God's Word:
Its Origin
And Authority
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of Seventh-day Adventists
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Zinaldo A. Santos
October 2002 issue

The article entitled “Church Discipline the Redemptive Way” deeply saddened me. I disagree with it and have major issues with the content.

It seems that Tim Crosby—as well as most Christians—define “open sin” as sexual sins as well as the usage of alcohol and drugs. However, this definition of open sin is far too narrow, especially in light of Jesus’ teachings. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus doesn’t spend His time condemning sexual sins and drunkenness, but instead attacks the open sins of pride and selfishness.

The open sins of pride and selfishness are far more damaging than any sexual impropriety. These sins cause much more pain and hurt to the church and its members than any other sin. If we were to take Crosby’s advice of kicking out people with open sin and used the true definition of open sin, I’m afraid we would be left with very few church members. In fact, we would have to shut down the majority of churches for lack of members, and I personally would have to be kicked out of the church because I struggle with these sins myself.

The other issue I have with the article is Crosby’s use of a few “success” stories of people who have been kicked out of church and then came back. The reality of the situation is that there are millions of people in the world who will never step foot in a church again or for the first time because of the judgmental attitude they experience among the members.

As a future pastor, I hope and pray that Crosby’s attitude is not one that I will come across frequently in the churches I will pastor. This attitude among the members is one of the reasons our churches are not flourishing like God wants them to.

—Trevan Osborn, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Tim Crosby’s “Church Discipline the Redemptive Way” is pure gold. It should be a main article in the Adventist Review on a high-priority track.

—Rolland Ruf, Collegedale, Tennessee.

I can’t help but respond to Richard Coffen’s “The Enigma of Unanswered Prayer.” It is unfortunate that books of prayer stories always chronicle the prayers that have answers directly in line with the requests made of God. Rarely, if ever, do we find detailed accounts of prayers either denied or answered in a manner greatly different from the initial request.

When God did not strike Mrs. Brown with death, it was a clear answer to the prayer of Kurt and Kent, and I am sure that with a little maturity and introspection, they should recognize that fact. Our Savior must have known that His prayer, “Let this cup pass from me,” was answered, although it could seem to have been ignored in the events that followed.

The prophet Elijah surely had the inspiration of God when he confronted Ahab a second time and demanded a convocation on Carmel. With instruction of this nature, Elijah could know, in advance, the response of God. The rantings of the heathen priests were, in fact, no prayers at all since prayers must be made to a being who can fulfill them. Baal was the product of man’s imagination constructed by man’s hands.

Surely, most of us have prayed prayers where the silent “No” of God directly corresponds with the request. And, this correspondence can, later, be clearly seen.

—Bryce Hickerson, Carmichael, California.

I read with interest Gosnell Yorke’s letter concerning Bible translations.

He commented upon the book Battle of the Bibles, by H. H. Meyers, which is an affirmation of the King James Version of the Bible. I too have read this book, and unlike Gosnell Yorke, found it to be an excellently researched book. It is historically sound.

It appears that Pastor Yorke may not be familiar with the fact that, at the time of the Reformation, the battle as to which manuscripts to use was pivotal. All European Protestants chose the untampered Eastern Syriac-Greek texts, while Roman Catholics chose the tampered Western Alexandrian Greek texts. By the way, the present King James Bible that we have today, rather than being the early seventeenth-century edition, is the late eighteenth-century revision.

Brother Meyers has raised a not insignificant issue concerning the most valid record of Scripture in the English language. This issue should not be treated lightly.

—Colin Standish, Australia.
God can be mystifying!

**Will Eva**

It seems to me that God is more rigorous and even, at times, severe, in His dealings with us than we would like to admit or accept. What is even more disturbing to us is that God appears to us to be much less consistent and much more mystifying than we would like to acknowledge.

We appreciate God more when we feel we can prescribe His thoughts and ways until they coincide with our own. We are more comfortable with God when to us He seems more adaptable to this or that carefully developed, politically correct notion.

We feel we can then place the tough issues of life and the church in the category of being settled and finalized, so that when we encounter any deviation from that settled position, it will be obvious to us how we should think and act. This is not the worst description of what’s often behind what we call “orthodoxy.”

We like to worship gods whom we have determined are in the business of making us feel good; who protect our peace of mind; who cure, comfort, and cater to us. We like a god who lives to shield us from having to deal with anything disturbing or different.

When you think about it, whether or not we worship God is often based on whether we approve of, or can in fact appreciate and identify with, His thought and behavior.

As part of this way of looking at God and truth, we sometimes seem to be convinced that when any given viewpoint is divisive, it must be wrong. It is intriguing to note when it was, and in which specific and general setting, that Jesus, the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), said, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34, NIV).

Looking at all this, we can well ask, Was God ever more mystifying to us than when He became a man at the Incarnation? Did He ever act in a more surprising, unexpected way? Was there ever a moment when God so entirely confounded what we humans were predicting and bargaining on?

Born with nowhere to lay His head. Reposed in a donkey’s feeding trough, wrapped in borrowed rags, which were bound about His tiny body by a peasant mother who was, of all things, a virgin!

And then, at virtually every significant step, He countered the expectations of His closest followers, who even when He was ascending . . . ascending? . . . held onto Him still insisting, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6, NIV). And finally, quite understandably, being killed as a danger to the faith and established structures and cultures of the nations; thus adding to His résumé one more massive offense—the offense of the Cross.

And the Incarnation itself was only part of the catch! No more sacrifices for sin, no more lambs or priestly ministries in the temple, and no more temple! No more Levitical or ceremonial systems. In other words, no more of that which had been central to the faith and practice of the faithfull for centuries. It seemed it was time for the orthodox to act and to stand up to be counted as proponents of the faith of their fathers. So the orthodox ended up putting God to death.

This matter of God’s involvement or guidance among us, of what the actual will and way of God are in a given situation, is a difficult issue to tackle. It is difficult because no matter which side of the line one stands on in a given situation, he or she is subject to the same questions about the validity of their position versus that of their counterpart.

Gil Valentine’s penetrating article, “A Slice of History” (see page 5), is a fine example of our classic struggle to understand and follow the way God is leading in His movements on this planet. The players in this “slice” are classic characters, as is the issue of orthodoxy versus innovation, as are the complexities of the struggle, as are the ways they play out, as is the frustrating, knotted-up impasse Dr. Valentine describes, as are the feelings that storm through the discussion, while the quiet, confident, hand of God is omnipresent throughout.
A slice of history: The difficulties of imposing orthodoxy

Gilbert Valentine, Ph.D., is vice president for academic administration, Mission College, Thailand.

The General Conference Committee faced a serious managerial problem. How could it ensure that an independent, “autonomous” senior college board follow its direction in the matter of ministerial education and the employment of theology teachers? How could it ensure the provision of safe yet effective ministerial training? How should the college board manage an unorthodox teacher?

The year was 1888, and the issues were serious and complex.

The following little-known episode from one of the most painful years in Seventh-day Adventist Church history may offer insights and provide a context for some of Ellen White’s strongest statements on academic freedom.

Traditional versus innovative

Concerned to ensure that ministers in training were exposed to the best in biblical and practical instruction, the General Conference Committee, in April 1888, had formally recommended that the Board of Battle Creek College appoint the energetic 38-year-old Alonzo T. Jones as its Bible teacher. At the time he was teaching Bible and history at Healdsburg College in California, and his fresh insights had impressed W. C. White and his mother.

At Battle Creek, Professor E. B. Miller had become rather staid and stale, and would benefit from a transfer to Healdsburg, to take Jones’s place. Influential members of the GC Committee, W. C. White and W. W. Prescott, had previously discussed the idea and persuaded the GC Committee to act. Besides, in the new year, they planned to bring in ministers from the field for a five-month intensive “in-service” training course, which needed a fresh, relevant, cutting-edge approach.

But the college board, dominated by more traditional thinkers, were not persuaded that this was a safe move. Although Jones was a bright and charismatic teacher, he was also outspoken and had begun to develop a reputation for challenging the status quo. Wasn’t he too unorthodox? And, in the view of Review editor and senior board member, Uriah Smith, the unorthodoxy was neither trivial nor inconsequential.

Jones had allied himself with Elliot Waggoner, the brash and even younger editor (31) of the Signs of the Times, in advocating a dangerous reinterpretation of Galatians 3:24. In suggesting that the Galatians text referred to the “moral law” and not the temporary and shadowy Mosaic “ceremonial law,” these teachers were deemed to be on extremely dangerous ground. Such a view, in Smith’s opinion, undermined “the pillars of the faith.”

It overthrew the validity of the church’s teaching on a central doctrine, the seventh-day Sabbath. And, as well, it negated the teaching of the Spirit of Prophecy for, as Smith pointed out, Mrs. White had previously indicated such teaching was wrong. The view of the “moral law” in Galatians, simple and spiritually insightful though it might sound to the uninitiated, threatened to undo teachings “vital to the existence of our faith,” explained the respected editor, who was also the senior (although part-time) Bible teacher at the college. Many respected pastors and church leaders agreed.

Furthermore, Jones had recently adopted a new interpretation of Revelation 13 and the mark of the beast and the Sunday law. Uriah Smith objected that this new teaching on eschatology contradicted all the church had published on the topic. It threatened the reputation of the Church and “undermined the positions held for 30 years.” No wonder parents in California were threatening not to send their children to Healdsburg if such things were being taught there.
The transfer of Jones to Battle Creek College would, therefore, not receive Smith’s endorsement. It was obvious that there was no consensus. Thus, the board, after “lengthy discussion,” declined to make the appointment. “No formal action was taken.”

Differences: Battle Creek College and the General Conference

Six months later, in October, the theological controversy in the Minneapolis General Conference session proved the point for leaders such as GC President Butler and editor Smith. Jones’s role in the troubles vindicated their caution. The fact that he had taken such a “prominent part” at the conference in “pressing vigorously points of doctrine, concerning which there exists differences of opinion among the body of Seventh-day Adventists,” did not win him friends in Battle Creek.

Nor did it make things easier for Smith and Butler when the idea of a transfer arose again at the college board meeting. Wasn’t it clear, they argued, that Jones was simply not a safe teacher? How could they have him teaching ideas in one Bible class that were at variance with what Smith himself would be teaching in another? So the board again discussed the proposal “at considerable length” and decided to appoint a solid, middle-of-the-road (but uninspiring) teacher named Frank D. Starr.

The action of the board, however, complicated things for the General Conference Committee. They had other plans for F. D. Starr, and this independent, noncooperation on the part of the college board was not acceptable to the GC Committee. They requested a highly unusual “joint meeting” of the college board together with the GC Committee.

Within the next 36 hours, the interview panel had a long conference with the unconforming teacher. Whether Jones had been advised beforehand, whether he really wanted the job, or whether he was simply intimidated by the weighty panel is not clear. In any case, he seemed to satisfy them. He conceded “the right of the board to determine what views should be presented,” and he assured them “in a very positive manner” that “if he should be employed to assist in the Lectures, he would not knowingly teach any opinions contrary to those which the Board desired to be taught . . .”

Views and role of Ellen White

Although such acquiescence may have pleased Smith and Butler, Mrs. White found it incomprehensible that just two men should be considered the guardians of the teachings for Seventh-day Adventists. She had delivered an impassioned speech at the Minneapolis General Conference session a month earlier (October 21) dealing with this very notion—the inappropriateness of a few people being guardians of doctrinal orthodoxy.

The atmosphere had been oppressive and supercharged at Minneapolis, as it still was at Battle Creek headquarters a month after the session. Mrs. White’s message seems not to have registered with editor Smith, who already had resigned from membership on the General Conference Committee to protest the way affairs were being run.

Matters were made worse by an incident revolving around the question of whether Jones should even be

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FRIDAY, MARCH 28 - A FRESH BREATH OF HOPE
SATURDAY, MARCH 29 - THE BEST IS YET TO COME
allowed to preach in Battle Creek. It seems that on this same weekend (November 24), it had been suggested that A. T. Jones be invited to preach at the Battle Creek Tabernacle. The church would be blessed, it was said, by his innovative insights on theology and eschatology as they related to current Sunday law issues. Senior editor Smith objected, however, saying that he could agree to such an invitation only if Jones would agree not to speak on the new themes. Prescott was commissioned to talk to Jones, who agreed to the conditions.

When Mrs. White heard of the strange goings-on, she was incensed. What an "incomprehensible tug of war" this was turning out to be. 9

The college board was reconvened. George Butler, the board chair, reported on the interview. Very strong differences of opinion were voiced, although these were expressed "in a brotherly spirit." Finally, in one of the longest actions on record in its minutes, the board voted to accept the General Conference recommendation and appoint Jones as Bible teacher, under the stipulated conditions. The vote was split 60/40. The chair abstained, and members felt such strong convictions that individual votes were recorded.10

Mrs. White worried about the larger issues. Could a church continue to grow in truth with these kinds of attempts to preserve orthodoxy and maintain the status quo? She thought not.

Prior to the Jones affair at Battle Creek College, someone had framed a resolution at the General Conference session that "nothing should be taught in the college contrary to that which has been taught. . . ." Ellen White spoke vigorously against the resolution and voted against it. She felt deeply, she said, for she knew that "whoever framed that resolution was not aware of what he was doing."

Later she was again horrified when she heard that Jones should not be invited to preach at the Tabernacle because "he took rather strong positions" on Revelation 13. And she was aghast that "arrangements were made to shut him out of the school for fear something should come in that would be at variance" with what had been previously taught at the college. "Was this a conscientiousness inspired by the Spirit of God?" she asked. In her view, the spirit of such inspiration was not "from God, but from another source."12

In her speech at the General Conference, Mrs. White had been very pointed in her opposition to these inappropriate attempts to ensure a status quo orthodoxy. In words that are troubling, but in some ways refreshingly radical, she declared that, "Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught hitherto. Away with such restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak. . . . That which God gives his servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God's message for this time."

It was her view that "the Lord has need of men who are spiritually sharp and clear sighted, men worked by the Holy Spirit, who are certainly receiving manna fresh from heaven." She was sure on that occasion in 1888, that the time had come when "through God's messenger, the scroll is being unrolled to the world."14

Of course, Mrs. White did not advocate unfettered libertarianism. She stoutly defended the faith of the fathers. The landmarks and pillars of

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the truth were of vital significance to her; they described the self-identity of the church and provided the basis for its mission. Mrs. White was deeply committed to the unity of the church, but she also saw the need for the church community to live with the creative tension between preserving the faith of the fathers and having a faith that was relevant "present truth."

"The God of heaven sometimes commissions men to teach that which is regarded as contrary to the established doctrines," she wrote to Haskell eight years later, in 1896, trying to help him open his mind to accept Prescott's new Christological interpretation of church teachings (that's another story!).

What can we learn?

This episode suggests that some approaches for ensuring orthodoxy are clearly inappropriate if they put authority for orthodoxy in the hands of very small groups, or if they reflect a disposition to control the minds of others, or if they reveal a phobia about things new.

The task of balancing openness to the freshness of the Spirit with the need for church unity and the ensuring of orthodoxy is a demanding task for any church leader today, just as it was in Ellen White's day. But then, when established reactionaries such as Smith and Butler could argue that a new idea was dangerous and undermined the essentials of the faith, at least the voice of the prophet could insist on openness and suggest otherwise with a "No, I don't see this as vital. What is more vital is to manifest a Christian spirit."

Today the church no longer has the living voice at Elmshaven or in committees to respond to specific new ideas, new circumstances, and new settings. But the Lord who gifted Mrs. White has indeed gifted the church and promised the church that the same Spirit, if allowed, will guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

1 Uriah Smith to A. T. Robinson, Sept. 21, 1892.
2 Ibid.
3 Ellen G. White (EGW) to Brother Healey, Dec. 10, 1888.
4 BCC Board Minutes, April 8, 1888.
5 Ibid., November 13, 1888. Although Butler had been replaced as GC president and Smith had submitted his resignation from the GC Committee, both retained their roles as college trustees.
6 BCC Board Minutes, Nov. 22, 1888.
7 Ibid., Nov. 25, 1888.
8 EGW to Brother Healey, Dec. 9, 1888.
9 EGW to Mary White, W-82 - 1889.
10 BCC Board Minutes, November 25, 1888. A month later, Butler submitted his resignation as chair of the board. He had received a scolding letter from Mrs. White for his attitudes. Out of office as GC president, he argued he would not be much use to the board. His resignation was not accepted, but he still did not attend any meetings during the next 12 months. Vice chair, Uriah Smith, directed affairs.
11 EGW, Manuscript 16, 1889.
12 Ibid.
13 EGW, Manuscript 8a, 1888, a talk to the ministers delivered on October 21, 1888.
14 EGW, Manuscript 8a, 1888.
The Trinity

Woodrow W. Whidden

Editorial Note: This is the second in an extended series of articles in which Ministry writers will express Seventh-day Adventist faith in Christocentric terms.

Seventh-day Adventist faith, Belief 2: The Trinity: “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.”

This quote, elaborated on by subsequent statements [Belief 3 (“The Father”); Belief 4 (“The Son”); and Belief 5 (“The Holy Spirit”), expresses the Trinitarian convictions of Seventh-day Adventism. It represents a significant culmination of doctrinal development in denominational history, a development that evolved from a distinctly non-Trinitarian mind-set (often expressed in an anti-Trinitarian spirit) to Arianism, semi-Arianism, and then onto the full triumph of the present Trinitarian confession of faith.

The key issues that had to be thrashed out were essentially the same ones that the church of the third to the sixth centuries resolved. These questions revolved around the tensions between the biblical revelation that seemed to point to God’s profound oneness (the unitarian evidence) and those passages that strongly pointed to a plurality of divine Persons in the Godhead (the Trinitarian texts).

More specifically, the central issues revolved around two key questions: (1) Is the deity of Jesus Christ just as fully divine in substance and nature as is the deity of the Father? and (2) Is the Holy Spirit also fully divine and genuinely personal—just as divine and just as much a person as are the Father and the Son? By the middle of the twentieth century, Seventh-day Adventists had reached the same consensus as had the church of the fourth century: that there is “one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” who have manifested themselves as a “unity of three co-eternal Persons.” When it comes to confessing what can be said about the substance of the Father’s divine nature can also be said about the Son and the Spirit.

While incomprehensible to the unaided human mind, the triune God can be “known through His self-revelation!” And it is the steady conviction of Seventh-day Adventists that the key revelation of God has come through Jesus Christ, the Infinite Son of God and Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The key work of the Holy Spirit has been to proceed forth from both the Father and the Son to draw attention to the Son. And in uplifting the Son, the Father is revealed and glorified.

Historically, there have been two basic types of objections to the Triune understanding of the Godhead: (1) scriptural and (2) logical. The main temptations in meeting these objections has been to gravitate to either unitarian or tri-theistic solutions. We are persuaded that neither Scripture nor logic will sustain either the unitarian or tri-theistic interpretations. If sufficient evidence can be adduced from the Scriptural testimony to support the full deity of both the Son and the Spirit, then we will have taken giant steps toward a Trinitarian interpretation of the evidence.

We will present some of the most appealing biblical evidence when we discuss the Son and the Holy Spirit in succeeding articles. But at this juncture we will present more general biblical evidence for the Trinitarian oneness of the Godhead. Then we will address the logical objection to the Trinity.

