TIMES OF SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

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Thank you for publishing Austin Miles's article "Burnout's Refining Fire" in the May issue of Ministry. I am one of the many who read and was impacted by his 1989 book Don't Call Me Brother. I was caused to re-evaluate my own personal ministry, although I made the conscious and deliberate decision to remain within my denomination, with all its faults and foibles. Now, reading Miles's article, I can only thank God for one more example of His all-encompassing grace. Philip Yancey asked the probing question, What's So Amazing About Grace? Nothing less than the fact that God accepts us as we are, unconditionally, while we are so prone to offer "conditional" cheap grace.

-Burton K. Jones, Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, Canada.

The excellent article "The Why of Paul's Preaching" by Pastor Robert Leslie Holmes (May 2003), was admirable at least for four reasons: (1) short and condensed article, in which he expresses much; (2) although he wrote to pastors, he also describes the way of salvation through Jesus; (3) in spite of being a Ph.D., he does not philosophize, he probes every statement he expresses much; (2) although he探问自己是否想把我们变成像他一样—像他—他被混淆了，他代表自己为保存受伤的芦苇，或从火中拿起一根棍子，声称自己是保存被掠夺的人的牧羊人。完全且简单地，宏观进化论和"上帝是爱"并不兼容。

Many have much 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.

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November 2003 M I N I S T R Y

In my humble opinion, in fifteen minutes' reading or less, he [John McVay] "has captured it all"—all that is necessary for a sermon.

Editor's note: Thanks, Lael, you are correct: "aviv/naj" is just what you say it is! Our serious error grows out of our technical inability to reproduce Greek and Hebrew characters in our printing process. We are working to rectify this problem!

How to" books intrigue me. Especially books on sermon preparation. The last book I purchased included a bonus—a sample sermon. However, after I read the sermon, I was sorry I bought the book. And this is not the only time I looked for much but found little—until I read John McVay's "The Preacher's Temptation" (July 2003). Where else would a hungry pastor stop in his or her search for excellence but at a theological seminary? And, O glorious happening, in my stop there I found an intrepid soul with the "temerity" to expose himself in written form before his peers. For when you think about it, Dr. John McVay not only exposed himself as a preacher, but as the head of an institution that by name ought to be known as a place where preachers can learn how to preach.

Was his article intended as a sermon? Well, in my humble opinion, in fifteen minutes' reading or less, he "has captured it all"—all that is necessary for a sermon. The first three paragraphs certainly make up an excellent and concise introduction. At the end of the seventh paragraph, the body of the sermon includes a wake-up call with a frightening blow to the ego. And the last two paragraphs, his conclusion, apply his message to those of us who preach.

continued on page 29
Is there anything more distressing to a pastor’s soul than to be overwhelmed by a sense of having lost hold of the hand of God? Perhaps there is, when it appears that no matter what you do, your reaching fingers can’t seem to find God’s hand again, and it feels as though they never will.

At such times, somewhere deep in the soul, furtive questions begin to insinuate themselves: “Where is God?” “Why has He become so silent?” Worse still, we may look at wrong things we’ve actually done and feel deep down that through doing them, we’ve all but permanently extinguished the flickering flame of our personal faith, and made it impossible to again be fully at peace with God and ourselves.

Am I an Esau or a Judas? we might silently wonder. And it sometimes seems there’s no one a pastor can talk to about these things. Everything’s become dull and hollow, especially the deep core of the soul. And an excruciating barrenness takes over, as we begin to believe ourselves not only to have failed, but to be failures.

Can such a thing happen to a minister? it happened to Elijah and Peter. It especially happened to Job, and so it happened to his heart-to-heart connection with God Himself.

And then companion to this there was the disheartening reality that there was no one who had an adequate understanding of what was actually going on in Job’s incarnate hell, no one understood Job, especially not what was going on between him, Satan, and God (see Job 1), even though Eliphaz, Bildad, and the others certainly acted as though they were experts in the field as they offered their high-sounding theological explanations.

And so the best human wisdom that was available to Job assured him that he was the sole cause of his problems; for why else would a just God turn His back and treat him so? And even though like every one of us, Job manfully attempted to preserve his innocence before them, himself, and God, he was frightfully highly vulnerable before the accusing, reproving fingers of his pious “friends.” Worst of all, their fingers seemed, especially in the context of Job’s understandable insecurity, to wield the authority of the finger of God Himself.

Believing the diagnoses of these authorities was especially pernicious considering that in all that was going on there was one thing that became entirely clear and present: That God was still doing exactly what it seemed He was not doing: actually watching and listening to all that happened, albeit from behind His mystifying silence. God was awaiting the strategic moment, dictated by infinite wisdom and love.

So, at the end of Job’s story the moment of truth arrives, and Job finally comes to the place to which God has inexorably been leading His man. Having left behind his silenced friends, Job finally hears God’s voice and “sees,” and having seen, allows the experience to penetrate his harrowed soul, and he responds, “My ears have heard you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:4-6, NIV). How amazingly cleansing and relieving is this sort of deep, permeating, contextual repentance!

The way God related to Job’s life as a whole (even though it’s an “Old Testament” life) proclaims the immensely powerful truth at the heart of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ; the truth expressed so powerfully in those few simple words from the old hymn: “When darkness seems to veil His face, I rest on His unchanging grace; in every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.”

If for you or me things are heading into darkness, or if we’ve actually been sitting long in the dark, let’s sing the old song and see the great light it proclaims. Consistent with that, why not also prayerfully read the sage wisdom so present in this month’s lead article by Victor Parachin.
Times of spiritual darkness: Twelve ways out

Victor M. Parachin

Every minister experiences times of spiritual dryness. It is a subjective feeling that God is distant, aloof, even absent. During a time of spiritual dryness, prayers feel empty, hymns are sung without energy, sermons are lifeless, and Scripture appears to have no power over daily life. Often called the “dark night of the soul,” it is a time when our sense of God’s absence is painfully felt.

Even the heroes of Scripture experienced moments when clouds of darkness descended on the spirit, or God seemed hidden and uncaring. On one occasion Moses shouted at God: “If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now” (Num. 11:15, NIV).

Similarly, Elijah found himself so discouraged and frustrated he prayed: “I have had enough, Lord . . . Take my life” (1 Kings 19:4). And the psalmist lamented: “Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?” (Ps. 74:1). Although dark, dry times do come, the good news is that by taking some simple, significant steps you can bring a time of spiritual dryness to a speedier end.

Here are a dozen ways for us to find our way out of a time of deep personal spiritual darkness.

1. Shed an old skin. “We must be willing to get rid of the life we’ve planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us. The old skin has to be shed before the new one can come,” observed Joseph Campbell. A time of darkness may be God’s signal that you have reached the end of one stage in your life. Be flexible enough to turn over a new page and start the next chapter.

2. See the good, expect the best. Your mind is a powerful tool. Don’t waste it brooding over what you don’t have, aren’t experiencing, or didn’t receive. That kind of negative thinking will only leave you more discouraged, depressed, and dissatisfied.

A healthier approach is to see the good, and expect the best. Apply to your experience the promise of God spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: “I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11).

3. Always choose faith over understanding. Sometimes the darkness descends when an urgent prayer does not seem to be heard. If that is the case, always choose faith over understanding.

Catherine Marshall tells of a time when she emerged from six months of spiritual darkness following the death of her second granddaughter in 1971, for whom she had prayed, pleading that God would bring her healing. In spite of such prayers, the baby girl died, plunging Marshall into a spiritual black hole.

After great depression and soul searching, she told of this insight: “When life hands up situations we cannot understand, we have one of two choices. We can wallow in misery, separated from God. Or we can tell Him, ‘I need You and Your presence in my life more than I need understanding. I choose You, Lord. I trust You to give me understanding and an answer to all my Whys—only if and when You choose.’”

4. Name it and claim it. In spite of how you feel, balance negative feelings and thoughts with the reality that God is love. Remind yourself that you are loved deeply, permanently, and lavishly by the God who created you.

Claim for yourself the many statements of Scripture which declare that particular truth, such as 1 John 3:1, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” Isaiah 43:4, “You are precious and honored in my sight . . . I love you.”

5. Let your gifts and talents lead you. During
were profoundly aware that some of the saints and mystics of past ages presumed that God wants you to move. Let your God-given gifts and talents provide a clue. John Catoir opens this up by saying, "If you have a beautiful voice, then use it in some way for God's glory, and for your happiness. If you are a good teacher, then presume that God wants you to teach. Put your gifts at the service of others."

6. Look for the lesson in the darkness.
The saints and mystics of past ages were profoundly aware that some of the most powerful spiritual lessons are gleaned during times of darkness and dryness. Observe, study, and analyze your condition; glean new insights.

The anonymous author of the great mystical work The Cloud of Unknowing, observed his own dark night of the soul and learned this lesson: "Whenever the feeling of grace is withdrawn, pride is the cause. Not necessarily because one has actually yielded to pride, but because if this grace were not withdrawn from time to time pride would surely take root. God in His mercy protects the contemplative in this way, though some foolish neophytes will think He has turned enemy to them."

7. Use the three healing words. "I forgive you" are three of the most powerful words a person can speak. Ask yourself if your current spiritual situation is connected to feelings of anger, resentment, or hostility over someone who has hurt you. If that is the case, consider extending forgiveness.

