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A tribute to James A. Cress.

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Our Readers Respond...

The kingdom of God
I want to commend you for publishing the lead article in the May 2009 issue (“The Power of God’s Kingdom and Ministry”). The author, J. P. Moreland, is a scholar and Christian thought leader whom I have admired for a long time. I have heard him lecture at Loma Linda University and, more than once, at his home campus, Biola University. Furthermore, his book The Kingdom Triangle is one of the most thought-provoking works I have enjoyed in decades.

I find balance in Moreland’s construction of the process by which we enter and grow in the kingdom of God. I agree wholeheartedly with his take on Phillip Jenkins, whose analysis of current trends in Christendom and the flowering of “southern” Christianity must challenge Adventist missiologists. And I resonate with Moreland’s plea that citizens of the kingdom should experience and demonstrate today the power of the kingdom.

— Bernard Brandstater, Loma Linda, California, United States

Power of prayer in preaching
How excited I felt when I read the lead article by Derek J. Morris “Prayer-saturated Preaching” (July 2009). What a wonderful interview with Dr. Alvin VanderGriend. Thank you so much. As prayer ministry coordinator in my local church, it was music to my soul.

Our mission in our church these past five years has been to bathe our ministry in prayer. We have two people on a roster each week to pray through the sermon. First of all, what a blessing it is to the prayer persons on the roster who pray through the service; and what a powerful force behind the scenes for the minister.

Sadly, not all ministers have this prayer support. We have heard comments from visiting ministers such as, “it was a powerful feeling to know that as I was delivering the Word of God to the waiting congregation, that my words were being uplifted in prayer behind the scenes. In twenty-five years of ministry I cannot recall this being a feature of any of our worship services.” Another said, “I don’t think I have ever preached and known that behind me there were some people who helped me link to a Power above. I want to tell you it makes me feel good.”

I wish all our churches would take the information in this marvelous article to heart. And pray, pray, pray! Our ministry needs it, and so do we as lay people.

— Noeleen Threlfo, Wollongong Seventh-day Adventist Church, Australia

I want to express my deep appreciation for the interview with Alvin VanderGriend by Derek Morris. I am not a pastor but I am asked to preach from time to time. And the more I am asked to preach the more I feel the need to pray and share this need with the church members.

Your article has been such a blessing to me! Thank you so much.

— Franca Zucca, Rome, Italy

Gratitude for the September 2009 issue
I am a 78-year-old, recently retired Catholic priest. I, by chance (but more likely by divine Providence), recently came across your September 2009 issue.

The article on forgiveness by Patti Ecker (“Forgiveness: A Part of the Journey to Healing”) was one of the best articles—if not the best—I have ever read on that topic. The article shows that she put a lot of prayer, thoughtfulness, and hard work into it. My guess is that the people who have her as a therapist are fortunate and blessed.

I also appreciated the articles by Mark A. Finley (“Evangelism’s Big Picture: From Baptism to Discipleship”), Tom Hoehner (“Ten Things to Be Learned in Pastoral Ministry”), and Nick Howard (“A Closer Look at Christian Leadership Coaching”).

— Ronald Scheible, email

I have been receiving Ministry for many years, and have been blessed and inspired by many articles. But none like L. S. Baker Jr.’s article, “Covered With Blood” (September 2009). I have preached many sermons on the blood, and types and shadows of the blood being applied. This was most inspiring and revealing. Thank you, Mr. Baker, for this article.

— Leonard L. Pugh, Pascagoula, Mississippi, United States

Gratitude for the November 2009 issue
I found the articles by Drexel C. Rankin (“Welcoming and Retaining Your Visitors” — November 2009) and William Loveless (“Appreciative Inquiry: Lessons From a Business Model”) most helpful. As the pastor of one of those middle sized, mainline congregations with a majority of gray-haired members, I am always alert for things that can help the teams here understand their mission and do evangelism more effectively. The article on welcoming visitors is one of those compact statements that I will surely share with our leaders.

But the “Appreciative Inquiry” planning really hit the mark. We have an unfortunate tendency to manage by avoiding mistakes and redoing what we did last year. You have given me a tool that I can use to help move us to a deeper discernment of God’s plan for our future.

— Jim Eaton, pastor, First Congregational Church UCC, Owosso, Michigan, United States

Continued on page 28 ▶
The young couple attends the same church where my wife and I worship. I had seen them many times, but this time was different. The young mother held a special gift in her arms—their young baby girl. However, on this day, what caught my attention was the expression on the baby’s face. Cradled in her mother’s arms, she was sleeping peacefully, and her face was the picture of a baby who was totally relaxed. Her face did not reveal any worries or discomfort—rather it was a picture of contentment and security.

I thought to myself, Of course she is secure. She is safe in the arms of her loving mother.

As I write this editorial for the January 2010 issue, I find it difficult to imagine a new year at the doorstep. The challenges of 2009—financial, political, etc.—cause me to wonder what 2010 will convey. Will the uncertainties of 2009 carry over into the new year? Most likely they will, joined with the old ones.

Security in our life

Nations, families, and individuals—including clergy—seek security. We may desire security, but where will we find it? May I suggest that lasting security comes from God, the same One who has called us to ministry? Just as our friend’s baby experiences security in the arms of a loving mother, you and I find security in the arms of God. I do not know what any of us will face in the new year, but I pray you seek refuge in the arms of our Lord.

During this year, when you experience spiritual challenges in your life, when you wonder how you will help others with their spiritual needs, I pray you will remember that you develop spiritually in God’s embrace.

Remember the blessing Moses pronounced over the Israelites?

“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27, NIV).

That same blessing is available to us and the same everlasting arms want to hold us. Even though we do not know the future, I feel certain each of us will want to experience the security that comes from being held by God. Furthermore, the same arms that give you security want to hold those closest to you—your spouse and children. Trust them to the arms of God.

Security and those whom we serve

Whether you are a pastor, chaplain, seminary professor, or denominational leader, ministry involves service. Yet in this work of service, we face challenges we would rather not have.

What will your challenges be in this new year? Will it be an unwanted move? Or a decision of a board or committee that is different from what you were hoping? Perhaps, in spite of hard and effective work on your part, you will receive severe criticism. Yet, even though others give us challenges, God does not ignore these challenges. The prophet Isaiah shared this promise with the Israelites and it is available to God’s people in 2010 as well:

He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those
that have young
(Isa. 40:11, NIV).

The ones whom we serve in our ministry—even when they take actions we do not agree with—need the security that comes from God. God willingly holds them in His arms as well.

Starting the new year

At the start of a new year, we usually think of goals, plans, and dreams for a better year. Those exercises are valuable, but this year, may I suggest we focus on the security we all desire. In a world where security is often elusive, God has not forgotten us. Jesus, in His long and personal prayer for His followers, prayed, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe” (John 17:12, NIV). That protection is still available, and we experience it when we allow our Father to hold us—secure in the arms of God.

In this new year, when things go well, thank God. When you have difficult decisions to make, cling to God. When you face challenges, seek safety in God. Safe in the arms of God—that is lasting security. 

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
Pastoring in pain: Serving God when you suffer

On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate the pain?” the neurologist asked. “Pain at level one would be stubbing your toe. Level ten would be the most excruciating pain you could imagine.”

His matter-of-fact demeanor irritated me. Surely he could feel my hurt. The pain on the left side of my face throbbed mercilessly, as always. “Most of the time about a five or a six,” I groaned, “but sometimes as high as a seven or eight.”

For close to six years, I have lived with what doctors now label “Atypical Facial Pain.” One side of my face is in constant pain, without any discernible cause or any prescribable cure. One medical Web site notes tersely, “Treatment: none available at present.” Pain has become my companion whether I am praying, studying, preaching, spending time with my family, exercising, or trying to sleep.

Like Paul, I have asked the Lord to take away this thorn in my flesh. So far, He has not. Faithful friends, colleagues, even complete strangers, have laid their hands on me, anointed me with oil, and prayed that God would heal me. So far He has not.

I have read books on pain and healing. I have been through X-rays, CT scans, MRIs, and spinal taps. I have tried 16 different prescription drugs. I have had surgery. I have altered my diet. I exercise more than ever before. So far nothing has taken away the excruciating pain. And so I live with constant pain.

In my darker moments, I grumble. I experience the aches, and I can only pray and pine that the Lord will heal me—now. In my brighter moments, I actually welcome the pain. My spiritual life—and my pastoral experience—has been enriched through coping with the constant agony.

Paralyzed by pain

I would be dishonest to say I am thankful for pain. If I could do something to never feel pain again—or had never known pain in the first place—I would do so, instantly. Yet I am beginning to appreciate some of the subtle blessings of pain. Years into this journey, I am starting to see some of the good things that come from suffering.

When my health began to fail, I found myself in very unfamiliar territory. For the first time I was overwhelmed by the reality that I could not solve my own problems. Up to that point, life had gone smoothly. I had done well by most criteria. I had graduated as the outstanding graduate of my high school and university department. I earned two master’s degrees from two different universities in four years. I completed a PhD in three years while pastoring full time. I had been blessed with a wonderful wife and three beautiful, healthy children. My pastoral ministry has been “successful” by most measures: people were coming to faith and growing in spiritual maturity. The churches I pastored grew. I led churches through building programs and into new ministry territory. I was involved in denominational leadership and had opportunities to shape new and exciting ministries.

Then the pain began. Between the pain and medication, I was dizzy and ill for months. Most weeks, all I could muster was a scratchy sermon. I preached sitting down because I was too nauseous and weak to stand. I could not visit. I could not teach. I could not meet with anyone. I had to excuse myself from committee meetings. I had to resign from community and denominational leadership. I was humbled. I was helpless. For the first time in my life I felt physically and spiritually powerless. And I felt physically and spiritually destitute.

I began to wonder, What if I cannot continue? What if I am physically unable to work? I looked at prospects for my family and myself, personally. What could I do besides ministry? My skills, abilities, gifts, and education did present options. But all the alternatives were similar to pastoral ministry in their physical demands: speaking, teaching, administrating, or counseling. I found myself lying awake at night, experiencing panic attacks.

Spiritually, I was exhausted. I prayed. But my prayers for healing went unanswered in the way I had requested. I read the Bible. The words sat on the page, irrelevant to my life. People offered spiritual wisdom and prayer, but their insights did not fit my situation. Their prayers for healing seemed to be ignored. One well-meaning friend prayed fervently, anointed me with oil, and claimed healing. When the healing did not happen, she politely informed me I ought to have more faith. I was angry with her, but I also wondered if she was right.

