pastor. Right from the word go, Evans made it clear that he had no intention of doing the Christian ministry for the lay people. On the contrary, his desire was to train and equip the lay people so that they might be God's ministers.

In the excitement of the new relationship, no one paid much attention to what was going to prove to be a significant difference in the style of ministry between Evans and his predecessor.

Within three months of Evans' arrival, worship attendance rose rapidly; the Adult Christian Education Department grew substantially; and a leadership training system initiated a new type of ministry. However, rumblings from the older members were rolling in swiftly and furiously. Humbottom had been a hand-holder, a tear-dryer, and a pastor who regularly got around to visit all the members in the parish. Evans, in contrast, was a teacher, a motivator, an organizer, and a visionary. Humbottom's ministry made no waves, no friction, and no progress. Evans' ministry propelled the church to surge ahead and raised waves and generated friction. The church found the change in pastoral style and leadership difficult to accept.

Pastor Dexter, utterly exhausted, dropped onto the sofa. He had just returned home from a three-day church growth seminar where he and three other pastors had been pumped up and motivated to muster the troops in order to achieve great things for God.

In the course of an average week, Dex busied himself with twenty different ministries at King Road church. Now the church growth experts told him to undertake three new things that would cause his ministry to "explode." Dex felt like he was going to explode. He knew that if King Road church was going to make any progress, he had to turn most of these 20 ministries over to laypeople. But every time he had tried this in the past the ministry simply dried up and died. Dex would retake the reins and continue being a one-man show. There was simply no time left to envision for the church or to train leadership for tomorrow.

However, six years as pastor of King Road church had extracted a heavy toll on Dex and his family. As he lay on the sofa, he felt a mixture of anger, frustration, failure, depression, and aimlessness. His was a case of burnout.

Dex turned on the TV. Johnny Carson was introducing his next guest. The fellow was an amazing juggler who proceeded to keep 20 china plates spinning on the end of sticks all at the same time. One after another the juggler started new plates spinning, and when he finally got plate number 20 aloft, plate number 1 was just about ready to crash to the ground. The juggler raced over to it and furiously spun it back into orbit just in time to rescue plates number 2, 3, 4... This went on for about seven minutes until the juggler was exhausted and Carson took a break for a commercial.

Dex stood up and yelled out to his wife, "That's it! That's exactly what I feel like; a plate spinner. I spend all week, every week, trying to keep those 20 ministries from falling apart. I never take time off to look at the larger picture and begin to envision for the future."

Dex had stalled in his ministry because he was unable to shift his leadership style from doing everything himself to being an equiper of God's people.

Three different experiences. Each one illustrates how difficult it is to shift from a maintenance/survival mentality to an envisioning/growth mentality. Jack, the mechanic, could not make the shift. Members of St. Paul's could not make the shift. And Dex, our burned-out pastor, couldn't make the shift. And yet, if a church is going to grow, the change must take place and without grinding too many gears.

Such a transition involves touching three significant bases.

Pastor's self-image

An effective leader needs to have the heart of a dove and the hide of a rhinoceros. Nothing significant was ever accomplished without a barrage of criticism from onlookers. Learning how to handle that criticism and at the same time maintain sensitivity is no easy task. Most pastors try to avoid any type of criticism because they want everyone to like them. The result is smooth waters, like Pastor Humbottom had, but no progress. The pastor who takes charge and leads will find conflicts and hurdles, and he or she needs to learn to handle them creatively. I have found that I can defuse my critics and antagonists by finding points that we can agree on, by learning to laugh at myself, and by refusing to get defensive no matter what.

Second, a pastor needs to be involved in the constant process of self-discovery and self-evaluation. No pastor, however successful, ever has all the cards sorted out. Life grows in abundance, fruitfulness, and insight as we reshuffle and regroup the cards that God has given to us.

I have experienced one of the most liberating exercises by working through Peter Wagner's Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow. There I discovered that God had not gifted me in every single area of ministry. For the first time, I felt OK about the fact that I don't really enjoy visiting shut-ins or counseling people or doing judicatory work. I realized that God had not gifted me for these ministries, but that He had gifted me for leading the church. I could now give myself the green light to invest heavily in the areas in which God has in fact gifted me.

This concept of giftedness leads us to the third important area of vision. For years I prided myself on being a jack-of-all-trades inside the church. I could handle every area of ministry, from shoveling the church sidewalks to burying the dead, from calling on new folks to designing confirmation material. I was a one-man band, like our friend Dex. The problem was that the church did not grow in depth or in numbers. I slowly discovered that if I focused my energy in the area of my giftedness, not only did I enjoy my work more, but fruit began to appear. I began to evaluate and sort out my priorities in terms of my gifts and my vision for the church. I delegated to others items that did not directly contribute to my vision/focus or were not in the area of my giftedness. I even dropped some ministries that I enjoyed but was not gifted in. Little by little, my identity, my gifts, my role, and my direction began to shift and come into focus. As all these areas jelled, my self-image strengthened.

Congregational expectations

In spite of Paul's counsel to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, RSV), pastors generally spend the bulk of their time ministering to people
personally rather than equipping them to minister. Most laity expect that from their pastors.

Father Mulcahy, the chaplain on the TV serial *MASH*, illustrates this point well. Father Mulcahey is a kind-hearted, honest man who prays for the sick, baptizes babies, counsels soldiers, and raises money for the local orphanage. What a lovely minister.

However, when it comes to leadership and direction in the MASH 4077 unit, no one ever thinks of consulting him. His job is to hold hands, not to lead.

Most congregations hire pastors to hold hands, not to lead. Pastors are expected to hatch, match, and dispatch. They are expected to be present at all sorts of meetings, but not to lead. If the pastor were to recruit, train, and engage a group of lay visitors, no one would object until that person was in the hospital and was visited by only a layperson. “The pastor didn’t care enough to visit me,” he or she would complain.

Well, as a matter of fact, the pastor cared enough to train a dozen laypersons to visit and multiply the ministry. (I seem to remember one ancient Rabbi doing something like that.)

One of my mentors in the faith was a workhorse in the area of visitation. When I asked him if he had ever trained laypeople to visit, he said, “Oh, yes, many times. But our laypersons constantly complained, saying, ‘It was a nice visit, but it’s just not the same as when the pastor comes.’” My pastor friend got so tired of trying to explain that his job was to train God’s people for ministry rather than to do the ministry for them that he gave up and went back to daily visitation. I’m afraid that decision lowered the ceiling on his ministry more than any other single factor.