One good way to do that is by writing a letter to the person who hurt you. Spell out the truth of what happened as you experienced it, but do so without blame, judgment, hostility, or anger. Say "I forgive you." Mail it only if you feel there's a reasonable chance that good will come from the recipient reading your words. If the person who caused your pain is deceased or incapable of hearing you, burn the letter. As you watch it consumed by flames, let your anger symbolically, if not palpably, go up with the smoke.

8. Be an angel. "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve?" queries the writer of Hebrews (1:14). Nothing expands the capacities of the soul as does reaching out and helping another person.

Be the individual who stands up for justice when an unjust action or work is committed. When others are cowardly, be the one who responds with courage and conviction. Where there is cruelty and unfairness, be sure to soften those blows with kindness and understanding.

Paul urged: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). By being God's angel you not only help others but will feel better about your life.

9. Do the right thing. If possible, don't take a job "just for the money." Many people—including those in highly paid positions and careers—are bored, frustrated, and unfulfilled by their work. Whether you are employed or not, take time for a spiritual career assessment, asking yourself, What do I love to do? What am I good at? What activities bring me the greatest spiritual and emotional pleasure? How can I use what I like to do to make a living and a contribution to the world?

10. Utter blessings. Even though you may be experiencing darkness, pray that all those with whom you have contact will experience God's blessings of peace, power, wisdom, love, joy, prosperity, and health. Privately utter these kinds of prayers of blessing for your spouse, children, friends, neighbors, employer, employees, and even strangers.

"Blessings keep our awareness of life's holy potential ever present. They awaken us to our own lives . . . with each blessing uttered, we extend the boundaries of the sacred and actualize our love of life." So says Lawrence Kushner, author of The Book of Words: Talking Spiritual Life, Living Spiritual Talk.

11. Have a listening ear. When you pray, remain still and silent in God's presence. Maintain a listening ear. God is a friend of silence. It is in solitude and silence that God's will is most clearly determined.

Be guided by this prayer, offered by African-American minister Howard Thurman, "Give me the listening ear. I seek this day the ear that will not shrink from the word that corrects and admonishes—the word that holds up before me the image of myself that causes me to pause and reconsider—the word that challenges me to deeper consecration and higher resolve."

12. Trust God even if you feel lost. No matter how you feel, continue trusting God for guidance and direction, perseverance and strength. Be encouraged by Thomas Merton's prayer: "O my God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me . . . Therefore, I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost I will not fear, for You are always with me, O my dear God."
Every church stops growing when the price gets too high.

Nine out of ten American churches have ceased their cycle of growth. Chances are, yours is one of the nine.

Just for fun, take a little quiz. Which of these describes your church?

(a) We don’t know why our church has stopped growing, and we really don’t care!
(b) We’re pretty clear on what our price is, but we’re satisfied with the status quo.
(c) We’re not sure why our church has stopped growing. Once we know, we will pay the price.

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— Bruce Benway
Advertising Executive, Omnicom Group, New York
Domestic violence: The hidden crime

T. Patrick Bradley

As we look at various societies and the moral guidance that these societies live by, we sometimes find a certain acceptance of domestic violence as a way of life, an expected part of relating within marriage. This may even be true in societies where violence, especially violence against an individual, is prohibited and where legal punishment for violence against a stranger is severe.

What makes domestic violence acceptable? And, most importantly, what can we do about the rampant domestic violence in so many of our communities?

A few facts

Over the years we have heard:

- That 20-25 percent of all marriages have domestic violence as a component
- That one woman in five in our American congregations is a victim of domestic violence
- That most women who leave a domestically violent relationship and divorce the abuser, remarry abusers
- That women who go to shelters for abused women normally return to the abusive relationship.

What are the facts? Are these statistics accurate and if so, how significant are they?

It is sad for me to confess that every congregation I have ever worked with has had some victims of domestic violence in its midst.

As a hospital chaplain I frequently see victims of domestic violence. As the chaplain for a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program I see even more.

Nature of abuse

Before we accept that abuse is a part of life, we must understand what abuse is about. Abuse is about power. It is the misuse of power by the perpetrator that results in fear on the part of the victim.

There is a story that makes the rounds in domestic violence workshops about a woman who, shortly after her wedding, declined to have sex with her husband. He went into the dining room and began smashing her heirloom china which had belonged to her grandmother. The message the woman got from this was “If you don’t do what I want, I can destroy you just like I am destroying your prized possessions.”

Another cadre of stories tells of abusers who kill the pet dogs or cats belonging to the abused person. The message here is “I killed your pet, I can kill your children, I can kill you!” Most times the message is subtle but understood. “I am in control. You must submit to me.”

Religious underpinnings

Many times the perpetrator takes a fundamentalist religious stance on the roles of men and women in marriage. Here I purposely refer to “men and women,” not “husband and wife,” because men and women is interpreted to be a ruler-chattel relationship, while husband and wife has to do with a partnership of equals.

The fundamentalist religious stance taken by abusers involves “prooftexting.” That is, finding a verse or even just part of a verse that can be made to justify a twisted authoritarian gender relationship.

A commonly used example of this is found in Ephesians 5:21-33. The abuser will put pieces of this passage together in such a way as to claim that it says, “Wives, be subject to your husbands for the husband is the head of the wife, so wives ought to be subject in everything to their husbands.” Abusers never include the parts that say, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies, or in the same way Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.

A complete reading of such a passage is
important in working with groups of men who are or might be abusers, and in connection with court-ordered treatment. In group settings a pastor can remind men that they are to love their wives as they do their own bodies and that if a husband gives his wife a broken nose he really should consider giving himself a broken nose.

Some abusers also quote the passage “You must forgive and forget,” as if it were Scripture (in reality the actual quote is from Shakespeare’s King Lear). Of course, forgiveness is scripturally supported. However, a victim who merely “forgives and forgets” will just be a victim again.

The victim must remember the violence in order to avoid any recurrence of it in the future. Further, forgiveness is not to be almost flipantly claimed as a kind of right to be granted without thoroughgoing confession and a complete turning away from the behavior that is being confessed because it is completely unacceptable.

Perpetrators must take responsibility for their crime

Often an abusive husband will attempt to blame his wife for his abuse of her. He claims that something she has done or habitually does causes him to behave toward her as he does. There is an interesting parallel to this kind of blaming in the Bible.

In Genesis 3 God asks, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:11-14, NRSV).

The fact is that a case can be made for the man failing to be the protector of the woman. The man should have been present to drive away the serpent. Instead he blamed the woman for his sin and, of course, the woman blamed the serpent. The truth is that God held Adam, Eve, and the serpent responsible for their action in this situation (Genesis 3:14-24).

It is clear that abusers must be led to understand that they are responsible for their own actions. It is only when they admit to the wrongness of their behavior and acknowledge their personal responsibility for their actions that they begin to find any real basis for inner and outer reform.

The victim’s problems in leaving the relationship

In practically every domestic violence situation the only safe course of action for the victim is to leave. Clergy involved with a couple where abuse is present realize that separation is the logical course of action for the victim. We may advise the victim to get out for her own protection. Yet she returns, why?

Domestic violence has a component similar to situations of “brainwashing.” In the case of brainwashing the victim is put in a situation where they are in isolation from all sources of help or separation from alternate viewpoints. In most domestic violence situations the abuser has started out by telling the victim that he will take care of her. That she doesn’t need to worry about money because he will earn enough. She does not have to work. He will take care of her.

Later when she wants to leave she finds that just as he has pointed out all along, she has no experience and so she is convinced that she is incapable of finding gainful employment, and her only obvious option is to go back into the abusive situation.

In many abusive situations, she doesn’t need a car because he takes her everywhere. She doesn’t need to be on the bank account because he takes care of all the bills. Her credit cards have only his name on them. Nothing is in joint ownership much less in her name alone. She goes to church only with him and cannot develop her own friends because he disapproves of them or he is not available to take her to visit.
Then of course, if there are children, in leaving she would have to leave her children because, and as such a husband tells her, the court would prefer to leave the children with him rather than place them with a destitute woman who has no job, no house, no car, and no income. And in many abuse situations it is not only the wife who is abused, but the children also.

**Cautions**

In such situations, we must not simply try to wrest such a woman from her situation without careful planning. One of the worst things one can do is to tear her away from the abuser. It will only anger him, and when she does return, and she will, he will beat her even more severely.

We cannot simply confront the abuser in front of the congregation or others. He may repent in church and punish her for telling about the abuse when he gets her alone.

We must not think that a protection order, restraining order, or peace bond will actually protect her. Their value varies from one judicial jurisdiction to another and from one police department to another. (Such protective laws differ widely from one country to another.) If you have a battered women’s shelter in your community, you can contact them to find out the content and effectiveness of local policies covering spousal abuse.

We cannot expect most women to simply leave their husbands and never return. Enlarging on what is said above, statistics show that women go to shelters an average of seven times before they finally leave the abuser.

We cannot simply accept a husband’s repentance without his participation in a counseling program with professionals trained in counseling domestic abusers.