Other Christian friends and pastoral colleagues evaporated. Whether they were unsure of what to say or
do, overwhelmed by other needs, or uncomfortable with a friend and colleague in pain, most of these friends never called. I felt very alone.

But I did keep praying.

**Cries from the depths**

Several years of hindsight later, I am surprised by the practical lessons I have learned through this ordeal. For instance, I have discovered prayer—real prayer. On my worst days I have been forced to pray, “Lord, just help me make it through this day!” I had never prayed such a basic prayer before. And the how their faith intersects with their life challenges.

I believe more passionately than ever in the great truths and promises of Scripture, especially the sovereignty of God. He can heal; I believe that absolutely. But I continue to appreciate that God does not heal at my command. Healing is His initiative and His gift. Healing is not some genie I can conjure up by the right prayer. Appreciating God’s sovereignty, I have learned, is not blind submission, but a statement of profound faith in an omnipotent, omniscient God.

I read the raw passion of the Psalms with a renewed respect for the suffering of God’s people. I am encouraged that I can pray brutally honest prayers.

My Christian faith has become much more relevant and pragmatic than in systematic theology class debates. I still believe and teach solid biblical Christian theology. But my preaching and teaching on complex issues, such as pain and suffering, is less trite. My reflections are tempered with more compassion than before. While I still champion spiritual truth, I find myself more empathetic with those who struggle with their pain and how their faith intersects with their life challenges.

Healing is His initiative and His gift. Healing is not some genie I can conjure up by the right prayer. Appreciating God’s sovereignty, I have learned, is not blind submission, but a statement of profound faith in an omnipotent, omniscient God.

My theology has also become more eschatological. As my present experience has become painful, I find I reflect more on eternity. Until the pain, I rarely thought of heaven. My day-to-day experience was quite comfortable. But now I find myself yearning more and more for the promised perfection of resurrection. I find myself more able to understand the biblical concepts of faith and hope—as yet unfulfilled promises that one day will be our lived experience—than I had before.

**Pain partners**

I have discovered new credibility in my ministry with others in pain.

Last spring I held Pat’s hand in the emergency ward when the doctor told him his diagnosis: lymphoma. I was there less than 48 hours later when he came out of his first chemotherapy treatment. The five tumors that the scans had identified were growing faster than any of the internists at the hospital had seen.

Lymphoma explained those splitting headaches that had crippled Pat since December. Test after test had revealed nothing. But the pain had persisted. And Pat and his wife, Nancy, had yearned for a diagnosis. Over the months they agonized, wondering what the problem really was. Now this.

My wife and I knew the stress of waiting for test results and diagno-

LIKE PAUL, I HAVE ASKED THE LORD TO TAKE AWAY THIS THORN IN MY FLESH. SO FAR, HE HAS NOT. FAITHFUL FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, EVEN COMPLETE STRANGERS, HAVE LAID THEIR HANDS ON ME, ANOINTED ME WITH OIL, AND PRAYED THAT GOD WOULD HEAL ME. SO FAR HE HAS NOT.
out, he announced I had “Atypical Facial Pain,” a rare neurological condition in which one side of one’s face is always in pain.

My diagnosis is not nearly as severe as Pat’s. But both he and Nancy appreciated that my wife and I had been there. We had endured the “not-knowings,” the “what-ifs,” and the “what-nexts.” We knew the agony of waiting weeks and months for a diagnosis. My suffering has given my ministry credibility with the Pats in my life.

I live 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with pain. Of course, Pat’s suffering was much sharper than mine. But as we shared, he knew I walked in pain too. Though our experiences and diagnoses were unique, we shared a bond. As we talked and prayed, he knew that my body was not whole either. We were both wounded. We were kindred spirits, aching together, crying together, and laughing together about lab tests, lunch trays, and tourniquets. Without my pain, we would still have related well. But we bonded more deeply because we shared physical suffering.

When Pat’s wife called at 11:18 P.M. on a Friday night, when I held his hand, when he slept in the Lord during my prayer over him moments later, Pat, his wife, and I shared a bond that will last into eternity. Our shared suffering has given my ministry credibility with the Pats in my life.

My pain life has pushed me to be ongoing, intensive evaluation of my life and ministry. I ask the Lord, “If you have enough faith, you will believe and things will happen.” In his cause-and-effect world, God chooses to tarry, allowing me to enjoy a pain-free existence. But if God were to heal me this instant, would I rejoice? Absolutely! I look forward, eagerly, to some day enjoying a pain-free existence. But if God chooses to tarry, allowing me to bear this pain throughout this life, can I see His blessing? Yes. The lessons I have learned, the opportunities for ministry that have come, the growing maturity I have experienced, have been blessings to me and those around me.

This pain has built bridges of compassion and caring that otherwise might never have come into being.

**Painful faith**

Last year I was one of several speakers sharing my spiritual story at a year-end banquet. The person who spoke before I did talked about a painful condition he had had. He had prayed, “in faith” (he emphasized this phrase several times), and now his pain was gone. His message was on how to pray “in faith.” “If you have enough faith, and pray,” he triumphantly proclaimed, “God will heal!” His experience led him to present a cause-and-effect formula. If you are in need, pray. If you have enough faith, God will act. Guaranteed.

I spoke next. I had not been healed. I spoke of my roller-coaster journey of faith. And I emphasized that though God had not healed me, I had found His Spirit sustaining me, grown deeper in my faith, and developed a profound daily dependence upon God. My pain has been instrumental in my spiritual growth.

After dinner, the other speaker spoke to me. “How can you be a pastor?” he asked. “You don’t have faith.” In his cause-and-effect world, my experience did not make sense.

That evening still haunts me. Was he correct? As I thought and prayed, I felt an affirmation that God was still calling me to pastoral ministry. I was reassured that I had genuine faith. But my journey has been different than my friend’s.

God, I believe, deals with us individually. For some, faith manifests itself in healing. For others, God asks us to be faithful by walking through the valley of the shadows. That faithful walking, day in, day out, is real faith too. I have needed tremendous faith to walk, hour by hour, with the pain.

By walking with pain, every minute, I am forced to be faithful. Every day I am forced to depend on God’s grace and mercy. This pain has become one of God’s most effective tools to keep me close and faithful to Him.

If God were to heal me this instant, would I rejoice? Absolutely! I look forward, eagerly, to some day enjoying a pain-free existence. But if God chooses to tarry, allowing me to bear this pain throughout this life, can I see His blessing? Yes. The lessons I have learned, the opportunities for ministry that have come, the growing maturity I have experienced, have been blessings to me and those around me.

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Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
Editor’s note: This sermon was preached during the 2009 Annual Council, a gathering of Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders held in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

The cross of Christ always loomed large in Paul’s thinking; whenever he spoke of salvation, the Cross was the centerpiece. Second Corinthians 5:14–20[1] is a typical passage. Here the apostle begins his presentation by saying that in Christ’s death on the cross the sin problem is essentially solved. The key component is in place. God has done everything He can for our redemption. I say, “everything He can,” for there is, of course, the matter of our acceptance of God’s offer. That is your decision. That is my decision. But by that one act on the cross, the defining moment in history, God bridged the gulf of alienation that sin had created. All of us, Paul says, “were dead in trespasses and sins but now have been made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5, NKJV). We who “were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, . . . have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:11–13). He “reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Cor. 5:18). The barriers are gone. The ticket for our homeward journey has been bought. We can come home!

Because the Cross has fixed the relationship between heaven and humanity, said Paul, this reality must now impact our relationship with people. He wrote, We no longer view people as we used to. We relate to each other differently. The worldly point of view, by which we may, in the past, have considered other people, is done with. We are done with it because of what has happened to us—we ourselves have become a new creation. The old is gone—the new has come. It is a fact that salvation always affects relationships. Relationships between people, to whom salvation has come, is hallmarked by peace and the absence of hostility (see Eph. 2:14–22). So, let us look at what this says to us as a church family.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is an international, global community. In this church we will not—we must not—value people on the basis of wealth, position, status, education, race, gender, color of skin, language, culture, or dietary habits. There must be no sense of superiority or inferiority created. In this regard, we confess that we have often failed. But a change must come; it must come in Paul’s argument because of the Cross. The Cross is the catalyst—the great equalizer—which levels all of us. Regardless of whom we are or where we have come from, we, each and all, have the same value in the eyes of God. He has set the value, and that reality must shape all our relationships.

An assignment for you
Against the backdrop of these thoughts, God says, Therefore, since I have made this arrangement in Christ, My Son, I have an assignment for you. I want you to be ambassadors of reconciliation for Me! (See 2 Corinthians 5:20 and Ephesians 6:20.) That, in summary, is the scene God sets before us.

Consider how this new reality—this reconciliation reality—plays out in each of the various regions where we come from and where we have been placed as leaders. Each of us must consider our local areas, for if we get it right there, it will spill over into the larger global church. How does our reconciled community look in terms of relationships and the focus and emphasis that your ministers bring to their preaching and teaching? These are the two questions to which our text takes us.

People, by the millions, are on the move away from their home countries into new ones. They will bring with them as much of their culture as is portable. How do we receive them? Are they seen as intruders? Are we uncomfortable with their style and content of worship, and therefore, do some say, “I think I will go to another church”? Leadership has a responsibility to encourage and create a warm and receptive atmosphere in our local churches and make them truly homes and places of worship for all who come. When they do come, will they be received with open arms?

What is the catalyst to make this possible? The cross of Christ, of course. The Cross has made us all into brothers and sisters with no sense of anyone being of lesser or greater value. The Cross has made us all equal; and that, says God, must show in the way we behave and relate to each other, for salvation always affects relationships. We are told that “the secret of unity is found...
in the equality of believers in Christ.”

As leaders, we have a responsibility to protect this truth.

As God’s reconciled people, we hear this counsel echoing in our minds: “press together, press together” found a dozen different places in the writings of Ellen G. White, always in the context of unity.

This dynamic power of reconciliation also speaks to us as leaders when we consider the role of women in our church, as well as when we consider entrusting leadership responsibilities to those who are significantly younger than we are. In these matters, we have not done well. I appeal to you as leaders to look at it again. These words challenge us: “When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it [the work] will feel the loss if the talents of both are not combined.” We have large segments of our spiritual family who need to be brought in from the cold. I am sensitive to the fact that culture and local conventions must be respected and cannot be abused, and there are great differences in this respect around the world. What you can do in some countries you cannot do in others, but, still, have we got it right? I think not.