Old Testament evidence

One of the passages that is most often cited in support of unitarian interpretations of the Godhead is Deuteronomy 6:4. This great passage, known as the “Holy Shema,” forthrightly proclaims the oneness of God: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (NASB).

A superficial reading of this text could point toward unitarianism, but when the meaning of the Hebrew word that is translated “one” (‘echad) is explored in depth (and compared with the word yachid), the results are revealing. ‘Echad actually means “one (among others),’ the emphasis being on a particular one. . . . The possibility of there being others is inherent in ‘echad, but yachid precludes that possibility.”

The difference between ‘echad and yachid can be further explained: ‘Echad refers to the oneness that results from a unity of numerous persons, while yachid is used in Hebrew to refer to an exclusively unitary being. In contrast to ‘echad, yachid “means ‘one’ in the sense of ‘only,’ or ‘alone.’” Moses, therefore, chose to employ the word ‘echad to express the idea of one among others in a joined or shared oneness.
This use of 'echad is neatly illustrated by the way Moses employed it to describe the marriage union: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one [echad] fleshly” (Gen. 2:24, NKJV, emphasis supplied). Here we have a plurality of two persons who enter into a deep plural oneness—a most appropriate illustration of the infinite oneness of the plural Godhead.

Other suggestions of this “oneness” are hinted at in Genesis. Genesis 1:26 reports the Creator God as saying, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (NKJV, emphasis supplied). The passage has God speaking of Himself with plural references. Furthermore, when God did create humanity in “Our” image, He established a plurality of two individuals, distinct from each other, yet capable of becoming “one” (Gen. 2:24). These verses strongly portray the historical fact that the plurality of oneness involves the image of God.

Yet there is further evidence in the Genesis record and in Isaiah that hints at God’s inherent plurality: (1) Referring to the sin of Adam and Eve, “the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil’” (Gen. 3:22, NKJV, emphasis supplied). (2) In the story of the great sin of the people at the Tower of Babel, God said, “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language” (Gen. 11:7, emphasis supplied). (3) Isaiah 6 records a remarkable vision in which the prophet saw “the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up” (verse 1). During this experience, Isaiah reports hearing “the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’” (verse 8, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

While none of these examples are coercive, their cumulative force provides interesting evidence from the Old Testament for the plurality of persons within the Godhead. The evidence, however, from the New Testament is more compelling.

### New Testament evidence

The most often cited passage is in Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (NKJV).

Please note that the text declares the Three Members of the Godhead to have a “name” (singular, not plural), strongly suggesting that They are One in personal character and nature.

This verse, along with 2 Corinthians 13:14, offers a striking insight to the life of the early apostolic church. These two passages present the apostolic greetings and Christ’s own formula for the rite of initiation (baptism) into the family of God in triune ways. Both suggest the unity of the Three great Persons operative in redemption and the life of the church.

The final evidence of the unity of the Godhead arises out of the presence of the Three at the baptism of Jesus: “When He had been baptized, Jesus..."
come up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:16, 17, NKJV).

Thus, Jesus formally begins His public ministry of redemption, all Three Members of the Heavenly Trio are present. The newly baptized Jesus comes out of the Jordan, the Spirit descends on Him like a dove, and the Father audibly speaks words of divine approval and identity from heaven. This scene powerfully portrays the oneness of purpose shared by the Godhead. Furthermore, it clearly evidences the distinctness of each divine being. Matthew does not present the Spirit and the Son as different manifestations or personifications of the Father, but as distinct personalities in concert with the Father even while They give every appearance of oneness in purpose and character as They focus on the redemptive mission of the Son.

Logical objections to the Trinity

To many non-Trinitarians the concept of one equaling three seems illogical. Millard Erickson has cogently suggested that Trinitarians need to give a coherent answer to how we can logically conceive three as one.

Erickson suggests that the real-life, practical world would not tolerate such fuzzy, “three = one” math. If I went to the grocery store and took three loaves of bread to the checkout counter and tried to persuade the clerk that they were really one and all that we have to pay for is one, the clerk might quickly call for store security.

Thus Trinitarians must give some reasonably coherent account to explain how one is three and three is one in the life of the Godhead. The question is this: What is it about the nature of the triune Godhead that makes the alleged persons called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit “one”?

The first response to the logic of Trinitarian thought is to admit that we are dealing with a profound mystery. While we readily believe the Bible when it says that Adam and Eve became “one” and were yet two, we have yet to fully fathom the ways of any man with any maiden (Prov. 30:19). Yet in loving relationships, there does develop a profound oneness. Are such relationships, therefore, illogical and incoherent?

Erickson points the way to a credible solution: “We therefore propose thinking of the Trinity as a society of persons, who, however, are one being. While this society of persons has dimensions to its inter-relationships that we do not find among humans, there are some illuminating parallels. Love is the binding relationship within the Godhead that unites each of the persons with each of the others.”

It comes as no surprise to Seventh-day Adventists that Erickson then appeals directly to 1 John 4:8, 16: “God is love.” Do we truly comprehend the depths of this inspired statement, so disarming in its seeming simplicity? We would suggest that these three words have a profound contribution to make to our understanding of a God who has eternally preexisted in a state of Trinitarian “oneness.”

Once more we resonate with the suggestively intriguing comments of Erickson: “The statement . . . ‘God is love,’ is not a definition of God, nor is it merely a statement of one attribute among others. It is a very basic characterization of God.”

For Seventh-day Adventists the key question about God has ultimate reference to the issue of His love. And if God is not love in the very core of His being, then any questions about His nature quickly descend to a state of biblical irrelevance. We, however, sense that love is the most basic characterization of God. If God is truly—in His essence—the God of love (John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8), then consider the following:

Could One who has existed from all eternity past and who made us in His loving image—could this God truly be called love if He existed only as a solitary being? Is not love, especially divine love, possible only if the One who made our universe was a plural being who was exercising love within His divine plurality from all eternity past? Is not real, selfless love possible only if it proceeds from the kind of God who, by nature, was and is and shall eternally be a God of love? Is the Creator God, who is called love, in any way finally dependent upon His created beings to reveal and demonstrate His love?

Instead, God is a Trinity of love, and this love has found its most moving revelation in the creative work, incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the fully divine Son of God. In the unique God-Man, love has been fully demonstrated, and the Godhead will be fully and finally vindicated as the only Power that can govern the universe. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the great issues of sin, salvation, and God’s fitness to govern can be fully vindicated only through the unfolding revelation of Triune love.

God’s Trinitarian oneness, in the finale, is not illogical but is the source of the only logic that makes any ultimate sense—a love that is self-sacrificing, mutually submissive, and eternally outward flowing in the graces of creative and redemptive power.

More on this topic in March...
Truth and experience: Finding an authentic combination

Kevin Morgan

Amerindians are expressing renewed interest in spiritual things. As Modernism has proved cold and unsatisfying, the present generation has begun looking for spiritual sustenance or emotional meaning elsewhere, though not necessarily through the channels of previous generations.

In a 1996 broadcast, Peter Jennings of America’s ABC News articulated some ways Americans are conducting their spiritual search. His special report began by saying, “While 88 percent of Americans count themselves as Christian, membership in mainline or traditional Protestant churches has been declining since the 1960s. The Catholic Church is also struggling. And yet, here we are in the mid 1990s with Americans hungering for spiritual meaning...”

What draws people to Zen Buddhism is that its “meditation strikes some as a daily, direct experience of the sacred absent from Sundays-only religion.” In other words, the “magnet” of Zen is its sense of “immediacy,” or supposed personal contact with God. For this reason, New Age phenomena are also thriving. They emphasize immersion in experience and suspension of reason, such as seen in “channeling.”

“Rewarded people,” said channeler Thomas Jacobson, “is the chance to temporarily suspend the debate over whether channeling is real and just immerse themselves in the experience” (emphasis supplied). Among Jews there’s a growing interest in a popular form of the Kabbalah, a “received” mysticism based on the Zohar, the thirteenth-century mystical book set down in ancient Aramaic by the Spanish-Jewish writer Moses de Leon. “Kabbalism... prescribes prayers, meditative practices and, depending on whom you ask, magical practices and numerology.”

All these forms of mysticism have one thing in common: they emphasize experience and the bypassing of reason. In fact, this is Webster’s very definition of mysticism: “The doctrine or belief that direct spiritual apprehension of truth or union with God may be obtained through contemplation or insight.
in ways inaccessible to the senses or reason.”

**The Christian connection**

Some Christian writers echo this broader definition of mysticism and suggest that such a direct and mystical connection with God might be a good thing. “There is no need to blanch at the word mysticism. It’s a perfectly sound word that merely describes a way of knowing beyond your physical senses; thus it accurately describes the life of anyone who believes in God and a world of the unseen. It is not a belief system or a set of doctrines. When we talk or think about love, prayer, meditation, revelation, inspiration, perception, intuition, or imagination, we are working in the realm of the mystical.”

Many Christians are, indeed, looking for meaning in mystical experiences. They don’t want to just know God, they want to experience Him. One of the new forms of Evangelical Christianity that Jennings highlighted was the Vineyard Fellowship, started by John Wimber, former musical arranger for the 1960s singing group The Righteous Brothers. Wimber started the fellowship. Jennings reported, because he hungered for the supernatural in Christianity. “I love Jesus. I love the stuff He did. I love the multiplying of the food and the healing of the sick, giving sight to the blind, spitting in people’s eyes. I love that stuff!”

At the Vineyard, the publicly mystical is not only tolerated but encouraged. “There is no doubt that emotional therapy is central to the ministry.”

Another phenomenon among Christians that could fall into the category of the mystical because it claims to be a direct connection with God is the experience of ecstatic utterance, or “speaking in tongues.”

The Pentecostal movement, with its phenomenal outburst of tongues, has swept over the Christian world. Called the “third force” in Christendom, it constitutes “a revolution comparable in importance” with the Protestant Reformation and the launching of the Apostolic church. Never has a movement taken over the churches to such a degree. But are there aspects to this mystical experience that are related to the practice of sacrificing objective reality for subjective experience?

The ready reception that modern tongues has received could well arise from the now common desire for “immediacy” with God. It too tends to bypass the intellect to gain a direct experience, an encounter with something mystical.

**Concerns about seeking after the mystical**

Those looking for such a mystical/emotional experience tend to accept a wide range of supernatural experiences as being of God (unless, of course, those experiences are clearly demonic). People in Christian meetings bark like dogs, or laugh until they fall on the ground.

After his prison term, Jim Bakker came to stark realizations about the type of religion he had been promoting. “One of the things I need to warn . . . people [about is] that, if we fall in love with miracles—if we fall in love with signs and wonders—we are being prepared for the antichrist instead of Jesus Christ.”

He then connected his statement with the prediction of false prophets working deceptive signs and wonders (Mark 13:22) and the prediction of the spirits of devils working miracles to deceive the whole world (Rev. 16:14). Bakker concluded by saying that instead of teaching people to seek after the miraculous, “We must lead people to love Jesus Christ.”

Jim Bakker is right. God would not have given us the scriptural warning if it were not possible for “even the elect” to be deceived (Mark 13:22). We must teach Christians to rely on Jesus Christ and His Word, not merely on their own experience.

**Is this emphasis the fulfillment of God’s promise?**

However intriguing these new forms of religion may seem, the honest seeker after truth must ask the question, “Should the Christian see mysticism as God’s open door into a deeper experience with Him?” And with the concerns about eschatological deception, “Does modern mysticism answer to the unique experience that God’s Word foretells as coming to His people just before He comes?”

The prophet Joel does describe a refreshing of the Spirit that will come before the end of all things: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28, 29, emphasis supplied).

God clearly wants a deeper experience for those who love Him, and dry formality without the power of the Spirit is useless, and worse. “This know also, that in the last days perilsous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves . . . having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:1, 2, 5, emphasis supplied).
The opposite of this “form of godliness” is exposed by Ellen White before the return of our Lord: “Notwithstanding the widespread declension of faith and piety, there are true followers of Christ in these churches. Before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children”16 (emphasis supplied).

Will this revival sweep Adventist believers in line with other Christian faiths? “Many, both of ministers and people, will gladly accept those great truths which God has caused to be proclaimed at this time to prepare a people for the Lord’s second coming. The enemy of souls desires to hinder this work; and before the time for such a movement shall come, he will endeavor to prevent it by introducing a counterfeit. In those churches which he can bring under his deceptive power he will make it appear that God’s special blessing is poured out; there will be manifest what is thought to be great religious interest. Multitudes will exult that God is working marvelously for them, when the work is that of another spirit. Under a religious guise, Satan will seek to extend his influence over the Christian world”17 (emphasis supplied).

God is anticipating a people who have an intimate relationship with Him, but we are not to seek to know Him merely through our own subjective feelings. There is Jeopardy in pursuing a relationship with God that depends primarily on experience without the objective guidelines and safeguards of Scripture applied in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Does the bypassing of reason for immediacy with God have a more sinister side to it? “Popular revivals are too often carried by appeals to the imagination, by exciting the emotions, by gratifying the love for what is new and startling. Converts thus gained have little desire to listen to Bible truth, little interest in the testimony of prophets and apostles. Unless a religious service has something of a sensational character, it has no attractions for them. A message which appeals to unimpassioned reason awakens no response. The plain warnings of God’s word, relating directly to their eternal interests, are unheeded.”18

Two practical safeguards

What about a Christian’s own private devotional world? How is he or she to pursue an intimate relationship with God without being confused by this hyper-experiential subterfuge?

It is important first to anchor all meditation in the revealed Word of God. The Bible says, “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97, emphasis supplied). Here is a primary purpose for the Word of God. God knows that our human tendency is to gravitate toward things that will destroy us. He wants us to hide His Word in our hearts (Ps. 119:11) as the foundation of all Christian meditation.

What place does the imagination play, if any, in Christian meditation? Sanctified imagination is ours to apply in an unambiguous way, one described in profoundly practical terms: “It would be well for us to have a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.”19

We need to hold our experience accountable to the Bible: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).20

 Shall we search for truth or shall we look for experience? If experience is what we are looking for, it is experience we will have, though it may not be the kind that is built on truth. In seeking truth we will find truth and the authentic experience that goes with thoroughly encountering it.

1 Peter Jennings on “Peter Jennings Reporting: In the Name of God,” (aired March 16, 1996, on ABC).
3 Ibid.
8 Jennings, “Peter Jennings Reporting: In the Name of God.”
9 John Wimber in interview with Peter Jennings, Ibid.
10 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
20 “Imaginations” can be racontiers.
We live in a time when some theological and religious authorities question the validity of the bodily resurrection of our Lord, and thus ultimately of people of faith. As they extend their arguments back into such ancient works as the book of Job, it is enlightening to critically review the validity of their views as they relate to passages such as Job 19:25-27, and to give well-founded interpretations of passages such as this one.

Two decades ago Michael Fox stated that Ezekiel, with the message of resurrection in his dry bones vision (Ezek. 37:1-14), reveals the courage of one who dares to affirm the absurd. Fox assumed this because in his opinion, no one in sixth century B.C. Judah was capable of contemplating an actual, physical resurrection.1 Fox’s position is that only during the intertestamental period did Jewish apocalyptic literature accept anything more than a metaphorical resurrection.

While this view is not universal,2 if we give credence to Marvin Pope’s modest proposal of a seventh-century B.C. date for the writing of the book of Job,3 we would be required to reexamine Job’s own statements before accepting a post-exilic date for the resurrection concept in the Hebrew Bible.

Positions such as Fox’s wrestle with the awesome implications of Job 19, which features some of the most famous words in Job: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:25, 26, NASB).

Analyzing Job’s rhetoric

Job could hardly speak more clearly than he does in verse 25a: “And as for me, ‘I know that my Redeemer lives.’” Nor do alternative readings of verse 25b present any particular interpretive crisis. In the NASB that line reads: “And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.” In the light of this eschatological emphasis, Job’s Redeemer appears at the end, or “at the last.” Thus it is not the clarity of verse 25 but the interpretive chaos on verse 26 that presents any real question about physical resurrection.

In 1950, E. F. Sutcliffe commented on the original Hebrew rendering of Job 19:26: “Every word of [this] text has been so thoroughly discussed in the commentaries that it seems superfluous to say more than a word on ‘nach Verlust meiner Haut’ (‘after loss of my skin’).”3 Other commentators, however, do not even accept that the words “after loss of my skin” appear in the text;4 they read “awakening” instead of “skin,”5 or neither skin nor awakening.6 Or they may preserve Job’s skin, while they alter the text elsewhere.

The context of Job 19

A study of the context of Job 19 surely challenges our placid notions of the patient Job of James 5:11. In 9:20-24 he is guiltless, but God finds him guilty; he despises his life, while the wicked run the world by God’s permission. Despite this he will argue his case before God (verses 34, 35), a God who would plunge him into the pit until his own clothes would abhor him.

In 10:14 God is, on the one hand, unforgiving of his sin and, on the other, contemptuous of his goodness. We do well to remember, though, that the Job who rants and rages also rejects the arguments and denounces the fraudulence of his treacherous friends.

Their best arguments come from Bildad. Even when Bildad speaks negatively in chapter 18, his words contain a familiar and valid hope that Job will frustrate only if he insists on wickedness. In verses 17 and 19, Bildad describes the fate of the one who so insists: “His memory perishes from the earth, and he
has no public fame. He has no offspring, he has no progeny, and there is no survivor where he once lived."

In his faithfulness to the wisdom tradition, Bildad strives to protect Job from endangering his prospects as a sage. His advice against the loss of memory, that is, fame (literally, having a “name”), is the highest appeal available to the ancient sage. 10

Job’s next answer to Bildad must represent more than mere dialogic continuity. From this perspective, juxtaposed against Bildad’s persuasive zenith, Job 19 might be seen as Job’s decisive response to his opponents’ convincing though flawed challenge. Along with this, the controlled intensity of Job 19 presents a remarkable contrast to Job’s earlier speeches.

Still, despite the violent mood swings, we discern progression in Job’s condition—from the utter gloom of his opening lament, an ode to death and oblivion, to the celebrated lines climaxing in chapter 19. Especially in his third speech, two entirely new elements both intensify the reader’s dismay and hint at breaking barriers to new regions of thought for Job’s exploration.

One of these new elements is the enigma of Job 13:15, a bedeviling utterance that may mean either that Job will hope or that there is no hope. Nevertheless, even this verse makes clear that Job knows himself to be right (he “will be vindicated”—verse 18, NASB). He has known this before (6:10; 9:13, 20, 21) and yet despite the knowledge, has sunk into despair.

But now, before his next descent into hell, Job introduces the second new astonishment of this speech by posing what seems no more than a rhetorical question: “If a man dies does he live again?” Job proposes an answer where none seems required, an answer that contradicts or transcends all expectation: “All the days of my struggle I will wait, until my change comes. Thou wilt call, and I will answer Thee. Thou wilt long for the work of Thy hands” (14:14, 15, NASB). In this dramatic outburst, Job breaks through the barrier of Sheol to speak of communion with God beyond the grave.

Unsurprisingly, however, even this new confidence seems to go unsustained. Job’s lips fall silent again, as their final words cynically repudiate Eliphaz’s effort to assure him a good death. 11 The last words of his fourth speech complain: “Where is my hope now? And who regards my hope? Will it go down with me to Sheol? Shall we go down into the dust together?” (17:15, 16, NASB).