We can’t force an abused wife to do anything. The abuser has been making all of her decisions for her. We cannot, as it were, simply take over from him the role of being the decision maker in her life, and expect to be truly helpful to her.

We must instead find ways of empowering her to make her own decisions. This is true even when the decision is to return to the relationship. She must make her own decision. It is the first step to healing.

**What can we do?**

1. We must begin by ensuring that we have people in our church who are prepared to provide the assistance that the victim will need when she finally escapes the violence.
2. We can support safe houses for domestic violence victims and their children.
3. We can, yes, we must, find the time to become educated on this problem.

Who will the people be who are prepared to assist the pastor with

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**ARCHEOLOGY**

Proves the Bible wrong

That is what recent TV programs and magazine articles have recently been saying, and as archaeology is currently interpreted, they are correct. No Exodus, no destruction of Jericho, no affluence in the days of Solomon! But there is an answer. Archaeologist David Down is the speaker in the video series *Digging up the Past*, aired over 3ABN every week. Recently he visited Syria and Lebanon where he made the video entitled *SOLOMON’S KINGDOM* in which he presents stunning archaeological evidence that supports Bible history.

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such victims? We, as ministers, must ensure that these particular people have the appropriate gifts and the appropriate training to be of real assistance to spousal abuse victims.

One of the best places to go yourself, or to which to send your team, to learn about domestic violence, is the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 936 N. 34th Street, Suite 200, Seattle, WA 98103; phone (206) 634-1903; fax (206) 634-0115. That center provides training, study materials, and videos to assist you in training your staff to identify and assist victims of domestic violence.

But while we concentrate on the abused spouse, we must also be prepared, at the same time, to work with the abuser. The sad truth is that when the victim does leave the marriage the perpetrator will find another woman to abuse. We must be God's instrument to end the violence.

After we have resources, we must let it be known in the congregation that we have resources with which to help them; not just for a day or so but for the long haul.

One of the worst things a church can do is advise a woman to go back to the abusive man and pray that she will be appropriately submissive and that the violence will simply end. In such a situation, when the woman finds little relief, she will not only end up leaving her marriage, but also the church.

Worse still, she may come to the place where she is convinced that the only way out of the violence is death. This may be her death at the hand of her husband or suicide, or even the death of her husband by her hand. In all this, if physical death is not the result, then there will surely be spiritual death.

In all of this, pastors often feel a pressing need for more resources. Where may pastors go to find the kind of help they are seeking? The following box lists some community resources which a pastor may be able to use.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

In North America and many countries, there are resources in the community to which a pastor can turn. The first is always the local "safe house" or "women's shelter." These establishments are always anxious to assist in teaching clergy about the problem. They are listed in your phone book. If you have trouble locating one, in the United States, you can always call the National Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or for the hearing impaired 1-800-787-3224 (TDD).

Every state in the U.S. has a coalition against domestic violence. These are listed at <http://www.ncadv.org/resources/state.htm>, which is part of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Web site.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Some further domestic violence resource centers are:


International Women's Rights Action Watch, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, 301 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNEFEM), 304 E. 45th Street, New York, NY 10017; phone (212) 906-6400.

USEFUL WEB SITES


RELIGIOUS RESOURCES

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA; phone (301) 680-6000. <http://www.adventist.org/>.


BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS


A century-old Midwest congregation was told that its basement social hall was woefully inadequate; younger members wanted a larger, brighter facility. When the elders said that the cost was too high, younger members argued that increased rentals would more than foot the bill.

When a Keystone State congregation hired a highly touted youth director, he created more innovative programming and attracted more young people than the congregation had ever seen. The result was that the youth director met opposition from older congregants, who felt that an inordinate amount of time, space, and funds were being lavished on a segment of the population unable to contribute financially.

One lay-led congregation had no minister; instead, it featured a collective approach to services and religious teaching. What worked in the 1960s, however, didn’t work in the 1990s: congregants had little time—or patience—to do the work themselves. After intense lobbying for both a paid teacher and minister, the members split so badly no one wanted to risk leading the church as its president.

When a rural Pennsylvania congregation wanted to grow, they felt they should move from a part-time to a new, full-time minister. The new minister did attract many new families but crossed a line when she nominated some new church members to the board. Infuriated, some congregants mounted a terror campaign, including anonymous phone calls, verbal abuse, and threats to blow up the new parsonage they themselves had built.

When the bishop wanted to close a venerable river town church and replace it with a new facility elsewhere, where newer, younger families were located, the older and more traditional parishioners objected—to the point of filing suit in church and civil courts.

An Ohio Valley congregation recruited a family whose 19-year-old son was asked to be youth director. Responding splendidly, the young man created many weekday events, including both worship and Bible study, as well as a strategy to develop teen leaders. Within six months the church was hosting 80 teenagers on an activity night—which is when the complaints began: The building wasn’t kept clean, amplified music was not appropriate for the neighbors, too many children milled about on the sidewalk.

(For the resolutions, see end of article.)

Any of these situations sound familiar? Of course. In fact, intracongregational intergenerational conflicts are the rule, not the exception—and resolving them requires skills that pastors don’t all always possess, yet must learn.

Ten helpful tips

1. Admit that you need each other. Far too many congregations splinter, with elders saying it’s our way or the highway. Yet for congregations to grow, youth needs the wisdom and stability of age, and age needs the energy—and future—of youth.

2. Identify and articulate the conflict. Congregations often ignore conflicts or assume (or pray) that they will miraculously disappear. Though the latter is a possibility, conflict generally takes human agency to be resolved.

3. Listen. Listen to what is being said, try to see it as a valid opinion, one that you yourself might make if that age. In other words, just because the nursery worked for your children 20 (or 50) years ago does not mean that it shouldn’t be modified now.

4. Remember what group you’re addressing. As Alban Institute’s Reverend Gilbert Rendle says, different cultural lessons are learned at different times. After 20 years, congregations develop a group identity. Yet newer congre-
gants have a consumer identity: How will something help me? “If consumers find it,” Reverend Rendle says, “they stay. If not, they leave.” Do you want the future of your congregation walking out the door?

5. Recognize impact. Consider how change would affect your congregation. If, for example, you want to bring in young people, calculate beforehand what changes they might demand before their presence unwittingly rends your congregation. “Generations resonate differently,” Reverend Tracy Keenan says. “Do you have the tolerance to expand the congregation?”

6. Be aware when you are emotionally involved. When you are, delegate your authority to someone who isn’t. As Rabbi Yisroel Miller, spiritual leader of Pittsburgh’s Congregation Poale Zedeck, puts it: “When people say ‘it’s only the principle of the thing,’ generally it’s their ego at stake.” Just as no parent or child would perform surgery on a family member, appoint surrogates when emotions run too high.

7. Separate issues. Often when people are troubled by one thing, they confuse it with something else, and it can be hard to know what is really bothering them. If a new youth leader raises numbers, what may be troubling is not the morning-after scrub-up but a perceived shift in the congregation’s power center.

8. Empower all parties in the conflict. As Speed Leas points out in his seminal Moving Your Church Through Conflict—“it is a truism that for people to ‘buy into’ a decision, they need to be part of the decision-making process. If they feel they have been manipulated by others, that others don’t understand the facts of the situation . . . there will be resistance to whatever decision is made.” While it can be difficult sharing real power with a child (or a parent), it must be done to resolve conflict.

9. Search for common ground. Cursing or cajoling will not make another point of view go away. At worst, your intransigence could tear the congregation apart. Remember, these are your children, your parents, your new neighbors, and to be a family means never having to leave home.

10. Don’t be afraid to mediate—or seek higher counsel. Mediation works when both parties are to accept the process, and the agreement brokered by the mediator. Mennonite minister John Stahl-Wert says, “If it is not a mediated situation, youth cannot win. Why not? Who votes in council meetings? Who pays the light bill?”

“Understand,” Minister Stahl-Wert says, “it is not possible to grow a congregation and simultaneously maintain control of it. Indeed, growth always involves giving up control—if it’s going to work. So be prepared: When a new generation comes into a congregation, it will require change in the way business is done.”

Consider your own congregation and its intergenerational conflict: How often have you tried these techniques? Could they have helped? Here’s how the above conflicts were “resolved.”

Century-old Midwest: The older members simply voted down the new social hall. Instead, the basement space was renovated.

Keystone State: To head off the youth pastor’s ouster, the minister personally raised money to support the new programs.

Lay-led: Realizing they had a serious problem, the congregation called in a professional mediator. After a series of meetings to set priorities and create a preliminary plan, the congregation finally hired a teacher—but no minister.

Rural Pennsylvania: Choosing safety, the new minister resigned.

River Town: Both courts found that because the Catholic Church is essentially a closed corporation, with such decisions residing exclusively with the bishop, his decision stood. Although some held out, a majority of parishioners moved to the new facility.

Ohio Valley: The youth leader was decommissioned and the program stopped.

* For further information about this subject, please contact Conflict Resolution Center International, 204 37th Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15201-1859.

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Elder abuse: A faith-based response

Winnie, age 81, lives with her divorced, alcoholic son Robert, who is under a lot of pressure at work and takes his frustration out on her. During a visit to the home, the parish nurse discovers that Robert frequently attacks Winnie verbally and physically. She also notices Winnie has several prominent bruises on her face. Winnie pleads with the nurse to keep their family problems secret and pray for her son.