We must, as a matter of honor to the whole church and in obedience to God, be proactive in attending to these matters. The power of reconciliation pulls us together. I speak to you from the advantage of some age. I long for the day when a much larger spectrum of those who are half my age will sit on the committees that make the decisions of our church and will occupy elected positions. They do it in politics in the choice of national and international secular leadership. Why should we not also be able to do it in the church? If we did, it would be a huge enrichment to the church, for they represent so many skills and come with such a spread of spiritual gifts.

I hear the objection, “But they don’t have experience!” We are not short of experience in this church. We may not always have the best of judgment, but we have experience enough to share with many. Again, we are reminded to “let not the youth be ignored; let them share in the labor and responsibility.” In this matter there is still much to be done to get it right. When election time comes, please, remember this. As leaders, no one is better placed than we are to influence changes. Paul identifies the Cross as the catalyst both to help us view each other differently and to remove some barriers that divide believers and are obstacles on our journey. Remember, reconciliation always affects relationships!

Then there is the large number of academics and scholars who teach in our universities. They are sometimes viewed with discomfort by leaders such as us. But they
are our partners in ministry. They perform an invaluable service, both to our youth and the church as an institution. Frankly, we could not be what we are and do what we do without them. They hold a very high position of trust. They teach and counsel our youth.

Professors guide their values and influence their direction. Their search is in the discovery and clarification of truth. I have the greatest respect for professors and their integrity. In their quest for truth, they will sometimes state positions and argue findings in which we think they are wrong. And we will tell them—we will address that challenge. But we will not walk away from them nor do I want them to walk away from the church with us. If there are aspects of our identity which we think they are wrong. And we will test it by what God has revealed to us. But we must talk—openly, respectfully, and with care. And then we must journey together, bonded to each other by the power of God’s reconciliation.

I appeal to you, as leaders, to reach out to your scholars and teachers in this spirit, care for them, and challenge them, as they will you.

Through the gift of His Son, God has bonded us to Himself, and He has bonded us as a family to each other.

Meaning of ambassador

Now, returning to the second half of the text, what does Paul mean by describing himself as an ambassador?

He chooses a word (presbeuō), as he does at least one other time (Eph. 6:20), whose Latin counterpart (legatus) was well known in the Roman world. The ambassador was the Roman emperor’s personal representative. His authority lay in his direct commission from the emperor. But he carried another interesting function. When a territory was conquered, the ambassador was to accompany the victorious general and arrange the terms of peace for the vanquished people, determine

the boundaries, and draw up the constitutional provisions. In a sense, the ambassadors were responsible for bringing the people into the family of the Roman Empire. So, it is almost as though Paul thinks of himself as a representative who brings to people the offer and conditions of God, whereby people may become citizens of God’s kingdom and members of His royal family.

It is actually quite breathtaking: God is making His appeal through us! Preaching the gospel is not talking about God; it is God talking through us, inviting people by saying, “Come, be reconciled to Me. Come home!” Preaching the gospel is about letting people hear this invitation. That is the core of the gospel. When we enter the pulpit to preach, the people must hear the invitation. It is a mistake to think people come to church to be entertained or hear something new; they come there primarily to hear the voice of Christ inviting them.

Back to the term ambassador. An ambassador functions away from home—in a sense, in a foreign land. Christians are always like that. They live in this world, for they have a function here, but they are a citizen of heaven. Is this not precisely what Christ senses in His very personal and moving prayer to His Father just before He goes into Gethsemane (John 17)? He says to His Father that His followers will encounter difficult times in this world; they will be exposed and vulnerable. And so He asks His Father to keep them safe. He says that the believers belong to a different world, that they are different. The inevitable conclusion one must draw is that individuals who are not willing to be different cannot be Christians!

Also, in a certain sense, the honor of the ambassador’s country is in his or her hands. His or her country will be judged by his or her performance. His or her words are listened to and deeds watched. It is the great responsibility of an ambassador to commend his or her country and indicate what it stands for to the men and women among whom he or she is placed to function. You both speak and act as an ambassador. That is how Paul saw himself. The honor of Christ was entrusted to him.

One of the first functions of ambassadors is to present their credentials. That is their official way of saying who they are and whom they represent. Listen to Paul, writing from his Roman imprisonment (Eph. 6:19, 20). What he, in 2 Corinthians 5:19, 20, calls the “message of reconciliation,” he here simply calls the “gospel.” For the two are the same. In sending his “credentials” to the believers in Rome ahead of his going there, he said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone” (Rom. 1:16).

The compulsion with which Paul had to preach the gospel—driven in an uncompromising way to be obedient to that call or assignment—cannot be overstated. Listen to his own words: “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross . . . is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:17, 18). “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2); and “When I preach the gospel, . . . I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16).

As Paul now reflects on the fact that he is an ambassador, sent out by the Lord on a certain mission, and that mission is to communicate the “message of reconciliation,” which, in fact, is the gospel, what were the primary thoughts passing through his mind? As he reflects on the content of the gospel, what are the elements that must come out forcefully in his preaching?

The content of the message

The answers to these questions have importance for us as a church, as those who are entrusted with such a broad-based array of biblical truths
and as those who run evangelism programs with titles and topics. What is it that must top our list?

Let me be absolutely clear: As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been entrusted with a broad spread of truth-filled messages that we will proclaim. We will preach the biblical prophecies of Daniel and Revelation; we will preach the sanctity of the Sabbath; we will preach the health message; we will preach about the state of the dead; we will preach about judgment; we will preach and present the moral and ethical values that define the Christian life; and, yes, we will preach about God’s creation as recorded in Genesis, chapters 1 and 2.

But I am led back to the text again (2 Cor. 5:19, 20) where Paul says that God, having committed to us the message of reconciliation, is now making His appeal through us: “Be reconciled to God.” Being true and loyal ambassadors, that particular ministry must top our agenda.

The first thing you and I must tell the world of unbelief is that God has reconciled them to Himself by the death of Jesus Christ. If we do not, our ambassadorial assignment has lost its meaning, and we have failed.

So, I appeal to you as leaders, remind your pastors and evangelists that all of our preaching and teaching must be placed within, and be framed, by the gospel of reconciliation. We are not there to be interesting or entertaining; we are there to present Christ as Savior.

There are four core elements to the gospel—the message of reconciliation—which we must identify. I find it striking that Paul, in presenting his credentials to the Roman believers, makes the point that he carries his ambassadorial assignment without shame. Consider what he had been through: he has been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Berea, and laughed at in Athens. And, yet, he says that he is not ashamed of any of that. Clearly, something in the gospel made Paul triumphant over all that men could do to him.

Key components

Here are the key components of the message of reconciliation.

1. There’s only one way. Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised by the Old Testament prophets. He is the One of whom the prophets of all (1 Cor. 15:19, KJV). If we do not keep in focus that Christ rose from death, and what that means, our faith is meaningless and our preaching is useless (see 1 Cor. 15:14). Paul writes, “I want to know Christ,” and I mean by that to know “the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). The knowledge of which Paul speaks is not intellectual knowledge, or the knowledge of certain facts or theories. He is talking about something very personal. The word he uses for “to know” indicates the closest and most intimate knowledge of another person; not knowledge about Christ, but to personally know Christ.

That, to Paul, expresses itself first and foremost as to know “the power of his resurrection.” Paul is not here thinking about the event that happened to Jesus, amazing though
it was, but he is thinking of a living, dynamic power that operates in the life of an individual believer—your life and my life, if we let it. It is a power that gives direction and purpose to life, it gives victories, it changes radically our lives, and it gives hope.

The resurrection of Christ means that He “holds the keys to death and Hades” (see Rev. 1:18). Without the resurrection of Jesus, death would have been for us all—for die is what we all do—a never-ending darkness. His resurrection is the light at the end of the tunnel. His resurrection guarantees us access to eternity.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is so much a part of the gospel that without it there would be no gospel.

3. A reconciling ministry. Furthermore, the gospel says consider what happened to Him after He rose from death. Listen to Peter again: We are saved by the “resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand” (1 Pet. 3:21, 22); and in his powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost: “We are all witnesses to the fact that God has raised Him to life, and now He is exalted to the right hand of God” (see Acts 2:32, 33); and there He is, involved in an ongoing ministry of reconciliation. This is the whole point of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Without this ministry, we cannot effectively be set free from our past or present failures or the impending destruction of the future. It is this ministry of reconciliation that Christ is engaged in today, giving us access to “the power of his resurrection.”

This is not speculation, it is simply the truth! The doctrine of the intercessory ministry of Christ, with all that it entails, is very much at the heart of the gospel and should be held high and asserted boldly by all who believe.

4. The certainty of His return. You cannot be a believer in the New Testament sense of the term without believing in the second coming of Christ. “Men of Galilee: Why do you stand gazing into empty space? He will come again,” said the heavenly messenger (see Acts 1:11). Without the doctrine of the second coming of Christ, we are all left standing there, gazing into empty space. The New Testament promises are too numerous and familiar to spend time here repeating these texts. I am only doing it to re-emphasize that this central Seventh-day Adventist point of faith is part of the core gospel and not peripheral to it.

The words in 2 Peter, chapter 3, are familiar to us all, but also ominous, as we, with eyes of faith, look to the second coming of Christ. The apostle says that belief in the second coming is something that, since the first generation of believers, has been the object of mockery by the cynics and scoffers. The cynics are here. Every generation has them. They do not go away.

All these constitute the core pillars of the gospel: the resurrection of Jesus Christ, His ascension, His intercessory ministry in heaven today, His second coming, our own resurrection, the earth made new—all of this belongs to the world of miracles; they are all a display of God’s unfathomable creative powers.

But miracles have no place in the world of cynics and scoffers. The only reality they will accept is that which can be tested, and for which there is a history.

The problem with the scoffers is that they sometimes put on soft clothing, come into the church, and mix with the believers. They cause uneasiness among believers by appearing to be intellectuals, well read, and ever so clever. They demand intellectual respectability of that which is to be believed. They will then often intimidate the believers. Peter says that the problem with these scoffers is that “they deliberately forget”—in fact they choose to deny—the Almightyness of the Creator who caused the earth to be formed. But, says Peter, you, my dear friends are not to forget (2 Pet. 3:5, 8). The deliberateness of their forgetting simply signals the fact that it is a choice they have made. Freedom gives men that option, and God has no answer to it except to hold them accountable in the judgment.