But then, following Bildad’s speech, come the eschatological, resurrection-oriented words of chapter 19. This is a statement of such focus, and so consistent within the balance of its thematic development, that it stands in clear contrast to the circuitous and contradictory expression of the earlier diatribes of Job himself.

Job’s self-conscious control may even be noted in the length of the speech, which seems to be the briefest of all his speeches. 12 Christo has shown how pivotal it is to the whole book of Job. 13 Within the overall speech, the confidence of verses 23-27 amounts to the next logical step in Job’s continued progression from a soliloquy of absolute gloom (chap. 3), through the consolation in his rightness (6:10; 9:13, 20, 21), to daring to speak of communion with the Deity beyond the time of his death (14:14, 15). Also, it demonstrates that the protagonist is equal to the rhetorical challenge as he confronts Bildad’s skillful argumentation recorded in chapter 18.

A translation of verses 25-27
Job’s “If only . . .” speaks his confidence in the words he wishes preserved. His concern is both that their credibility not be forgotten, and that the story of his vindication be properly attested. Here, as I understand them, are the words he speaks: “As for me, I know my Redeemer is alive, Who, the Last, shall rise upon the earth. 14 And after my corruption, though my skin has been stripped away, 16 I shall yet, in my flesh, see God. I myself shall see Him for myself. Such a longing consumes me!”

I translate the disputed phrase “after my skin” (‘ahar ori) as “after my corruption.” The wealth of discussion and proposed optional
emendations of the phrase seems to overlook its connection with the book's first mention of "skin" on the lips of Satan (2:4).

When Satan fails to induce Job to blasphemy through material deprivation, he launches a new and enigmatic challenge: "Skin for skin," he taunts. "All that a man has he will give for his life" (2:4, NASB). His argument is that the threat of death will be enough to expose Job's insincerity and separate him from his God.

Job's reference to "skin" (or in context of physical corruption (19:26) may be designed both as his own climactic affirmation of faith, and the ultimate undoing of the mischievous claim on which Satan had founded that horrible test of the patriarch's faith. Job knows nothing of the adversary's charge. But he may yet expose the falsehood of Satan's claim by a precise contradiction of the adversary's own language. His words point to a time yet distant when Job will experience a vindication over which God Himself will preside, and one which Job will be alive to experience.

Summary and conclusions

Job 19:25-27 is the climactic peak of Job's response to the challenges of his friends. Here Job contemplates his own case at a level hitherto unknown, and hereafter unsurpassed. He thinks and speaks sub specie aetemitatis.

If Job was written as early as some traditions suggest, his thinking may have influenced the writing of Israel's eighth-century prophets more than is generally acknowledged. It should not then be surprising that his concept of a final day of reckoning and vindication closely corresponds with other Old Testament passages.

Having studied the concept of resurrection derived from Jewish intertestamental literature gives no credence to the tradition of the Babylonian Talmud on this question. Nor does it accept Ellen White's implication that the book of Job may be the first biblical book ever written, being composed, along with Genesis, during Moses' self-imposed exile in the Midian desert.

Taking Ellen White's comment at face value, the book of Job apparently dates to the first half of the fifteenth century B.C., the time of Moses' sojourn in the desert of Midian. And the sentiments of Job 19:25-27, compared with other biblical passages such as Job 14:12, 14; Isaiah 26:14, 19; or Hosea 5:8-6, solidly buttress the confidence that this book explicitly supports the faith of Job, the one who is the Last to receive personal vindication for His faithfulness, from the God whom he knows to be his Redeemer.

It is no mere coincidence that in Revelation 1:17, 18 Jesus is described (describes Himself) as "the First," and most significantly, "the Last." Here John employs that name, the Last, in connection with the very principles with which Job first placed them: the context of conquest over death and the grave.

Jesus, our resurrected Lord, has not lost the keys to death and hell (Rev. 1:18). Thus, we today, with more assurance than ever, may declare with Job, our faith in a day of eternal liberation to come. Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Job's Redeemer, the Redeemer of John's Revelation, is our Redeemer and Life-Giver also.1

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3 Representing the independent personal pronoun in its almost exclusive use as emphasizing the nominative subject (GKC, 32d).


5 C. Larcher, "Livre de Job," in Bible de Jérusalem, 2nd ed., 1957; 96, quoted in Tournay, ibid., 490, and reflected in The Book of Job: Reader's Edition (Garden City, N.Y.: 1971): "This I know: that my Avenger lives, and he, the Last, will take his stand on earth. After my awaking, he will set me close to him and from my flesh I shall look on God" (Job 19:25, 26). For Patrick W. Skehan see idem, "Stropheic Patterns in the Book of Job," CBQ 23 (1961), 125-142, 138, 139.

6 Larcher, ibid.

7 Skehan, ibid., 285.

8 See Proverbs 22:1: on the value of rwm (good name, public esteem). Christo, ibid., 85-87, shows keen awareness of the theocratic relation between chap. 19 and Bildad's preceding speech. He does not comment on its ethiological power.

9 See again 5:4-31, 25.

10 There is strong opinion that the text of Job has become scrambled, particularly from chap. 26-28. But a conservative evaluation of the material suggests ten speeches for Job List (chaps. 6:7-50 verses; 2nd (chaps. 9:1-5)—56 verses; 3rd (chaps. 12:14-74)—74 verses; 4th (chaps. 16:17—37)—73 verses; 5th (chap. 19:28—29) 46 verses; 6th (chap. 21:21—33) 26 verses; 7th (chap. 22:40—41) 26 verses; 8th (chap. 25:13—18) 28 verses; 9th (chap. 27:28—29) 30 verses; 10th (chap. 29:31) 33 verses.

11 Christo, ibid., 42, 83, 226, where he also argues that verses 25-27 are central to this speech.

12 Pryce, ibid., studies the term qwm in the Hebrew Bible and finds it applied to God as personally involved in human history, raising up leaders or rising up to defend. Man as subject of qwm rwm after falling, having sinned, or died (pp. 167). Christo cites Isaiah 26:14, 16:19, and Hosea 6:2, as passages that portray qwm and y to "describe the concept of resurrection" within affirmation or denial (121, 122). Thus Christo finds here the possibility of intentional doubl entendre, with qwm suggesting both "stand/return up and raise up/resurrect."

13 Use of qwm in an unscrambled resurrection passage (26:19) points to the meaning "earth." It is who lie in the dust (skyn >pr >pr > preceded by nqtp >pr ) and resurrect them, and have life (y >pr >pr ) who are to awake and shout for joy (pr >pr ) (19:14, Gen). As reference to humanity; for contexts of frutilude and mortality see Genesis 18:27; Job 42:6; Ecclesiastes 12:7.

14 "It is entirely possible that nqtp is used for its double meaning, "strike off," and "go round," Christo, ibid., 222. Also the s. j. may be understood as an abstract, referring to Job himself (ibid.). So that the line may also read "after I have been brought around," i.e., resurrected (see n. 30), nqtp not being an imperfactive or passive plural "after they have[or have not] been resurrected.me"

15 Pryce, ibid., 366, 367.

16 Pryce, ibid.

17 See Ellen White's comments in Signs of the Times, Feb. 19, 1889, p. 12. This article supplies valuable insight into how Moses' desert experience contributed not only to his subsequent leadership of Israel but specifically to writing these books. The White quotation on Mosaic authorship also appears in Frances D. Nichol, ed., SDABR (Washington, D.C.: Beren and Herald, 1977), 3:110. For more discussion sympathetic to Mosaic authorship see ibid., 493.
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A kiss of charity:       The debate over agape

John Dinsley

We often hear that God's perfect love is best expressed in the Greek word agape while earthly love is best summed up with the word phileo. Is this true, or just an idea made prominent in sermons, articles, and books? To search out an answer, I went to the Bible, where I first assembled two piles of data: One containing biblical material which employed the word agape, and the other, texts of Scripture using the word, phileo.

This article deals with some of what I discovered.

How agape is used in the New Testament


Clearly the ability to exercise agape is not only an attribute of God; it is also a vital ingredient in the Christian's experience. But can I have agape love? Evidently. And, can I have agape love without God's help? Absolutely. In Christ's own words, we read of the unconvert-ed sinner (just below John 3:16), "men loved [agapao] darkness rather than light" (John 3:19). Further, Jesus talks of people who "[agapao] the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15). If agape love is the benchmark of God's love and the converted Christian, why does Jesus say "sinners also [agapao] those that [agapao] them" (Luke 6:32)?

How phileo is used

Meanwhile, what about the other love, phileo?

"The Father himself loves [phileo] you because ye have loved [phileo] me and have believed" (John 16:27). While Jesus loved (agape) His disciple John, Jesus also loved (phileo) him (20:2). Further, the "Father [phileo] the Son, and showeth him all things" (5:20). And one who "[phileo] father or mother . . . son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me," says Jesus (Matt. 10:37).

Like agape love, phileo love can be earthly, even "earthly." The Pharisees "[phileo] to pray standing" (Matt. 6:5) and "[phileo] the uppermost rooms at feasts" (23:6). "He that [phileo] his life shall lose it" (John 12:25). Those standing outside heaven's gates are those who phileo and make lies (Rev. 22:15).

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance identifies agape as primarily a function of the head, the mind, the intellect, while phileo is more a matter of the heart, the emotions. But, lest there be any doubt as to God's approval of phileo love, as well as His insistence on practicing it, Paul, the great champion of agape, includes this admonition in his benediction to the church at Corinth: "If any man [phileo] not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (1 Cor. 16:22); that is, excommunicated or cursed until the divine judgment!

It is no wonder then that, when Jesus asked Peter the first two times, "Simon, do you [agapao] me?" Peter replied, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I [phileo] Thee" (John 21:15, 16). In answering this way, Peter knew, or at least felt himself to be, on safe ground, even though Jesus was challenging his level of devotion.

One God, two loves

Agape is occasionally translated "charity"
in the King James Version, and *phileo* is sometimes rendered “kiss.” Again both words are set in a framework of approval and censure. First Corinthians 13, the “love” chapter, edifies charity, while in His letter to the church at Thyatira, Christ rebukes their brand of *agape* when it does not condemn fornication (Rev. 2:19). Likewise, when translated “kiss,” Jesus chides Simon the Pharisee for giving Him no *philema*, while Mary had not ceased to (earnestly) “kiss” (*phileo*) His feet (Luke 7:45).

In fact, the disciples were all admonished to “salute one another with an holy kiss [a word derived from *phileo*]” (Rom. 16:16, KJV, emphasis added) as a token of their affection for one another. Then as an act of supreme rejection and deception, Jesus asks, “Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss [from *phileo*]” (Luke 22:48, emphasis added).

In a revealing blend of these two words, Peter places them both in one verse, showing us their simultaneous place in the conversion experience. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned [phileo] of the brethren, see that ye [agape] one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again” (1 Peter 1:22, 23).

In his benediction, Peter does a similar thing when he calls the growing church, in a time of great trial and betrayal, to “greet ye one another with a kiss [philema] of charity [agape]” (5:14, emphasis added).

**Making sense of apparent contradictions**

What sense then are we to make of all this, the admonitions and apparent contradictions? As our Creator, Christ fashioned humanity in His image, imbued with all the functions of God’s heart and mind, emotionally and intellectually, though in a finite form. But God’s creation went amiss and all that God had pronounced “very good” came under the law of sin, and the seed of death planted itself in the human soul.

What had been pure and noble and abounding, now, under the power of sin, became perverted and self-seeking. Nevertheless, the good seed, embedded in the soul by grace, remained ready to break out to produce its own fruit when the human being responded to the goodness of God, repented, and was born anew by the Holy Spirit.

So today, we see the love functions of mind, heart, and body devoted to the flesh or, when revitalized by the gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ, aligned with the mind and heart of God. Yet both seeds strive for space in every soul.

Both God’s Spirit and Satan’s are at work in us. Paul laments for all of us, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). Who can save me from this internal civil war? “I thank God [He can] through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (verse 25).

In God’s original plan we can see that both *agape* love, that seated in the intellect, and *phileo* love, that issuing from the heart, were originally on an equal footing in the human soul. Neither one predominated. But when Satan beguiled humanity, largely through exploiting our emotional, or *phileo*, side, it was *phileo* love—the emotional side of the human being—that became especially vulnerable.

Both kinds of love are constantly operative and both are an authentic way of expressing love; both being a part of God’s creation. Both kinds of love are potentially operative in human-to-human, God-to-human, and human-to-God relationships. All things considered, however, it is nevertheless true that *agape* love is that which is primary, which is the ultimate in our relationships to one another and to God.

Thus, while Christ challenges us to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37), *phileo* love is subject to *agape* love, even while we are to love God completely, that is, in every way. While we go from faith to faith, maturing in our experience, we are to add to brotherly kindness, charity (2 Peter 1:7); that is, we are to add to our philadelphia, *agape* (2 Peter 1:7).

As Christ laments, “thou hast left thy first [agape]” (Rev. 2:4); nevertheless, “as many as I [phileo] I rebuke and chasten” (3:19).
The Discover Bible School

Kurt Johnson

My parents asked me to begin studying the Bible with them and our neighbors, at their house,” said 15-year-old Andrea before 1,000 camp meeting attendees. “I told them ‘No.’ However, God thought differently. He had a plan for my life and finally I said, ‘Yes.’ God impressed me to make that choice. If I had not made that one choice for Jesus, I would not be standing here today.”

Two weeks before her testimony, on September 14, 2002, Andrea and six others were baptized in Newbury Park, California. All had been participants in a small-group meeting hosted by their neighbors, Augie and Eleanor Ariza. The group watched the Discover Videos and studied the Discover Bible Guides.

A new outreach is born

Andrea and her family and friends are examples of many who have become involved in the “new look” Discover Bible School Ministry that has swept across North America over the past six years.

NET ‘95, the first satellite evangelistic meeting in the Adventist Church, had been concluded for several months. With thought and prayer, the leaders weighed their options, hoping to improve the ‘95 plan. A planning meeting for NET ‘96 was scheduled.

In the meantime, Dan Guild from The Voice of Prophecy and Robert Spangler were praying, talking, and strategizing. Mark Finley and Don Gray, on an overseas trip, were doing the same. When they all got together, Dan presented the Discover Bible School concept. According to Dan, smiles of amazement crossed the faces of others; all had come with similar thoughts! In this setting, the Discover Bible School for North America was born.

What began in 1996 as a local church-based correspondence Bible school, with some visitation involved, has evolved into a multifaceted, nationwide Bible study outreach ministry. Today almost 2,400 churches have registered for the course since the first Discover Bible School was organized in North America.

Features of the Discover Bible School

Personal touch is the first goal of the school. Church members are encouraged to deliver Bible lessons personally to those requesting them. There are also small groups, one-to-one studies, video/DVD presentations, correspondence, and the Internet.

A Discover Bible School manual, instructional videos, mail services, a resource catalog, training/consulting, a quarterly newsletter, and a constant flow of new soul-winning products are part of the services.

Especially popular are the new Answer Sheets (Discover Discussion Sheets) used with the Discover Guides. The student looks up seven to ten Bible texts and writes in the answers to the questions posed in the lessons. The questions are paged to a NKJV Bible. The discussion and decision questions make for an easy-to-use soul-winning tool.

In addition to using The Voice of Prophecy Bible Guides, Bible study videos, and other soul-winning materials, the Discover Bible Schools are encouraged to combine the VOP lessons with study guides from other ministries. This team-ministry approach serves as an umbrella over the local churches and their Bible study outreach ministry. Thus, a Discover Bible School is more than just the handing out of the Discover Bible Guides. The bottom line is to meet the needs of people while leading them to Jesus.

Varied approaches, inspiring results

I have entitled one of my favorite Correspondence School stories “Dumpster Evangelism.” Fred Corder, from Wytheville,
7 Mysteries Solved
Howard Peth turns to the Bible for solutions for seven of the most puzzling mysteries to confront humanity:
1. What happens at death?
2. The Resurrection.
3. Is there a literal hell?
4. Is man a created being?
5. 666: history's strange mark.
6. A monument in time.
7. The second coming of Christ.

Secrets of Revelation
Jacques B. Doukhan shows how the Old Testament provides the key to unlock the symbolism of Revelation.

The Trinity
Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John Reeve trace the doctrine of the Trinity through Scripture, church history, and the writings of Ellen White. In this book they discuss the theological and practical implications of Trinitarian belief, worship, and practice, showing how it affects what we believe about salvation, atonement, the great controversy, and other significant doctrines.

The Return
Shawn Boonstra and Henry Feyerabend show how the concept of futurism has blinded many people to the fact that the antichrist has been at work throughout church history.

What Inspiration Has to Say About Christian Perfection
Is perfection essential to salvation? Or is it an unreachable moral ideal attained only by Jesus? Jean R. Zurcher analyzes the Greek and Hebrew words involved, the lives of Bible characters who are called "perfect," and major Ellen White statements on the topic.

The Church at Washington, New Hampshire
A Who's Who of Adventist pioneers, the church at Washington, New Hampshire, might be regarded as the birthplace of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The story of the church and the people who founded it, Mark Ford's illustrated historical account is an inspiring record of God's leading in denominational history.

The Music of Washington, New Hampshire CD
0 8290-1716-0. US$15.15; Can$45.15.

The Return CD
0 8290-1705-6. US$18.15; Can$25.15.

Visit your local Adventist Book Center
- 1-800-765-6955
NET 2003
COMING APRIL 27–MAY 24, 2003

Lonnie Melashenko will present NET 2003, “The Voice of Prophecy Speaks,” from April 27 to May 24. In the midst of today’s overwhelming life crises, people want to know where they can turn. Pastor Melashenko’s messages will demonstrate that an understanding of prophecy helps to provide them with the guidance they are searching for.

NET 2003 will be uplinked by ACN from Columbia, South Carolina every night at 7:30 p.m., for the first eight evenings. After that, meetings will be aired only on Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday through May 24, allowing time each week for pastors and Bible workers to visit those who attend.

Four additional Wednesday night sessions will be telecast on May 28 and June 4, 11, and 18. During this time of transition to the local church, pastors are encouraged to present worship services on additional prophecy topics.

“The success of any evangelistic series is determined to a great degree by what happens on opening night,” says Benny Moore, VOP executive director, “and opening night success depends on good preparation long before the meetings begin.”

Discover Bible Schools at churches across North America are a vital part of the preparation. “This will be a natural way to reap Discover Bible School interests,” says James W. Gilley, vice president for the North American Division. “For churches with a Discover Bible School, now is the time to develop more interests. For others, this is a great opportunity to get one started.”

The Voice of Prophecy daily and weekend radio broadcasts will help build an audience for NET 2003, since listeners already identify with the VOP and Pastor Melashenko. Every broadcast encourages listeners to enroll in the Discover Bible Guides.

Preparation for the evangelistic series includes three interactive training sessions by satellite on January 25, March 15, and April 19. Training videos will also be available.

“We live in urgent times,” says Pastor Gilley. “Let’s seize the opportunity, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to share Jesus with our neighbors.”

For further information, visit <www.net2003.com> on the Internet.

—Eldyn Karr, Public Relations Director, The Voice of Prophecy

Virginia, was visiting his daughter. As Fred left her apartment complex, he took her garbage to the dumpster, where he saw a number of mass-mailed enrollment cards. Fred picked up one of the discarded cards, filled it out, and mailed it to the local Discover Bible School. He completed the lessons, started attending church, and was baptized.