Hattie, age 86, is in poor health and recently moved to a nursing home, where Father Toal offers the sacrament of Communion weekly. Hattie has no family and few friends in the city where she lives. She tells the priest that she has been verbally abused and threatened by staff when she has reported her missing valuables.

These are typical examples of elder abuse. Research indicates that clergy are one of the most likely groups of professionals to encounter cases of elder abuse.

Elder abuse is a form of domestic violence that is almost as prevalent as child abuse. Elder abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of an older person, usually by a relative. It may include physical violence, threats, verbal abuse, financial exploitation, neglect, or sexual abuse.

Elder abuse is largely a hidden problem. The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates that only 1 in 14 of the between 1.5 and 2 million annual cases of abuse are actually reported. Faith communities can play a critical role in the prevention of elder abuse, though, learning to identify and appropriately responding to the problem.

What faith communities can do

Reporting elder abuse is the act of a responsible person trying to assist an older person in crisis. In the United States most states operate toll-free telephone hotlines to answer questions and report elder abuse. These phone agencies usually immediately report elder abuse to a state agency, such as Adult Protective Services or the Department on Aging. In most situations the appropriate local agency promptly sends a social worker to the home to make an assessment and recommendations for appropriate interventions. Reports can be made anonymously.

Faith communities can aid in the prevention of elder abuse through fostering public awareness about the problem and providing services and information to families at risk. Further, caregivers for the elderly often indicate that a support group, where they can discuss their problems and find emotional support, would be of the greatest help.

These caregivers also indicated that short-term respite and help with basic household chores would make it much easier for them to cope with the high stress levels that are sometimes a part of caring for the elderly. These are exactly the sort of services that churches can readily offer to at-risk families.

An additional element in preventing elder abuse is the significant religious value which teaches that no one should be subjected to abusive or neglectful behavior. It is natural for faith communities to hold and promote these values. When older adults are regarded as disposable, society fails to recognize the importance of assuring dignified and respectful living situations for all.

In addition to promoting positive social attitudes toward seniors, faith communities can take positive steps to educate people about elder maltreatment and to encourage interventions, which help families cope with problems that contribute to abuse.

Those aged 80 and older were at the greatest risk of mistreatment. Many victims are frail, vulnerable, and dependent on others.

A recent study showed that nearly 50 per...
After reading this article, how would you view the elder abuse cases in the opening vignettes? What additional information would you gather to better assess the abuse? What specific action would you take in these situations and why?

Author response to Winnie’s vignette

Like Winnie’s son, most elder abusers are adult children of the victim and are often substance abusers. Characteristically, abusers are stressed, excessively dependent for financial assistance on the victimized senior, and frequently have a history of violent behaviors.

Among the risk factors for victims of elder abuse are being female, advanced age, frailty, emotional dependency, intergenerational conflict, lack of a support system, cognitive impairment, and shared living arrangements with the abuser. Winnie needs help to stop the violence, which like all forms of domestic violence will escalate unless an intervention is made. Her trust in her parish nurse should be used to assist her in understanding that denial of the problem will only make the situation worse.

After reporting a situation such as Winnie’s, a social worker usually will make a home visit to gather information and make recommendations for appropriate interventions. Her adult son must be confronted with his violent behavior and he will need to seek treatment for his alcoholism. Winnie’s safety is paramount.

Author response to Hattie’s vignette

In a study of nursing home personnel, 10 percent indicated that they had once or more physically abused patients by either shoving, pushing, grabbing, pinching, or slapping the senior. Yelling at and insulting patients was reportedly commonplace. An alarming 81 percent of the personnel had observed at least one such incident of psychological abuse in the past year.

Hattie is telling her pastor that she is being psychologically abused in the form of intimidation and threats as well as having been robbed. She feels unsafe and may be losing weight as a result of her fears, and she needs your immediate help.

In the U.S., federal law requires that every resident of a nursing home have access to an Ombudsman who acts as advocate and resource person in all abuse cases. You need to report Hattie’s situation to your local Ombudsman immediately and stay with Hattie until she is safe.

The number for the Ombudsman should be posted in the nursing home, if not you can find the listing under Adult Protective Services or Department on Aging.

Church members can be a great help in preventing abuse for isolated people like Hattie by making regular visits. Seniors in nursing homes, who have regular visitors expressing interest in their welfare, are at much less risk of being victims of maltreatment.

Research indicates that clergy are one of the few professionals in the community that make regular visits to nursing homes.

Faith communities need to be involved in educating congregants about the normal aging process as well as the emotional and social functioning needs of the cognitively impaired and their families. Care is stress-ridden in any situation, but more so without well-directed preparation.

U.S. organizations that provide additional information on elder abuse and its prevention include:

**Administration on Aging (AOA); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC 20201; (202) 619-0724; <www.aoa.gov>; Eldercare Locator: (800) 677-1116.**

**Interfaith Caregivers Alliance; 112 West 9th, Suite 600, Kansas City, MO 64105; (816) 931-5442; has existed since 1987 to develop and support interfaith volunteer caregiving programs across the U.S.**

**National Center on Elder Abuse; 1225 I Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 898-2586; <www.elder-abusecenter.org>.** The Web site includes a state-by-state listing of relevant toll-free telephone numbers.

**National Long Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center; c/o National Citizen’s Coalition for Nursing Home Reform, 1424 16th Street, NW, Suite 202, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 332-2275; <www.nccnhr.org>.**
God’s people and their franchise

Robert M. Johnston

Statement of Faith #11: The Church. “The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word, and from the Scriptures, which are the written Word. The church is God’s family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish. (Col. 1:17, 18.)”

Statement of Faith #12: The Remnant and Its Mission. “The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.)”

Statement of Faith #13: Unity in the Body of Christ. “The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality; and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Matt. 28:19, 20; Ps. 133:1, 2; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Acts 17:26, 27; Gal. 3:27, 29; Col. 3:10-15; Eph. 4:14-16; 6:6-8; 1 John 2:19-23.)”

When Jesus replied to Peter’s confession of faith in Him, “On this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18), He spoke in the future tense. Technically speaking, the Christian church was not birthed until after Christ’s resurrection, though it was certainly conceived during His earthly ministry. And it had a long prehistory before that, for God’s people can be traced back to the beginning of sacred history.

The remnant and the development of the church

Starting with Cain and Abel the human race has separated into two groups—those who had faith in God and chose to obey Him, and those who did not. In the Bible we witness a long series of widenings and narrowings, cycles in which God’s people multiply, while the majority apostatizes. At these points God calls out a remnant of faithful ones to make a new beginning. Thus God chose the line of Seth, then the family of Noah, then Abraham and his family. Indeed, the Bible is in a hurry to get to Abraham, devoting only eleven chapters to everyone who went before him.

Abraham is the father of the faithful, for he “believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). God made powerful promises to him and his offspring (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7), including the promise that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3).

The apostle Paul noted that the word “offspring” (Gen. 12:7) was in the singular, and therefore found its fulfillment ultimately in one Person, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). But that gets ahead of our story.

Not all of Abraham’s children were heirs of the promise. Isaac was the chosen one, and of his children, only Jacob. Jacob’s line became the nation of Israel. But that nation divided into the Northern (majority) Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Only the latter survived, becoming known as the nation of Judaea, whose people were called Jews.

But there was yet another narrowing, for most of that nation went into Babylonian captivity, from which again a minority returned to their land. Each time a narrowing took place, the Bible calls the faithful minority that was called out “the remnant” (see for example Isa. 10:20-22 and Mic. 2:12).
Sometimes the remnant was distinguished by their having not forsaken old truth, and sometimes by their having embraced new truth. The latter situation was the case after the beginning of the Christian era, when the Pharisees believed themselves to be defenders of their faith when they rejected Jesus and His message.

**The church and Jesus’ arrival**

With the coming of Jesus the final narrowing of Israel occurred—in fact Israel was, in effect, narrowed down to one Person, who was the Real Israel. But immediately another widening happened, for this New Israel came to include everyone who united with Jesus—the church.

The New Testament teaches this concept in several ways. In Hosea 11:1 the Lord had called Israel “my son”; in Matthew 2:15 that prophetic word is applied to Jesus.

In John 15:1-5 Jesus taught that He is the Vine and His followers are the branches; the vine was a symbol of Israel in Isaiah 5:1-7 and in the décor of synagogues.

After Saul persecuted the church—the followers of the Lord Jesus—the Lord met him on the road to Damascus and said, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” The many are thus closely identified with the One.

The church is metaphorically the Lord’s body on earth (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13) and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). The Gospel of John is fond of using words and making statements that have a double or even a triple meaning. In John 2:19 He said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

Many religious leaders of Jesus’ time thought He meant the architectural temple from which He had just expelled the sellers of sacrificial animals and money changers. But John tells us He meant His body that was to be resurrected. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not only the rising of His literal body; it gave rise to the church, which Paul spoke of as a body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12).

The work that Jesus began on earth in the flesh is being continued by His church. While on earth Jesus was the Bearer of the Spirit, who descended upon Him as a dove and remained upon Him (John 1:32). Now the church is the bearer of the Spirit, anointed by the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The Spirit is given to empower for ministry.