Faith cannot be suspended until it has gained respectability. Faith accepts the truth as it comes to us from the Scriptures. Faith disappears the moment it has to qualify itself by criteria that are basically and purely intellectual. Faith receives the Word of God and accepts it without qualification.

This is the gospel! In a sense, the gospel is a generous container that holds all that ultimately matters for faith to survive and salvation to be secured. It is also the context in which all other articles of faith must be placed to make sense and have validity. I urge you as leaders to remind your ministers, evangelists, and teachers of this. Every pulpit must carry the message of reconciliation, and every church must be a witness to what a reconciled community is and how it acts. Our children and grandchildren must hear the gospel from the lips of their parents and grandparents. Your children want to know your story of how you met Jesus and how He has changed you as a person. They don’t need truth statements apart from you; they want to know what happened to you.

With Paul, I say, that it does not really matter what accolade or honor, or whether any at all, they bestow on me, but “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel,” for that is my ambassadorial assignment.
Does a sin gene exist?

Why does every descendant of Adam and Eve, except Jesus Christ, sin? Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (KJV), a theme reiterated in Romans 5:12: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (KJV). Commenting on Romans 5:12, one Bible commentary states, “When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they not only lost their right to the tree of life, which resulted inevitably in their death and in the passing on of death to their descendants, but by sin also became depraved in nature, thus lessening their strength to resist evil…. Thus Adam and Eve passed on to their posterity a tendency to sin and a liability to its punishment, death.”

If so, then we have an inherited factor that puts us at odds with the Lord. Could this factor be a “sin gene”?

Genes

Genes determine our physical makeup, basic personality traits, and aptitudes. They have an enormous influence on who we are and how we behave. Genes are segments of the chromosomes that direct the production of proteins. As of 2003, we know the chemical structure of our genes spread out on 24 chromosomes.

The human genetic material found in every cell (except red blood cells) consists of 3.164 billion units called nucleotides. All information required to form a human being resides in the order in which the four different nucleotides are linked together. A single gene contains thousands of nucleotides, and it codes for one or more types of protein. We each have approximately 30,000 genes, and know the functions of approximately half of them. However, genes occupy only 2 percent of our chromosomes; the other 98 percent is “non-gene” material whose functions are not well understood.

No one knows, though, how we go from proteins to behavior and personality, due in part to our sketchy grasp of brain function. All brain activity depends on the movements of nerve signals among millions of brain cells. At the junctures between nerve cells are gaps called synapses. Nerve impulses cannot pass from one cell to another without neurotransmitters. We suspect that the levels of these neurotransmitters (produced by proteins) likely determine how thoughts and feelings are generated.

The influence of genes is clearly seen in children when they show aptitude for art, music, math, etc.—all inherited from our ancestors. If, though, among our inheritance the tendency to sin exists, the big question is, Which of the 30,000 genes is responsible?

Genes and the Fall

After the six days of Creation, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31, NIV). The Creator did an exhaustive review of all aspects of creation, from engineering, biophysical, biochemical, physiological, ecological, interrelational, and sociological perspectives. We must assume, therefore, that there was nothing wrong with Adam and Eve when they came forth from the Creator’s hands. They could not have been created with a tendency to sin.

So we look at the story of the first actual sin in search for clues to how the “tendency to sin” was acquired.

In the Genesis story of the Fall, the only consequence of sin was that Adam and Eve’s “eyes . . . were opened” (Gen. 3:7, NIV) and they became aware of their nakedness. In the absence of additional information, the “opening of eyes” is a difficult phrase to understand, but this in no way could imply a sudden lessening of Adam’s and Eve’s moral statures.

What happened to them after sin? Perhaps the Lord modified Adam’s and Eve’s genes so that now the first couple’s natures were sinful? Though possible, it is much safer to stay within the confines of the biblical narrative. Besides, do we really believe that the Creator of every good and wonderful thing would stoop to corrupt His own creation?

Whatever happened in Eden at, and after, the Fall, the notion that we have the compulsion to sin built into our very fabric is, indeed, troubling. The expression of genes is automatic (as the color of one’s hair or the shape of one’s nose); we didn’t choose them. Thus, where we have a “sin gene,” sinful behavior could be considered an irresistible and natural product of human nature. To make matters worse, some biblical texts seem to appear to bolster the argument for sin having a genetic basis. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, / or the leopard its spots? / Neither can you do good / who are accustomed to doing evil” (Jer. 13:23, NIV). Fortunately, this text may also be understood to say that sinful behavior has become natural, like genetically determined characteristics, that we sin so easily; that makes more sense than seeing in the text evidence for a sin gene.

Are there sin genes?

In fact, the arguments against the notion of a sin gene are more impressive than the ones for it. If sin had a genetic basis, the Creator would
be responsible for our sinful nature. Judgment for sinful behavior would constitute a mockery of justice. Even in earthly courts, aberrant behavior based on physiological causes is treated with compassion.

Additionally, there would be no known way to stop sinning and conversion could occur only with a genetic change. Ordinarily, we go through life with our inherited genes; behavior does not alter genes. Someone may argue that the Lord could, supernaturally, alter the sin gene. But, after such a change, the converted individual would be incapable of sinning again unless there would be another genetic change, only now in the wrong direction.

Also, if a sin gene were identified, then some form of gene therapy could cure this problem, as with any other illness caused by faulty genes. There would be no reason to think that God’s saving grace is needed for the reformation of character.

Then how could we explain the sinless nature of Jesus other than that He was either born without the sin gene, or was some kind of mutant, incapable of sinning? Neither option seems to be satisfactory, especially when the Savior must also be our Example.

If sin is not passed from one generation to the next via genes, the only other possibility would appear to be environmental influences. But the idea that sin is the result of external influences opens the way to excise it. Besides, examples may be given to show sin can occur in a perfect environment (the Garden of Eden) or it need not happen in wicked environments (Jesus growing up in Nazareth).

Sin is sin only if it stems from free choice. If one’s sinful behavior is forced by irresistible internal or external forces, it may be excusable. For example, there is a genetically determined condition called Tourette’s syndrome. Attendant with this disease is a profane manner of speech. There are also documented cases where head injuries have lead to profound alterations in personalities in which previously responsible persons became unreliable and irresponsible.

**Self-preservation**

The all-pervasive nature of sin certainly suggests the genetic element, however unreasonable, of a sin gene. But what if sinful behavior was caused not by one, but by a combination of several factors, some of which were genetic? Moreover, the genetic components would not coerce sinful behavior but would merely predispose us to it, leaving us able to decide whether or not to sin.

Let’s consider the sin gene called selfishness—the promotion of self-interest above the needs of others. In reality, this sin can be described as a warped expression of self-preservation with our instinct for the sin of self-preservation as the genetic factor. For many years I studied the biochemical changes in the bacterium *Escherichia coli* following exposure to the reducing substance thioglycerol. I noticed that thioglycerol inhibits or slows down the growth of this bacterium, and I decided to study how it happens. It turns out that the bacterial cell takes extreme measures to get rid of this offending substance. We now know that even in this simple bacterium there are networks of genes designed to defend the cell against the adverse effects of sudden bursts of heat, cold, external pressure, and numerous other environmental changes. In other words, the will to live is built into the very fiber of every organism by the Creator.

Adam and Eve, too, were created with this instinct for self-preservation. So long as they were sinless, they felt secure in the friendly confines of Eden. But after their sin, as they were staring in the face of a suddenly uncertain future and eventual death, their instincts for survival quickly took over. They hid from the Lord and attempted to shift the burden of guilt away from themselves.

We, too, deal daily with our instincts to survive. This need prompts us in every situation we encounter to choose a course most advantageous for ourselves. But here we have a true choice: we are not compelled to benefit ourselves every time. On this level, followers of the Master are asked to practice self-denial for the sake of others.

In fact, says Paul, the Christian is called to die daily to self (1 Cor. 15:31), but even he, himself, confessed, “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind” (Rom. 7:21–23, NIV).

The “law” Paul refers to here, may well be our ingrained selfishness but with no sin gene. Although we are genetically programmed to seek survival and comfort, we can control the extent to which we respond to our internal drives. We are not helpless pawns in the clutches of our genes.

**Conclusion**

As long as we are on this earth, facing uncertainties, aging, and death, we will have to deal with selfishness—a sin as pervasive as gravity. But as eagles are given wings to fight gravity (Isa. 40:31), the child of God has access to the Holy Spirit to overcome selfishness (Rom. 8:9–11). Only in the earth made new, when the prospects of life-threatening illness and death will be removed, will we be freed from the shadowy consequences of our instinct to survive.

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3. Exceptions to this rule are exposure to radiation or to mutagenic substances.

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Tell us what you think about this article.
Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
What we discovered at the Church in the Fields is well worth noting! This young congregation was planted in 2007 in the town of Macquarie Fields, a suburb just south of Sydney, Australia, and exists because of a Global Mission Project of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We visited them in late 2009.

This congregation was the epitome of warmth and friendliness, love and acceptance. Though the church group was only two years old, already 80 were attending. We counted! There were 32 young people in their early to middle teens, 28 late teens through young adults, with a few mature adults sprinkled among them, and the rest were children.

The church had been planted to support a religious private school that served pre-kindergarten through grade 11 and was located on the school grounds. While the MacArthur Adventist College had served primarily the children of constituent Seventh-day Adventist churches in the surrounding communities for more than 30 years, in the last 5 years the church group had begun to serve a broader community of young people—and the gathering had begun to grow and thrive.

What did we discover the day of our visit? What did we feel they are doing right?