The Internet phase of the Discover Bible School is gaining popularity. Anyone with computer Internet access can give Bible studies to students anywhere! There is even a CD Enrollment Disk similar to a printed enrollment card or Lesson #1. Mass mail or hand out the CD, and recipients can complete Lesson #1 from the CD and connect to the Internet to sign up for the rest of the study guides. In addition, one can advertise and obtain their own students, grade lessons, as well as communicate with the students regularly.

Karen Glassford has been operating an Internet Discover School from home. “I have had the awesome privilege of being an Internet Bible School instructor for nearly four years,” she says. “I have students from eight years old to those in their eighties. Don’t wait for a more convenient time to begin your own school. I can’t overemphasize the joy and wonder that will come into your life.”

The testimonies of her students keep Karen inspired. One student writes, “I never understood how God could torture someone in hell for all eternity. I am so relieved and happy now. . . . Thank you for helping me see God as someone I can’t wait to spend eternity with.”

Another writes, “I used to go to an Adventist church 30 years ago. I found your Web site and began Bible studies. It just dawned on me when I got to the lesson on the Sabbath that this was an Adventist Web site! I think the Lord is telling me what His will is through these lessons. I will be visiting an Adventist church soon.”

Combining the Bible School with evangelistic meetings

A successful feature is combining the Discover Bible School with evangelistic meetings. The local church uses the Bible School ministry as preparation before an evangelistic series, operates the Bible School during meetings, and involves the Discover School in follow-up and discipleship of new members.

Here’s how it works. Bible study enrollment cards are mass mailed and handed out by the members. Those who have completed the course, or are currently studying, are invited to attend the evangelistic meetings.

During the meeting a banner identifying the Discover Bible School and a table for the lessons is placed in the foyer. The evangelist asks the attendees to pick up a study guide each night at the table. Students return their completed answer sheets and pick up the next study guide. A graduation is held at the end of the series, with follow-up provided.

Weekly small-group Bible study in homes is very important. Friendships, discussion, and in-depth study with graduates, those newly baptized, and their network of family and friends are excellent discipling processes.
The Berean Adventist Church
An example of this kind of evangelism process at work is the Berean Adventist Church in downtown Los Angeles. The Berean Church hosted a multi-church reaping meeting with the VOP during September 2002.

Pastor Kendall Guy says, “The Discover Bible School is one of the most effective ways of working with people. The lessons generate an excitement for studying the Bible. People from all walks of life can identify with the lessons. During an evangelistic meeting the Discover Bible School is just the thing needed to keep people focused in learning the truth of the Scripture.”

The Berean Church started with 150,000 Bible Study Enrollment Cards mailed prior to the evangelistic meeting. This mailing resulted in 2,333 requests for Bible studies. There were also 900 door-to-door responses requesting studies. About 170 who came to the meetings took the lessons. Sixty-two completed them, along with 12 who completed the Focus on Prophecy Guides as well.

Here are responses from some of the Berean Bible School students.

“I am grateful for the Discover Bible Guides. The guides helped me understand God’s Word and experience a deeper friendship with Jesus.”

“These lessons have made me want to be baptized. I loved reading them, and learned a lot.”

“The study guides have meant a lot to me. I had to stop at one point and give God thanks for sending His Son to die for my sins.”

NET 2003
If your church is participating in NET 2003, the first step is to become involved with a Discover Bible School. The NET 2003 meeting will be uplinked from Columbia, South Carolina, April 26–May 24. In addition, use the Discover School as part of your local church evangelism process. The Discover School can be the core of your church’s evangelistic outreach, follow-up, and assimilation.

If you haven’t updated your Discover Bible School or started one in your church, why not begin now? With commitment, dedication, and hard work—all immersed in prayer and the presence of the Holy Spirit—your church Bible study ministry can take on new life.

Through the Discover Bible School, there is something for every local church member to do. If someone can write a note, lick a stamp, use a computer, knock on a door, share a smile, and be part of a small group—let them decide their level of involvement—then there is a place for them.

For a free Bible School Information Packet: call 1-877-955-2525 (toll free) or 805-955-7659; fax 805-522-1760; or email discover@vop.com.
The magnitude of the pastoral call

The picture of a pastor as spiritual leader originated in Scripture, and it remains one of the most ancient and fascinating biblical symbols. Before human beings spoke of God as their Father, they referred to Him as their Pastor. Micah referred to Him as the One who would gather Israel “like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture” (Micah 2:12, NKJV), and prophesied about the Messiah saying: “He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord” (Micah 5:4, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

Jesus spoke of Himself as “the Good Shepherd,” One who “gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Of all divine titles, none is more significant than “the Good Shepherd.” Jesus never introduced Himself as preacher, bishop, priest, or administrator, but in this passage and others He presents Himself as Pastor.

Many biblical passages overflow with descriptions and inspiration for the work of the pastor. While these portray God or Christ Himself as the Pastor of His people, their implications for the pastor are by all means valid enough.

Psalm 23 is one of these. It describes God as a tender and caring Pastor, willing to place Himself in courage and diligence as the Helper, Guide, and Protector of the flock. In Luke 15:3-7, Jesus describes Himself as One willing to face perils without end in seeking the lost sheep. Again, the implications for the ministry of the pastor are transparently plain and strong.

The Pastor, the shepherd

The main task of the pastor is to render aid. The church has grown. It has become institutionalized. Thus the need is more urgent than ever for leaders who are especially gifted by the Spirit to manage the various aspects of the affairs of the church. No matter where one is serving—whether at the head of a congregation, promoting a department, administrating a given area, in a classroom, in an editorial office, or chairing boards and committees—he or she cannot afford to forget that at the heart of their calling, they are a pastor. The group being led is a “flock.”

The issues the minister deals with are directly related to God’s exaltation before humanity, as well as the growth and well-being of the flock, which is the church. The pastoral mentality should never be suffocated or replaced with the administrative and managerial mannerisms of the present age.

The pastoral worldview was the prevalent vision of the primitive church. As time went by, however, a change occurred in how pastoral work was faced, valued, and assessed. The situation has now evolved to almost tragic proportions. This is especially true in our scientific and materialistic age, when the tendency to value things above human beings is growing with frightening speed.

Some years ago, Roy Allan Anderson said: “The church has caught the spirit of the times, and she is doing her work today as a highly organized institution. But the Advent church began under the leadership of deep students of the Word. The pioneers were a deeply spiritual group of men and women. Prayer, study, and frequent counsels were a vital part of their program. But the tendency today is to place the emphasis on other things. The ability to expound the Word and feed the flock, the capacity to comfort the sorrowing and care for the fatherless, even the worker’s personal piety, seem of necessity to be neglected by virtue of the heavy promotional program laid upon men.”

It is necessary to urgently redeem the excellence of the pastoral call. “These are fast-moving days. Everything is measured by speed. And if someone trips and falls, before help can come he is trampled under foot by the surging crowd. Man finds himself home-
less amid a jungle of machines and untamed forces, and millions are wondering whether life is worthwhile. Others, trying to palliate their misery, are drifting down the stream of life to crooning music, not knowing which way they are heading and feeling that nobody cares. These conditions call for shepherds—strong, wise, kind shepherds, shepherds who can sympathize and love the wickedness out of human hearts, shepherds who are not too busy to spend time untangling individual and community problems. Everywhere there are broken homes and broken hearts, and these call for a shepherd’s care. The world does not lack luxuries, but it does lack love. Eloquent preachers, detailed organizers, and business executives all have their place in the church of God, but the flock grows in grace and Christlikeness under the gentle touch of the shepherd.”

Showing the fruit

The greatness of pastoral ministry will reveal itself in the attitudes and in the life of the minister. His or her speech and action will do justice to the high calling of the pastor. The pastor’s personal bearing and behavior are crucial. Here are some indispensable aspects of a healthy pastoral attitude:

Possessing conviction about one’s call.

In a missiological sense, we know that the Lord has called all believers for the task of evangelizing. This has to do with the exercise of the “royal priesthood” about which the apostle Peter spoke (1 Peter 2:9). Nevertheless, the Lord has blessed some of His children with the special gift of pastoring, calling them to the task of leading His people and spreading the saving influence of His kingdom.

The unequivocal conviction of the divine call is, no doubt, one of the pillars of ministerial success. Paul possessed it: “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus” (Gal. 1:15-17, NKJV).

For Paul, the divine call was so distinct that he had no need to consult anyone else to extinguish any doubts about it. God had made him a worker and a minister. And there resided his unbreakable strength.

The assurance of the call does not prevent trials and difficulties. But, in the midst of these, the pastor maintains a blazing flame of enthusiasm, a deep and inner motivation and desire to proceed. Whoever possesses this quality will not pull back in the face of the pressure; neither will such a pastor have peace and pleasure in any other activity.

Thus, divinely compelled, we should get ourselves into the work, trusting that the One who has called us will always go before us.

Communion with God.

“Like people, like priest” (Hosea 4:9, NKJV). These words impose on us a tremendous responsibility. When the pastor enjoys a rich spiritual experience, no doubt he will communicate this to his congregation. Thus there is the critical need in the life of the pastor for close communion with God. If every minister always runs to God in fervent prayer, “as in agony,” the Lord will certainly invigorate his spirit and multiply his faith.

Individually, and with our family, we should never forego the privilege of communing with God. The pastor should remember that he is a human being, fallible and constantly exposed to danger. Distrusting our own strength, we may fully trust God.

Passion for souls. The founder of the Salvation Army once said to the

**For Paul, the divine call was so distinct that he had no need to consult anyone else to extinguish any doubts about it. God had made him a worker and a minister. And there resided his unbreakable strength.**
We get questions!

James A. Cress

Everywhere our team travels we get questions, often variations on the same theme. Sometimes the questions are submitted in search of information, and other times individuals are in search of a platform to espouse personal views. I thought you might enjoy some typical questions from recent ministerial councils.

Over the years, there have been differences of opinions expressed by pastors in respect to head covering by women and wedding rings. Please, we need to have one teaching and understanding on this issue.

Here the questioner requests the impossible. Recognizing that differences of opinions have existed for years, he pleads for one consistent teaching. I’m reminded of a training convention for local church elders that I conducted in West Jamaica. Several hundred participants, including a significant number of women elders, listened as a man enquired whether it was custom or doctrine that demanded a woman wear a hat to church. My tongue-in-cheek answer was that in my culture it was custom but that in his culture it appeared to be both custom and doctrine. Then I closed the subject with admonition that in matters of women’s hat styles and dress preferences we ought, as men, to remain silent.

Issues regarding wedding rings have been settled among Adventists for decades. Wearing, or not wearing, wedding rings is entirely a personal preference. I’m sure the questioner believed I would be biased since my wife, Sharon, had just preached an excellent sermon at that Bible Conference.

A simple answer, of course, is No! There are no texts that command women to preach in church. Proof-texting our way to answers, however, may be the weakest approach to finding truth. Scripture and our own denominational heritage provide ample examples of women preaching. For example, the Samaritan woman at the well was the first individual whom Jesus commissioned as a public evangelist. She had amazing results. Mary, fresh from meeting Jesus at the tomb, was the first to preach His resurrection. Her results were not as great. Although her message was comprehended, Jesus later scolded His disciples for refusing to believe her proclamation. Priscilla held such an esteemed leadership role that she instructed other preachers, and our own Adventist heritage has relied on the effective preaching and writings of Ellen G. White’s prophetic role. If you still need a proof text, try Galatians 3, in which the apostle declares, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Our church’s polity decision to not ordain women should not be confused with the Lord’s call for every believer to proclaim His Word.

Is it our doctrine to force someone to marry a woman he has impregnated after the church board has disfellowshipped them?

The timing of the board’s action has nothing to do with the issue except to remove the church board as party to the discussion.

Premarital sexual relations are a sin. They are also a reality. Perhaps the church should offer much more in premarital education, especially to young people, with the aim of avoiding sinful situations more than punishing sinners.

The answer to sin is repentance, confession, forgiveness, and walking in new life. Marrying an individual with whom you have sinned does not atone for those sins. Marriage certificates do not move past behavior from the prohibited column to the approved column. That would be salvation by works.

I want to be further illuminated on the theology of rebaptism.

So do I. But the scriptures are silent beyond one passage (Acts 19:1-7), which tells of 12 believers who had been baptized by John in anticipatory faith of the coming Redeemer and who did not know the historic reality of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension. When they heard this good news, they were baptized again.

This unusual incident is insufficient to mandate that previously immersed believers ought to be rebaptized. Adventists have always maintained that an immersed person is welcomed into church fellowship by profession of faith in their previous baptism. The foot-washing service, which precedes Communion, is a tangible and spiritual reminder of cleansing that Jesus provides to all, and those seeking rebaptism should be directed first to this meaningful service. Our own manual, however,
does require rebaptism for readmittance into the church for certain moral failures that have disgraced the church's witness in the community. Although there is no biblical text to "prove" this point of polity, any organization has the authority to establish rules by which it will govern itself.

**Kindly tell us why people should eat the Lord's Supper apart from the 14th day of Nisan (the biblical date for Passover). Why does our church conduct Communion quarterly?**

With the reality of the gospel being present in Himself as our Passover, Jesus clearly terminated ceremonial feasts that pointed forward in shadow to Him. Therefore, the date of Passover has no controlling relationship to the Communion service, which may be celebrated quarterly, weekly, monthly, or annually. Rather than prescribing a frequency schedule, Jesus simply stated, "As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of Me."

*Servant mentality.* The principles of God's kingdom are different from those of the world: "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44, NKJV).

The idea of greatness found in the teaching of Jesus does not agree with what the world thinks. In the church, we all have to be servants. Only Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church. No human being may have the audacity to occupy this position, and even Jesus occupies it because He is the greatest of servants.

Struggling to gain a "promotion," compromising or planning it by some artful means would constitute the very antithesis of true Christianity. Whoever takes this route reveals a passion for power that does not consider the true means that are alone valid as we reach out to attain our aims as servants of God.

We must remember that in God's system there is only one caste—that of servant, and that is true no matter where one works. We must be seen as someone who serves, who gives of himself. What really matters is the attitude. Not the title.

**Ministerial ethics.** Someone has defined ministerial ethics as "moral science." It is an elevated standard of human conduct that involves consideration, respect, and courtesy toward our fellow human beings.

The Bible says: "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion..."
for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8, NKJV). “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness” (Gal. 5:22, NKJV). The corollary of all that is said about ethics is: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matt. 7:12, NKJV).

The principles behind this theme encompass the type of relationship we should maintain with our family, with church members, with a predecessor, successor or colleague, with those who lead us or those we lead. As pastors, we are always dealing with individuals for whom Christ gave His life. They are more important than anything else. Their feelings must never be disrespected, whatever the provocation.

It is almost inevitable, however, that in our relationships with other people we will encounter people with personalities incompatible with our own; yes, even among gospel ministers. In these cases, we need to possess special grace from the Lord to learn how to solve the problems that may arise. Attitudes and decisions that we cannot understand and about which we can do nothing, should be placed in the hands of “Him who judges rightly” (1 Peter 2:23, NKJV). He will take care of it and in time show that “all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28, NKJV).

Atitudes with the opposite sex. We can never repeat too many times the care that we should take when it comes to our relationships with other people in the arena of our sexuality. This is especially true in these days when, in the name of good commu-

Communication and a relaxed relationship between individuals, many so-called taboos have been eliminated. Let’s speak from the male pastor’s viewpoint: A pastor is expected to be friendly, respectful, elegant, and polite when dealing with anyone, including women. A great part of the church’s work is done by women. Most women in the church give evidence of possessing an elevated and exemplary spiritual experience.

But the enemy of God, along with our own human weakness, makes us vulnerable to that special attention we receive or even grant to someone special, that long handshake, that look, or that private interview or counseling situation.

“Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22, NKJV), says Paul. If today we regret the loss of powerful pastors from the past, it is because this counsel is underestimated. Deep dependence on God, alertness, prudence, Christian discernment, good judgment, and moderation are indispensable to the minister. All this is in addition to the protection a Christian wife represents, especially when the marital relationship is kept strong and each partner maintains themselves as attractive, inviting, and safe for each other.

Financial stability. The difficult survival conditions of the present world may represent, for many pastors, an invitation to involve themselves in sideline businesses to increase the family income. This practice, concealed or not, contradicts the great-ness of the pastoral call. “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4, NKJV).

“The energies of the minister are all needed for his high calling. His best powers belong to God. He should not engage in speculation, or in any other business that would turn him aside from his great work.”

In sending out the twelve disciples, Jesus commanded them: “Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs” (Matt. 2:9, NKJV), which does not mean to adopt an out-of-context lifestyle. The principle implied is that of simplicity—no involvement in the spending fever of our days. With the command, Christ guaranteed the support of His servants: “For a worker is worth his keep” (Matt. 10:10, NIV).

When putting in practice the basic principles of economy, what seemed little, with the Lord’s blessing, will be multiplied and the needs will be met. The wise control of the family budget will make sure that the spending is no greater than the income, so that the pastor will be free from the danger of indebtedness.

The present days, which are the last and most difficult ones in history, require a powerful ministry, a ministry of quality and uncompromised spiritual commitment. Our struggle is a spiritual one; God’s cause is spiritual. We must be spiritual men and women. The church expects to see pastors with this profile.

In these critical days, the fervent prayer of every minister must be that God will grant us all the ability to develop and possess the rare qualities that stand behind true and effective pastoral ministry. It is ever true that this may be ours through the action of the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us so freely.
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Julia Vernon

Ministry is to minister
An honest, realistic and encouraging view of everyday life in ministry
Allen Davis
Organizational misconduct

Thank you for sending Ministry alternate months. James A. Cress did a magnificent task in writing on “Organizational Misconduct.” The Scriptures are very clear on this subject. It is sad that the “church” has overlooked and continues to head in the direction of “abuse of power and position.” Such failure to disclose misconduct and even unproven accusations is unconscionable and unscriptural.

—Wilmer R. Witte, Grandville, Michigan.

Ministry, September 2002

I really appreciate the stimulating articles in Ministry magazine, and also the fact that I receive the magazine free of charge. It is a great help and encouragement.

I’m not being negative, but I want to comment on something that has always intrigued me. An advertisement for the Elder’s Digest, featured in your September edition, showed a fairly typical portrayal of Jesus, complete with long hair. Yet Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:14 that it is a disgrace for a man to have long hair. I realize that this is a cultural thing, but if that was the culture at the time, then surely Jesus must have had short hair. And yet so many biblically based publications insist on portraying Jesus with long hair. A case of tradition overruling the Bible?

—Hor Williams, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, Wales, United Kingdom.

The plaintive cry of the editorial in the September Ministry calling for dialog between prophetic and theological thinkers calls for immediate action. Longstanding walls of status and ego have stood between pastors, administrators, and theologians that silence any opportunity to share and rediscover together the valuable biblical truths unique to Adventists.

What we need are pastors, theologians, and leaders willing to admit when they are wrong. That means periodic sessions where they humbly sit together, focusing on specific critical passages, allowing their words to bring the group into joyous unity. Now is the time.

—Norman L. Meager, Lima, Ohio.