**The rise of the church**

The church sees itself as the continuation of Israel. In the Old Testament the assembly of God’s people was called the qahal—the congregation—of Israel. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek (known as the Septuagint translation), the Hebrew word qahal was sometimes translated synagōge and sometimes ekklesia.

Jewish congregations used the word synagōge, and so sometimes did Christians at first (as in James 2:2, Give the Blind a chance to Read about Jesus

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MINISTRY
Greek). Christians came to use *ekklesia* as their self-designation, the word we translate “church.”

The word “church” is used several ways in the New Testament. It could mean a local congregation, at that time usually meeting in houses (Phil. 3: Col. 4:15). It could mean all Christians in a city, such as the church of the Thessalonians. Even in the singular it could refer to all Christians everywhere (Gal. 1:13)—ultimately the worldwide church.

The word “synagogue” has never been used in this universal sense. (One never speaks of a worldwide synagogue.) Matthew is the only Gospel that uses the word “church,” and it is interesting that it (Matthew) uses the word in both the universal sense (16:18) and the local sense (18:17).

There are two ways we use the word “church” that are not found in the New Testament. There it does not refer to a building (though the word synagogue was so used) or to an organization (though it had organization). Church was always people, the people of God, the people of Jesus, especially when they assembled together. Collectively they are the saints, and they are priests (1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6).

We have seen how Israel was narrowed down to Jesus, and then widened again by the act of grafting Gentile branches into Him.

**Healthy church unity and the necessity of a remnant**

Does the story end there, or does the cycle of multiplication, apostasy, and new remnants, raise a troubling question. Is this a never-ending process? Is every new remnant fated to give birth eventually to another one, and another, and another?

The doctrine of the remnant must be balanced against the doctrine of church unity and Christian forbearance. Human groups that are formed around strong beliefs and opinions are often fractious, and some believers think every difference of thought should be fought over, and in any case not tolerated.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome precisely because some of them thought that way. Some argued that Christians were obligated to do all the Jewish things—observing the festivals and maintaining scruples about food offered to idols, and so forth (Rom. 14:1-22). Others were “liberal” in regard to these matters.

In this setting, Paul made a beautiful plea for mutual tolerance and respect. Agree to disagree if you must, but accept each other. As in a marriage, not every difference of opinion is worth splitting over. In fact, very few are worth it.

Sometimes family fights are the worst kind, and the church is a family. Nonbelievers can be content just to say, “You’re wrong.” But believers soon find themselves going further and saying, “You’re of the devil.” No wonder Jesus said, “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other” (Mark 9:50). The New Testament epistles are replete with warnings against church strife and with pleas for peace.

Throughout history most remnants separated from the larger body either because they were forced out, or because they were clearly directed by the Lord to come out. It is not a move to be made lightly or willfully, because there is a fearful warning against dividing the church so as to cause separation. Paul wrote: “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:17).

**Holding together two models of the church**

In this context, it helps to keep in balance two different models of the church, both are found in the New Testament. They may be called the Pauline model and the Johannine model.

Paul’s model of the church assumed that membership in the church is visible, and it is possible to fall from it (cf. 1 Cor. 5:12, 13). The church at Corinth had some serious problems, but when Paul addressed them he said, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy” (or “called to be saints”). For Paul “sanctified” did not mean “behaviorally perfect,” but rather “dedicated to God.”

Martin Luther spoke of people who are justified by grace through faith as *simul justus et peccator*—at the same time righteous and a sinner. He was thinking of individuals, but the same thing can be said of the church. It is a very human institution, defective and feeble, but Christ loves it.

The Johannine model of the church is different, as revealed in two texts. In 1 John 2:19 the writer warns against false brethren, saying, “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”

In other words, it is possible to be in the church but not really be of the church. The fact that those John describes in his epistle did not really belong to the church while they were in it, is shown by the fact that they finally leave the fellowship.

But there is another important aspect to consider as we look at John’s model of the church. In John 10:16 Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”

In other words, it is possible to be out of the church without really being out of it. The fact that they belong in the sheepfold is revealed when they come in.

In this Johannine model it is possible to speak of a visible and an invisible...
The church is where we can all practice that song and teach it to others. One is the church that we see, and the other is the church that God recognizes. The two obviously overlap, while they are not identical.

The church and God's reign

Alfred Loisy, a French scholar, once wittily wrote, “Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, and it was the Church that came.”

What is the relation of the church to the reign of God? Catholic thought tends to make the two synonymous, but that is not the way the New Testament explains it.

In fact if we turn to one or two of the places in the Gospels where Jesus speaks of the kingdom and try substituting the word “church,” it’s interesting what happens. Try it, for example, in Matthew 12:28. Would you want it to say, “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the church has come upon you?”

George E. Ladd sums the matter up neatly with five propositions: The church is not the kingdom; the kingdom creates the church; the church witnesses to the kingdom; the church is the instrument of the kingdom; the church is the custodian of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is found wherever God reigns. It is a pattern of life for our cities, what kind of cities would there be? Has the salt lost its savor? Is it then simul justus et peccator?

Again, the church lives in a paradox. Her Lord wants her to be without spot or blemish (Eph. 5:27), but at the same time she stands in need of His forgiveness. Let her and all her children therefore be forgiving. Let them bear fruit, beginning with the fruit of repentance.

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1 Quotations from the Bible are taken from the New International Version (NIV).
2 In the Greek of 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 “you” is a collective plural, while “temple” is singular. It is saying that the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit.
3 One way in which this concept is expressed is in the metaphor of the olive tree in Romans 11:13-21. Some branches are lopped off, others are grafted in, but the trunk remains the same. In the rest of this chapter, however, Paul makes clear that the Lord is not finished with ethnic Israel. Perhaps the same can be said of the wider Christian church.
4 The Septuagint translates with symagoge in the first four books of Moses and with ekklesia in Deuteronomy.
5 Just as in the Old Testament Israel is represented as the bride of the Lord, in the New Testament the church is represented as the bride of Christ (cf. Eph. 5:25-27).
6 Ellen White wrote: “Entangled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts.”
One of the most striking of all Christ’s predictions was His assertion that at the moment of final judgment, when the “sheep” are divided from the “goats,” the dominating deciding factor, the overriding question, will be how human beings have treated one another. To be more specific, it is how we humans have ministered to those who are hungry, thirsty, alienated, unclothed, sick, and imprisoned (Matt. 25:31-46); how, in short, we minister to the poor.

Another of Jesus’ far-reaching predictions was simply that the poor will always be with us (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8). In the face of such realities, can gospel ministers properly ignore the privilege and burden of ministry to the poor? How does this privilege and burden relate to the kingdom we proclaim? And will that kingdom come in its finality while we overlook the ministry to the poor?

Too present to be missed

The poor are too present to be missed. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services set the poverty line at an annual income of $8,860.00 for the individual, and $18,100.00 for a family of four. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that a total of some 8-10 percent of the American population lived in poverty in America during the last two decades of the last century.

By comparison with this American data, the World Bank reports that one billion people live in countries categorized as “low-income” where the per capita Gross National Product ranges from $90 to $660 a year. Clearly much divergence exists between the notion of poverty in America and elsewhere.

Dramatic as the divergence may be, we must acknowledge that the real tragedy is simply poverty itself. Given its dominating presence in the world, it must be at least remarkable that so many of us succeed in seeing so little of it.

One articulate young student of mine wrote that the first and foundational reason why he does not help the poor is his commitment to ignoring them. “I limit my exposure to them,” he says, “visually, educationally, and of course relationally . . . .” this way, while I can [spew] pious affirmations that poverty is a problem and we must do all we can to help, I can simultaneously push the poor so far out of my life as to make them unreachable in any proactive sense. It is as if I am reaching my idealistic theological hand out of a car window as far as I can to touch the poor while my practical ministerial foot is pushing the gas pedal in reverse.

His vivid metaphor will not make the poor evaporate. Nor does the mandate of James 1:27 allow for effective gospel ministry while they are ignored. For James, pure and undefiled religion before God requires attention to orphans and widows in their affliction, in short, ministry to the poor. Another of Jesus’ far-reaching predictions was simply that the poor will always be with us (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8).

In the face of such realities, can gospel ministers properly ignore the privilege and burden of ministry to the poor? How does this privilege and burden relate to the kingdom we proclaim? And will that kingdom come in its finality while we overlook the ministry to the poor?

Too much of a contradiction

My student’s above insight shows that ignoring poverty also presents a significant contradiction of authentic missionary commitment. The exclusive language of “we” and
“they” effectively underlines this fact. Notwithstanding our own needs, the “we” who contributes and subscribes to the journal Ministry generally stand economically apart from the “they” whom this article identifies as poor.

For that reason alone, this “they” becomes our natural missionary obligation, the place to which “we” must go, sent in mission out beyond our self. It is not the only place to which we may go. But it is our widest field. Ignoring it, then, constitutes disobedience to the gospel commission itself.

An oft circulated e-fact quips that if the world were shrunk to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, 70 would be illiterate, 80 would live in substandard housing, 50 would suffer from malnutrition, and 6 people (all from the U.S.) would possess 59 percent of the entire village’s wealth.