• At the entrance to the school grounds was the sign, "NO PERFECT PEOPLE ALLOWED. Good! I thought. We can come in!"
• Arriving a few minutes early, we found the grounds alive with kids and adults. We were surrounded by activity—we were enveloped by it.
• We were greeted by two women who happened to be crossing the schoolyard and took the time to stop and talk for a few minutes. We felt welcome. Already!
• Stepping into the auditorium, we saw the front of the room set up with chairs, a small stage, and equipment where the leaders were preparing for the beginning of worship. In the back half of the room were small, round tables with chairs and a breakfast bar set with juice, hot drinks, and a buffet. We were invited to eat or simply sit and chat.
• Andre Afamasaga, the school chaplain and church plant leader, joined us and began to tell us about his love—the kids, the parents, the community, the Church in the Fields. Later he excused himself to prepare for the worship service, and Jill, the principal of the school, slipped into a chair beside us to continue the conversation.
• Amy, a young Global Mission pioneer, stopped by with her felt-tipped marker and name tags. She was tagging everyone. We were tagged too—Don, Marti. And that is how people greeted us from then on.
• Hugs, kisses, and broad smiles were flying fast from person to person with such genuine affection that we knew this was a loving congregation.
• A young fellow named Mark invited each of us to choose an envelope from an array he held out to us. Peeking inside we found pictures he had hand painted on 4 x 8 cards—he was using his gifts in ministry.
• Both diversity and acceptance were evident for differences in age, social status, religious experience, race, and gender. Interaction seemed free and easy. We were introduced as international guests to the entire group.
• Participation was open to all.
• It was a simple worship service, nothing extraneous. A couple led the praise singing. A young mother read a scripture as she invited people to give their tithes and offerings, and then two earliteen boys passed the
offering baskets. A woman, who I later learned was not yet a member, invited folks to share about their week—their struggles and blessings—and they did just that with a trusting openness; then the praises and requests were lifted to God in prayer. Ray and his wife, Emma, sang a rap song with beautiful words and a praise chorus that we could all join. A two-person skit offered the question, Do you trust God to be in charge of your life? And the message, presented by a sharp, young Aboriginal guest pastor, pointed out that it takes more faith when God does not answer your prayer the way you would like than when you receive the expected answer. Finally, a video of the recent baptism of seven of the young people was narrated by Andre, and others were invited to receive Jesus as Lord and prepare for a later baptism. Three of the adults responded during the final prayer.

• The worship service ended and folks separated into Discovery Bible classes for Kindergartners, Kids, Youth, Adults, and Fresh, a class for new believers.
• On a screen appeared the words, Church in the Fields, an Adventist community loving God and others.
• Before we left, Amy came to hug us and pray for us, asking God to bless us through the coming week.

So many things this young church did were so right! They received one another with such real love and warmth. And they didn’t come tiptoeing shyly before a God they didn’t know either. They came with joy—with exuberance. And we pictured God’s delight as they approached.
THE DEBATE IS HEATING UP. Did a loving God create this earth or are we the random product of millions of years of natural selection? Is the Bible teaching of a literal six-day Creation viable, given the scientific evidence pointing toward evolution? Or can both theories be successfully blended into one?

Creation and Evolution takes a thoughtful look at these issues. University pastor Dwight Nelson invites readers to join the experts in a candid creation-evolution dialogue. With clarity and logic, Dr. Nelson carefully examines the clues, among them: the complexity of living organisms, geological discoveries, and the human reproduction system. All, he concludes, lead to one rational conclusion—that a Divine Master Designer created our planet. And it is this same loving Creator who guides our lives and promises us a new earth home with Him one day.

Take a look at the evidence, prayerfully search your heart, and then draw your own conclusions. The fact is that since no one was there “in the beginning,” both theories of origin require faith—a perfect requirement for those wanting to know the truth about the beginning... and the end.

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The impact of justification by faith to the current Protestant and Catholic relationship

The Council of Trent (1545–1563) hurled anathemas at the Protestant doctrine of justification, and Protestants flung volleys back. Truth was at stake. But not now. Survival of Christianity is said to be the reason for deemphasizing differences and stressing agreements in order to face a common enemy—secularism.

Particularly since Vatican Council II (1963–1965), the Roman Catholic Church has worked steadily to bring other churches into union with itself. An article titled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium” states, “We together pray for the fulfillment of the prayer of Our Lord: ‘May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me’ (John 17). We together, stressing agreements in order to face a common enemy—secularism.

What is the one mission of the one Christ? If the mission is to proclaim salvation through the life and death of Jesus Christ, do Catholics and Protestants have the same mission? This article takes the position that Catholics and Protestants do not have the same mission, as evidenced in their understanding of salvation. We will note (1) justification defined by Trent; (2) justification defined by Scripture; (3) different views of salvation; (4) who is changing; and (5) the missing context.

Justification defined by Trent

Trent decreed that the Latin Vulgate version of Scripture was the official Bible, but this version doesn’t do justice to the Greek word δικαιοσύνη, which means “to declare righteous,” for the Vulgate translates it by the Latin word justificare, which means “to make righteous.” To be declared righteous has nothing to do with personal merit, whereas to be made righteous leads to works of merit. “The Greek verb refers to something outside of a person in question” whereas “the Latin refers to the qualities of the person in question.”

According to Trent, justification “is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend.” Faith, hope, and love are infused into the Christian, so states William Schroeder. With the infusion of justification there begins a process of justification in which works merit further justification. This is a crucial Catholic contribution. This Catholic view seems to confuse the categories of justification and sanctification and places sanctification before ongoing justification. William G. T. Shed is right when he states that “Men are justified in order that they may be sanctified, not sanctified in order that they may be justified.” Furthermore, the Catholic concept of infused justification, or “physical justification,” is a state in which only a partial remission of sins is experienced, for guilt still exists and debt is to be met by temporal punishment, even beyond this world in purgatory. This, I believe, fails to do justice to the Cross.

Catholic theology holds that justification is a transformative act by which something supernatural is infused, placed within the soul of the believer. By contrast, the Protestant view affirms that “to be justified” means God says that a person is righteous through accepting Christ’s substitutionary death by faith. Nothing new is infused in one’s soul. This, it seems to me, does justice to the Cross.

Justification defined by Scripture

Justification comes by faith in Jesus Christ and cannot be earned. Paul says “they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24, RSV), for “a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (3:28, RSV). And even that faith, itself, is not something that springs from the human heart, but a gift that comes from God (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 2:7, 8). Humans are “justified by his blood” (Rom. 5:9, ESV). Calvary was the “one act of righteousness” that “leads to justification and life for all men” (5:18, ESV). “God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become...
the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV). Justification is a level reality.

In Romans 4, Paul uses the terms justify (dikaiō) or righteousness (dikaiosunē) in a declarative sense, not in a transformational sense. “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned (logizomai) to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3, RSV), or “counted to him” (ESV). Reckoned or counted simply means that Abraham was legally declared or reckoned as righteous because of his faith in God. The term counted (nine times in Romans 4, ESV) signifies imputation, not infusion.

Christ’s imputed righteousness makes unnecessary any infusion through sacraments or works to merit righteousness. Calvary was payment in full. Reckoned righteousness finds the recipient always dependent on the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ. By contrast, the Catholic Church’s teaching about infusion focuses on inherent righteousness and human works. Personal performance and the mediation of others (Mary and the saints) take the place of sole dependence on Christ crucified, resurrected, and interceding before the Father at Heaven’s throne.

**Differences in understanding salvation**

The pivotal difference between Catholic and Reformation understanding of justification is the difference between infusion and imputation. Paul G. Schrotenboer says, “Apart from a new Roman Catholic confession on justification by faith, Trent remains a major barrier between the heirs of the Reformation and Roman Catholicism.”

In harmony with ancient Catholic tradition, Pope John Paul II’s encyclical Redemptoris Missio, issued December 7, 1990, states, “God has established Christ as the one mediator and that she herself [the Church] has been established as the universal sacrament of salvation.”

Quoting from Vatican Council II, the encyclical goes on to state that “Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.”

Vatican II also noted, “Through the Church, we abide in Christ.” The church is the body of Christ. “In that body, the life of Christ is poured into the believers [an infusion], who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ. . . . Truly partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharist bread, we are taken up in communion with Him and with one another.”

The church and its sacraments have a central role in the Catholic process of salvation—a position not found in Protestantism.

Further, the papal encyclical made a significant statement, entrusting the church and its mission to the guidance of Mary, a view not accepted by Protestants. While Protestants hold that salvation is through Christ alone and that He is both the sole cause and the Mediator of salvation, Catholics believe that the church, Mary, and the saints also have a mediatory function between God and humans. These three come between Christ and believers, and often function as if Christ’s mission—life, death, present intercession—is not enough.

**Who is changing?**

Is the barrier of Trent coming down? Or is the sixteenth century mission of Protestants changing? Some leading Protestants are concerned. David F. Wells, for example, writes, “The evangelical world, in fact, is now coming apart because its central truths, what once held it all together, no longer have the binding power that they once had and, in some cases, are rejected outright with no following outcry.” Examples are the New Perspectives on Paul (NPP) and Federal Vision (FV) that reject the doctrine of justification by faith alone (sola fide), the foundation upon which the Protestant church stands or falls. Guy P. Waters rightly warns, “The church is facing a threat that strikes at her foundations.”

Karl Barth referred to the Council of Trent as the one that “speaks of the good works of the regenerate man, who is only a little sinner and commits only tiny sins, and who is the happy position of being able to increase the grace of justification in co-operation with it, and even to augment the degree of his eternal bliss. The practical consequence of all this is that the misery of man is not regarded as in any way serious or dangerous either for Christians or non-Christians. The Reformation communions could not reunite with a Church which held this doctrine, and they cannot accept the call to reunion with it to-day.”

Barth added, “With its doctrine of justification the Roman Church closed the door to self-reformation and deprived itself of all possibility of seizing the initiative in uniting the divided Church. It was impossible for the Evangelical Churches to return to fellowship with Rome when the decisive point of dispute was handled in this way. They could not surrender truth to unity.” This surrender of truth to unity is well under way in recent Catholic-Protestant documents to achieve a superficial unity against secularism.

Although Scripture alone was the Reformer’s position in the sixteenth century, today critical methods are placed above Scripture by some Protestant scholars just like the Magisterium is placed above Scripture in Catholicism. When Scripture is not supreme, when Scripture doesn’t interpret Scripture, tradition usurps Scripture’s interpretive role whether in Catholic or Protestant hands. This is one foundational reason why more harmony between Catholics and Protestants exists today than in the sixteenth century. In other words, Protestantism has changed.

**The missing context**

Salvation, of course, is much broader than justification. The gulf between sinners and the Savior is uncrossable from the sinner’s side. It took God to come from His side and cross the abyss in order to rescue humans. Salvation requires the life, death, resurrection, and present ministry of the Savior. Salvation involves justification, sanctification, and final
glorification. It requires the work of the Holy Spirit, who restores the image of God, damaged by sin.