If the pastor is going to make this shift from chaplain to leader, it helps to know from the outset that it will be an uphill battle all the way. About one third of the congregation will pull along with you after a few years of training and teaching. This group, a delight of any pastor, will be the powerhouse for tomorrow’s church. Another third will allow you to lead, equip, and delegate as long as you are still willing to marry their daughters and bury their parents. In time they will accept the shift in pastoral roles, but they won’t help to accomplish it. You can count on the final third to vote no on every issue. It doesn’t matter what the issue is—they are against it because anything new means change, and change is the last thing they want. These folks will dig in their heels and disagree with you either to your face (rare) or behind your back (common), or simply wait you out (very common). It takes vision, skill, and confidence to lead the first third; handshakes, smiles, and hugs to lead the second third; and a cast-iron will, guts, and funerals to bring the last third along.

The trust factor

The third and critical element to facilitate the shift from the maintenance/survival mentality to the envisioning/growth mentality is trust. Before any lasting changes can be initiated, mutual trust needs to develop between the pastor and the congregation. Most established congregations are like huge ocean liners, needing a lot of time and a lot of room to turn around. Too much change, too fast, will pull the church apart. The pastor needs to monitor the rate of change, allowing only so much change to take place at any given time.

No congregation that has been together through thick and thin is going to follow a pastor they do not trust. Laypeople will put up with a certain amount of change from a new pastor during the honeymoon period. Unless the pastor wins the trust of the people, the change will be short-lived. In any case, the most productive period of a pastor’s tenure does not begin until after his or her fourth or fifth year, and those first years are best spent earning and building people’s trust.

I find it helpful to conceptualize trust-building in banking terms. Every time a new pastor visits a family in their home, sees a shut-in, marries a couple, baptizes a baby, comforts a widow, or oversees a funeral, that pastor is making a deposit in the “People’s Bank of Trust.” As the years go by, the trust balance grows and pays dividends. When the time comes for the pastor to introduce change, a large balance has accumulated on which the pastor can draw.

The shift from chaplain to leader is a long and difficult process. The shift will mean saying no to a lot of good things in order to say yes to the best. The shift will demand from the pastor and the people a better understanding of the meaning of ministry—that it is God’s equipping the saints “for building up the body of Christ.”
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When the enemy comes in like a flood

Noel O. Idiodi

What’s a minister to do when the demands of family, congregation, and society all seem to conflict—and to detract from the minister’s task?

When the enemy comes in like a flood, it pays to pause and contemplate the lives of fellow servants of God under similar circumstances.

After the showdown

The great contest at Mount Carmel between God’s prophet and Baal’s worshipers had ended. News of the defeat soon reached the queen: Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including his killing of all Baal’s priests. Jezebel quickly dispatched a message to Elijah: “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow” (1 Kings 19:2).*

The fear of death overtook the celebrated prophet. Feeling alone, he thought of Mount Horeb and headed there. Why Mount Horeb? Because that was where God gave the Decalogue. To Elijah, that place symbolized love and justice. He wanted God to judge between his call for reformation and Ahab’s idolatrous reign.

If you were God, what would you have done to Elijah? Lectured him on faith? Enrolled him in a course on the management of fear and stress? As a conference president, what line of action would you take toward a district pastor who has abandoned his responsibilities and is praying “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers” (verse 4)?

Our God is altogether different from human beings, praise His name. He provided the food that strengthened Elijah for the marathon of 40 days and nights that took him away from the manslayer Jezebel.

Elijah left Mount Horeb a changed man. He had but to anoint his successor, tour the schools of prophets, and then mount a VIP spaceship to heaven. No more fears of being haunted. Enough of Jezebel’s rudeness and death threats!

Not all faithful servants of God, however, are taken to heaven without bowing to death. In fact, Scripture records this as happening only in Enoch’s and Elijah’s cases. Job slept in the Lord. Moses died on Mount Pisgah. And millions of other faithful servants of God have gone to their graves.

Running with footmen and horses

Later in Israel’s history the nation had again forsaken God. Priests, king, and subjects had all gone their own way. Jerusalem was under a threat of siege. Under these circumstances God appointed Jeremiah to deliver His warnings to the spiritually bankrupt country.

Jeremiah needed assurance of God’s protection and support to back him up. “Be not afraid of them,” the Lord guaranteed His prophet, “for I am with you to deliver you. . . . I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down. . . . They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you” (Jer. 1:8-19).
That unique ministerial call came wrapped up in powerful promises. Yet not long after Jeremiah embarked upon his mission, he met with fierce opposition. His rebukes and reforms were rebuffed with defiance. Plots were made against his life. Even his brothers betrayed and criticized him. Worse still, the rich were getting richer, while the masses groaned under the yoke of their temporal and spiritual leaders. Wickedness and idolatry strove for the mastery of God’s chosen race.

“Why does the way of the wicked prosper?” Jeremiah finally queried God. Embittered by the open malice of his people and their persistent resistance to God’s warnings, the prophet longed for death. That sounds like some of us, doesn’t it? Haven’t the holy angels seen and heard us sometimes secretly hissing, murmuring, or clenching our fists in anger and regretting our covenant to work for God?

What does God expect?

Through the years, the story of God’s dealings with people, as dramatized in the lives of His prophets and apostate Israel, has been written down and retold again and again. It deserves to be, for it reveals something of what humanity is like and what God is like. Neither one has changed from that day to this. God is still compassionate and gracious. He is still slow to anger. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.

Humankind is sinful, selfish, and divided by Satan’s intrigue. People are egoistic. They grab for themselves freely whatever they can, and the little they feel obliged to give they record with minutest accuracy. The prescriptions humanity has written itself in education and scientific progress have only created more problems for the already confused race. The world needs a Redeemer, not helpless “intellectual giants.”

The solution God offers fallen humanity has been heralded by His ministers for ages. Today God is calling on His servants worldwide to arise, to raise their voices higher still above earth’s Babel, to warn the inhabitants of His soon-coming judgments.

Unfortunately, in times such as this when all hands should be on deck, many clergymen and church leaders are already giving the red-light signal of being burned out with demands from their own families as well as from their congregations and society at large. The same types of frustrating problems that wore out the prophets of old now confront ministers and church officials.

How can we strike a balance between the conflicting demands of these three important groups—family, congregation, and society?

1. Like Elijah, we can seek solace in divine justice, no matter who our Jezebels may be. We can flee into God’s waiting arms and disclose to Him all our burdens. We simply cannot guess what His answer will be until we get there.

2. To withstand the terrible tribulations that must come just before the Master’s second advent, we must learn to endure the lesser troubles by fulfilling the primary tasks of giving love, care, and warmth to our family members.