Evidently, material and economic need are inescapable factors in most populations, and this is a truth that confirms some individuals in their theological correctness, testifying as it does to the accuracy of Jesus’ words that the poor are ever with us.

Judas’s or Jesus’ theology

With numbers like this, it’s clear that the plight of the poor is too urgent to postpone any longer. Jesus’ rejoinder about the poor always being with us is not designed as a sanction for their suffering. In the incident in which He spoke those words, Jesus was the recipient of effusive adoration and absolute sacrifice, even as a repentant woman poured out on Him her total life’s savings.

But not everyone there that day was pleased. Judas’s greed-inspired indignation (John 12:4-6) juxtaposes service to Jesus and service to the poor. Indeed, it is Judas’s remark that drew forth Jesus’ quotation from Deuteronomy 15:11, a verse in contrast with God’s preference (stated in the same passage) for the total elimination of poverty (verse 4). In context of Judas’s sanctimonious choice for food-stamp support as opposed to support for Jesus, the latter unleashes a stinging condemnation of those whose preference for Deuteronomy 15:11 denies God and His children the Deuteronomy 15:4 ideal.

Some perceive Jesus’ citation of Deuteronomy as reason to ignore the poor. They believe the status of the poor should not be modified, for God has so doomed or destined them. For some—whose fervor for the poor replaces their respect for the claims of the gospel—indoor plumbing and a roof over all heads becomes their ultimate conception of salvation.

For the first of these, God has designed some for misery; for the second, God only matters as much as creature comforts can afford. Hence, we have the frequent, distorted, and unqualified references to the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46).

But just as Judas would serve the poor rather than have Jesus honored, so do we dishonor God who ground our theology on Deuteronomy 15:11 rather than working with energy, talent, and all, toward the realization of God’s ultimate ideal.

The year of remission, considered in Deuteronomy 15, is nothing but a symbol of that ideal of absolute and unmodified freedom, not merely from the shackles of economic poverty, but from all the futility to which sin subjects us into the glorious liberty of eternally and abundantly living daughters and sons of God (John 10:10; Rom. 8:21).

To the extent we have lost sight of that ideal, we may well have unwittingly chosen the theology of Judas over that of the alabaster box. The time is now for us to return to the ideal. For now it is time that the gospel, in all its liberating dimensions, should be preached to the poor.

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2 Data derived from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/02statab/00ab001.html>, Web site of U.S. Census Bureau—Statistical Abstract of the U.S. Ethnic breakdowns that among Blacks was from a high of 33 percent in 1982, to a low of 24 percent in 1999; Hispanics ranged downwards from 28-25 percent; and Whites upward from 8-10 percent.


4 By way of illustration, the American family which live at a level of poverty equivalent to the desperation of the world’s poorest 1.3 billion might own, between them all, a single pair of shoes, one suit or garment each, a smattering of foodstuffs—generally excluding meat, fresh vegetables, canned goods, crackers, candy and such like, one radio, and a cash hoard of $5.00. See Robert L. Heilbroner, The Great Ascent: The Struggle for Economic Development in Our Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 33-36; cited in Sider, ibid., 2.

5 Joseph Obiad, essay, “Why I Don’t Help the Poor.”


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The pastor and visitation: Richard Baxter’s model

Paul Miller

Three hundred fifty years after it was written, The Reformed Pastor by the English Puritan Richard Baxter, remains one of the most helpful works available on pastoral ministry. In these times when there is so much confusion over pastoral roles and expectations, Baxter’s work can illuminate the goals and methods of ministry. The book is an extended treatment of Acts 20:28: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

This pastoral classic falls into three sections. In the first, Baxter outlines the need for pastors to have oversight of themselves. The second section concerns pastoral oversight of the congregation in a spirit of humility and service. The need for pastors to “take heed unto themselves” and to “oversee the church of God” are the twin themes that run throughout. Pastors cannot be effective unless they practice both personal self-examination and devotion to their flocks. In the third section, Baxter makes a practical application of the principles outlined in the first two. This section is a detailed argument in favor of regular, systematic, personal instruction of the congregation. Baxter himself spent two full days a week with his congregation, teaching them the essentials of their faith. I want to focus on the method of systematic visitation.

Ministry more than a “job”

Baxter lamented a situation in his day that is similar to our own. Many, he said, treat the ministry as “but a trade to live by.” However, there is a key difference between pastoral ministry and every other occupation. Pastors are called to be shepherds of the church of God (Acts 20:28). They are not called to “do a job” or even to carry out “professional responsibilities,” but are summoned into a living, personal relationship with a community of people on behalf of Jesus Christ.

Pastoral ministry is, in essence, a personal relationship. We cannot put sharp boundaries around authentic personal relationships, because they are grounded in the communion of whole personalities that cannot be fragmented into “roles” or “functions.” In a marriage it is impossible to separate the “roles” of friend, lover, partner, adviser, critic, or cheerleader that are bundled together into the designation “spouse.” Likewise, pastoral ministry defies the categories and classifications of the modern “job description” that tends to reflect the alien ethos of business or government more than the values of the kingdom of Christ. The “job” of the pastor is determined by our calling to care for people in the name of the Good Shepherd. Baxter understood that ministers cannot think about what they do apart from who they are—and whose they are.

Integration through visitation

Baxter’s holistic understanding of ministry with reference to the last part of The Reformed Pastor is illustrated when he deals with “personal catechizing and instructing,” or pastoral visitation. Visiting, Baxter argued, is the principle method of bringing about personal “reformation” in the parish. (This is the sense in which he talks about the “reformed” pastor. “Reformed” does not refer narrowly to a particular confession but should be understood in the sense of “re-formed”—remade, reshaped, renewed.) Baxter combined visitation with instruction into an overall strategy of pastoral care. He insisted that every pastor should devote a large portion of the week to visiting people in their homes, following the apostles’ example (Acts 5:42) by instructing them on the “principles of religion” and testing their knowledge.

Even in the seventeenth century, it seems, pastors resisted going out and visiting their
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flocks. "We teach our people in public [on Sundays]," they argued, "how then are we bound to teach them [individually] besides?" Baxter tried to get pastors to stop thinking of visitation as an onerous duty and to consider it an advantage to both themselves and their people. The people benefit when the pastor combines visiting with personal instruction, because one-on-one encounters lead to deeper intimacy and effectiveness. Baxter describes the sort of person with whom every pastor is familiar: the faithful pew-sitter who, after listening to decades of sermons, still does not know the difference between Genesis and Revelation, let alone the more subtle points of Christian doctrine. More can be accomplished with such a person, he argues, in 30 minutes of private conversation than in 10 years of preaching, because the communication of the gospel is a profoundly personal event. The pastor mediates a personal Savior to his or her flock, person-to-person. Each person tends to respond to sermons in his or her own way, and often they do not hear accurately what the preacher has said. Personal conversation can deal with the individual's own peculiar needs and correct misunderstandings.

Regular personal instruction benefits the pastor as well as the congregation. People get to know a pastor who visits and can cooperate more effectively in the redemptive work of the church. Visiting strengthens preaching, because it helps pastors know what to preach. They come to know their people's struggles and fears. This knowledge enables them to preach with greater power. Baxter expresses it eloquently: "By means of [personal instruction], we shall come to be better acquainted with each person's spiritual state, and so the better know how to watch over them. We shall know better how to preach to them, and carry ourselves to them, when we know their temper. . . . We shall know better how to lament for them, and to rejoice with them, and to pray for them." Knowledge of Scripture combined with intentional visitation are the practical foundations of evangelical preaching: "as the physician's work is half done when he understands the disease, so, when you are well-acquainted with your people's case, you will know what to preach on" (page 228). Indeed, Baxter regarded personal instruction as a form of preaching. "Surely," he wrote, "a man may as truly preach to one, as to a thousand" (page 228).

Visitation also engages the pastor as a healer. Baxter uses the images of the "shepherd" and the "physician" to describe the minister. We are called to bind up the brokenhearted and to heal their wounds with the medicine of the gospel. Unlike other helpers, pastors can actually go out to seek and save the lost. We have what Paul Pruyser has called "the pastoral right of initiative and access." Once people have invited us in, we discover how many broken and broken hearts there are out there. It never ceases to amaze me how people will open their hearts to their pastor during the course of the visit, confiding things they have not told even their closest friends or family. We can use such opportunities to teach them of the healing power of the Savior.

Several pastoral roles—preacher, teacher, healer—coalesce in the act of visitation. Baxter did not view visitation as merely one of the "tasks" that keep the pastor busy. It is a method or a means by which the pastor can more effectively be who he or she is called to be. According to Thomas Oden, pastoral visitation is "one way of reflecting the glory of God's own visitation of humanity in Christ, seeking the lost, redeeming sin, mending pain."

Conditions are very different today from what they were in the 1600s. Consequently, it is not easy for pastors to do what Richard Baxter did: spend all day Monday and Tuesday interviewing families. Practically speaking, people are too scattered today, both in terms of geography and of lifestyle. However, Baxter's central principle—that personal visitation strengthens the total pastoral ministry—can still be adapted profitably to the contemporary situation. This is especially true in smaller communities where the neighborhood church still exists.

No matter what the difficulties, it is essential that we pay attention to Baxter's model of the active pastor—"going out," "seeking," rather than passively waiting for people to come to church, to join Bible study, to make appointments.