Editorial Note: There is certainly a need for pastors, theologians, and church leaders to dialogue. However, the appeal of the September editorial was more along the lines of pastors, theologians, and church leaders integrating within themselves as individuals a simultaneous and holistic theological and prophetic approach to the Bible, uninhibitedly giving both the theological and prophetic their just part to play in the quest for truth. Doing this would go far in bringing us together as pastors, theologians, and church leaders.

Mike Parsons (“Letters,” September 2002) is correct in saying that “shoddy and misleading scholarship” exists in both science and religion. He is also correct in saying that those who, like this writer, hold that life has existed on earth for a short time are making a faith statement that has only scant support scientifically.

However, Parsons is repeating a misleading “defense” of materialism, often heard when Darwinists are confronted with the facts. The current data of science, if our interpretations are correct, point to the impossibility of generating life and its diversity by random means, even with the help of natural selection. When Parsons states that “a physical or biological system can move to a state of increased order as long as it receives energy from outside,” he joins Darwinists in ignoring the fact that this statement is untrue unless there is a program in place; a program that directs the deployment of the energy so that the normal trend toward disorder is reversed.

To give only one example, a dead badger at the side of the road is “receiv(ing) energy from outside”, that is, from the sun. However, we never see the badger’s body “move to a state of increased order.” This is because the program that directs the use of energy in the badger (its DNA) is no longer operable. It is the generation of this DNA program that Darwinists cannot explain, except by storytelling and hand-waving. They are unwilling to admit that, with today’s data and today’s knowledge of natural processes, the existence and operation of the DNA code and the cell are, quite simply, inexplicable.

How did life come to be on this earth? Empirical data alone does not give us a conclusive answer. But, given what we do know and what we are learning about life and its processes, the scientific evidence points away from the continued on page 29

Free Subscription

If you’re receiving Ministry bimonthly and haven’t paid for a subscription, it’s not a mistake. Since 1928 Ministry has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can’t use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.
Seventy-five years!

A nyone glancing at this month's cover will know that 2003 is a milestone year of celebration for Ministry magazine. (Please notice the "75" logo on the cover, following the word Ministry.) Seventy-five years ago this month Ministry's first issue was dispatched to approximately 1,200 Seventh-day Adventist ministers in North America. Thus this issue is the magazine's nine hundred and first, or approximately so.

Today, Ministry reaches about 50,000 clergy from a large variety of denominations, and 20,000 Adventist ministers and others. Along with these statistics, for the first time in the magazine's history, in 1999, the number of Adventist ministers receiving Ministry outside North America surpassed the number receiving it on the parent continent. This is a trend that only promises to grow, given the increasing use of the English language in much of the world, and above all, the exponential growth of the Adventist Church outside of North America.

Added to this is the fact that this month marks the first time in Ministry's history when it will be translated into the French language, especially for the sake of our many ministers in French-speaking Africa and the Indian Ocean islands. This French-African edition will be circulated quarterly.

So, how will we be celebrating our 75th anniversary?

Starting with Jo Ann Davidson's fine article in this issue, "The Word of God: Its Origin and Authority," we are planning to publish, month by month throughout this year and through 2004, a unique expression of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. We will be presenting articles that affirm and develop Seventh-day Adventist expressions of faith or doctrinal belief.

We recognize that this kind of venture is not unprecedented. The Ministerial Association of the General Conference was itself involved some years ago in the publication of the book Seventh-day Adventists Believe.

Thus, when it comes to the pattern, and to a degree the purpose of this celebrative expression of faith, we will do it with some added elements in mind. We hope that this will offer a distinct contribution to the collective thinking of our community of faith, especially to the personal faith of Seventh-day Adventists and other interested persons everywhere. With the cooperation of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, Ministry plans to:

- Above all, express Seventh-day Adventist faith and doctrine in an unequivocally Christocentric way. We recognize the challenge of adding this element to our approach, but see it to be imperative to the development and maturating of Adventist faith.

- Make this celebrative venture an international one. Writers from all over the globe will be carefully chosen to write on a given aspect of Adventist faith. Thus the collective contribution of our venture will not be so much the work of one or two persons, or indeed merely of a committee, but to a degree, of the international community of Seventh-day Adventist ministers and theologians.

- Express or represent Seventh-day Adventist faith authoritatively, accurately, and definitively. At the same time we will intentionally attempt to commission recognized, centrist writers from across the spectrum of Seventh-day Adventist thinking and outlook.

- Render an expression of Adventist belief that is contemporary and relevant. We fervently hope that these articles will be inspirational to the reader. Besides this, it is important that we let our readers know that we have responsibly contemplated some of the challenges facing the Adventist faith.

- Write these articles so that they can be understood by the layperson. This is important because, once complete, we would like to take the combined work done in Ministry, that is, all the articles published in the next two years, and publish them in a compiled book form, which we plan to release in mid-2005.

We firmly believe that no faith can live long while it remains set, static, and formulated. This was a view held very dear and unequivocal in the hearts of our ancestors in the faith. Faith, by its nature, is dynamic and developmental. At the same time, by its nature, the same faith rests on immovable certainties and verities that must be allowed to shine in the heart and eye of each successive generation.

Looking at all the aspects we are attempting to blend into this celebrative 75th anniversary project, we realize that we have set ourselves a stimulating challenge. In light of this, we genuinely plead for the presence and guidance of our Lord, and for the prayers, support, and candid comments of our Ministry family.

We would like nothing more than to make a genuine contribution to our collective mind, soul, and heart, as we move toward the ultimate moment of truth: the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. ☩
God’s Word: Its origin and authority

JO ANN DAVIDSON

Editorial Note: This article is the first in an extended series (throughout 2003 and 2004) that seeks to express the elements of the faith of Seventh-day Adventists in a Christocentric way. Throughout this series Ministry will use the statements of belief found on pages 5 to 8 of the 2002 Yearbook of the Church. The first belief of Seventh-day Adventists discusses the Bible. It says:

“The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”

Why do Christians insist on the “absolute” nature of the Bible? The question involves a precise appraisal of the fundamental assumptions and parameters within which the many Bible writers wrote. These are often stated explicitly.

For example, none of the Bible writers ever attempts to prove the existence of God. Without exception, they all assume He exists. Biblical prophets openly claim to have real knowledge of an infinite God. They are absolutely certain God was speaking through them when they thundered, “Thus says the Lord!”

Fleming Rutledge is correct: “The witness of the Bible is that every other god under the sun is a product of human consciousness except only the God of the Old and New Testaments. Whether we believe this or not, we must admit that it is an awesome claim. I am more convinced than ever that the Scriptures set before us something, or rather some One, who is far beyond anything the unassisted human imagination could dream up.”

God’s self-disclosure

Moreover, all the Bible writers believe that God is truly who He declares Himself to be. For example, God insists that He can foretell the future, and that doing so is a mark of His divinity: “‘Present your case,’ says the Lord. ‘Bring forth your strong reasons,’ says the King of Jacob. ‘Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. ... I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images. Behold the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.... Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?’” (Isa. 41:21-23; 42:8, 9; 43:13, NKJV).

Through the prophets God announced the great time prophecies concerning the history of nations and also the coming of the Messiah. There are some who assume God could not be so precise, and so claim that the prophecies were written after the fact as if they were predictions. This attitude or view of God, this questioning of His ability to predict and control the future, is never found in any of the Bible writings.

Furthermore, the biblical writers were absolutely certain that the infinite God can and does communicate with finite human beings. They never argued that human language was any kind of a barrier to direct communication from or with God. In fact, with great frequency God is referred to as the actual Person speaking through the prophet.

For example, Elijah’s words in 1 Kings 21:19 are referred to in 2 Kings 9:25-26 as the oracle that “the Lord uttered ... against him” (RSV). Elijah is not even mentioned in the 2 Kings passage. The message of a prophet was always considered equivalent to direct speech from God. In fact, this identification of a prophet’s words with God’s words is so strong in the Old Testament that often we read of God’s speaking “through” a prophet, and disobeying a prophet’s word was tantamount to disobeying God.

In Deuteronomy 18:19, the Lord speaks of the coming prophet, through Moses: “Whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him” (RSV). And when Saul disobeyed Samuel’s command at Gilgal, Samuel rebuked him: “You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you ... now your kingdom shall not continue ... because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (1 Sam. 13:13, 14, RSV).
Direct speech

The Bible writers also record numerous incidents of God speaking directly to human beings in the Old Testament, including conversations with Adam and Eve after the Fall (Gen. 1:28-30; 3:9-19) and with Job (Job 38-41). There is also the divine call of Abram (Gen. 12:1-3), the first of several conversations with him; the burning bush dialogue between God and Moses. The civil code spoken directly by God to Moses. The repeated use of the introductory formula, “Thus says the Lord”—or its equivalent, used thousands of times, clinches the full authority of the prophetic message. In fact, a distinguishing characteristic of true prophets is that they do not merely speak their own words.

Throughout the Old Testament, the point is repeatedly underscored that prophetic speech came from God. God said to Moses: “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” (Exod. 4:12, RSV; cf. 24:3); to Jeremiah and Ezekiel: “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9, RSV); “You shall speak my words to them” (Ezek. 2:7, RSV; cf. 3:27). And people who refused to listen to a prophet were held accountable for refusing to listen to “the words of the Lord which he spoke” through the prophet (Jer. 37:2, RSV).

Such extensive evidence strongly suggests that biblical prophets experienced something far more than a “divine encounter” that merely implanted a mystical conviction and/or admiration for God in their hearts. God does not just encounter human beings with glorious feelings but also with actual information (Deut. 29:29). Indeed, it is striking that one Person of the triune God is known as the Word.

The written Word

Closely connected with God’s direct speech, one finds numerous accounts of a prophet writing down the words of God, which are then taken as fully authoritative. A few examples can sensitize us to this crucial reality: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a memorial in a book.’” “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord” (Exod. 17:14; 24:4, RSV); “When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book, to the very end” (Deut. 31:24, RSV); “Joshua wrote these words [statutes, ordinances, and the words of the covenant renewal, verse 25] in the book of the law of God” (Josh. 24:26, RSV). “Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship; and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord” (1 Sam. 10:23, RSV).

Thus even the recording process is divinely directed with the penman being “moved” or “impelled” by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). This written communication thereby has divine authority, as Moses testified: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deut. 4:2, RSV).

The nature of God’s revelation is diverse. In addition to speaking directly with human beings, God also employed other supernatural methods: angels (Daniel); theophanies (Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Moses, Paul, John); dreams (Joseph, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar); supernatural writing (Exod. 31:18; Dan. 5:5); a voice from heaven (Exod. 19:9; Matt. 3:17; 2 Pet. 1:17).

Divine activity

Though closely involving chosen humans, divine revelation is never controlled by human beings. It is not a human achievement, but primarily a divine activity. What we find in Scripture is neither a collection of penetrating intuitions of divinity nor a discovery of profound human insights.

Both Testaments consistently testify that the truth of God is not the end product of a diligent human search for the divine, or somebody’s best thoughts about lofty matters. It comes exclusively through God’s initiative as He discloses Himself to humanity. We are not taught that a prophet speaks about God. Rather, God speaks for Himself through His prophets, and human language is assumed to be capable of conveying divine communication. All the biblical writers insist that God made Himself and His acts known.

The New Testament apostles write with the same absolute authority as the Old Testament prophets, insisting that they speak by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:10-12), to whom they credit the content of their teaching (1 Cor. 2:12, 13). Significantly, the same Paul who urges that believers seek to work together peaceably, often uses harsh language to defend the absolute truth of the gospel he has preached (Gal. 1:6-9). In fact, apostolic teaching is very “directive,” issuing commands with the strongest authority (1 Thess. 4:1-2; 2 Thess. 3:6, 12—“we command you”).

The prophets and apostles do not describe how they recognized the “word of God” when it came, but it is clear they were certain that God had spoken. Even when sometimes God spoke in ways they did not fully understand, and on occasion even objected to, they never questioned the divine origin of the message.

The Bible, however, was not verbally dictated by God. Human messengers were divinely guided in the selection of apt words to express divine revelation, and thus the prophetic words are called the Word of God. The individuality of each writer is evident, yet the human and divine elements are virtually inseparable.

Ellen White offers an intriguing
insight: “The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that ‘the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’” (John 1:14). 2

Continuity and unity in the Scriptures

A careful reading of the biblical text also reveals a basic continuity and unity in both Testaments. The extensive citations of the Old Testament in the New Testament indicate that the Old Testament writings were considered by New Testament writers to be a divine revelation.

A few of the hundreds of examples include: Isaiah's words in Isaiah 7:14, which are cited as “what the Lord had spoken by the prophet” (Matt. 1:22, RSV); Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 as words that God said (Matt. 19:5); He speaks of “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4, RSV). Words of Scripture are said to be spoken by the Holy Spirit. In quoting “what was spoken by the prophet Joel” in Joel 2:28-32, Peter inserts “says God,” attributing to God the words of Joel (Acts 2:17). Isaiah 9:6 is quoted by Paul and Barnabas as something that “the Lord commanded us,” contending that an Old Testament prophecy placed moral obligation on them also. Paul writes that the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophet Isaiah (Acts 13:31). Peter's vision (Acts 10:13); to Paul on his journeys (Acts 18:9-10; 23:11); and in the revelation to John (Rev. 1:11-3:22).

Jesus' view of the Old Testament

Jesus Himself insists on numerous occasions that He speaks the word of God. For example: “The Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak” (John 12:49, RSV). Paul claims to have received a revelation from God: “If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37).

The minds of the New Testament writers are saturated with the Old Testament. They refer to it often, and quote it extensively to undergird their theological arguments. The four Gospels make it strikingly obvious that Jesus Christ submitted unreservedly to the Old Testament and confirmed its absolute authority for others. In His teaching and ethics it was foundational. Old Testament prophecy was the pattern for His life, as He often declared: “It must be fulfilled,” as it is written. He rebuked the Jewish theologians of His time not for studying the Old Testament, but for permitting human tradition to cloud and even falsify God’s written Word (Mark 7:1-13).

Further, Jesus expected others to accept the Old Testament as authoritative. Often He would inquire: “Have you not read what David did . . . have you not read in the law . . .” (Matt. 12:3-5, NIV). When questioned on the issue of divorce, He answered, “Have you not read . . .” (19:4, NIV). His response to those upset by children praising loudly in the temple was, “Have you never read . . .” (21:16, NIV). Once when His authority was being questioned Jesus told a parable, concluding it with these words: “Have you not read this Scripture . . .” (Mark 12:10, NIV).

Responding to a lawyer's question about salvation, Jesus asked: “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” (Luke 10:26, NIV). The lawyer
answered with a direct quote from the Ten Commandments, and Jesus said: "You have answered right . . ." Answering the Sadducees' inquiry about marriage in heaven, He said: "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures . . . have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying . . ." (Matt. 22:29-31).

The prominent Pharisee Nicodemus sought Jesus out one night. While discussing His mission, Jesus questioned Nicodemus, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things?" When asked about last-day events on the Mount of Olives Jesus urged His questioners to read Daniel in order to understand (Matt. 24:15).

The factual and historical reliability of the Bible

The apostle Paul intensifies this pattern of referring to the Old Testament and insisting on its authority. For example, in his Roman letter, he built a powerful argument, showing that the foundation of the gospel is to be found in the Old Testament, and in the process Paul demonstrates the paramount principle of listening to what Scripture says about itself.

Moreover, while it is sometimes argued today that the truthfulness of the Bible does not necessarily include the historical details, we find Jesus and the New Testament authors accepting the historicity of the Old Testament. In fact, the New Testament writers rely on the historical narratives of the Old Testament to undergird the certainty of future actions of God.

Grudem is insightful when he declares: "Perhaps it has not been stated emphatically enough that nowhere in the Old Testament or in the New Testament does any writer give any hint of a tendency to distrust or consider slightly unreliable any other part of Scripture. Hundreds of texts encourage people to trust Scripture completely, but no text encourages any doubt or even slight mistrust of Scripture."

The aesthetic quality of Scripture is an integral part of its nature and quality. The exquisite nature of the ancient Hebrew poetry has long been extolled. In the last quarter-century, the literary quality of the biblical narratives has finally been recognized. It is now acknowledged that these stories were not written primarily for children, but are superb theological statements voiced within a distinctive literary expression. God utilizes aesthetic values to intensify His revelation, and even as a part of it.

**Interpreting and understanding Scripture**

To some readers, the Bible appears as an enigmatic collection of seemingly unrelated materials: narratives, poetry, legal codes, sermons, letters, prophecies, parables, royal annals, histories, and genealogies, with all of it bound together in one cover, and the question is How can one make sense of it all? The issue of interpretation (hermeneutics) is a continuing topic in theological studies. And Scripture itself clearly instructs that it is possible to misread and misinterpret Scripture. Many of the biblical writers, and even Christ Himself, warn against false teachers and false teaching.

Jesus Himself has provided the key component in the understanding and interpretation of Scripture. In exposing the mistake of the religious leaders of His time of coming to Scripture as though in itself there is some life-giving power, Jesus instead exposed the revolutionary idea of approaching the sacred writings with the realization that they actually testify of Him, and of life through Him (John 5:39, 40).

The apostle Paul testifies that when seeing Jesus in Scripture, a veil is taken away from the eyes (2 Cor. 3:14-16). The two disciples traveling to Emmaus also had an authenticating experience in the correct understanding of Scripture. The risen Lord interpreted the Old Testament Christologically for them, thus causing a "burning" in their hearts (Luke 24:32).

Contemporary Christians, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus,
have read Scripture. They also know of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Yet some have yet to be persuaded to accept the Christ-centered nature of Scripture that the risen Lord presented on the road to Emmaus. To see Jesus Christ in the Bible with the eyes of the heart is to approach its interpretation and thus to understand it for its true intent.

The authority and value of the whole of the Bible

Some take the position that different portions of Scripture are of questionable authority or value. No modern writer addresses this issue more directly than Ellen White: “What man is there that dares to take that Bible and say this part is inspired and that part is not inspired? I would have both my arms taken off at my shoulders before I would ever make the statement or set my judgment upon the Word of God as to what is inspired and what is not inspired. . . . Never let mortal man sit in judgment upon the Word of God or pass sentence as to how much of this is inspired and how much is not inspired, and that this is more inspired than some other portions. God warns him off that ground. God has not given him any such work to do. . . . We call on you to take your Bible, but do not put a sacrilegious hand upon it, and say, ‘That is not inspired,’ simply because somebody else has said so. Not a jot or tittle is ever to be taken from that Word.”

God Himself expresses the same sentiment: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,’ says the Lord. ‘But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word’ (Isa. 66:1, 2, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

The Christian doctrine of Scripture is about a Book. Really, more than a Book. Through its many writers we meet a God who yearns for His children, who is in earnest to communicate His love to them and who loves them more than He loved His own life. Fleming Rutledge expresses my sentiments eloquently: “Every time I think I am losing my faith, the Biblical story seizes me yet again with a life all its own. No other religious document has this power. I remain convinced in spite of all the arguments that God really does inhabit this text. With Job, I say yet again, ‘I had heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise my words, I melt away in dust and ashes’” (42:5, 6).

5 Rutledge, 25.
Preaching: The challenge of a Christ-centered and holistic view of humanity

Gerhard van Wyk

We often say things about people, even from the pulpit, without seriously considering the assumptions of our statements. Doing this often proves counterproductive and even disastrous for our preaching.