Salvation involves a work of re-creation, and only God can create. That’s why Scripture speaks of salvation in three tenses: those who “were saved” (Rom. 8:24, ESV); those “being saved” (1 Cor. 1:18, ESV); and those who “will be saved” (Matt. 24:13, ESV). Salvation is a process, beginning with the new birth (John 3:3–7), and ending in glorification at the second advent of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51–55). Salvation is God’s answer to the problem of sin. Because sin is law-breaking (1 John 3:4), resulting in death (Rom. 6:23), Christ died to pay for human sin (Isa. 53:5). Calvary was no mere revelation of God’s love—it was redemption. In dying Christ maintained the unchangeableness of His law. He revealed the truth about Calvary. This is not addressed in the current Catholic-Protestant debate.

Salvation needs to be studied in the context of the relational Trinity. Salvation is not the result of human works of merit as our Roman friends believe, nor is it God’s work of deciding human destiny in eternal decrees as our Reformed friends believe. The former looks at salvation as a human work, the latter looks at salvation as a divine decree. The latter view was launched to counter the other view. Both theologies need to consider salvation in the context of the relational Trinity.

The inner history of the relational Trinity is an eternal covenant of love. Among the Persons of the Trinity there lies an eternal reciprocal love, so that each Person loves the other Two, and in so doing, loves God and fellow beings, the very essence of the law as enunciated by Christ (Matt. 22:37–40). The nature of God is love (1 John 4:8–16), and God’s inner history of Trinitarian love demonstrates that the law is a transcript of Their character. Sin is more than law-breaking (1 John 3:4), it is a broken relationship (Rom. 14:23: “everything that does not come from faith is sin” [NIV]). Sin breaks a relationship with the Trinity. Salvation, on the other hand, is a restoration of a relationship with the Trinity. This means that the covenant relationship between the Trinity and humans reflects the covenant relationship within the Trinity. In fact, the covenant relationship in the inner dynamic of the Trinity overflows into the outer dynamic between the Trinity and humans. Believers will love God and fellow beings, and keep God’s law through covenant communion with the relational Trinity.

Therefore, when Scripture states that salvation is by faith alone and is not dependent on human works (Eph. 2:7, 8), we have a fundamental truth. Salvation is solely the result of God’s love and grace towards sinners. Because of what God has done through Christ, He declares us to be righteous. Justification is not an infusion of anything into our lives; nor do our good works contribute anything to the salvation process. However, a saved person is saved for good works, not by good works. Saved persons will manifest a saved experience in their lives through works of obedience. As Christ said, loving God is revealed by keeping His law (John 14:15). Sanctification means, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20, NIV; cf. Phil. 2:13). This proclaims the truth about Calvary.

The essence of law-keeping is demonstrated in the eternal history of the Trinity. Their reciprocal love for one another never changes, for the law is as immutable as God. Scripture declares that God does not change (Mal. 3:6) and that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:5, NIV). That is why the law was written in the hearts of believers in the old covenant historical period (Deut. 5:29; 6:4; 11:13; 30:6, 10; Isa. 51:7) as well as in the new covenant historical period (Jer. 31:31–33). Salvation has always included law-writing on hearts and minds for salvation is restoration, changing law-breaking rebels into law-keeping believers. Scripture says saints “obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12, NIV). The importance of law-keeping in salvation seems to be missing in the Catholic-Protestant debate.

The union Christ prayed for was not a mere papering over of differences and pretending that there is agreement. Christ prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17, NIV). May “all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21, NIV). That’s real union. The relational Trinity is united in love and truth, and no other union will answer Christ’s prayer or combat secularism, because it is, itself, secular. So leaders pushing for Catholic-Protestant union are on the wrong road, journeying away from, rather than towards, true union.

2. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 34.
6. Ibid., 36; see also 45.
9. Schroeder, 46.
12. Ibid., 441.
18. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4:1, 626.
The book of Revelation and reality

Having started my doctoral studies, I was determined that for my dissertation I was going to look at the theme of cosmic conflict in the book of Revelation. I did so, realizing that the bulk of current scholarship had relegated the book of Revelation to nothing more than a critique of the Roman imperial system.¹ In this paradigm, the beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1–10) is the Roman Empire; the wounded head is the emperor, Nero, thinly veiling the myth of 
Nero redivivus;² and the beast from the earth (13:11–18) is the imperial cult or the imperial priesthood in Asia Minor.³ Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Wilhelm Bousset said that “the observation that the core of the prophecy in the Apocalypse refers to the then widely held expectation of Nero redivivus is in my opinion an immovable point that will not again be surrendered, the rocher de bronze [rock of bronze] of the contemporary historical interpretation against which all contrary points of view so far have been dashed to pieces.”⁴

As if that was not bad enough, my university supervisors leaned in that same direction in regards to the book’s meaning. However, emboldened by the text of Revelation, and the work of Richard Bauckham and Jon Paulien on John’s use of the Old Testament,⁵ I did not want to give up on the cosmic conflict theme.

This article reveals some of what I found.

A different genre

For starters, in my chapter on method, I indicate that the genre of Revelation is ambiguous. It does not univocally belong to apocalyptic genre and is probably best classified as prophetic (if generic classification is deemed absolutely necessary). Determining genre is important, of course, but clarity on this point can be bought at too a high price. Loosening Revelation from the company of generic apocalypses, allowing it to be read more as a second Ezekiel, for instance, than as a second Daniel, opens the book to more nuanced readings.⁶

Having eased the book out of the straitjacket of genre, I wanted to allow Revelation—like other notable books in the Bible—to treat us to “the antagonism between sensory appearance and meaning”⁷ rather than to be confined to the visceral and unsubtle intimations of generic apocalypses. “The simple notion that a text means what it says is always inadequate, but with Revelation is always wrong. Revelation does not mean what it says, it means what it means,” says David Barr.⁸

This does not mean that determination of meaning is beyond reach. Rather, this is a reminder that a prima facie reading is inadequate. Revelation’s disclosures are reserved for “anyone who has an ear” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9), and it calls for a mind that has wisdom (13:18; 17:9). Revelation is in the business of “aural circumcision,”⁹ and its disclosures depend not only on what is said but also on what is heard.

The importance of details

A central element, I believe, is the personage on the opposing side in the conflict portrayed in Revelation. However some scholars claim that this element can be safely brushed to the side at no loss to interpretation. In Saving God’s Reputation, I start my argument on this point by beginning with the end of the book.¹⁰ The beast and the false prophet (the Roman Empire and the imperial priesthood in Asia Minor in critical interpretations) are now removed from the stage (19:20). Only the dragon, “that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan” (20:2, NIV; cf. 12:9), is left. For a figure that is supposedly a mythological “stock” character (as he has been deemed by some scholars), Satan is given a lot of attention in Revelation. He is bound, and then released under the compelling logic that he must be released (20:1–3). Despite this prominence, one interpreter tried to evade the whole issue by arguing that John left it to an unintelligent disciple to finish the book, and the disciple failed miserably.¹¹ Others have said that the seer simply has lost interest in what he is describing.¹²

My interpretation, in contrast, takes neither approach. It recognizes that the text should be read as it stands, and that the text, as it stands, allots to the figure of Satan a central role in the cosmic conflict.

God’s reputation?

Along with the character of Satan in the book of Revelation, a larger issue exists: how does the book make God look? Anton Vögtle says that God “is not the only one who is at work in this world—as the Apocalypse makes so abundantly clear.”¹³ Few observations are as
important as this one. On the terms of Revelation, the devastation that unfolds in the sequence of the seals (6:1–8:1) increased a notch higher in the sequence of the trumpets (8:2–11:19), until evil finally takes off its gloves with nothing to restrain it in the sequence of the bowls (16:1–21), is not circumlocution of divine activity (although some of the most astute interpreters of Revelation see it as that). John, it seems, goes out of his way not only to show the demonic quality of the action but also to link the action and the acting subject with such clarity that the reader virtually finds the passport, driver’s license, fingerprints, and copious amounts of DNA of the acting subject at the scene.

The divine reputation looks better if one sees these calamities as unambiguous, unmitigated demonic activity. Divine permission must be distinguished from divine agency. Divine permission poses problems of its own, but these problems are ameliorated by the recognition that the acting subject in Revelation’s relentless portrayal of destruction has claimed to be something other than what he is.

**The silence of the Lamb**

The suspense that accompanies the story of the losing side in the cosmic conflict is dwarfed by the stunned silence that accompanies the presentation of the winning side (5:3; 8:1). Jesus is not an imperial figure; in Revelation He is “the Lamb.”

Loren L. Johns draws out three crucial elements concerning Revelation’s Lamb Christology. First, “the lamb is declared worthy precisely because it was slaughtered (5:9).” Second, having been slaughtered is an essential part of the Lamb’s identity (5:12; 13:8); it is constitutive of Jesus’ experience and character. Third, the slaughter that comes to view does not refer to sacrifice for sin in the sacrificial cult, set to soothing organ music, “for the language is that of butchery and murder, not ritual sacrifice.”

Also, just as Jesus in the Gospel of John reveals what God is like, the Lamb’s role in Revelation is revelatory. The slaughtered Lamb appears “in the midst of” the divine throne in heaven (5:6, KJV; cf. 7:17) in order to show that “Christ’s sacrificial death belongs to the way God rules the world.”

What comes to light, then, is not an imperial figure bringing the rebellious to heel by power. “[N]o one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it” (5:3, NKJV), says John. Why does he say that? Is his main point that other potential candidates for the task lack the Lamb’s pedigree for this task? Or does it have (as I see it) a persuasive intent of the order that “absolutely no one else would have solved the cosmic conflict this way”? 

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Eye for an eye

There is, though, another element regarding the character of God. The logic of retribution tends to dominate the interpretations of Revelation, as when John J. Collins—fluenced by his decision to assign the book to the apocalyptic genre—finds in Revelation “the projection into the future of what was unfulfilled in the past. Jesus did not destroy the wicked in his earthly life, but he would return with supernatural power to complete the task.”22 Was the notion of “an eye for an eye” only temporarily suspended (Exod. 21:24; Matt. 5:38–42), to be recalled into service in Revelation in double measure (Rev. 18:6)? Does God, at the very end, send fire from heaven against God’s opponents, burning them alive (20:9)?

