Student Writing Contest Winners
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**Philemon: The social implications of transformative relationships**

The multiple layers of relationships that connect Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus are constantly in tension; but in exploring these points of tension, one can gain an understanding of what is actually being birthed through the relationships.

*Melody J. Wachsmuth*

**“Let both of them grow together”: Church discipline in the Gospel of Matthew**

Matthew, the Gospel writer, groups various sayings of Jesus to help us appreciate how different statements were, in fact, to be understood in the wider context of the teachings of Jesus.

*Luca Marulli*

**Our eternally righteous God: Paul’s great controversy theme in Romans 11**

The author of this article suggests that Paul’s focus is profoundly apocalyptic and classic Seventh-day Adventist theology.

*Elizabeth Östring*

**Music in worship—a look at a difficult but important subject**

Musical worship should be comprised of a God-centered activity, entirely focused on Him.

*Ryan Hablitzel*

**Melchizedek people: The function and role of general revelation**

The author seeks to present a balanced approach to the topic of general revelation by focusing on the figure of Melchizedek and the apostle Paul’s references in Romans to the revelation of God in nature.

*Martin Monacell*

**Trends in biblical hermeneutics (part 1 of 2)**

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, orthodoxy or pure doctrine was the primary concern of the Protestant confessions in both the Lutheran and Reformed churches.

*Hans K. LaRondelle*
Emergent theology

I read with joy John Jovan Markovic’s two-part article about the Emergent Church movement (“The Emerging Church: A Call to Action and Authenticity,” March 2010, and “The Emergent Theology: Voices of Confusion,” May 2010), in which he clearly spells out its inherent dangers. With the gradual and insidious changes creeping into our church and with many clergy and others fearful to call sin by its right name, I urge you to communicate more of this message to our church members. This message is not just for our clergy. We all need it!

—Janet C. Neumann, email

Lifelong congregational ministry

Van Charles Blake was right on target in his article titled, “Pastor For Life” (July–August 2010). If only church administrators would take his eight ideas into serious consideration.

I spent the last ten years of pastoral ministry in isolation from conference leaders. In those ten years, only two leaders visited me and my family. A conference president made a speech at a ministers’ meeting in which he stated he loved us and appreciated our work. I challenged him to back his statement up with personal contact with me and my family. He said he had a plan, but that plan never materialized in a visit to my home.

I conducted a seminar for a group of pastors and their wives on the topic of clergy loneliness. None of them would talk about their loneliness in the meetings, but they expressed it in private. The negative effects of chronic loneliness are staggering. It weakens morale and the pastor’s ability to minister; yet pastors seem to receive little support. At a camp meeting, I presented the devotional messages in the prayer tent. After each meeting, the spouses of pastors would ask to speak to me privately. I spent two to three hours each day listening to their lonely cries. That was years ago; but the ache in my heart for those lonely spouses still lingers in my mind.

Dr. Blake, keep speaking up for a segment of the church that suffers in silence and loneliness.

—Larry Yeagley, Gentry, Arkansas, United States

Violence against women

As it relates to the article titled “End It Now Today!” (July–August 2010), I have been listening to my wife for more than ten years complain about our church and the lack of interest in this subject. She is eager to read any article that seems to address the issues of abuse in any area but especially the Adventist Church, as she says the articles are nonexistent if deeply hidden in a magazine.

I’ve attended seminars and read countless articles that she has passed on and I don’t think, until receiving this one article, that I actually took the time to really seriously read it. The campaign is just that, a campaign, if it does not appear to have the support of the clergy. The article addresses this very issue and I, too, am guilty of not doing enough and will do all I can to do better.

I, myself, when quizzed by my wife about when was the last time I preached on domestic violence, I dropped my head in shame as I told her after 23 years of preaching, not one of the countless sermons have been on domestic violence.

In my clinical settings, I’ve ministered to these women and addressed their needs by praying with them and referring them to the social workers who are trained in these areas, failing to focus more on the spiritual side of them. I never really gave much thought to the fact that there were women and men within our pews needing more than just the GOOD NEWS.