In this article different ways of viewing people will be analyzed and a few of the consequences of these beliefs will be exposed. An appeal will be made for a holistic Christ-centered anthropology, one which focuses upon every basic aspect of the person’s being addressed in our preaching. This all-around approach to preaching will be seen to be vital to the task of preaching.

Literature on preaching often addresses only the so-called form and contents of preaching; how and what to preach. It leaves out a most determinative factor: the preacher’s basic assumptions. The preacher’s convictions and even feelings about people, or about anthropology, may be regarded as one such a basic assumption. These assumptions may challenge the congregation to social activism or to pietistic passivity. Pietism in this article indicates the pretension of a holy life without pious deeds, which spells emptiness and meaninglessness.

A liberation theological anthropology

Some preachers, proclaiming their anthropological convictions from the pulpit, are to a large extent influenced by the school of thought known as Liberation Theology.

Liberation Theology regards the poor as champions of a new humanity. The liberation of human beings from pain, suffering, exploitation, and discrimination is seen as the true liberation of the human being. Consequently, people are not viewed as a means to an end, but they are seen as an end in themselves. Human dignity is regarded as the highest value. This theme, stated as a preferential option for the poor, runs through the entire script of Liberation Theology. It is not seen so much as a particular kind of theology as much as it is seen as a manifestation of the being and mission of the worldwide church.

It assumes that the gospel needs to be proclaimed within an active solidarity with the numerous struggles of the poor, and exploited. To situate oneself in this locus, the preacher needs to be converted to another world; a new way of understanding and of reformulating the gospel message. Only when Christians work toward abolishing injustice is authenticity possible. We are participants in God’s redemptive acts because we play a part in God’s creative acts.

Sin is seen as a refusal to love others and therefore a refusal to love God. Although people must be freed from personal individual sins, Liberation Theology stresses the social aspect of sin. People become truly human by the creation of a new social reality. Personal and structural changes establish people in a new humanity. Liberation and salvation are not regarded as identical, but liberation anticipates salvation.

Preaching that springs from this kind of pietistic anthropology takes serious cognizance of the socio-political messages of the Bible. According to Liberation Theology, Luke’s version of the beatitudes, (6:20-26, NIV), e.g., “Blessed are you who are poor,” does not speak of the spiritually poor and hungry, but of the financially poor people of the world. The gospel messages are not to be spiritualized and thus robbed of their literal liberating power.

A social anthropology

Social anthropology and the preaching that springs from its presuppositions, regards life on the earth as one of our greatest gifts. This means that the pursuit of life is not attainable
in isolation, without being involved with our fellow human beings. In all of life’s pursuits, it is said, we should strive to maintain a dynamic relationship with our extended family, tribe, ancestors, as well as with God and nature. We are expected to engage ourselves in activities that will promote the total welfare of the whole of our community. A fulfilled Christian life cannot be experienced in isolation from others. Human beings are seen to be human only because of others, with others, and for others.

According to this approach, Christian preaching, as influenced by the Augustine, Luther, and Calvin tradition, has focused too much on the problem of death, forgiveness, and individual salvation. It has thus tended to spiritualize the gospel and to draw a sharp dividing line between the spiritual and physical needs of people. Western theologians are being accused of falling prey to Calvinism and the “separation” it effects between God and human beings.

**A liberal anthropology**

Liberal Anthropology has three main features as points of departure:

- **Individualism** portrays the heart of liberalism. The individual is seen as more “real” and fundamental than society is. Preaching from this ground will ascribe a high degree of completeness and self-sufficiency to the individual. A more important moral value will be attached to the individual than to society or to groups of people.

- **A “low” anthropology**

  A biblical anthropology with a “low” view of people is to a large extent based upon an emphasis of the fall of humanity into sin. Under this presupposition, people were created in the image of God, but this was considered as almost completely invalidated or cancelled out by the original sin.

- **A “high” anthropology**

  The Imago Dei, the “image of God” motif of the Creation story, exemplifies a “high” anthropology, in contrast with a “low” approach. Scriptures that may be seen to “prove” its validity, are exemplified by passages such as Psalm 8:4-8.

  Much of American pastoral theology, in particular, seems to have been influenced by this “high” anthropology and the liberal view of people. Boisson, regarded as the father of the Clinical Pastoral Education Movement, believed that theologians and...
pastors should study “human documents,” (that is, “people in distress”), as well as the relevant biblical passages that deal with these questions.

A new model or view of the nature of humanity developed within the Clinical Pastoral Education Movement. People were believed to be dynamic and to be capable of development and change. While human relations were regarded as of the highest importance, the relationship with God was certainly not ignored.

Carl Rogers, a prominent humanist psychologist, maintained certain notions about human beings that were, for various reasons, attractive to preachers who upheld a “high” view of humanity. Some of these ideas contain these elements:

+ People are motivated by “one basic tendency and striving—to actualize, maintain and enhance the experiencing organism.” People are seen to have an inner potential that preaching can help to unlock and release.
+ Human brokenness or neurosis is seen as primarily a matter of “incongruence” between the self and the experiencing organism.
+ Human fulfillment is understood in “process” terms. The actualization of one’s potentialities for growth is seen as an ongoing process.

Preachers, following these assumptions, believe that the synthesis between Rogerian psychology and Christian theology provide a more positive image of human beings. They believe that the so-called high view of human beings made a lasting contribution when it uncovered that which lies beneath the surface within people: innate human dignity.

Others, however, believe that this approach has several limitations:
+ It tends to “romanticize” the feelings of people. This synthesis equates the image of God in human beings with the principle of “biological actualization” and undercuts the importance of such elements as symbolic identity with a tradition and a history, and with human reason and moral sensitivity.
+ It disparages the rational and moral dimensions of human beings.

The “actualization tendency” does not fully account for important dimensions of rational and moral life.
+ There is an over-identification, even an equation, of salvation with “health.” Christian living is far more than the fulfillment of one’s individual potentiality. Christian life also has moral dimensions and includes aspects of self-transcendence and self-giving love.

The Christ-centric anthropology

This view of people points to the fact that the text of Hebrews 2, for example, integrates both aspects of the “low” and the “high” anthropology. Hebrews 2:5-18 is regarded as a Christ-centric reinterpretation of Psalm 8.

According to these texts little or nothing of the high expectations for human beings has been fulfilled: “Now we still do not see that everything has been subjected to him” (Heb. 2:8b refers to the soul of the human being). The author of Hebrews sees this to mean that even Christians have not reached their full potential.

What was described in Psalm 8 as a “high” anthropology is now used as the attribute of a “low” anthropology. For a little while, Jesus is made less than the angels, and the “little less than the angels” becomes “a short while lower than the angels.” It serves to indicate the humiliation of Jesus. This humiliation, however, has a peculiar purpose. Through His suffering Jesus is crowned with honor and glory, and as a result, He opens the way for people to reach their full potential and “high” calling.

Humiliation is thus not the permanent status of Jesus, but it becomes the functional way by which the fulfillment of humanity, according to Psalm 8, is reached. The life of Jesus is both an ironic commentary on the failure of humans and, at the same time, a miraculous demonstration of how failure is to be overcome. Jesus leads many to glory, (Heb. 2:10) and
restores them to full humanity (Heb. 2:14-18).

A Christ-centric view of humans is seen as a refusal to accept the destructive effects of sin as a permanent state. On the other hand, however, it also refuses to be an open-ended optimistic anthropology.

**A holistic anthropology?**

Is a holistic view of people actually possible? In our preaching and teaching, is it possible to avoid the pitfalls and reduction of some of the anthropologies, delineated above, and to construct an anthropology that addresses human beings as whole beings?

According to holistic assumptions, the Bible knows only the “total” human being and not the different parts that some have defined or separated out in dualistic ways. Human beings do not only have bodies, but in the holistic sense, they are also their bodies. Accordingly, to state that “I am my body,” is saying too much, but to say that “I have a body,” is saying too little.

Sermons challenging only the so-called spiritual side of people, without addressing their physical and social existence, may be nothing more than pointing to “a pie in the sky, by and by.”

Sometimes we may be tempted to overlook the importance of people as socio-political beings and forget that all people can only worship God within a particular culture and from within a specific social context. If we really want them to hear and understand the “whole” good news of the gospel and its implications, and not only the text of the Bible, then it is also important to make known “the text” of the human being.

In changed social situations the oppressed have often become the new oppressors.

Theologians who operate with binary oppositions, that is those who see reality merely in terms of good/bad, white/black, spirit/flesh and truth/untruth, are often tempted to be, on the one hand, totally against any idea of wholeness, and on the other, they may have fallen prey to perfectionism. They tend to be extremely one-sided. On the one hand, a statement like, “Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God’s ideal for His children. Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached,” should never be understood apart from Christ’s redemption and re-creation.

On the other hand, in our preaching we should not emphasize the hopelessness of God’s people in a mechanical and unthinking way, or minimize the potential of people who have been recreated by Christ. Although Paul emphatically states that we are all under the power of sin and there is nothing good in people, our preaching should always also forcefully proclaim the fact that we are new creatures in Christ. We are not only always capable of sinning, but we are also able to be a new humanity in Christ.

It is important that we realize that we are free people in Christ. Many preachers emphasize the hopeless condition of our humanity, not because it is a biblical truth, but because people love to be “comforted” with this kind of preaching: The worse they feel about themselves, the “better” they feel.

**Conclusion: Preaching to the whole human being**

Amid all the ideas, conceptions, and presuppositions about people that are behind our preaching, there is the critical need for us to begin to pray and think and work toward a Christ-centered anthropology. After all the horrors of the previous century and following the terrors that seem to multiply among us these days, it is impossible for us not to acknowledge the worldwide disastrous effects of our sin.

It is even more important, however, for us to proclaim a triumphant living Christ, who has been crucified and who works through the Holy Spirit toward our healing and wholeness. In our sinful world we cannot afford to be without an intentionally holistic anthropology, one that undergirds everything that comes from us and from our pulpits from week to week.

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Understanding the book of Revelation: Three interpretative keys (part 1)

Hans K. LaRondelle

Editorial note: This is the first in a three-part series. Parts 2 and 3 will appear in the March and May issues of Ministry.

Revelation is the most difficult of all New Testament books to interpret, primarily because of the elaborate and extensive use of symbolism. With this challenging statement George Ladd begins his commentary on the last book of the Bible. Many scholars agree with Ladd. However, there are at least three interpretative keys that help us understand the difficulties in this book.

John wrote the descriptions of his apocalyptic visions in Revelation in a thoroughly Hebraic style of Greek because he actually thought in Hebrew: A meticulous analysis of John’s Greek syntax shows that as a rule he used the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as his original source. This fact obliges us to seek for the theological meaning of John’s systematic allusions to the Old Testament and its history of salvation.

As a Hebrew Christian, John adopted Israel’s covenant language and style of expression. This was completely familiar to Jewish Christians acquainted with Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets. One important literary feature is illustrative of this and has hermeneutical significance: “The parallelism of the style is too obvious to be ignored. The author repeatedly breaks forth into verse in which the parallelism of Hebrew poetry is carefully observed.”

More than 600 times the Apocalypse alludes to Israel’s covenant history. This fact points to the first key for understanding the book of Revelation: John’s symbolic visions have their roots and theological meaning in the Hebrew Bible! Knowledge of the Older Testament is therefore absolutely essential for grasping the meaning of John’s prophetic language in Revelation. “The Old Testament in general plays such a major role that a proper understanding of its use is necessary for an adequate view of the Apocalypse as a whole.”

Creative use of the Old Testament

We need not impose some preconceived philosophical interpretive method on the book of Revelation, such as literalism or allegorism. But we do need to ask those questions that reveal John’s own method of uniting the Word of God in the Hebrew Scriptures with the testimony of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and how he blends Israel with the apostolic church of Christ.

John presents three interpretative keys at the beginning of the book itself. The opening statement contains the master key: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place ... that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1, 2, NIV).

A close reading of these words indicates the three keys that are in John’s mind and that become guidelines in helping us understand the Apocalypse: God, Jesus Christ, and their unified revelation to the church.

Let us first consider each of these divine authorities in their mutual relationship. (1) The new revelation of Jesus was given to Him by God, “his God and Father” (1:6, NIV), the covenant God of Israel. This implies that the Old Testament remains the foundational Word of God.

(2) This God reveals a new orientation of salvation history, because He entrusts His sovereign rulership to the risen Lord Jesus, who now reveals God’s plan to His servants.

(3) John summarizes all he was shown as “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (1:2, NIV). This double phrase coordinates God and Jesus Christ on the same level of divine authority, because the grammatical construction of both parts of the phrase is similar.
Both God and Jesus now reveal their united testimony as a sacred trust to the church to receive and hold fast as her supreme standard of faith and worship, even in persecution and in the face of death. With some variations, John uses this twofold phrase as his key signature to describe the faithful church in times of apostasy and persecution throughout the book of Revelation (see Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 14:12; 20:4).

**John's literary style of developing his theme**

How does John present his interpretative keys within the Apocalypse? Any self-proclaimed principle of interpretation will prove to be inadequate, as Martin Kiddle rightly warns: “We realize now that it is futile to attempt to manufacture a substitute key, as though the book must be made to reveal what we think it ought to reveal. Instead, we must attempt to get back into the mind of the writer, to appreciate his outlook, his reading of the times in which he lived, and his remedy for them.”

It is John’s style to sum up the main theme of his book in his introduction or prologue, and then to develop it at length in his visions. For example, observe the striking similarity between the prologues in John’s Gospel (John 1:1-18) and the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:1-8). In both prologues John testifies of the divine glory and authoritative testimony of Christ (John 1:1-3, 18; Rev. 1:1, 5).

While in the Gospel of John the prologue culminates in the glory of the Incarnation (“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” John 1:14, NKJV), the prologue of the Apocalypse ends in the glorious return of Christ (“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” Rev. 1:7, NIV). The Apocalypse thus functions as the continuation of the gospel story and builds on the earthly testimony of Jesus.

At the end of the first century, it was no longer necessary, as it had been earlier, to argue that Jesus Christ had fulfilled the Messianic promises of the Old Testament and that the church was the chosen heir of its promises. The urgent question now was the consummation of the Old Testament promises in the return of Jesus.

**Revelation’s primary connection with Daniel**

John proclaims that his book is the Apocalypse “of Jesus Christ which God gave him.” This opening statement informs the church that the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ has the same inspiration and authority as that of the Hebrew Scriptures. At its conclusion the Lord identifies Himself by appealing to the prophetic Word of God: “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David and the bright Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16, NIV).

John’s Apocalypse thus claims to be the heavenly “testimony of Jesus
Christ for the church, in which the risen Lord reveals God’s determined plan for the church age. Jesus identifies Himself as the Davidic Messiah, promised by Israel’s prophets (Isa. 11:1 and Num. 24:17). Jesus’ testimony will therefore be in essential harmony with God’s prophetic Word.

What then is the content of His testimony for the churches waiting for His return?

John reveals: “to show what must soon take place [Greek: ha dei genesthai].” These words are an explicit allusion to the same words used by Daniel to the king of Babylon: “There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days” (Dan. 2:28, 29, NRSV), “what shall be hereafter” (verse 45, NRSV, ha dei genesthai, LXX).

Daniel’s and John’s use of the word “must” [dei] for the future of humankind is of profound significance. They do not mean the blind necessity of fate but the plan and providence of Israel’s God for the eternal future of humanity.

This God not only knows the future, He also “changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings” (Dan. 2:21, NRSV), and has determined the outcome of history after His own will (see Dan. 2:44, 45).

Walter Grundmann clarifies: “It is the dei of the mysterious God who accomplishes His plans for the world in the eschatological consummation.” This divine “must” of God’s plan includes not only the scourge of human warfare (Matt. 24:6), but centers primarily in the blessing of the Messiah’s atoning death (Matt. 16:21; Mark 10:45), the proclamation of the gospel of God’s kingdom (Mark 13:10), and the promised “universal restoration” of Paradise (Acts 3:21).

John’s allusion to Daniel in Revelation 1:1 strongly suggests that Revelation must be understood in conjunction with Daniel’s symbolic visions about the future plan and purpose of God. This Danielic frame of reference is an integral part of the first key of knowledge for understanding John’s Apocalypse.

Recent scholarship has confirmed that Daniel is “the most influential” of all the Hebrew prophets to which the book of Revelation alludes. This does not mean that both apocalyptic writers convey the same limits of divine revelation. The New Testament apocalypse advances Israel’s prophetic faith through a new interpretative principle of fulfillment in salvation history: its Christological fulfillment.

The historic fulfillment of Israel’s Messianic prophecies in the earthly ministry of Jesus had already been the central burden of Jesus’ testimony in the four Gospels. Revelation’s burden is to reassure the church of Christ that Israel’s end-time prophecies will find their ultimate consummation in Christ and in His new-covenant people. This is apparent from a comparison of the promises made to the churches in the seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3 with the promises realized in the New Jerusalem visions for the followers of God and the Lamb in Revelation 20-22. Thus Revelation assures the “soon” fulfillment of Daniel’s sealed prophecies.

Comparing Daniel 2:28 and Revelation 1:1, for example, illustrates the close connection between the two books: “what will happen at the end of days”; “what must soon take place”; “what shall be hereafter” (Dan. 2:28, 45; Rev. 1:1, NRSV).

Apparently, John replaces Daniel’s phrase “at the end of days” (NRSV) ["in days to come," NIV], or “what will take place in the future” (2:45), by his word “soon” or “quickly.” John’s new emphasis on a “soon” fulfillment of Daniel’s symbolic forecast marks a decisive progress in salvation history. While Daniel’s book was “sealed until the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4, NRSV), John announces the inauguration of the fulfillment of Daniel’s vision of the future that will bring the kingdom of God on earth.

John’s vision of Christ’s continuous ministry

John proclaims that God has taken a new initiative in salvation history in Jesus Christ, through His death, resurrection, and exaltation in heaven. This new act of God in Christ is the defining moment for the Christian faith. John therefore calls his Lord “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5, NRSV).

These titles unify Jesus’ earthly witness and His present and future ministries in heaven. In his subsequent vision of the scroll with seven seals in God’s hand, John focuses specifically on Jesus’ new role as the Ruler over all humankind as the critical juncture in salvation history (Rev. 5).

Significant in all this is the repeated emphasis on Jesus’ worthiness to rule over humanity and the universe: “See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev. 5:5, NRSV). Such designations of the risen Lord can be understood only from the Hebrew Scriptures and from their Messianic promises (see Gen. 49:10; Isa. 11:1-10). How does John clarify Jesus’ victory on earth?

John describes the “conquering [nikao]” of Jesus in terms of His death: “Then I saw between the throne . . . and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered,
having seven horns and seven eyes” (5:6, RSV). John views a slain Messiah. In other words, the “Lion”-Messiah has conquered by becoming the sacrificial “Lamb” of God! The nature of this “conquering” of Jesus is crucial for John, because it becomes the model for each Christian to “overcome” in the seven letters to the churches (see 2:21; 2:7, 11, 17; etc.).

Gregory Beale explains this well: “Christ himself overcame by maintaining his loyalty to the Father through suffering and finally dying (cf. 1:5). He was physically defeated but spiritually victorious.”