**Using pastoral visitation to teach**

There are many occasions when visiting and teaching can be combined.

_First, the pastor has certain "rites of passage" which provide excellent teaching opportunities._ Visiting with a young couple planning to get married, with parents after the birth of a child, with bereaved families—these are all opportunities for deepening Christian understanding.

Marriage appointments can be a time to instruct couples about the uniqueness of the Christian concept of love in contrast to popular romantic notions. The pastor can relate the unconditional love promised in the marriage vows to the unconditional love of Christ for His people, and actually invite couples to a deeper Christian commitment.

Baptisms or dedications can be opportunities to teach about God's covenant faithfulness and His promise of a future. Pastors can bring young parents into touch with Jesus' words about childlike faith.

Funeral preparations not only serve a comforting purpose, but are moments for teaching about the gospel of resurrection.

_Second, pastors can teach during times of crisis._ The death of a loved one, the breakdown of a marriage, or the loss of a job plunge people into...
Changing the world with ID?

A new movement is emerging in the scientific world. Called Intelligent Design (or ID), the movement asks a question: “Is it possible to detect intelligent design, if the designer is unknown?” The answer is a simple “Yes.”

The only time complication seems to arise is when this question is asked of nature. Is it possible to detect intelligent design in hieroglyphics? Yes. Is it possible to detect intelligent design in flint arrowheads? Yes. Is it possible to detect intelligent design in the pews of a church? Yes. Is it possible to detect intelligent design in the incredibly complex and elegant molecular machines within our cells? Many would say that to even ask this question is going too far.

Implications

Two and a half years ago I attended a conference at Baylor University called “The Nature of Nature.” One of the most striking scenes of the conference was a confrontation at the end of Michael Behe’s presentation.

Mike is a leader in the ID movement. The confronter, a molecular geneticist I idolized in graduate school, demanded that Mike admit in public who the intelligent designer is.

It was a surreal scene, with huffing and fuming on one side while Mike smilingly directed us back to the science he had been discussing.

Demands for clarification about who the implied designer is are common from opponents of Intelligent Design theory. If design is detected in nature, it only seems logical to ask who the designer is. Some people are, obviously, uncomfortable with what would appear to be the answer.

Interestingly, some believers in the biblical Creation are also demanding that ID state who the Designer is. Presumably the reason is not because they fear the answer, but because they view ID as somehow inadequate unless the answer they espouse, Jesus Christ (see John 1:1-3), is clearly stated.

Henry Morris, founder and president emeritus of the Institute for Creation Research, recently published an article entitled “Design Is Not Enough!” in which ID is framed as inadequate unless God is acknowledged as the Designer.

Mark Looy, another Christian at The Institute for Creation Research (ICR), suggests that ID theorists “are merely rejecting evolution (or at any rate the ‘random’ explanation of evolution) in favor of a generic notion of intelligent design, and this does not go far enough.”

Fence-sitting

Scientists committed to the philosophy of materialism believe the scientific study of Intelligent Design goes too far in rejecting the materialist Darwinian explanation of life’s origin and by suggesting that an intelligent designer can be inferred from the evidence for design in nature. They wish ID would get off the fence, admit it is creationism and thus, in their opinion, become totally irrelevant.

On the other hand, some creationists believe ID theorists don’t go far enough; they wish ID would get off the fence and join them in their battle to convince the world of the Bible’s accuracy. It is ironic that from the perspective of believers and unbelievers, Intelligent Design is an uncomfortable fence-sitting position.

Does, then, ID go far enough when a designer is inferred but not named? The answer is: Yes, No, and Maybe.

From the perspective of science, ID goes exactly as far as it needs to go and no further. ID goes just as far as the empirical evidence warrants, as does all good science.

Nature is clear that design was involved in the production of life. The evidence present-
ed in books like Darwin's Black Box remains unrefuted and logically consistent with data from nature. No logically coherent natural cause for life has been proposed which accounts for the observed irreducibly complex molecular machines and information in living things, without appealing to speculative stories lacking empirical foundation.

On the other hand, ID clearly does not endorse the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; or the time scale of a six-day Creation within the last few thousand years.

Though not surprising or disturbing, this has caused some creationist Christians to believe ID does not go far enough. This view arises from an unfair expectation of what ID, or more specifically nature, can tell us about the God who gave us both nature and revelation.

**Only so far**

In Romans 1:20, Paul says: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Clearly nature can get us to step one: realizing that there is a Creator. And this is what ID does. But it seems unlikely that, in its fallen state, the creation can tell the whole gospel story in terms we can understand.

The creation may paint clearly the broad brush-strokes of God's creative power, pointing humanity on a quest to know Him, but to take the quest further requires faith and understanding of Scripture.

For believing Christians, the answer to the question of whether ID goes far enough may be "No" if more is demanded of ID than ID can give. Science cannot fulfill the gospel commission, and to suggest that it can, should, or might is silly.

If ID does go far enough from a scientific perspective, but yet does not scientifically prove Scripture true, or tell the gospel story, or identify the Designer as the Judeo-Christian God, what is an appropriate Christian response?

The most productive response, "Maybe," is illustrated by the Bible story of Moses and the burning bush, when Moses asked God for His name: "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them?" (Exod. 3:13).

God's response, given in verse 14, is essentially what ID tells us: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exod. 3:14).

**Going the distance**

To His people enslaved in Egypt God says, Don't worry for the moment about exactly who I am. The important thing is that "I AM."

It was only later, after Israel had left Egypt, that God revealed more about Himself at Mt. Sinai. Moses and the people of God had to first understand that God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—existed before they could act.

Once they acted, by leaving Egypt, God provided a more detailed revelation of Himself.

In the modern world God's people need to first understand that he exists—that "HE IS"—before they can take the next step: understanding who He is as revealed in Scripture.

ID is a plough, turning the sod and preparing old hard ground for planting. If Christians leave off with just ploughing, weeds will grow up and the field will be useless. To ensure the harvest, it is our job as Christians to be enthusiastically sowing and weeding.

Maybe ID is enough to start the process of opening minds to the Creator, but Christians must pick up their part of the load if souls are to be led all the way to the heart of God. Christians may choose to sit on their hands complaining that ID does not go far enough, thus ensuring that it does not.

Alternatively, we may carry our divinely initiated role by providing a logical and coherent Christ-centered follow-up to the revelation of nature, proclaiming to "every nation, kindred, tongue and people" (Rev. 14:6) that the Intelligent Designer revealed in science is indeed the God who gave His life blood for the sins of the world.

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Displaying the Commandments

When Judge Roy S. Moore, Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, surreptitiously sneaked a 5,280-lb. granite monument depicting the Ten Commandments into a state court house, he defended his illegal action by declaring, “I must obey God.”

Generating much more fever than fervor, hundreds of protestors gathered, prayed, shouted, and declared their confidence in the “Ten Commandment Judge” who was defying the godless bureaucrats who had determined to prevent believers from expressing their religious convictions according to their first amendment rights.

While it may be argued as to whether any individual’s personal beliefs can be imposed upon the thousands of other citizens who daily accomplish business in the state’s judicial center, it must also be recognized that displaying the huge monument of the Commandments has been declared unconstitutional and the reasons Judge Moore offers for his actions will not stand the scrutiny of either U.S. law or biblical principles.

Obeying God. When the apostles declared their fealty to “obeying God rather than man,” they clearly affirmed the foundational moral position which prioritizes loyalty to God over compliance to the dictates of civil authorities. However, they did not, simultaneously, destroy the clear distinction of separation of church and state which Jesus articulated when He declared, “Render unto Ceasar the things which are Ceasar’s and unto God the things which are God’s.”

By an admittedly narrow interpretation of obedience to the Ten Commandments, it would be possible to define the very establishment of an engraved monument as disobedience to the second commandment’s prohibition against making “any graven image.” By an admittedly broader definition of obedience, it is mystifying how someone can declare their fealty to God’s authority by displaying such a monument and yet disregarding the fourth commandment’s enjoinder to “remember the seventh-day Sabbath.” Despite a person’s intention, the question remains, “What is obedience?”

Displaying the commandments. Furthermore, if we follow Scripture’s example, it is difficult to reconcile public display of a monument with God’s own example. When the divine lawgiver wrote on tablets of stone and subsequently “displayed” the product of His handwork, He located the display not in the public view, but inside the courtyard, inside the sanctuary, inside the smaller room (most holy place) behind the veil, inside the ark of the covenant, covered over with a solid slab of gold (mercy seat).

Neither the perpetuity of, nor the commandment obedience to the Ten Commandments was dependent upon their public display on the avenues of society or in the venues of daily business. In fact, ever since the destruction of the temple, the Ten Commandments have been secreted away at Jeremiah’s direction, never yet to have been publicly displayed.

Where God wants to display the Ten Commandments. God desires that the world view His Ten Commandments and He declares the new covenant locus of His intention for their display, “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Heb. 8:10).

The message is direct and clear. Keeping the commandments and allowing the world to observe you keeping the commandments, is more important than displaying a replica of the commandments. The importance is not what we say, but what we do.

Where is the monument to be? “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men. Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:2-3).