3. In the words of Jeremiah, “it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth” (Lam. 3:27). That yoke may include learning how to handle a critical congregation. We can avoid many mistakes by consulting more experienced colleagues in the ministry. Nonetheless, there is this unavoidable unpleasantness called “learning on the job” that everyone must go through. If we lack wisdom in carrying out our functions, our heavenly Father is more than willing to supply all our needs—unless we are tired of asking, seeking, and knocking in faith.

4. The frustrated author of the book of Lamentations later discovered that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. Despite experiencing disappointment and deprivation, and even several brushes with death, Jeremiah could testify that the Lord’s mercies are new every morning and never come to an end. Rather than writing our own books cataloging our complaints, losses, and defeats, can we not learn from Jeremiah?

5. Feeling insulted and unfairly criticized for giving God’s messages of reproof, Jeremiah hesitated to go on his divinely appointed errands. But a Heaven-kindled flame wouldn’t let him rest: “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (Jer. 20:9). Does this same fire burn in us in spite of others’ critical remarks? Do we still thirst for and search for souls?

6. Sometimes our perspective is distorted, our judgment of others prejudiced. Elijah thought he was the only lily thrusting its white petals above the mucky waters. The Lord encouraged him with the news that there were 7,000 in Israel whose knees had never bowed to Baal.

7. “Beloved,” admonished Peter, “do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12, 13). Naturally we wish to see a positive response to our love, to hear a word or two of appreciation, to receive sympathy and encouragement, and to know the joy of intercessory prayers offered on our behalf. But we must not be surprised if we do not get all these from our congregation or family. We may more often hear reproach and unreasonable demands. When we do, we must remember that it was God Himself, not human beings, who called us to service. He whose eyes always notice a fallen spar- row does not slumber; He watches over you. Has He not promised you support in all the sacred tasks He has called you to?

The afflictions and blows that God, in His providence, allows to come to us are meant to destroy every idol that would weaken our hold on Him. We need not be afraid of the purification process, however painful, when the crucible is held by our Maker’s own dear hands. “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Youthful David used a mere sling to bring down the boasting Goliath with a divinely guided pebble. As He did of the humble Moses, God asks of us today, “What is that in your hand?” (Gen. 4:2). A rod? Influence? A talent? The touch of the Master’s hand will make all the difference required.

Near Cambridge University in England, there is a large military cemetery for United States servicemen. A massive stone monument there bears this inscription:

“To you, from failing hands we throw the torch;
Be yours, to hold it high.”

In this, earth’s last hour, can God count on us to hold aloft the torch handed to us by our predecessors? Never give up. Remember that there are no hopeless situations, only hopeless people! **

*Bible texts in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.*

MINISTRY/SEPTEMBER/1991 19
Criticism—bane or blessing?

Richard J. V. Cooper

Criticism can be a tool for growth—for both the giver and the receiver.

Leadership involves coping with critics. Leaders often face the challenge of personal reaction to the decisions of a committee. They frequently have to defend decisions that may not reflect their personal preference. A teacher has to face an irate parent. A personnel director has to handle the anger of the experienced worker over the mistakes of a new worker. The pastor has to cope with the scalding words of a church member who cannot understand a board decision or who feels that the pastor deliberately left some vitally important element out of the sermon.

How can we turn the potentially painful into something that helps us to grow? Is criticism always a bad thing? How can I disagree strongly, express myself clearly, and still retain the respect of those I criticize? Does the critic really have a point that I need to be aware of?

I believe that criticism can be a tool for growth both personally and corporately. We need not dismiss critics as troublemakers; instead we ought to take time to understand, giving the benefit of doubt, looking at issues more positively, all make up the way you can best deal with the critic. Let us consider criticism from two points of view: the giver and the receiver.

If you are the criticizer

If you choose to criticize an action or decision, consider the following before you give final shape to your criticism.

1. Be sure you have something worth saying. What is your point? Are you really clear about what you wish to say? Is your viewpoint valid? Is your objective practical, realistic, and free from personal bias and prejudice? Have you checked out the information that you are reacting to? That could save you real embarrassment.

2. Decide how you can best make your point. Will you talk to the party involved or write a letter? Depending on the situation and the subject matter, it may be preferable to talk things over rather than to write. If you are sure of yourself and wish to write, make your point clearly, honestly, and with a loving attitude. Consider to whom the written communication should be sent in order for it to be most effective and fair. To one person? To many? To the pastor? To a column in the church paper? To the conference president? The subject matter of your criticism will decide that, but at all costs, stick to facts. Shun injury, prejudice, and insults.

3. Take your time. The proverb “haste makes waste” is true in human relationships too. Check all your facts. Define your objectives. Give the other person time to meet with you and
discuss your concerns. Seek an appoint-
ment with the other person and ask for
time to discuss the issue and its impor-
tance for you and the church. Premature
discussions often lead to embarrassing
situations and frustrations.
4. Be charitable. Even at this stage
you might discover that you were wrong
in either facts or interpretations or both.
Admitting this opens the way for a
better relationship. In your conversa-
tion, be willing to listen, rather than
carrying on a monologue. Show that
you have a real interest in the issue. You
even may find yourself moving from the
role of an opponent to that of a sup-
porter! Remember: “He has the right to
criticize who has the heart to help.”
5. Know yourself. Be aware of your
own personality and how it affects oth-
ers. Aggressiveness, personal remarks,
rough language, loud voice, and threat-
ening gestures often create hurdles in
the dialogue process and may make the
situation worse. Respect for the other’s
personality and views must not be com-
promised in pressuring a place for your
own. Be sensitive and keep your objec-
tives limited and clear in your mind.
6. Determine whether your response is
constructive or destructive. When you are
teased up with strong feelings, your in-
tentions may be constructive, but your
approach and the end results may not be.
In expressing criticism, choice of words
is very important. Some words hurt,
while others convey the point with nu-
ces of concern. Any expression of
opinion should take into account the
weakness and the strength in the opposite
point of view. If you write a letter, can
you wait for a day or two before you mail
it? Such a waiting period often prompts
its own answer to the issue at hand,
making confrontation unnecessary.
7. Consider the alternatives. You may
have clearly expressed rejection of a
certain idea, but have you suggested a
constructive alternative? Have you in-
cluded in your response what you agree
with, what you appreciate, and what
you think may be improved or changed?
Sometimes we are so concerned about
what we dislike or disagree with, that
we do not identify what we really want
the person to do, to consider, or to be. It
is easy to assume that others can read
your mind, but they can’t. So strive for
clarity and effectiveness.