In Revelation 5 John portrays how the Father in a solemn ceremony in the heavenly throne room has handed over His sovereign reign of the world to the risen Lord Jesus. The Lamb of God has taken the scroll [biblion] of God’s eternal purpose from “the one who was seated on the throne” (Rev. 5:7, RSV).

The crucified and risen Lord will now begin to open the seven seals of the heavenly scroll (6:1), because He is authorized to execute the judgments of God that will lead up to the final establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. In response, the entire universe sings anthems in worship of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 5:13, 14). Thus the vision of Revelation 5 functions as a surprising initial fulfillment of Daniel’s prophetic view of the coming of the “Son of man” to the Father to receive His lordship over the church and the world, even before the final judgment begins.

Stefanovic explains this progressive fulfillment of God’s prophetic Word: “With the taking of the biblion [scroll] the whole destiny of humankind is put into the hands of the enthroned Christ; hence it is indeed the heavenly book of destiny. On the basis of its contents he would judge, hence, the judgment book.”

Apostles and the prophetic word

The apostles confirm the progressive fulfillment of God’s prophetic testimony as it continues to come from the same covenant God. The historic testimony of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, is the authoritative gospel key for understanding the intended meaning of the Word of God in Moses and the Prophets.

The testimony of Jesus, “the Alpha and the Omega” in the Apocalypse (Rev. 22:13), is the inspired Christological application of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah, as they speak beyond their setting in literal, historical Israel to the age of the church.

Parts 2 and 3 of this article will appear in the March and May 2003 issues of Ministry, respectively.

3 Charles, Studies, 88.
7 Beale, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: NIGTC, Eerdmans, 1999), 77; John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation, ch. 2.
8 Beale, The Book of Revelation, 353.
Schizophrenia: What pastors need to know

Andrew J. Weaver, and Richard L. Binggeli

Schizophrenia is a severe, episodic illness caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. It frequently has a far-reaching negative impact on many aspects of an individual's life, as well as that of his or her family. It often has its onset when a person is young. About half of males and one-fourth of females who develop this illness do so before they turn 19.

Schizophrenia clearly has a biological basis; numerous studies have shown changes in brain structure and function. Neurotransmitters—substances that allow communication between brain cells—are thought to be involved in the development of the disorder. Persons with a close relative who has this condition are at the greatest risk of acquiring it. One in ten persons who have a parent with the disease will eventually develop it. The disorder carries a high risk of suicide. One in ten individuals with the illness end his or her life in suicide, especially in the first six years after the initial psychotic episode.

The disorder carries several disturbing symptoms, such as impairment of a variety of basic psychological functions including perception (hallucinations), reality testing (delusions), thought processes (loose associations), feeling (flat or inappropriate affect), behavior (disorganization), concentration, motivation, and judgment. Thus the condition usually affects occupational, educational, and social activities.

Primary treatment

Antipsychotic medications are not a cure, but they offer the best treatment available for persons suffering from this severe mental illness. After going onto such medications, most people show substantial improvement within a few weeks. The medications are especially helpful in reducing delusions, hallucinations, agitation, confusion, and distortions. Antipsychotic medications also reduce by half the risk of future episodes.

As is frequently the case, however, antipsychotic medications may have side effects, including stiffness, tremors, restlessness, drowsiness, dry mouth, and, occasionally, a chronic irreversible movement disorder. Newer antipsychotic medications appear to cause fewer side effects.

One of the greatest challenges in treating persons with schizophrenia through medication is that they stop taking their medication. Short-term hospitalization in a well-staffed facility can offer a person and his or her family needed stress relief in a protective environment while the person is adjusting to medications.

About 20-30 percent of those with schizophrenia recover to lead a normal life. Another 20-30 percent continue to suffer from moderate symptoms, while 40-60 percent continue to be seriously impaired from the disease. Approximately one-half of all mental hospital beds in the United States are occupied by patients with some form of this illness.

Long-term care

Since schizophrenia is usually a long-term illness, continuing medical care and medications will be needed. It is important to find a psychiatrist who is well-qualified, interested in the illness, and empathetic with the sufferer.

Individual psychotherapy can also be helpful. Such therapy involves scheduled conversations between the client and a mental health specialist. These sessions focus on current and past problems, thoughts, feelings, or relationships. By sharing life experiences in this way, the person may gradually come to a better understanding of himself or herself, learning to more effectively sort the real from the unreal and distorted.

A supportive, reality-oriented approach is generally of more benefit than probing insight-oriented psychotherapy. Offering accurate, simple information about schizo-
phrenia and the medications will be an important part of the process of healing.

Self-help groups have become increasingly common and are often used by mental health professionals in addition to therapy and medication. These groups, usually led by ex-patients or family members of people with schizophrenia, provide patients with mutual support as well as comfort in the awareness that they are not alone.

Self-help groups also seek to promote accurate information about mental illness in order to dispel the stigma and to empower those affected by it.

The role of the faith community

The church can be of great value as a continuing source of contact and support for persons suffering from schizophrenia. It can also be of significant value to the families of persons suffering from the illness.

The church can offer acceptance and care that is often not found elsewhere. Families dealing with any chronic illness undergo considerable strain, and this is no less true for mental illness. Since schizophrenia is a disease of the brain, it is important that pastors encourage blame-free acceptance of the person and his or her family.

In a recent study, researchers discovered that three in four psychiatric patients identified religion to be an important source of comfort and support. However, the same study found that psychiatric inpatients were less likely to talk to a pastor than to a comparable professional in a general medical hospital. Moreover, while 80 percent of the psychiatric patients considered themselves spiritual or religious, only 20 percent had a pastor or spiritual advisor to consult.3

Some faith groups have developed outreach programs to help clergy and congregations support and care for those with mental illnesses. These groups can help combat the stigma and provide leadership training, and provides online peer support.

Dual Recovery Anonymous (DRA, P.O. Box 128232, Nashville, TN 37221; 877-883-2332; dronline.org) is an international organization founded in 1989 with 130 chapters. It offers self-help programs for individuals who experience the dual disorder of chemical dependency and a psychiatric illness. It is based on 12-step principles and the personal experiences of individuals in dual recovery. It has a newsletter and provides assistance in starting local groups.

Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health (101 King Street, Suite 420, Alexandria, VA 22314; 703-684-7710; www.fcmh.org) is a national parent-run organization with 122 affiliated groups. It focuses on the needs of children and teens with mental health problems and provides information and advocacy. Its Web site features a Spanish connection.

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI, Colonial Place Three, 2107 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22201; 800-950-6264; www.nami.org), founded in 1979, is a network of self-help groups for relatives and friends affected by mental illness. It has a section devoted to giving support and information to siblings and children of persons with mental illness; NAMI has a newsletter and runs an antidiscrimination campaign on behalf of the mentally ill. It provides educational materials to clergy and religious organizations.

The National Empowerment Center (599 Canal Street, Lawrence, MA 01840; 800-769-3278; www.power2u.org) is a consumer-run center that provides information on self-help resources and conferences. It also offers networking, conference calls, and workshops.

National Mental Health Consumers Self-Help Clearinghouse (1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 1000, Philadelphia, PA 19107; 800-553-4KEY; www.mhsselfhelp.org) is a consumer self-help resource offering information geared toward meeting the needs of mental health consumers. It offers assistance in advocacy, on-site consultations, training, educational events, and listing of related publications.

Pathways to Promise (5400 Arsenal Street, St. Louis, MO 63139; 314-644-8400; www.pathways2promise.org) helps to develop outreach programs to the mentally ill through religious communities. It offers information, educational materials, and other resources for clergy.

Schizophrenia Anonymous (c/o Mental Health Association in Michigan, 15920 West Twelve Mile Rd., Southfield, MI 48076; 810-557-6777). This international group is organized and maintained by individuals with schizophrenia-related disorders. It offers fellowship, support, information, and professional assistance. It has weekly groups, guest speakers, and phone help.

Many such organizations are, of course, based in other countries of the world besides the United States. Contacting mental health facilities and professionals, general social services organizations, or the chaplaincy and social services in your local hospital, will enable the pastor to locate and recommend sources of help to sufferers of schizophrenia and their families.
that is often the “second wounding” associated with mental illness. Families report that the societal stigmas associated with the mentally ill have negative impacts on sufferers that come in the form of a sense of lowered self-worth, difficulty making and keeping friends, lack of success in getting a job or finding a place to live, and simply in overall recovery.

Popular motion pictures depicting mentally ill killers and high-profile news coverage of tragedies involving the mentally ill, contribute to these stigmas. The families of the mentally ill believe that accurate, factual information about mental illness is the best remedy for these kinds of societal attitudes.

The truth is that people with schizophrenia are usually less violent than others. They are often timid and emotionally vulnerable. Very few are dangerous. They do not have a “split-personality” as portrayed in the famous classic, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Problems with violence and aggression may arise among a few individuals who do not continue their medications, especially if they abuse drugs or alcohol.

Unfortunately, individuals in the U.S. who suffer from schizophrenia or other severe forms of mental illness do not receive treatment, and they become homeless, use alcohol and/or illicit drugs, and may end up in prison. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty estimates that at least 25 percent of our nearly one million homeless suffer from some form of mental illness.

There are now far more mentally ill persons in U.S. prisons (approximately 250,000) than in state hospitals (approximately 58,000). Until recently, state mental hospitals served as the places of last resort for those who could not find adequate treatment in the private sector. The increasing closure of these institutions has become a major reason for the lack of treatment of the severely mentally ill. The serious lack of appropriate treatment for the mentally ill is an issue that needs the active involvement of the faith-community.

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What makes pastoral supervision effective?

Chor-Kiat Sim

The heat was unbearable, but I was freezing. My hands were cold, but my Sabbath suit was drenched with sweat. When members of the congregation congratulated me at the door after the worship service, I nervously accepted their gracious remarks. It was my first sermon without supervision and was intended for my training. The next Monday, I told my senior, supervising pastor, Matthew McNeill,* who had been on vacation, about the energy needed to prepare and deliver my sermon. He was strong in his affirmation of what I had achieved. That was almost 30 years ago, but I still treasure his lifelong commitment to pastoral ministry and supervision, and his commitment to my learning and to me.

Reflecting on my relationship with Pastor Matthew, I constructed a paradigm of pastoral supervision, with six fundamental principles. This paradigm, modeled by my senior pastor who drew from Christ’s way of supervision,1 consists of the following questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What is my ministry?
3. Where am I going?
4. What must I know about relationships?
5. How should I be trained?
6. What are my resources?

The themes in these questions can be classified in three interrelated phases in pastoral supervision: formative, directional, and continuous education (see chart on page 22).

The formative phase

Who am I? Knowing one’s pastoral identity2 is essential to a supervising pastor. As a senior pastor, Matthew knew who he was. His awareness of his heritage and rich pastoral experience enhanced his position and his function as a pastor.

He believed that he was more of a preacher/teacher than an evangelist. Knowing his gifts of preaching and teaching, he integrated them into his ministry. Such an awareness and self-understanding were a result of his deep knowledge of God. Knowing God and understanding himself influenced his pastoral responsibilities.

Matthew’s supervisory leadership resulted in positive support from his associates and his congregation. A senior pastor’s aptitude can inspire harmony and create a congenial atmosphere in the pastoral team that permeates the whole congregation.

By setting this kind of example, senior pastors also teach others how to know their strengths and weaknesses. They are free to be vulnerable or to be guarded in promoting learning and growth.3 Their interns and/or associates emulate them, becoming certain about their own pastoral identity, discovering how they may use themselves as “instruments”4 modeled after the supervision practiced by Jesus Himself.

When the disciples were fully aware of who Christ was (John 13:3-5), they could serve as He did. When they finally knew who they were, they were filled with the Spirit (Acts 1:6-22 and 2:1-4). Nicodemus invested his time and talent for the Lord, and the woman of Samaria introduced Christ to her whole town after they knew what sinners they were and what a Savior they had (John 3:1-18; 4:7-42). Knowing oneself along with actually acknowledging Christ as the Master Supervisor is the first step in pastoral supervision.

What is my ministry? Identifying one’s true and specific calling in ministry does not come naturally. Years of experience and feedback from seasoned ministers have helped to heighten my awareness of my calling.

Matthew, my senior supervising minister, believed in creative leadership and was inclusive in his outlook. He visited me personally, respected my ethnic background, and attempted to understand me as a young ministerial graduate. He helped me to identify the untrodden grounds in the formative stage of...
my career that defined my role and interests.

Senior pastors should believe that “setting boundaries in the workplace” can help their team to grow spiritually. They must allocate time to meet the spiritual needs of their interns, organize special programs and retreats so that the interns can reflect on areas of weakness and strength. With God’s guidance and a senior pastor’s empowerment, interns or associates can grow and perform even what is considered humanly impossible.

Senior pastors play an important role in assisting interns in identifying their gifts in ministry. A competent senior pastor helps them to know what their callings are and empowers them to serve with love. Love is the key to enhancing spirituality, pastoral care, evangelism, family life, and other ministries of each congregation.

The directional phase

Where am I going? A clear sense of mission provides direction in ministry. Matthew knew where he was going. When he felt convicted to order for pastors to know who and where they are, they need to set goals and be well prepared for their assignments whether in worship, evangelism, or training. He conducted regular pastoral meetings, both for educational and administrative purposes. Frequently, he shared with me the latest publications and findings in driven pastors journey along the path of righteousness, balancing law and grace. They will encounter difficulties, but blessings and reconstructions will come as they set “the image of Christ” to be their highest ambition. When pastors possess a sense of mission and a desire to emulate Christ, their churches will grow because there is power in having such a mission, one clearly seen and planned for.

What must I know about relationships? Supervisory competence consists of intra-relationships and inter-relationships. Recognizing that everyone has his or her shadow side, Matthew and his associates spent time in providing constructive feedback to one another. He believed in “leadership from within.” Therefore, he encouraged his associates to have a vital relationship with God.

Matthew had a rich spiritual experience himself, which was his source of motivation.

Building relationships between the senior pastor and the associate begins with both spending time with God. Such relationships are the source for “love, friendship, mutual respect and trust.” Then the pastoral team will experience their connections with God, letting warmth and love permeate their congregation.

Continuous education phase

How can I be trained? Pastoral education is a continuous process. The local conference ministerial association has resource materials that outline the biblical principles and professional growth plans that pastors need. Senior pastors should not hesitate to adopt these programs, and invite feedback from other pastoral educators to evaluate the performance of their pastoral teams.

Matthew expected his pastors to be well prepared for their assignments whether in worship, evangelism, or training. He conducted regular pastoral meetings, both for educational and administrative purposes. Frequently, he shared with me the latest publications and findings in

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| 2. What is my ministry? |
| Know my gifts |
| Identify and stay within my boundaries |
| Identify my mentors |

| 4. What do I know about relationships? |
| Know my intra-personal relationships |
| Know my inter-personal relationships |
| Have a vital relationship with God |

| 6. Where are my resources? |
| Appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit |
| Use Christ as a role model in supervision |
| Evaluate my personal and professional growth |

Matthew was considered humanly impossible. He encouraged pleasant pulpit decorum, giving the glory to God. He was creative and constructive in various aspects of programming. Matthew knew his mission and helped me to develop my own mission statement. My mission at that time was to continue my professional growth and assist him in reviving the church. With this in mind, we prayed for guidance and experienced a revival in the congregation. The Holy Spirit led many in our congregation to baptism.

There is power when a person knows his or her mission clearly. Only a clear mission can direct one’s pastoral vocation successfully. In order for pastors to know who and what they are and where they are going, they need to set goals and be open to periodic evaluations for personal growth.

Spiritually speaking, mission-based pastors journey along the path of righteousness, balancing law and grace. They will encounter difficulties, but blessings and reconstructions will come as they set “the image of Christ” to be their highest ambition. When pastors possess a sense of mission and a desire to emulate Christ, their churches will grow because there is power in having such a mission, one clearly seen and planned for.

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nurture and evangelism. He inculcated the principles of spiritual growth by praying daily and inviting the Holy Spirit to inspire, comfort, and edify.

To equip and train ministerial interns, senior pastors should meet with them at least once a week. Those experienced in pastoral supervision are likely to say that full and effective supervisory responsibility in an institutional setting requires at least 12 hours each week. This includes educational seminars, verbatim analysis, personal consultation, and supervision. In congregational settings, however, perhaps four hours a week on the average will do. One hour for educational purposes; another for a group planning; and two for individual work or pastoral function-related consultation between the senior pastor and the intern. A well-organized curriculum, including phases of pastoral ministry and evangelism, will enable senior pastors to help their supervisees to measure their progress.

What are my resources? Spirituality is vital in pastoral supervision. There is no use supervising, teaching, or worshiping without Christ being the center of all our plans and activities. Matthew was creative and spiritual because of his commitment to Christ. Under Matthew’s supervisory leadership, I was encouraged to spend more time with the Lord. His constant prayer for me reminded me how Christ prayed and agonized for His disciples. Matthew prayed constantly for me and our congregation.

The senior pastor’s responsible attitude and passion for pastoral ministry will encourage young pastors. God calls senior pastors to model whatever an intern or an associate needs. Some will be particularly helpful with preaching. They will set examples in dynamic preaching and nurturing sermons, and will openly share their “secrets” with their interns. Others may inculcate a caring spirit toward each congregation, loyalty to the church organization, or commitment to weekly pastoral visitation. Whatever their special talents, senior pastors have a responsibility to model the essentials of pastoring and to reflect on these with their associates.

At their heart, the three phases in this paradigm are centered in Christ’s method of supervision. Pastoral supervision is a sacred calling responded to by senior ministers who want to mentor younger and/or growing pastors.

Through effective supervision and modeling, senior pastors can contribute to the development of a strong and effective ministry.

* Matthew McNeill is a pseudonym.

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1 In Luke 24:17-32, while journeying to Emmaus, Christ asked questions, walked with the disciples, and opened the Scriptures as a means of supervision. As a result, the disciples cherished their heart-warming experience and were empowered to fulfill the gospel commission.
Transformed into a new person: The relevance of God

Wally Drotts

What is the purpose of Christianity and the church? Why the busy programs, expensive edifices, learned clergy, and scholarly seminaries? One basic purpose: to bring God and human beings into a relationship so as to supply life with meaning and hope. People do not exist for the institution; the institution exists for people. Failing that, the church loses its franchise. The central purpose for which the church and its ministers exists is to cultivate and inspire that meeting of humans and God.

When asked why he robbed banks, a notorious bank robber answered, “That’s where the money is.” Ask your congregation why they come to church and do they say, “That’s where God is”? Meeting God is the core purpose of biblical religion. A study of Jacob illustrates the point.

Genesis presents Jacob’s life as a movement from being a deceptive manipulator to becoming a man at peace with God, from a devious religionist to a devout and deeply spiritual person. Jacob’s life can be divided into three phases.

Phase 1: Egocentrism

The first phase of Jacob’s life may be labeled as “egocentric.” Jacob had an acute case of it. He was the leader and others were his servants, even if he had to conquer them by wit and strategy. In the young Jacob we see a dangerous mix of naive intelligence, driving ambition, and illusions of grandeur. He seems to have absorbed, at his mother’s knee, the skill of spotting and exploiting the weaknesses of people to his personal advantage.