My suggestion is that the reality of cosmic conflict that plays out in Revelation offers other options.23 Specifically, as to the mysterious binding and release of Satan (20:1–10), I suggest that it is the logic of freedom, not the logic of lex talionis (law of retaliation) “that leads to Satan’s release, and it is within the logic of freedom, precisely the value said to be lacking in the divine character, that Satan proceeds to work his definitive undoing (20:7–9).”24

Conclusion

Though often seen as a book revealing the future, Revelation also should be read as a message that illumines the present. The ideology of Revelation, right down to the self-designation of the book (apocalypsis), is the ideology of transparency (as against secrecy);25 the ideology of accountability on the part of the ruling power; the commitment to the non-use of force; and the obligation to abide by this commitment on the part of those who hold to “the commandments of God as revealed by the faithfulness of Jesus” (see 13:10; 14:12).


3. The most important source for the imperial cult as the referent for the beast from the earth is S. R. F. Price, Ritual and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), see also Steven Friesen, Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5–131.


5. According to Bauckham (The Climax of Prophecy, xi), Revelation’s allusions to the Old Testament are “meant to recall all the Old Testament context, which thereby becomes part of the meaning the Apocalypse conveys, and to build up, sometimes by a network of allusion to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of Old Testament prophecy,” cf. also J. Paulsen, Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Allusions and the Interpretation of Rev 8:1–7 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988).


14. The term liturgy is used a total of twenty-one times in Revelation (8:2; 6:4 [twice]; 6:8; 11:1; 7:2; 8:3; 9:1; 9:5; 11:5; 11:13, 12:5 [twice]; 13:7 [twice]; 13:14; 13:15; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4. Five of these occurrences are “positive” (8:1; 11:1; 11:1; 19:8, 20:4), describing privileges given to the redeemed. One is ambivalent (7:2). The remaining instances refer to permission or assignment. David Aune, Revelation 3 vols. (WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1997), II:394, 419) accepts the traditional idea of the paxiam curvium but notes that the expression by itself cannot resolve whether the “divine enablement” refers to a positive or negative activity. As to the trumpet sequence, Borders (Revelation, 134, 135) is convinced that “all the plagues come from heaven,” are not caused by independent powers, and proceed ultimately “from the sovereign hand of the one God.” Jürgen Rüffell, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5–131.


17. Ibid, emphasis added.


19. Tonstad, Saving God’s Reputation, 141. Carl (Revelation, 75), configuring persuasion in a way that deserves a better story line than he gives it, writes that “omnipotence is not to be understood as the power of unlimited coercion, but as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible power of self-negating, self-sacrificing love.”


21. What is left for God to do when the losing side has exhausted its powers of destruction (Rev. 20)? The losing side conceives some covenants, seeing consequences rather than retribution at work: (1) fire from below (8:17); (2) fire from within (Ezek. 29:18); (3) self-destruction in the Old Testament antecedent to Revelation’s eschatological battle (Rev. 20:9; Ezek. 38:21; 4) self-destruction and dissolution in the tanks of the losing side explicitly featured in Revelation (17:19) even to the point to suggest that when the beast and false prophet are “thrown alive into the fire” (19:20), they meet the consequences by the hand of those who feel aggrieved by them; (5) self-destruction as featured in other apocalyptic voices (14:19, 20; cf. 1 Enoch 100:2–9; 6) Origen’s notion (First Principles 2.20.4) “that every sinners kindles for himself the flame of his own fire, and is not plunged into a fire which has been previously kindled by someone else or which existed before him” (?); (7) two more covenats, perhaps the most significant, that I leave unmentioned here.


Looking for something different? Choosing a college is one of those big life decisions involving a major investment of time and money. Prospective college students have an amazing array of details to consider as they decide where to enroll. For Christian students, additional details come into play. Which college offers an experience compatible with their lifestyle and belief system? Encourage students in your congregation to choose a distinctively Christian and distinctively Seventh-day Adventist college. We combine the best of both worlds—excellent academics set in a faith-affirming environment.

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Jon Paulien, author of multiple books on Revelation and other topics, has packed the book of Revelation into a daily devotional book—a unique contribution. The author covers John’s entire Apocalypse. As typical for daily devotional books, one page is reserved for one calendar day. In this case, a respective daily devotional consists first of the Bible text, second, an explanation, and third, a personal prayer. Normally, the daily Bible text(s) contain sections with boldface type. On these bolded words, the author focuses his attention and interpretation. Since decisions to take a passage from Revelation instead of dealing with a single verse. An appendix covers references used in the daily readings. The daily prayers are short, to the point, open, and honest. One can identify with them.

From one day to the next, the daily readings are quite different in style. Some contain illustrations, real-life stories, or poems that are appealing and practical spiritual messages but hardly interpret the respective biblical text. On other days, the author provides short, exegetical insights into the biblical text. These are very valuable for those who long for more than a superficial acquaintance with Revelation. A third category contains elements of both—exegesis and practical application. The author has to be lauded for a judicious mixture of approaches when moving from one day to another. In this way, the messages do not become too technical or too simple and may satisfy various audiences. Also, the book does not become quickly outdated and can be used in one calendar or another.

When it comes to theological insights, some readers would differ here and there from what the author has presented, but overall, this great book can help people fall in love again with the book of Revelation and the Lord of this book.

—Reviewed by Ekkehardt Mueller, ThD, DMin, associate director, Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

A computer program for congregational pastors

I have been using the Church Membership Directory (CMD) program for more than 20 years, and I find it very helpful. CMD is relatively easy to use and very versatile. The developer is constantly improving the program, and he is very accessible anytime I need help or clarification with certain features. He takes seriously the input and suggestions from users and incorporates them into updated versions.

CMD allows me to keep lots of information about individuals and families. It can track such things as birthdays, anniversaries, attendance, offices and committees, talents, activities, and visits from the pastor. It is helpful for providing statistics and information for denominational reports. Newsletter mailings are a breeze, mail-merges are a snap, and smaller lists for groups within the congregation are easily set up, which can be printed in a variety of formats. It can track interests as they develop a relationship with my church. A separate contributions module is very useful for producing statements of giving, as well as reconciling deposits and bank statements. Security features limit access of sensitive information to authorized users.

It is easy to print church directories with CMD. There are a variety of formats to choose from, as well as flexibility in determining the output form. The program has the capability to store photos of both individuals and families. There is even an option to give congregants a digital copy of the church directory for their home computer. Members can then easily put in updated copies of the information as the church office makes them available.

CMD is reasonably priced, making it affordable even for small parishes. It is flexible and can be adapted to a great many functions.

For information about the latest version of this program, contact softwareforministry.com.

—John Blewitt, pastor, Faith Presbyterian Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, United States
Lutheran Denomination Adopts Statement on Worship

St. Louis, Missouri, United States—To help the nearly 6,200 congregations of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) come to a “God-pleasing harmony” on the issue of worship, the LCMS Council of Presidents recently and unanimously adopted a “Theses on Worship” after two years of study and discussion.

In October 2009, LCMS President Gerald B. Kieschnick sent the document via email to the synod’s 35 district presidents for distribution to pastors and other church leaders throughout the country. The document includes eight theses based on Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. The theses do not impose a certain style of worship, but rather encourage great care “in choosing forms, rites, and ceremonies because they either support or hinder true worship.” The theses state that “forms of true worship are in accord with the Word of God.”

Some highlights include:

- The Scriptures and Confessions give the people of God considerable freedom in choosing those forms, rites, and ceremonies that aid the worship of God.
- Uniformity in forms, rites, and ceremonies while desirable, is not essential to the unity of the Church.
- The polarization that is affecting the Church concerning the issue of forms, rites, and ceremonies is sinful and hinders the proclamation of the Gospel.

“The Council of Presidents is keenly aware of the diversity of worship practices in LCMS congregations,” wrote Kieschnick in a memorandum sent via email with the theses. “This diversity in many instances has resulted in disharmony and even polarization. In order to foster God-pleasing harmony in this matter the COP encourages pastors, worship leaders, musicians, and other church leaders to engage in prayerful conversation with one another, in submission to God’s Holy Word and the Lutheran Confessions.”

While acknowledging the diverse opinions that exist around worship, Kieschnick said the district presidents are committed to helping the synod reach harmony on the issue. [LCMS/Vicki Biggs]

First Festival of Religious Freedom in Colombia Attracts 15,000

Bogotá, Colombia—A historic Festival of Religious Freedom was held September 26, 2009, in Bogotá, Colombia. Fifteen thousand people attended the event—the largest convocation of religious freedom ever organized in that country where, in years past, many were persecuted for their religious beliefs. Fortunately, the situation has changed in Colombia where religious liberty is now a reality.

The Coliseo de Camping was the sports arena chosen for the event that was part of a worldwide chain of festivals of this type. John Graz, director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, said the intent of the event organizers was to cover all the continents with great celebrations in stadiums, coliseums, gymnasiums, and churches. The main idea behind the festivals is to give thanks for religious liberty and create a positive environment of freedom and peace for the gospel proclamation.

Álvaro Uribe Vélez, president of the Republic of Colombia, spent more than an hour with the delegates who represented a broad range of faith communities—including Jews, Muslims, and Christians. He answered questions related to religious freedom, reaffirmed religious liberty as a fundamental human right supported by his government, and considered that historic congress of religious freedom as “a generator of peace for the nation,” says Pastor Álvaro Niño Escobar, co-organizer of the event. [Alfredo Garcia-Marenko]
**First “Christian Parents Today” conference**

** Orebro, Sweden — More than 100 parents from different backgrounds and ages gathered October 9–11, 2009, for the first “Christian Parents Today” conference.**

The brainchild of this event, Carina Lillback Larsson, Children’s Ministries director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sweden, said that the conference was the fulfillment of a dream and hard work since 2008. Primarily directed to Seventh-day Adventist parents, it was also opened up to other parents.

Carina submitted articles to Christian family magazines and participated in local radio chat shows to promote the conference, with the result of 4 percent of the participants being outside the Adventist community.

The theme for the weekend was “Time Together.” It began in a practical way on Friday night, giving the participants the opportunity to have time together with God in praise and worship, and a story that introduced one of the recurring challenges of the weekend—“Time Thieves—How Do We Use Our Time?”.

During the Sabbath morning worship, Berny Carlsson, Family Ministries director of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sweden, shared five points that reflect how God treats us as His children and how we, in turn, should relate to our children: accept their uniqueness, affirm their value, trust them with responsibility, correct without condemning, and love them unconditionally.