**If you Are Criticized**

If you are the recipient of criticism,
the following ideas may cushion you in
your moments of distress.
1. Identify the source clearly. Don’t
respond to hearsay. The nature of the
criticism and the extent of its spread
may determine whether you want to
give an oral or a written response.
Whatever, deal directly with the person
concerned and do not involve unrelated
issues or persons. Approach the person
with an open mind and with the assump-
tion that the criticism was meant for the
common good of all concerned.
2. Set a time. When making the initial
contact, avoid being drawn into imme-
diate discussion, or getting into an argu-
ment. This is not the time to reveal any
hurt or anger that you may be feeling;
instead create an atmosphere of trust and
openness. Let the critic feel that you are
genuinely interested in listening.
3. Clarify the issue. Be willing to
listen. Gently find out what is upsetting
the other person. Pay attention to the
feelings that lie behind what is being
said to you. Be aware enough of your-
self so that you can honestly express
your own feelings and not be domi-
nated by your critics. Provide an ob-
jective outlook for a mutually helpful
dialogue.
4. Ask yourself whether you have
heard this criticism before. Is the issue
something you have had previous prob-
lems with? If so, you may need to take
a second look at your own position. Get
professional help, if needed. It can be
painful to admit your weaknesses, espe-
cially when you have made strong ef-
forts to make positive changes. Take
courage! Hurting is a part of growing.
He who touched the skin of the leper,
the eyes of the blind, and the prejudices
of His own disciples can also help you to
turn the stumbling blocks into stepping
stones! With His help you can set your
own objectives and achieve them.
Don’t allow yourself to be destroyed.
Make the choice to take what is harshly
stated and use it to help you to grow.
Remember critics are as human as you
are; they may be harsh in their stat-
ments, but if there is truth in them,
accept it.
5. Ask questions. Critics, when con-
fronted, have a tendency to wander from
the subject. Ask them to be more spe-
cific. Prod them to tell you what they
would like you to do. Questions bring
wider understanding and open up poten-
tial answers that neither side had consid-
ered. Your questions can also help crit-
ics to see that their response was not as
complete as they thought. This may help
take some of the pressure away from
you. Remember the ancient Chinese
saying: “Build your enemy a golden
bridge over which he can retreat.”
6. Keep a sense of humor. One
failure in one part of your life does not
make the rest of it a shambles. Remem-
ber: “The fact that people are born
with two eyes and two ears but only
one tongue suggests that they ought to
look and listen twice as much as they
speak.”
7. Keep calm. In time you will usu-
ally have the chance to respond to the
points raised. Keep your focus on the
central issue. Be constructive. Do not
blame and attack. Try to build as Jesus
did.
8. Evaluate. Don’t make immediate
commitments to change. Don’t agree
with criticism just to placate the critic.
This kind of agreement may help you
for the time being, but in the long run it
is detrimental to your growth and self-
esteeem. Instead take time to consider
what has been shared with you. Pray
about it. Take advice from those who
know you well, those you can trust.
Accept responsibility when you are in
the wrong. This phase can be uncom-
fortable as it challenges you to face your
mistakes and use them as a basis for
improvement and change. You can also
find confirmation of your strengths.
Your choice determines how much you
will grow.
9. Thank your critic! Critics come in
all hues: combative, aggressive, frivo-
ulous, forceful, personal, rational, illog-
ical, silly, intellectual, etc. Whatever
the case may be, your recognition of
each as a person, your appreciation for
the time and concern they have shown,
and your interest in their point of view
would help you build strong relationship
with them. You might even win a
friend.

The critic and the criticized are both
God’s children. As we grow together as
part of God’s family, why not follow the
counsel of Paul: “Let us not become
weary in doing good, for at the proper
time we will reap the harvest if we do
not give up. Therefore, as we have
opportunity, let us do good to all peo-
ples, especially to those who belong to
the family of believers” (Gal. 6:9, 10,
NIV).
Internship or internment?

Lorna Arthur

Approached as a period of discovery and training, ministerial internship can truly contribute to the making of a minister.

A theology graduate, Lorna Arthur is actively engaged in church work along with her pastor-husband. She writes from Manjimup, Western Australia.

Theo intern is to impound or confine or place under restriction an undesirable person, generally under unpleasant conditions, such as during wartime. To intern can also mean to invite graduates to climb new heights of learning by giving them practical and supervised experience in their chosen profession. From the first description comes the word “internment.” From the second, “internship.” When the distinction between the two is blurred, when those under internship experience a feeling of internment, there are serious problems—both for the interns and for the organization that provides internship.

And this is particularly so in ministry! Ministerial internship, intended as an apprenticeship in service, often becomes a period of confusion and discouragement. Many young pastors and their families feel trapped. They do not know what is expected of them. They feel they are on trial, and they are not sure how long the period will last. As the years grind on with little communication from the local ordained minister or the conference, many interns experience anxiety regarding their image and self-worth. Confidence gives way to self-doubt: Is my work appreciated? Am I in the right job? Was I really called to the ministry?

The internship period can be a blessing to all concerned. It can lighten the load of the local minister, increase the talent pool of the conference, and give the novice a glimpse of Christlike service. I shall now outline some practical ways in which this ideal can be reached. I shall address my concerns to the intern, to the supervising minister, and to the conference president. But first some thoughts on college training and the ministry.

College preparation

My husband and I enjoyed our college years, taking many of our classes together. We studied everything from giving Bible studies to fine art. In no time at all it seemed that we were on our way to our first assignment: a small rural community, where we lived in a house designed and built by a local farmer. The nearest neighbor was about a half mile away. A hand-laid pipe brought us water from a small spring up on a hill. Sometimes frogs came down with the water. And for entertainment, well, I do remember one Saturday night, sitting in our car to keep warm, listening to an old tape as a deep voice sang, “So send I you, to labor unrewarded, To serve unpaid, unloved, unsought, unknown, To bear rebuke, to suffer scorn and scoffing— So send I you to toil for Me alone. So send I you to loneliness and longing, . . . So send I you to taste of Calvary.”

College does not prepare you for loneliness, longing—or people. The toil is not merely geographical or physical or social. For example, on our first visit to one farmer he invited us out for a night of rabbit shooting. On another occasion my husband had to liaise with the town builder over roof tiles for the new church. Our idea of a social life, our values, and our theological perspectives were often miles apart from the
people we had come to serve.

Our college days taught us to study and to persevere in difficult circumstances, but they did not prepare us for some of the more practical aspects of ministry. Classes on money management, church building programs, and, above all, counseling and personal relationships would have been invaluable. We soon learned that ministry is more than passing six subjects per quarter and taking part in student Weeks of Prayer. Ministry is people: loving them in spite of differences; counseling them on family problems without taking sides; being there when they need you.