Scripture cites three instances to support Jacob’s early reputation as a cheat. Genesis 25 relates his birth account as if to say that Jacob’s tendency was congenital. When Rebecca delivered the twins, it was noticed that Jacob grabbed the heel of his brother who preceded him from the womb. Jacob seemed to protest the accident of being born second, and from the beginning tried to manipulate things in his favor. Thus the ancients read the incident and named the child Jacob, meaning “supplanter” or “one who grabs the heel.”

The second instance involves taking advantage of his brother’s hunger. Esau, the older twin, was a robust, hairy outdoorsman. Jacob pursued the more refined and intellectual arts. No wonder his mother and he grew close.

The day Esau returned from the hunt, starved, Jacob saw his opportunity to recover the birthright denied him at birth. For a simple meal of porridge, Jacob asked in return his brother’s birthright. Hungry, naive, and impulsive, Esau traded his birthright for a single meal. Jacob was learning well the art of saving his neck by using his head.

The most cruel deception of all was Jacob’s daring plot in tricking his aged and blind father. Two assets most coveted by a Semitic son were birthright and the death blessing. Jacob had manipulated himself into gaining the first. He had apparently awaited the opportune moment to capture the second.

Genesis 27 records the ugly deed. Isaac’s dying request of his elder son, Esau, was a meal of his favorite venison. Esau loved his father and was delighted to do his bidding. He left immediately for the hunt. Unfortunately, Isaac’s wife and the mother of his children, who preferred Jacob to Esau, overheard the request. She quickly plotted a deception. Jacob would take it to his father dressed in a hairy garment simulating Esau’s body. Although Isaac was suspicious, the deception succeeded and Jacob won the coveted blessing. Jacob cheated his father and betrayed his brother—a memory he would never shake off.

The price was high. Jacob lost his father’s respect and his brother’s trust. Within hours,
urged by his mother who feared Esau’s reprisal, Jacob was on the road. Why not use the time to find himself a wife among their relatives far to the east? As it turned out, Jacob never saw his mother again. When he returned 20 years later, she was dead.

The third instance showing Jacob’s egocentrism was at the time of his famous dream. While he grew immensely as a result of this dream, his ego was still insistently in the dream Jacob saw a ladder, or ramp, stretched from heaven to earth, indeed to the very place he lay. Hurrying back and forth on errands were angels, obviously messengers of the real King over all the earth. The ramp led up to God’s throne. Instantly and hauntingly, Jacob would have to reckon with the Almighty. Jacob’s dream was not his conversion, however, for he quickly tried his ingrained bargaining skills on God. “Bring me back,” he says, “to this place, and I’ll give You ten percent of my gains” (see Gen. 28:20-22).

At least we can say this: The God who until then had been academic and irrelevant to Jacob, now became, if not dear, at least actual and real. This first phase of Jacob’s life illustrates the adolescence of our modern mind, which dismisses God as a myth, and the human as ultimate.

Phase 2: Realism

As it is for all of us, reality was Jacob’s main subject in the school of the real world. Fantasy was forced to give way to adversity. During the next 20 years, Jacob grew humble. What he had previously done to others was now being done to him. Charmed by Rachel, he agreed with her father to pay a dowry for her hand in marriage through seven years’ work without pay; but on the wedding night he discovered that he’d been outwitted by a father-in-law more skilled at deception than he (Gen. 29 and 30). Rachel’s sister was now his wife. To marry Rachel, the woman he loved, he agreed to work an additional seven years on the same terms. Fourteen years to get a wife!

On a subsistence income, Jacob raised a large family. Only by the help of God and careful strategy was he able to escape at last. Life plodded hard during those years. No heavenly dreams or divine revelations came to brighten Jacob’s life. The daily chore of his life was as normal and uneventful as ours. Yet he did not seem to grow cynical. If God had forgotten him, he could not forget God.

The Jacob of Phase 2 became a seasoned man, mellowed by life, and ripe for the higher life. If not yet a fully changed man, the foundations had been laid for Jacob’s ultimate encounter with God.

Phase 3: Conversion

If in Phase 1 God had been academic with Jacob, and in Phase 2, seemingly absent, with Phase 3 God became actual and alive to Jacob. He discovered in God the answer to life. He became a transformed person. Genesis 31 tells the story of his meeting Jacob soon after learning of his brother, Esau, was coming to meet him with a small army of 400 men. It seemed that Esau was about to deal out Jacob’s final deserts. Yet Jacob would use his head to salvage what he could. One wife, half the children, and half the cattle he sent in one direction, while the other half of everything he sent off in another direction, thinking that if one group were captured, at least the other group would escape. But he himself stayed back, alone.

That night Jacob didn’t sleep. He was terribly afraid, but what finally dominated him was a need beyond that of protection. It almost seemed he was struggling for his soul with God. The fundamental commitments of his life were at stake as out of the darkness of the night a terrifying stranger emerged to wrestle with him.

As morning began to break, so did the ultimate question of the human soul. Jacob cried out to the Stranger, whom now he began to realize was not an enemy. “I will not let You go until You bless me.”

By cunning Jacob gained earlier the best blessings men could give—the birthright and the death blessing, but he remained unsatisfied. There had to be more. The blessing he now craved with the whole of his being was the blessing of God. He would cling until that blessing came. That was the moment of Jacob’s ultimate turning.

The person first born as “Jacob,” God now made into an “Israel.” He was given the name that the Jewish people have carried with pride ever since. Religion fulfilled its purpose in Jacob’s life; it had brought him to God and made him completely new. That’s true religion. That’s what the church and its ministry is all about.

Clement of Alexandria was right in asking, “What help is it to you that God is God, if He is not your God?”
Should we depersonalize another person’s faith?

One of my first questions after I began working with military veterans was, “Why is the speech and literature of war so full of ethnic slurs?” The answer was always the same. “These names dehumanize the enemy and it is easier to fight and kill a dehumanized, impersonal enemy. You hesitate killing people if they still appear to you as human beings.” Thus, dehumanization, or depersonalization, is a standard, valued technique in war.

Sadly, this technique has its equivalent in the language of religion as well: Papist, popery, Prod, Hebe, Christ-killer, Dunkard, cultist, mumbo-jumbo, Hairy Krishner, bells and smells, Mooney, Jay Dub, heretic, apostate, Sabbatizer, and Holy Roller. Such terms dehumanize the other person and his religion, making it easier to reject, even hate, and ultimately to persecute. Even statements such as, “The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ god isn’t our God,” or “The Roman Catholics don’t have the same Savior we do,” may have a note of objectivity in them, but in the end they are clearly made on the background of a kind of superiority and religious egotism.

Since the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, were intimately connected to the attackers’ view of their religion, it was inevitable that some Christian ministers would cement the religious connection even further by tarnishing and depersonalizing an entire religion—its people and its faith. In the aftermath, statements of dehumanization and judgment of the Muslim people as a whole became all too common in many quarters.

A seed of distorted truth lies behind many epithets. For example, those who have at a certain point in their experience been forced by poverty and persecution to be very frugal, such as the Scots, may be labeled as miserly. Those who reject the majority-accepted, orthodox portrait of God and paint an alternative portrait may be accused of embracing a different god altogether. Again, the destructive element is not the fact that we disagree with a given person or group as they present their faith, but that our disagreement turns to disdain, dehumanization, and depersonalization. This simply was not the way of Jesus Christ.

Can dehumanization be justified?

The essential question must come back to this: Are these departures and differing views
of God enough to justify the dehumanizing accusation that they worship a different god? From the standpoint of historical continuity, they are not.

For example, the Christian portraits of God, while differing in some ways from the Jewish portraits, are rooted in the same divine/historical events, utilize the same Scriptures, incorporate many of the same religious heroes and symbolism, and use much of the same religious language. The later portrait of God was painted and embraced by people who originated in the earlier faith tradition. The later one grew out of the foundation of the earlier one as a divergent continuance of the worship of the same God—a different portrait painted from a different perspective.

Most often, the original followers of a new religion viewed themselves as part, or a continuity, of their parent faith. They saw themselves as having found a fuller understanding of God, or as possessing a more mature understanding of Him. While the resulting tensions with the parent faith were very strong and led to a violation of some of the principles espoused in this article, when all was said and done, they inevitably recognized their spiritual ancestry even as they espoused a faith different from the original.

Even in the case of Islam, there is a tie of language between its view of God and those of Judaism and Christianity. Hebrew Scriptures use the terms elohim, elovah, and el to refer to God. Allah is the direct descendant of those words, just as Arabic is a direct descendant of ancient Hebrew. Even as it is important and valuable to note the substantive differences between faiths, so is noting and valuing the substantive and even the “organic” similarities and historical affinities.

While we cannot concede the call of inner conviction or conscience before God, and while, by the nature of those convictions, we are called to share our faith evangelistically, we need to honestly assess not only the arenas over which we disagree or depart from others but also embrace those areas in which we find genuine commonness and brotherhood. If we are genuinely faithful to both sides of this interfaith reality (what we have in common and what we don’t), it cannot but enliven and strengthen our evangelistic effectiveness.

For the Christian minister, it is essential to go deeper than the usual approaches of either indiscriminately embracing the approaches of a given view of God and faith, or blanketly and destructively denigrating it. We need to go, not only beyond prejudice and fear of the unknown but beyond historical and linguistic scholarship as well. We need to go and learn at the feet of the Master-Teacher as to how to react to those who have painted a different portrait of our God. So, what did Jesus teach?

Relating as Jesus did

First, He taught us that the call to “love our neighbor” is a call to love and respect precisely those who have a differing portrait of God. In Luke 10:25-37, a Samaritan was the model. A differing portrait of God, an accusation that the Samaritans’ god was not God, was the driving force behind the bitter hostility of Jews against Samaritans. Jesus taught His audience that love and depersonalization cannot co-exist in our ministry.

Second, Jesus instructed His first 12 ministers not to disrespect those whose portrait of Him differed from their own, the one He had taught them. We find the story in Luke 9:49, 50 (TEV). “John spoke up, ‘Master, we saw a man driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn’t belong to our group. ‘Do not try to stop him,’ Jesus said to him and to the other disciples, ‘because whoever is not against you is for you.” Even those who don’t see Jesus our way may be serving “our Jesus.” It isn’t up to us to pronounce
Ministry is to minister

Allen Davis*

At times it amazes me that I've reached such an advanced age without learning some basic life lessons! But there are times when the Holy Spirit does lead us “into all truth” even though feeling the impact of truth can be more than a little painful.

It's all quite easy as long as I relegate the Holy Spirit's revelational role to clarifying some concept of doctrinal correctness, especially if it is targeted at somebody else's spurious view of Scripture. I find that comfortable, and better still, a tool that I can use to my advantage. But, when the Lord directs His light upon the flaws of my inward fabric, I tend to twist and squirm.

Recently He did it again. Someday I’m going to learn.

Learning my lessons—real ones

During the last several months I've found myself heading down a rather well-worn emotional path. I became involved in discussions regarding several professional positions that were open and which seemed attractive to me, only to have them all come to naught. I'd either get a “call out of the blue” dealing with one or another of these attractive situations, or I’d actually get a little proactive and see what I could do to get my name into the mix of consideration. Each episode turned into an exercise in futility.

As I faced the frustrating fruitlessness of things, growing out of my sense of personal rejection, I found myself reverting to some childish self-preoccupations. These would reveal themselves in moments of woundedness when I would dejectedly think about how it was that no one really understood my needs and my gifts, and how very much I'd like to be given the chance to . . . whatever.

I also found that if I allowed myself the luxury of self-pity long enough, I'd start to feel twinges of resentment. That's the sort of thing that happens when I start taking an inventory of how hard I work, how much I give, and how no one seems to notice.

Once in a while, in moments of lucidity, I'd remember an experience told to me by a very dear friend of mine, who had advanced into a high administrative position in the church. He and I had a mutual friend who had given years of his life to the pastorate, but unknown to me had grown bitter when he was passed over for positions he felt he should have had. He had been looking at my first friend and his administrative advancement. Watching his “progress” through the years, he had become jealous because he came to feel that those kinds of opportunities always seemed to leave him standing where he was.

I was determined that I'd never become bitter. I was determined I'd not take stock of the colleagues with whom I went to college, assessing where they were in the pecking order, compared with me. Yet, in spite of my best intentions, I recently found myself again taking an accounting of my efforts and the apparent lack of measurable “returns,” the ones that I “always” seemed to experience.

Ministry is wonderful, but . . .

Now, don't get me wrong. In sane moments I know that ministry is the sweetest thing I've ever been given, no matter the role I'm fulfilling or the “level” on which I find myself. I know I'm genuinely privileged to have what I have, and to do what I do.

I pastor a church where 90 percent of my members truly appreciate what I do for them, and where only 10 percent think I'm the antichrist! That's worth something, isn't it? (The trouble is, I'm just as human as the next pastor . . . Nine sincere “thank you’s” for my investment in my people always gets short-circuited by the one sincere saint who says of my sermon, “Well, that was different . . .” or worse.)

* Allen Davis is a pseudonym.
A wise colleague of mine once observed that ministry is the only profession in the world where the folks for whom you discharge your task all believe that they are outshining experts in your field of specialization. This truth finds a way of surfacing all too frequently in my case, and rattling me just a little.

Don't get me wrong. In cogent moments I know I'm indeed a man most blessed by the fact that God has entrusted pastoral ministry into my hands. The truth is that I'm in a situation where very little of what I do is as excitingly fulfilling to me in the kinds of ways some might expect it to be. Preaching is preaching, whatever the level. Teaching is teaching, whether to a few or multitudes.

The thing is, ministry as a profession is not a 60-hour week of preaching and teaching. That would be exciting, but it's not the daily reality I face. Some of ministry is just simple giving in the arena that meets the needs of my congregation, whether immediate or long term, and to do it well. That's it. I'm not paid to expend my energies in self-promotion or in self-fulfillment. In this context it's also true that ministry after this order doesn't leave room for the jealousies or woundedness that may come down the road of disappointed ambition or trivial criticism.

But I must ask again, How did I get this far without the Holy Spirit being able to lead me into this truth?

There's one more confession... I'm not a little nervous. A large enough piece of me is afraid that the Lord is soon going to push things further, asking me to define love in its mature, incarnational sense!

**Letters**

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Darwinist dream of the undirected forces of nature; chance and necessity. The most recent advances in physics and biology point directly to an intelligent Designer as the best explanation for the origin of life and its diversity.

Even if Parsons is correct that no professional biologists/geneticists reject Darwinism, this is a matter of philosophy and not a matter of evidence, and it can be explained in precisely the same terms as my adherence to a young age for life on earth.

—Earl M. J. Aagaard, Angwin, California.

**Should we depersonalize another person's faith?**

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fare” seriously. In Romans 12:20, 21, the Spirit laid down a surprising basic rule of engagement. “As the scripture says: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by doing this you will make him burn with shame.’ Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good” (TEV).

Often, I hear ministers from various denominations describe how they use depersonalization to apply the concept of Christian warfare to those with differing visions of God. They sometimes express the sentiment that this is the only alternative to compromising with error.

Evangelizing as Jesus did, does not include insulting and degrading either the faith of those we seek to win or the people themselves. Aspects of our conditioning and culture may seem to demand that. The idea of telling it fearlessly and “prophetically” may seem to require it. But that is a delusion, and besides, it doesn’t work very well! We must tell the truth, but it should always be told in genuine love.

As implied in the passage from Romans 12 cited above, there is the way that adheres more closely to the biblical model, the rules of engagement that are worthy of our calling. Even though we cannot in good conscience praise a differing vision, we can follow the Romans 12 rules of engagement more closely, treating our differing neighbors with kindness and respect in the way we talk about our faith and theirs. That kindness may well lodge in their hearts, softening hostility and creating an environment in which true spiritual dialog might some day take place, and on the basis of which they might even be won over.

Depersonalization is, first and last, an invention of this world. It is completely carnal in nature, born of the human temptation to strike out at anything different from ourselves. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV), God cautions us regarding our Christian warfare: “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world...” (emphasis supplied).

God’s spiritual weapons include not just the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17, NIV), but also the weapons of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23, NIV).
For Adventists to celebrate the 75th anniversary of any venture seems incongruous with our name. Although personally pleased with Ministry's continuing contribution as we reach our publication's diamond jubilee, my Seventh-day Adventist heritage leads me to apologize more than congratulate.

Our Lord's delay forces both a theological and practical challenge for every believer in the eschaton. From those first century believers who anticipated a quick parousia to early Adventists who mistakenly established a date for the second coming, we have struggled with short-term planning and dashed dreams as we have postponed projects or closed the coffin on beloved friends and family members.

Seventy-five years ago, Ministry first emphasized our confidence in the soon return of Jesus. Sixty years ago my parents entered ministry confident that Jesus would return long before they would grow old or wait in the grave. Thirty years ago, Sharon and I eagerly began our pastoral ministry with no sense of need to plan for a retirement we would never reach. Proclaiming our confidence in the surety of Jesus' return by citing texts enumerating end times characterized by chaos and deterioration, upheaval in nature, proliferation of disease and disasters, and compromise by spiritual leadership. Oh, and don't forget Scriptures strongest warnings against the multiplication of independent ministries which attempt to draw away disciples after themselves.

Somehow, as Lisbon's earthquake, the dark day, and falling stars faded into history's recesses, their indications of imminence of the second coming were less persuasive than the reality of their importance as signals of transition from the dark ages to the time of the end.

When church's growth demanded expansion and renewal, "Should the Lord delay His coming," became code to explain the necessity of long-range plans, expanding facilities, or even renovating buildings which critics suspect should never have been constructed in the first place.

Living squarely between what Charles Bradford terms the "ought" and the "is," the church ought to be in the kingdom, but is still here on earth. Even now we seem unwilling or incapable of planning beyond the next quinquennium a global strategy to "finish the work" because it might be perceived as lack of confidence in Christ's near return.

Too often, those who struggle with the issues of delay are labeled liberal because they seek understanding beyond rote repetition of answers developed by Uriah Smith. Self-styled "historical" Adventists brand any who differ with their particular theological interpretation as heretics even as they prey on the nostalgia of thousands to support fiercely independent ventures.

Both as an individual believer and as an Adventist pastor, I long for the culmination of our blessed hope! I believe in the literal, visible, personal, and imminent return of Jesus and pray that it will occur in my lifetime. My confident proclamation is predicated on personal study and earnest desire to help others prepare for His coming.

My most powerful sermons focus on Jesus' return. One year I preached a twelve-sermon series, the last Sabbath of each month, on the second coming. After all, we are Adventists because of the Advent. Beginning the next year, my elders asked me to continue. "Preach the same sermons over again, Pastor."

I do not scornfully ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" even though our Heavenly Father has failed to follow the time line I might have devised. Instead, I pray for patient comprehension of the New Testament which always places that delay in terms of God's infinite love, patience, and unwillingness to see any sinner perish (2 Peter 3:9).

Even as I affirm my confidence in the future and my gratitude for God's providences in the past, I am called upon to live in the present. Even in the midst of traumatic, troubled times, we live in the kingdom of grace while we long for the kingdom of glory.

To paraphrase Barry Oliver's outstanding affirmation, "Just as we eagerly look forward to the future of Jesus coming, we gratefully look up to the present reality of His grace which opens heaven for us now." Lively hope endures the present.

Revelation concludes with the cry of the lonely heart, "Even so, come quickly" coupled with the reality of preparatory waiting, "and the grace of our Lord and Savior, be with you all."

Jesus wants to return even more than I want Him to. Hurry up and wait!
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