We should do whatever it takes to bring this issue out into the open. Many agencies are eager and willing to provide assistance as well as welcome volunteers. Training volunteers within our churches to know the difference between a “prayer meeting” and a “support group” is vital. Many of the agencies offer modules and, as clergy, we can adapt many of the programs to be woven into everything from Sabbath School to Divine worship. Making our churches safe places is our responsibility.

—Robert Olsey, email

Continued on page 13
Look around you

Most articles in this issue are written by ministerial students who are among the winners of our second Student Writing Contest. When we commence these writing contests, we wait with great anticipation to read the submissions and anticipate outstanding work from the students. Once again, they have fulfilled our hopes. I believe that our readers will likewise appreciate the quality of these articles and that these writings will help each of us personally and professionally.

These winning submissions were chosen after each were thoroughly evaluated by up to five individuals, reviewed once more by the editors, then edited for publication. The evaluation process was anonymous. Neither the reviewers nor the editors knew who the writers were or from where they came until after the winners were chosen. We congratulate each of them and thank God for the quality of young people studying for ministry.

With the publication of these articles we are announcing another Ministerial Student Writing Contest. If you know of any individuals preparing to be pastors, please encourage them to consider sending an article for admission into the contest. The financial reward will help them; but more than that, they will be blessed by their research and writing, and their manuscripts will be a blessing to others. We have published the details of the contest on our Web site at www.MinistryMagazine.org.

Your replacement

While we think of those now studying for pastoral ministry, let us also focus on those who may replace present ministerial personnel. I am not suggesting you need to leave your current assignment to make room for those newly graduated, but I am suggesting that we need to think ahead and look at young people who are good candidates for pastoral appointments. God appreciates our work, but He always beckons those individuals who enthusiastically live and effectively proclaim the gospel. I am asking you to take specific action in recruiting others to be ministers of the gospel. Here are some suggestions:

Ask. Look around and ask some of the young people if they have considered preparing for ministry. Ask the Lord to guide you in this process, and He will lead you to the appropriate individuals. While I refer particularly to young people, I would not want us to forget mature individuals who also show promise for ministry. In many countries, seminaries have a large ratio of older persons preparing for ministry. Many of them have succeeded in other careers, and God has been speaking to them about planning for ministry. A word of encouragement from you may be just what they need to help them make the decision. Not too long ago, I had the opportunity of talking with the captain of the airplane on which I had flown. While still working as a pilot, he was studying to become a pastor; and he was looking for his first assignment with great anticipation.

Some may question the need to ask individuals if they might consider ministry as a summons from God, for does God not do the calling? The reality is that God often uses others to help us in the decision-making process. I started thinking of studying for ministry only after a young pastor asked me if I had considered going into the ministry. Actually, up to that point, I had not—and I explained that to him. Once he asked the question, the thought of ministry resided in my mind, and after several months, I decided to change my plans and study for ministry. Your question may be just what someone needs to hear. Ask them.

Tell them to ask God. While your encouragement to consider ministry may be pivotal in the decision-making process, each individual needs to be invited by God to study for ministry. Encourage the prospective candidate to ask God for guidance. The call to effective, spiritual, and long-lasting ministry is more than a human appeal. God beckons the person. Human beings, as outlined above, can be important in the process of preparing for ministry, but God’s call is an absolute. Unless God asks one to ministry there is no real request. While our emotions are part of this conversation with God, the summons from God is much more than an emotional reaction. Such an appeal comes only through much prayer as we follow God’s guidance.

Tell them to prepare. Remind the individuals whom you believe would make good ministers that along with the call from God, a need for human preparation also exists. While such preparation for ministry may vary from one denomination to another, and from one country to another, this remains a necessity. A candidate may see another pastor preach and conclude that they can preach with only a little practice—not realizing that ministry involves much more. Those who do not want to be trained may want to be pastors; but their commitment would usually not be sufficient to sustain them in ministry. God’s call does not eliminate the need for thorough preparation.