When interns get to the place where they feel comfortable in ministering to people and competent in daily caring for the church, their internship will become foundation stones, rather than millstones, to their subsequent ministry. Those first few years often determine the tenor of their future service.

To the intern

“You can change the world!” Throughout your college years that is one message you could not have missed. With that vision firmly rooted in its place, you step out to your first parish—and there you hit your first brick wall: member inertia. Nobody seems to want change, least of all in the way you think they should. What can you do? You can let disillusionment harden into bitterness. You can conclude that you are a failure and the system that produced you is incompetent. Or you can begin to evaluate this new “reality” and change your internal attitudes accordingly. There are at least three things you can do.

First, approach your internship without preconceived opinions. Prejudgment is a valuable time-saver in everyday life. You do not research the baking industry every time you slice a loaf of bread. Based on experience, you trust your baker, and take a bite. However, when you commence your internship years, you may find that prejudice can, in fact, be prejudice. Your experience with the conference administration and the local minister need not mirror that of earlier graduates in every detail. Why burden your new relationship with your supervising pastor with the weight of others’ tales of woe? Give your pastor your loyalty. Give yourself a chance.

Second, cultivate a teachable spirit. The favorite phrase of a 4-year-old boy who comes to play with our toddler is “I know.” If that is your philosophy, be prepared for disappointment. Nobody likes a know-it-all. Before the full weight of church responsibility is yours, learn to listen more than you speak, and consciously maintain a teachable spirit. You will certainly make more friends, and you will be surprised at how much even the quietest church member can teach you.

For example, we learned a lesson in evangelism from an unexpected source. In the second church we pastored, we began a series of public meetings with much apprehension. Our members revealed very little evangelistic talent or support. But a woman in a wheelchair made the difference: in her own quiet ways, she brought to the meetings more people than anyone else, and led the most to the baptismal pool.

Third, be prepared for hurts. Recently our church ran a holiday program for local children. The person in charge gave her total commitment to the program. She even took off a week from work. After the first day, she confided in me, “People do not seem as willing to help me as in previous years.” Evidently she was not flooded with gratitude or cooperation.

Her comments reflect a type of pain that every minister feels. You plan a program, spending hours in planning, and then discover that your members are not there to support you. That hurts. You can take this personally, and subject your family and yourself to much anguish, or you can use the experience to build up your mental file of what works and what does not.

To the supervising minister

An atmosphere of learning and discovery marked our internship period largely because of the kindness and love displayed by our local ordained minister. He opened his home and his heart to us. He listened to our troubles and plans, and included us in meals and family worship. We worked 35 miles away, and so he sometimes gave us a bed for the night, too. His wife shared ideas and experiences with me as we prepared meals and washed dishes. They both made us feel proud to be allies in service.

Unfortunately, not all supervising ministers have worked with interns so successfully. One insisted on phoning an intern early in the morning. Another expected his intern to run errands, wash his car, and even polish his shoes! Still another required that the young trainee follow someone else’s script in preaching in a public campaign, the humiliating experience eventually pushing that intern out of the ministry.

So what can you do to have a successful relationship with your intern? First, ask yourself a series of questions: What did you like most about your own internship? What caused you the most heartache? What do you now expect from the intern working with you? Answer these questions honestly, and you will have a good start in preparing for constructive communication and shared goals with your intern. You will also help your intern to overcome a common dilemma he or she will face: “What is expected of me?”

Second, share your experiences: your failures, your successes, your ups, your downs, your good times, your bad times. Let these speak to the young person. A life shared is a life built. Take the intern with you on your visits. Invite the trainee to sit on board meetings, to help you plan the agenda for the church. Let the intern try his or her own God-given wings.

Third, obtain the respect of your intern—not by your wisdom, not by your eloquence, not by your sermons, but by your humility, kindness, and willingness to be a friend. Your intern is your fellow laborer together with God.

To the conference president

Your interns have spent up to six years absorbing information and ideas. This living “raw material” now becomes your precious charge. Like you, they will sometimes feel lonely. Like you, they will feel squeezed between the opinions of those in their care and those who pay their wages. Like you, they need a helping hand when they fail and a pat on the back when they succeed. You can make so much difference to their training and attitude toward ministry.

“If there is one thing I have learned in the ministry,” says one experienced minister, “it is to listen. If you are going to lead, you have to be the best listener in the world.”

This person has learned that to lead people without knowing them or understanding their needs is an uphill road. Talk to your interns. Listen to them. A quick telephone call can mean more than a long letter. Don’t let people hear about their new appointments from the rostrum. Be considerate of feelings, and your thoughtful attitude will be multiplied a hundredfold, for there are few things as encouraging to harassed ministers and interns as a cheerful and
helpful conference administration.

Communicate conference policy clearly and intelligently. As ministry becomes professional, involving years of training, interns need to know where they stand with regard to finances and terms of employment. If a conference cannot afford the benefits stated in policy, it may be better to change the policy rather than appear to begrudge every request of the interns. At the time of their greatest commitment and lowest finances they need the assurance of accurate information on which to plan their family budgets.

Another area of concern is evangelism. As a conference president, do you expect all of your interns to be reapers? Sometimes the quest for impressive baptismal statistics honors the charismatic evangelist, but does not recognize the quiet one who prepares the soil, who plants and waters the seed. Is the contribution of that quiet one of any less value? Diversity, as in an orchestra, can contribute to harmony and creativity.

Good communication leads to better understanding. Take, for example, retreats for pastors. "My husband came home exhausted," commented one pastor's wife recently. In what sense can retreats be exhausting? Why are these meetings held? To straighten out theology? To motivate greater baptisms? To provide moments of inspiration and seasons of refreshing? Do pastors and interns have any input in the content of the topics presented at a retreat? Or doesn't it matter? Does the schedule provide opportunity for personal relationships, conferences, discussions, and sharing? You will find more about your intern's real needs across the breakfast table than from the other side of a podium or a desk.

What the intern needs may be just a word of encouragement. Like Tom, who spent all morning cutting the hedge. The job was heavy, and the sun was hot. By the time his wife came home from shopping, he was just past halfway. He stood back and wiped his brow. She looked out of the car window and said, "You sure have a lot left to do." With that she disappeared into the cool house. Your interns often feel just like Tom. They have worked hard. They are tired. The last thing they want to be told is that they really should be up to cutting far bigger hedges by now. So what do they need? The same as Tom: a cool drink and some praise and appreciation.