“Quality time versus quantity time” was just one aspect of time considered by Carina Lillback Larsson as she and the participants explored the responsibilities of parents in helping their children develop their own spiritual experience.

Practical workshops ran simultaneously in the afternoons, covering topics such as Parenthood in the Bible, Learning Styles and How We Communicate, Help—I’m a Mum, Being a Dad to Teenagers, Creative Worships, Teenagers, and Sex and Alcohol. Each day ended with a panel discussion where the participants shared practical ways in which they had created time in their lives for their families.

The event ended with a practical discussion led by Paul Tompkins and certified family life educator Karen Holford, on how to create margins or spaces in our lives so that we have time with our families and, most importantly, time with God. [Audrey Andersson/TED News Staff/TED News]

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**Measuring the effectiveness of ministry**

After reading Thomas C. Fillinger’s article (“Measuring Ministry Effectiveness Objectively” — November 2009), I find myself asking the following:

1. By what standards do church administrators measure a local church? The ABCs of this article, or what? And would it not follow that pastors conform to the expectations of their superiors in leadership? Does there need to be a whole new culture of leadership to be copied by pastors and churches?

2. How many pastors and churches model this article? Few? Many? Any?

3. Does it seem that this article highlights process rather than heart hunger, spiritual revival, renewal, and reformation?

4. Having done 15 interim pastorates in retirement and seeing firsthand the stagnation, and watching struggling churches with bloated memberships and declining attendance, it seems that priority should be given to repentance, revival, and reformation rather than process.

—Philip W. Dunham, email

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**Thoughts of a young minister**

Thank you for Tom Hoehner’s helpful and insightful article (“Ten Things to Be Learned in Pastoral Ministry” — September 2009). I have only been in full-time ministry for two years and still have so much to learn; but I find it to be the greatest calling, and I am enjoying it immensely. Indeed there are hard times; but when I see the Lord changing peoples’ lives, the hard times fade into insignificance.

—Calvyn Jonker, associate pastor, Howick Baptist Church, Auckland, New Zealand
Happy, healthy new year — exercise and diet

As pastors, do the words “I’ll do it later” or “I don’t have time” sound familiar? Have you wanted to set goals in order to live a healthier lifestyle but needed a little push to get motivated? It’s a new year, and no matter where you are, it is an opportunity for a fresh start.

Think about the different elements that have prevented you from establishing a regular exercise regimen and eating a healthy meal each day. What are some common barriers to exercise and healthy meal planning? What types of exercise are important to include? How can you eat a complete, balanced diet?

Obesity is still a major public health concern as the latest projections globally were approximately 1.6 billion overweight adults and at least 400 million obese adults in 2005.

The World Health Organization further estimates that by 2015, approximately 2.3 billion adults will be overweight and more than 700 million will be obese. At least 20 million children under that age of 5 years were overweight globally in 2005.*

By setting an example to your children and church congregations, you can help break the deleterious pattern. Research demonstrates the power of role modeling that can help increase awareness and education to change unhealthy health habits and behaviors, which can in turn ameliorate the health status.

Overcoming and breaking barriers to fitness

The most common excuse used with the topic of exercise is I don’t have enough time.

From visiting members to conducting various meetings, it can be pretty challenging.

• Squeeze in short, 10-minute walks throughout the day. Exercise does not have to be grueling and done hours on end.
• Get with your youth group. Play a sport or other outdoor activities. Time does not seem like a factor when you’re having fun with energetic people.
• Get up earlier in the day. You can spread it out to twice a week and add more on later.
• Play with your children or grandchildren. A game of tag or doing household duties together can build good family values as well as burn extra calories.

Other barriers to exercise are boredom, tiredness, laziness, or all of the above.

• Exercise does not have to be a chore. Spice it up. Try something new, creative, interesting, and fun.
• Gaining more energy is a benefit of exercise. Just take the first step and do it.
• Most physical activities and movement are beneficial to your health. If you like to garden, swim, or play tennis, go for it.

Exercise tips

Moderate exercise of 30 minutes, five days a week is recommended.

• Include a cardio workout such as running, biking, or swimming, which can help your heart rate get going. Heart disease is the number one common illness worldwide. Controlling risk factors can counteract serious health consequences.
• Strength training increases endurance, strength, toning of muscles, and aids in weight loss. If you do not have weights or other equipment accessible, you can start with push-ups and sit ups on the floor. Two sets of 15 repetitions are recommended. Adjust the intensity and frequency at your own risk.
• Walk more. It is recommended to walk 8,000–10,000 steps daily.
• If possible, ride your bicycle or walk instead of taking other modes of transportation.
• Prevent a sedentary lifestyle. For example, walk while using the phone; take a stretching break at your desk; use a chair to sit and then stand with proper posture for 50 repetitions.

Meal planning

• Increase consumption of fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains (examples: barley, brown rice, oats, and quinoa) legumes, nuts, and seeds. Variety is the key.
• Reduce sugars, sodium, and foods high in fat. Many of these foods are shown to be addictive and it’s important to alter your mind and taste buds and choose other palatable foods.
• Limit eating out during the week, and work together with your spouse or family to take healthy meals to work or on the go. Accountability helps to encourage healthy eating.
• Bring your favorite fruit with you. The more filling and fibrous, the better it is for you.
• When you travel or go on a vacation make healthy choices and eat in moderation.

In order to take better care of others, take care of yourself. Remember to recite 1 Corinthians 3:16 as a reminder that your body is God’s holy temple. This new year, add a new routine of fun-filled physical activity and nutritious meals by taking gradual steps to a healthier, new you.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.


Medical consultants: Allan Handysides and Peter Landless.
Following the worship service where I was the guest speaker, the pastor and his wife invited me to their apartment for lunch. I wanted to accept the gracious invitation, but wondered if they could afford to feed another—for they lived in a country that had serious financial challenges. To not accept would have been inappropriate; so I accepted, deciding that I would leave a meaningful gift.

As we waited for lunch, the young pastor told me he wanted to show me something important. His face brightened as he invited me to see his book collection that was in the corner of the room—a rather small collection, but very special to him. With great enthusiasm he showed me a special section of five or six books and said, “These books are very special to me for they help me with my ministry.” I recognized them for they were published by the Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In addition to the content of the books, they were special because they were affordable—provided to this pastor and thousands of others around the world at less than one-tenth the retail price.

The concept of providing needed resources to pastors—especially in economically challenged areas of the world—was the dream of James A. Cress, who, after a brief illness, died November 26, 2009. Since his death, words of condolence to his wife, Sharon, and his family have been spoken and words of commendation for his ministry have been expressed by many around the world. On this page—a page where we published his “Pastor’s Pastor”—I wish to express appreciation for his commitment of providing for the needs of pastors around the world. Much could be written about his contributions, but I will highlight some of his outstanding achievements:

- James Cress’s “Pastor’s Pastor,” first published in January 1993, has been a blessing to clergy. Since 1993, approximately 200 “Pastor’s Pastor” articles have been published. The title itself is significant. In the Adventist Church, one of the main roles of ministerial secretaries includes providing support to congregational pastors, and Jim’s “Pastor’s Pastor” column reflected this mission.
- Since 1928, Ministry has been provided to Adventist clergy, and since the mid-1970s it has been made available (six issues yearly) to clergy of other denominations. Jim Cress, during his leadership, expanded that program and now more than 85,000 receive the journal. Additionally, a new way of providing continuing education was introduced in 1998. When I proposed the concept of broadcast-by-satellite live seminars to clergy around the world, Jim enthusiastically embraced and supported the concept and thousands have benefited.
- James Cress’s commitment to pastors was also exhibited when, in 1995, he energetically started local training seminars for Adventist ministers around the world. Scores of such events were held over the next several years, and more than 90 percent of Adventist ministers have participated.

He will be remembered for numerous other contributions, including the start-up and expansion of Elder’s Digest—a journal for key leaders in the churches, and his support of pastoral families and spouses, evangelism, and training of students for ministry. He will be remembered as a pastor and as a pastor to pastors. The pictures here are only snapshots of some of moments in his life. The contributions we have mentioned are only a sampling of his ministry. We thank God for James A. Cress’s ministry and rejoice in the promise of the resurrection.

Those who wish to send a message of appreciation or a message to Sharon, Jim’s wife, please write or email us at ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.

--Nikolaus Satelmajer, editor
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Lawrence Geraty is the President Emeritus of La Sierra University. He grew up as a citizen of the world in a Christian missionary family who ministered in China, Burma, Hong Kong, and Lebanon. Educated in seven different countries and various states across the USA set him on a lifelong course committed to the values of diversity. Lawrence Geraty earned a PhD with distinction from Harvard University in Hebrew Bible and biblical archaeology, taking examinations in 10 languages. In his notable scholarly career, Dr. Geraty has received numerous honors, including a Fulbright Fellowship and serving as advisor to former Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan.

Marguerite Shuster is the Harold John Ockenga Professor of Preaching and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. She joined the School of Theology faculty in 1992 after serving as an adjunct assistant professor. Her courses include Homiletics, Systematic Theology, Making Doctrine Live, and various preaching practices. Marguerite Shuster’s published books include The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners (2004), Perspectives on Christology: Essays in Honor of Paul K. Jewett (1991), and Power, Pathology, Paradox: the Dynamics of Evil and Good (1987). She also edited and completed Jewett’s Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human (1996) and has published many articles, sermons, chapters, and reviews.

Roy Adams is the Associate Editor of the Adventist Review and Adventist World, serving in this position since 1988. He was born in the Caribbean, and received his education at schools in Grenada, Trinidad, Canada, and the United States. The bulk of his pastoral work was in the Ontario and Quebec provinces of Canada. After obtaining a PhD in Theology from Andrews University, he lectured at what is now the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS) in the Philippines. From that base, Roy Adams’ teaching and speaking appointments took him to many other Asian countries, and he continues to be a highly sought after international speaker at major clergy professional development meetings.

Miroslav Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School, and Founder and Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture. A native of Croatia, Dr. Volf has forged a theology of forgiveness and non-violence in the face of the horrendous violence experienced in Croatia and Serbia in the 1990s. Dr. Volf is a highly awarded author. Free of Charge: Giving and Forging in a Culture Stripped of Grace was selected as the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Lenten Book for 2006. Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation received the 2002 Grawemeyer Award. He has also been featured on National Public Radio’s “Religion and Ethics Newsweekly.”

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