We must understand the essential distinction between cause and effect. Although commandment keeping will never be the cause of salvation (“not of works lest anyone should boast”), good works of obedience are always the consequence and fruit of a saving relationship (Eph. 2:8-10).

It is essential to note that Jesus personally established the prerequisite of love as the only acceptable motivation for obedience (John 14:15). God does not seek compliance as much as He desires conversion.

Regardless of the judge’s good intent to correct society by displaying the commandments, we should never anticipate that unregenerate humanity will be prompted to obedience by mere recitation or visual observation. The perpetuity of the Ten Commandments does not depend on massive monuments, but on faithful response to the Holy Spirit’s directives lived out in the behavior of believers to one another.

Our challenge is to keep the commandments out of love, not to display them out of defiance.
Letters continued from page 3

If Dr. McVay should happen to read this grateful response, I think I know what he will say. The same thing Charles Spurgeon was reported to have said when complimented by some in his congregation, “Aye, the devil whispered that to me ere I left the pulpit!” Thank you, John McVay, for reminding us to give the glory to God.
—Frank Vessels, pastor, Barstow, California.

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The pastor and visitation continued from page 25

The pastor and visitation

emotional, social and spiritual crises. Particularly in smaller communities, with limited mental health resources, the pastor is most likely to receive the first cry for help when lives begin to crumble. Pastors continue to be on the very front lines in dealing with individuals and families in crisis.

Acute loss is often accompanied by feelings of guilt. “What did I do to cause this to happen? What could I have done to prevent it from happening?” People are brought face-to-face with issues of sin, failure, and injustice at such times. Visitation at times of crisis affords the pastor the opportunity to bring people into touch with the realities of grace, forgiveness, and hope that lie at the heart of the gospel.

Visits during passages and crises are special opportunities for pastoral instruction. It is not necessary to wait for these exceptional moments.

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Having earned some of his considerable media-savvy reputation as a proponent of the Christian Internet, writing a book called “Internet for Christians” and having advised Billy Zeoli, et al on the establishment of gospelcomm.com, a nonprofit evangelical Web portal, Quentin J. Schulze now has a problem. People, some Christian, some not, are taking this “online community” idea too far, he says: They believe the technology is so transformative normal society isn’t important anymore.

That’s the recurring—some might say repetitive—theme found in Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age, a 256-page indictment of a techno-society few might recognize. While some denizens in Silicon Valley or the Internet cafés of China seem strung out on the information superhighway, Schulze finds little at all to praise in today’s Internet.

A professor of communications arts and sciences at Calvin College, Schulze wants readers to remember the need for virtue in a world gone digital. Condensing the wide-ranging rise and fall of the dot-coms seen from around 1995 to 2001, Schulze views the digital age as something unquestionably destined to suck the spiritual essence from believers and to derail those seekers who might become Christian believers.

“Our belief in the power of cybernetic systems to improve our world ultimately rests on the faith that our use of information technologies will make us better human beings,” Schulze declares. “But moral questions about human life are beyond the interpretive scope of information technologies. The meaning of moral wisdom, in particular, cannot be captured through the binary capacity of machine logic.”

Neither, one could argue, could a “cybernetic system” similarly capture the beauty of a sunset, parse Hebrew grammar, or deliver an understanding of the Smoot-Hawley act. However, one can use “the binary capacity of machine logic” to view pictures of a sunset (and use one as your computer “desktop”), run BibleWorks software to parse Hebrew, and go online to read about Smoot-Hawley until your eyeballs fall out. What you then do with that knowledge is, of course, up to you.

Yet there are people who, apparently, let computers and technology assume a far greater amount of importance in their lives than such items should, and it’s these people who worry Schulze, especially those who are trend-setters in society. Heralding the Internet as the home of a new “community,” one based on specialized interests (NYPD Blue, quilting, body piercing, or the music of Sandi Patty) as opposed to the real “communities” in which we live day-to-day, these technology “evangelists” (that word having for several years been an official job title at more than one Silicon Valley firm) suggest that all you need are pixels to make life better.

Schulze fears—and not without cause—that over-reliance on technology will lead people away from faith and communitarian habits. He cites the reluctance of Yahoo!, the online search engine and media company, to make charitable donations, and reads this as a departure from the sense of “commonweal” that stood behind earlier industrial titans such as Rockefeller and Ford. (Not all high-tech entrepreneurs are averse to charity, however: Bill Hewlett and David Packard, the late founders of HP, each established family foundations, and Bill and Melinda Gates have a huge foundation of their own. However, these foundations give money to birth control causes and secular research, as opposed to John D. Rockefeller’s contributions to the National Council of Churches and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.)

That there are those who over-rely on technology or overbelieve its promise is no surprise: the jobless middle-managers of Cupertino and San Jose, the depleted investors in Lucent Technologies or Cisco Systems, or the publishers of now-defunct tech magazines whose names suggested permanence, such as The Industry Standard. But there have always been people who overbought the promise of the “new, new thing,” whether it was the internal combustion engine (“Tucker”) or television (Jim Bakker). That someone blew a fortune on developing a car that didn’t sell, or another—even a professing Christian—fell victim to his own press releases and temptations, negates neither the utility of the automobile or the effectiveness of the broadcast medium. Just ask Lee Iacocca or Billy Graham.

And this is where Quentin Schulze’s argument starts to fall short. His call for virtue and common sense in using the Internet is sorely needed, but his condemnation of technology seems overblown. Did the advent of the washing machine or dishwasher turn domestic tasks into something profane, or does letting the Maytag handle dirty clothes (versus beating them against a rock) allow for other, more needed tasks? Some may yearn for the days of sitting by as mother churned the family’s butter, but others are happy to pick up a pack at the grocery store, drive home in an SUV, and spend the time on...
their kids as opposed to the transmogrification of cream.

Schulze is right, very right, when he declares, “When we divorce our high-tech endeavors from the goal of serving others responsibly, we become amoral technicians.” But when John Rigas and his family allegedly looted the cash reserves of Adelphia Communications, it wasn’t because they were amoral technicians, it’s because they were amoral, period. Had their company been a basket-weaving combine as opposed to a cable TV and broadband Internet provider, their theft would still have been, well, theft. Are the alleged moral and legal failures of a Kenneth Lay, a Bernie Ebbers, or a John Rigas due to technology or were they merely enabled by it? Would Wille Sutton be a hacker today instead of a bank robber?

Along with a passel of academics and thinkers whose works he cites almost to excess (one almost wishes he’d offered Václav Havel a co-author credit, given the volume of the Czech playwright/philosopher/politician’s work he quotes), Schulze sees the use of the Internet as possessing overwhelming dangers, ones that outweigh any advantages. The fact that I can use a Web site to evangelize halfway around the globe doesn’t sufficiently counter the bad found in disconnecting from society to play an online game for four hours.

Along with his worthwhile concerns, Schulze is not above a little evangelizing of the high-tech masses when he begs for a greater sense of community among “netizens” and for more than a greater tragedy, in spiritual terms, than the dire straits of cyberspace. Quentin Schulze pulls his readers through.

I suspect the reason Schulze has kept a hand in the online world is because he sees—however grudgingly—the vast potential for good that the Internet holds, as well as the raw fact that if gospel-proclaiming Christians aren’t online promoting the truth, error will happily step in. A few years back, the Church of Scientology boasted of volunteers who invested tens of thousands of “man hours” to create a 30,000-page Web site. Even if both claims are drenched in hyperbole, there’s no doubt that a wealth of non-Christian ideologies are online clamoring for spiritual seekers. Without the bona fide presence of Christians willing to mount this digital Mars Hill, we may suffer a far greater tragedy, in spiritual terms, than the dire straits of cyberspace. Quentin Schulze pulls his readers through.

—Mark Kellner, Assistant Director, General Conference Communications Department for News and Information, Silver Spring, Maryland


Being a church pastor is one of the most difficult callings. The congregation has expectations, conference administrators have expectations, the demands of being a husband/wife and father/mother enter into the equation, and if that weren’t enough, there are a few things God expects of a servant leader. This book assumes that pastors are having an increasingly difficult time juggling all the varied (and sometimes contradictory) demands of being a pastor in the twenty-first century. Each of the 12 chapters begins with statistics gleaned from clergy members about various facets of ministry—from their pay to their feelings of job satisfaction to the quality of their relationships with their spouses and children.

In addition to the insights and strategies provided by the authors, of the 12 chapters feature interviews with ministry specialists, who offer suggestions for living a balanced, God-centered life. The challenge—and it’s a real one—is finding the time to step back from the chaos that surrounds parish ministry and learn to control situations, rather than letting them control you. Each chapter ends with practical “renewal” strategies that are simple to digest and implement (if done gradually over a period of weeks or months).

The authors are both ministry professionals. Their years of ministry and their work as consultants to pastors give this book authenticity. The problems they outline are real; and the solutions they offer encompass the entire pastoral experience—physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual.

Pastors new to ministry will find Pastors at Greater Risk useful for avoiding the dangers of trying to accomplish too much and thus live a life out-of-balance. Veteran pastors will find in it a challenge to avoid the mediocrity that comes with boredom and provide their congregations with a ministry that changes lives.

—Stephen Chavez, managing editor, Adventist Review, Silver Spring, Maryland.
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