Another area of concern to interns is somewhat taboo in the conversation presidents have with them—ordination. It is not taboo, however, among interns. As camp meeting approaches, they compare notes. Watch as they try to keep the longing from their eyes when yet another member asks, "Are you going to be ordained this year?" Much of the self-doubt and career insecurity that interns feel could be reduced by following a few simple steps. First, remove the mystery surrounding ordination. It is a solemn step, not a secret one. Second, clarify the terms on which ordination is based. Perhaps a booklet could help, outlining such topics as the biblical basis for ordination, conference expectations, personal preparation, and family involvement. Third, remove the financial connection from ordination—a move that could free some conferences from embarrassment.

When the intern, the local minister, and the conference administration thus place their will and their resources to make internship what it ought to be, this period of training need not be feared or experienced as internment, but approached as an opportunity for transformation, for the making of a minister.

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Should you try expository preaching?

Floyd Bresee

Which is better preaching—expository or topical? The question sometimes generates much heat and precious little light. One answer is that every sermon should be both. That is, every sermon should be expository—it ought to expose some Bible truth. Every sermon should be topical—it ought to be about something! But the discussion goes deeper than that.

Which sermon type is more biblical? The preparation of every sermon should begin in Scripture. The preaching of it can then begin anywhere—preferably with the congregation. Having found Bible truth, the preacher may well begin the sermon by awakening the listener’s interest in and need for that truth. Beginning the sermon delivery with the Bible doesn’t make a sermon biblical. Beginning the sermon preparation with the Bible does. Often expository preachers claim that they begin with Scripture and that topical preachers don’t. Not necessarily so.

“Expository” defined
Simply defined, an expository sermon is a sermon that’s based on the exposition of three or more verses of Scripture. If the passage discussed is shorter than that, the sermon is usually called textual. Sometimes the unit of Scripture is a paragraph, at other times a chapter, occasionally an entire book. In the expository sermon’s strictest form its structure follows the order of the ideas in the passage. Presumably, expository preachers begin preparing their sermons by choosing a passage of Scripture and studying it in depth.

Strengths and weaknesses
Expository preaching has much to commend it and, if properly used, is probably the best kind of preaching for most pastors. It is usually quite biblical, inclining the preacher to study the mind of the author. It generally contains good depth and affords an inexhaustible supply of material. It tends to lead to balanced preaching, because the topics come from Scripture rather than out of the preacher’s head. It may actually be the easiest to research, because the preacher can focus on just one passage and dig deeply enough to truly master it and feel quite confident about its meaning.

Seventeenth-century Puritan preachers gave expository sermons a bad name. Many of them wrote interminable discourses with a dozen divisions. Congregations claimed their preaching was boring and irrelevant—all information and no application. Consequently, this strongly biblical and highly commendable sermon type fell somewhat into disrepute.

Effective expository preaching
Some suggestions for effective expository preaching:
1. Choose your passage wisely. Too short a passage leaves you with too little biblical authority. Too long a passage easily overloads an audience. It may say too much.
2. Avoid exhaustive exposition. Expository preachers are tempted to emphasize explanation over application. Make the exegetical part of the sermon brief. Exegesis is not the ultimate aim of the discourse. Don’t spend so much time digging that you don’t have time to hold up to the light the diamond you’ve already uncovered.

Spurgeon insisted that the sermon begins where the application begins. Spend less time on what your passage says or means and more time on what difference it makes. Don’t make your congregation spend the whole morning in ancient Palestine. None of them live there during the week.

3. Focus on one lesson. Seldom does a Bible passage concentrate exclusively on a single point—or even on one subject. Too many expository preachers begin by heading north toward one point, then turn and go south toward another for a while. Finally, they throw in a little east and west and sit down with the audience still going round in circles. Avoid this by studying your passage until the Holy Spirit convicts you with the truth most obvious in the passage or most needed by your congregation. Then focus your exposition on this truth and pass over everything extraneous to it.

The best sermons drive one idea home with such specificity and power that listeners are stopped in their tracks. Give them a little of this, a bit of that, and some more of something else and they’ll shrug it off and go back to their world unchanged.

If you have traditionally preached topical sermons, or some other type, I urge you to experiment with expository preaching. You can preach biblical sermons using any sermon type, but it’s easiest to do so with expository sermons.

In a later column we’ll take a look at topical preaching and how it too can be both biblical and effective.
Charles Swindoll quotes an exasperated lady who complained, "My minister is a lot like God—I don’t see him all week, and I don’t understand him on Sunday!" Looking beyond the humor, one can see truth there. Too many of our pastors are overwhelmed by long lists of presumed responsibilities. They rush to and fro so much all week that perhaps they are not clearly seen by their members. And they’re so exhausted Friday evening and Sabbath that perhaps their sermons are a bit fuzzy.

I believe that the elders of the church can play a significant role in rectifying this situation. We have taken on a "noble task" (1 Tim. 3:1, NIV). We are commissioned to be overseers of God’s church—and we can do that best by working closely with our pastors.

Our pastors are human—let us never forget that. They need close friends, confidants, and sounding boards. They need to be affirmed, honestly and generously. Elders can, by their own example, foster such a spirit in the entire congregation.

Pastors need adequate quality time with their families, for their own nurture, and the all-important nurture of their spouses and children. We need to be sure that they are enjoying some form of weekly recreation so they can relax, recharge, and be refreshed. We may, on occasion, even have to arrange the details of a weekend away, including adequate coverage for the duties they leave.

But the most important aspect will be our presence, our listening ear, our friendship. By becoming personal friends of our pastors, we will develop more open communication. Feedback from the congregation will be welcomed. Private, constructive criticism can be shared. Positive challenges can be voiced.

The friendship will also result in mutual accountability. When a pastor is in touch with a trusted elder on a regular basis, they can help each other maintain ethical, moral, and spiritual integrity. They can encourage each other to live a balanced life in the areas of daily devotions, personal health, and family strength.

**Divide the responsibilities**

There should be a clear division of responsibilities between pastors and their elders. Too often pastors are exhausted. Their ministry is no longer fun. They feel like slaves driven by a taskmaster congregation. But their exhaustion is not necessarily proof of their dedication. It may only reveal their inability to say no, and their failure to delegate responsibility.

Acts 6 clearly indicates that pastors should not be occupied with the nuts and bolts of the church organization. Their high priority, their calling, their specialty, is the spiritual nurturing of the members in the church and the evangelism of the spiritually hungry outside its walls. Exodus 18 points out that the unnecessary workload often thrust upon our leaders will only wear them out. Such a load is too heavy for them; they cannot handle it alone.

The elder/pastor relationship resembles the general practitioner/specialist model in medicine. The head elder (the general practitioner) can take care of the mundane (howbeit important) day-to-day business of the church. He or she can easily chair the board meetings, organize the other elders to visit every family each quarter, take charge of In-gathering (along with the personal ministries leader), and lead out in a good share of the prayer meetings and worship services, especially in "swarmed" churches or companies.

This would free up the pastor (the specialist) to concentrate on the critical, high-priority matters of the church—evangelism, with which thousands should be reached, and serious counseling and nurture, which hundreds need, both in and out of the church.

The elders’ monthly meeting with their pastor should, however, remain high priority. Here the focus needs to be on the spiritual and personal growth of the leaders and the needs of their congregation. Here goals should be set and reviewed. And here the elders can be trained and encouraged to do more than just fulfill platform duties. They need to be challenged to lead out in gospel-oriented programs.

Pastors should be the leaders, the creative thrust, the chief communicators, of the church. But they should never be the managers of the mundane. They have been given a great job to do, challenges to be seized, an eternal deadline to work toward. Let these specialists do their job. Let us be their support. Then, unlike that dear exasperated lady, we will all see our pastors where they are really needed all week, and we will easily understand them in the pulpit on Sabbath.
Sabbath In Crisis
Dale Ratzlaff, Life Assurance Ministries, Applegate, California, 1990, 345 pages, $14.95, paper. Reviewed by Herbert Kiesler, associate director, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

The author, a former Seventh-day Adventist minister, takes the position that God gave Israel the fourth commandment Sabbath as a sign to remember continuously. He states that both circumcision and the Sabbath were aspects of the Sinaitic covenant. In his opinion, the sabbaton—rest of the old covenant—represents a type of the sabbatismos—rest of the new covenant. The former demands observance while the latter becomes a part of the believer’s experience.

Ratzlaff rejects both the transfer-modification and the reformation-continuation theories regarding the Sabbath, opting for the fulfillment-transformation view. In his opinion Jesus fulfilled the Creation Sabbath, and Old Testament symbols such as physical rest, Sabbath, and the seventh day “have been transformed into other vehicles in the new covenant.”

He says that as a symbol the Sabbath represented three main streams of truth. It memorialized Creation rest, stood as the sign of the covenant, and served as the day for worship. He maintains that the new covenant transforms these three ideas. Creation rest, for example, finds its fulfillment in Jesus as the one who provides true rest. In the new covenant this Creation rest is no longer the seventh-day Sabbath, but rather the eschatological rest of grace.

Similarly, in the old covenant the Sabbath was essentially a day of rest. Only with the introduction of the synagogue after the Babylonian captivity did the Sabbath become a day of worship. The new covenant does not command Sunday worship either, history indicating that it was a later development.

The author has made a comprehensive study of the Sabbath question, using in part an inductive approach. He presents his material in a popular style, making it easy reading. But the book has serious problems. I disagree with the author’s main thesis, which identifies the Creation Sabbath with a permanent rest rather than with a literal seventh day. The author contends that sin interrupted this Sabbath rest and that the Sinaitic Sabbath only acted it out. When Christ came, He restored the true Sabbath—rest—that is, permanent, redemptive rest in Him.

While it is true that the seventh-day Sabbath represents the rest into which the believing Christian enters, nothing indicates that Christ’s saving work replaced the Sabbath.

Ratzlaff uses the fulfillment-transformation schema, which is basic to his thesis, to draw a direct line between the Sabbath and the Lord’s Supper. I find no biblical support for this. More fundamentally, this schema is based on a false understanding of the law in the New Testament, especially in the teachings of Paul. The author hardly touches on key passages, such as Romans 7. Thus one gets the impression that Ratzlaff is moving in the direction of antinomianism.

The New Testament does not reveal any transformation of the Sabbath. Rather, it clearly teaches that in the new covenant God’s people will experience a transformation of the heart (Jer. 31:34; cf. Heb. 8:8-12; 10:16, 17). It is the human race that needs transformation, not the Sabbath.

The Homilies

One of the most enduring benefits of the English Reformation is The Homilies, 33 sermons published in two parts. Book one dates back to 1547 (Edward VI), and book two to 1563 (Elizabeth I). Archbishop Cranmer (book one) and Archbishop Jewel (book two) were the principal contributors. The intention was that the sermons be read each Sunday, especially by ministers who lacked the gift of preaching. Such a practice would make plain the way of salvation through faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. It would also define the content of Christian doctrine and lifestyle.

The reprinting of The Homilies is welcomed for three reasons: 1. It provides an opportunity for the Anglican Church of today to review how far it has departed from the faith, practice, and theology of the English Reformers. 2. It provides powerful and clear expositions of Christian faith and practice. 3. It offers to ministers a model for biblical, theological, and practical preaching.

The Transforming Moment
James E. Loder, Helmers and Howard Publishers, Colorado Springs, 1989, 244 pages, $12.95, paper. Reviewed by Methodius James O’Driscoll, retreat director and Greek Catholic monk, Mount Tabor Monastery, Redwood Valley, California.

Books about conversions and passages of life are fairly common. However, books that examine life-changing events and the process of transformation in a scholarly yet personal way are not common. Loder’s book touched both my heart and my mind.

Loder draws from theology, psychology, and philosophy to examine changed lives. He sees conversion as a process involving the whole person, and not just an intellectual or emotional change. It involves struggle, and we can better appreciate the reality of the spiritual conflict when it is not explained away or ignored.

The creative tension in experiencing any event, especially divine indwelling, calls for the deep and imaginative participation of the whole being. Indeed one involved in a “convictional experience” is a real living-in-the-world person and not a disembodied spirit.

Loder, a Presbyterian minister, warns of the dangers of occult mysticism and urges an objective grounding in the Word. “This is the Christ-instituted way of placing such experience in context.”

Case studies and Loder’s own personal experiences help enliven his presentation of transforming moments. I read this book at a time when I was
grieving the death of a friend, and I found the book frequently speaking to my needs.

Not a book for casual reading at the beach, *The Transforming Moment* demands an investment of thoughtful time. But that investment will be worthwhile. Fortunately, the author writes in an orderly and logical manner and includes a glossary of terms. Once the reader enters into the flow of the writing, he or she will find much that rings true in his or her own spiritual pilgrimage.

**Every Minister Needs a Lover—Just Be Sure It's Your Spouse**


The authors have designed a book with the busy pastoral couple in mind. Intended to be used as a manual for couples wanting to enrich their marriages, it is divided into 30 practical, readable segments dealing with everything from finances to vulnerability. Although the book is designed primarily for pastors and their wives, much of its practical advice applies to any marriage and can be used by the pastor for sermons or seminars.

In order to facilitate the sharing process, each chapter contains short personal insights by the authors, a related Scripture passage, and several paragraphs from noted marriage specialists such as Clinebell, Dobson, and Tournier. Three discussion questions follow, some of which seemed a bit repetitive.

I found the strongest chapters toward the end of the book. These chapters deal with specific clergy needs such as the role of the pastor’s family, the spouse’s role, preacher’s kids, etc.

The Eppingers present a warm and optimistic vision for clergy families to grasp. They avoid stereotyping and make themselves vulnerable in order to reach fellow workers struggling to balance the demands of family and ministry.

**Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem**


When, where, and who wrote the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke? What literary process made these books so alike and yet different? The “Synoptic problem” has kept New Testament scholars busy and battling for nearly 200 years. Many of their theories have seemed to threaten the view of inspiration held by conservative evangelical denominations.

Wenham’s book gives linguistic, historical, and exegetical evidence supporting an early date for the Synoptic Gospels. Following in the tradition of the iconoclastic *Redating the New Testament*, by J.A.T. Robinson, this book asserts that Christians may have known the Gospels more or less in their present form since the mid first century A.D. Wenham dates Luke in the early A.D. 50s, Mark about A.D. 45, and Matthew as early as A.D. 40.

To show his conclusions as credible, which I believe he succeeds in doing, Wenham provides extensive details. The average reader will probably not have the background or the interest to follow all of these details. For this reason the author begins each chapter with a summary of its arguments and conclusions.

Wenham outlines the various Synoptic theories that have held sway through the years, making this a worthwhile reference book. Unfortunately accompanying diagrams are so complex they offer little help in understanding the problems. But the author uses the bulk of the book to build his own theory. He proposes that each evangelist received information by oral transmission, with Mark having some dependence on Matthew, and Luke having some dependence on Mark and Matthew. The author finds no place for the Q source.

But the conclusions of *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, derived from years of research, must be hailed for their excitement and recognized for their significance. Wenham presents his views on how the Gospels were written, the oral transmission of the Jesus tradition, and when the Gospels were written. Summarizing his research, he concludes: “These [Gospels] were written at dates when many were alive who could confirm or contradict what was written.”

Placing the written Gospels in the second decade of Christianity is a radical proposal. Early response from the academic community is cautious but respectful. Attacks will come, but conservative scholars, teachers, and ministers now have available the results, of a lifetime of research that give credibility to a very early date for the Synoptic Gospels. This work goes a great way toward establishing the dependability of the Gospels as history and thus makes them credible founding documents of Christian faith.

**Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate**


In its fourth edition (revised and expanded), *Old Testament Theology* continues to provide the best broad-spectrum coverage available on the subject.

This standard survey and reference work on Old Testament theology has gone from its original 100 pages in 1972 to 260 pages in the current edition. The subject matter remains the same, with new material added in the subsections and conclusions. The bibliography has been expanded to more than 40 pages making it what some consider the most up-to-date and comprehensive bibliography ever published. The indices have also been expanded in corresponding manner.

The author includes his own solutions to the main problems that scholars have struggled with in Old Testament theology. This resource remains of great value to both pastors and professors.
Confessing God as Creator

From page 5

Authentic living

A third area in which the doctrine of creation becomes crucial to Christian proclamation is in the authentic understanding of ecology and history it affords. Because God is the Creator, the biblical revelation consistently maintains that matter is not intrinsically evil, and that nature contains nothing "self-originating, self-operating, self-sustaining, or self-explanatory." This world belongs to God; it is not ours, to treat as we wish without any regard to a norm higher than our self-will and self-interest.

The essential goodness of creation thus lays the foundation against dualism of nature, on the one hand, and meaninglessness of history, on the other. As Niebuhr points out, the confession of God's creatorship carries the implication that "the world in its totality" is "a revelation of His majesty and self-sufficient power." The doctrine of creation escapes the error of the naturalists who, by regarding causality as the principle of meaning, can find no place for human freedom and are forced to reduce man to the level of nature. It escapes the error of the rationalists who make nous into the ultimate principle of meaning, and are thereby tempted to divide man into an essentially good reason, which participates in or is identified with the divine, and an essentially evil physical life.

The prophet Isaiah forcefully directed a people in despair to look to God's creative activity and to discover therein meaning for their own history, however twisted and meaningless it may have seemed: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nought, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing."

The gospel proclamation today could do no less. Genesis inevitably points to Revelation. The beginnings move toward new beginnings; the creation toward consummation. With all its chaos and disorder, with all its confusion and hopelessness, this cosmos is not without hope: it is moving toward its inevitable climax. To this climax the angel of Revelation 14:6, 7 draws our attention, and part of our responsibility is the proclamation of that eternal gospel that insists: "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water."

3 Ps. 33:6-9.
7 Isa. 40:21-23.

*A All Bible passages in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.*
Getting the congregation to evaluate you!

Evaluation helps performance and enhances professional maturity. For a minister, what better way to get an evaluation than asking the congregation to take on the role? I find this form helpful.—Bradley K. Whited, pastor for administration, La Sierra Collegiate Church of Seventh-day Adventists, Riverside, California.

Stress control: self-help manual

Stress is our word. Never before has any generation been afflicted with so many stress-related disorders as ours. Stress takes its toll intellectually, physically, socially, and culturally. Even the spiritual quest finds itself under bombardment from competing cures that leaves many unsure. So it is reassuring to find that a physician has turned to the Great Physician's invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28), and has come up with some biblical perspectives on stress control.

In Managing Stress, Walter C. Thompson, M.D., discusses how sin, broken relationships, self, and defective lifestyle relate to stress, and how turning to God reduces stress. The biblical perspective of agape dominates the book. The reader can discover God's way of managing life by relying on the power of prayer and the promises of His Word. The self-help manual comes with exercises, projects, and complete les-

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**PASTORAL EVALUATION FORM**

(Place an "x" in the appropriate box: 1—strongly agree; 2—agree; 3—not sure; 4—disagree; 5—strongly disagree. Your candid assessment will help me better my ministry.)

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In SPIRITUAL ATTRIBUTES, my pastor is:
- Christlike.
- sincere.
- Spirit-filled.
- devoted.
- pure.
- phony.
- liberal.
- conservative.

In PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS, my pastor is:
- healthy.
- active.
- well groomed.
- relaxed.
- temperate.
- tense.
- vigorous.
- attractive.

In PRACTICAL TRAITS, my pastor:
- is a hard worker.
- is well organized.
- is careless.
- is prompt.
- is persevering.
- keeps confidences.
- is hasty.
- is a good visitor.
- is dependable.
- is sloppy.
- is family-oriented.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS:

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