Please do it

My final request? Look around you for individuals whom you believe may be good candidates for ministry. They may be waiting to hear a word of encouragement from you and God’s church will be blessed.
Philemon:
Going beyond social barriers

Philemon, a Pauline letter reflecting the social norms of the first century Greco-Roman culture, has often been used in various debates surrounding the question of whether Paul supported slavery. Such a focus, however, misses the profundity of what Paul was asking Philemon to do within his cultural and social framework. In fact, because identification and adherence to one’s own ethnic identity and social norms seems intrinsic to our human nature, this article will explore the current significance of the theological themes in Philemon, highlighting its tension between cultural values and identification with Christ.

Historical context

Written while Paul was in prison, Philemon is intensely personal but very short. Most scholars consider it as representative of a letter of mediation or intercession, a common genre with other letters found in the same historical time frame. In order for us to understand the letter’s significance within its cultural milieu, we must first summarize a brief historical picture regarding slavery in the Greco-Roman world.

Slavery was inextricably interwoven within the strictly stratified Greco-Roman culture. The classes ranged from the upper echelon Romans, who governed the provinces militarily or politically, to near the bottom, which included the freedman or freedwoman, named thus after being released from slavery. At the very bottom, of course, were slaves.¹

Benjamin Isaac traces some of the attitudes toward slavery during the time period of Greco-Roman prominence. Although variance in thought existed, the social framework of the Greeks seemed to have been woven around what Aristotle called “natural slavery,” that is, asserting that those conquered or in slavery were actually inferior by nature. This was the natural and good order of things, therefore, that society honored these differences by having masters (or people groups) fulfill their role, while slaves performed their own roles. Because of this, both the Greeks and Romans saw those who were “born for slavery” as essentially immovable in their social context, even through the generations.²

Craig DeVos highlights this idea in relation to Philemon by asserting that “behavior is linked to background, form, or function,” and therefore even freedmen or freedwomen would experience very little difference in relationships, even through the generations.³ In short, simply demanding freedom from slavery for Onesimus would most likely have made little impact or difference, practically, for its present context. Within this framework, the themes of Philemon can be discussed.

The primacy of relationships

This short and succinct letter bursts with a multiplicity of relationships, both explicit and implied. The multiple layers of relationships that connect the three men are constantly in tension; a tension that arises between the social and cultural norms of the day and the evolving transformation that arises from Paul’s understanding of what being a “new creation” in Christ really means.⁴ In exploring these points of tension, one can gain an understanding of what is actually being birthed through the relationships.

One such tension includes Paul’s relationship with Philemon. He speaks of Philemon as an equal, using terms such as brother, co-worker, friend, and partner—all names that seem to be in reference to the gospel and ministry (Philemon 1, 7, 17). However, underlying these relationship markers are Paul’s subtle references to his authority, which would reflect the cultural norms. Paul was well within his rights of authority as a suffering prisoner for Christ, a teacher and a mentor, and old man worthy of respect, all of which would command Philemon’s obedience. For instance, he uses the phrase “command you to do your duty,” which speaks of his rightful power and authority that culture would bequeath him as an elder and teacher. Yet, in the same sentence, he refuses to abide by these “rules” for the sake of Philemon’s voluntary acquiescence on the basis of love (vv. 8, 9).

Paul also holds the dual role of creditor and redeemer in tension.
He mentions the debt that Philemon owes him (v. 19), most probably referring to his spiritual influence in Philemon’s life. Yet he chooses to not demand repayment, but rather appeals to something different. He also acts as a kind of redeemer to Onesimus by insisting on repaying any debt or harm that Onesimus has brought upon Philemon (v. 18).

Socially and culturally, the relationship existing between Onesimus and Philemon is that of slave and slaveholder. Although Paul had been radically changed through his encounter with Christ, he was still working out the gospel from within his culture. Since Onesimus was a slave, most likely Paul, at least initially, viewed him as such. And yet, he calls Onesimus his child and positions himself as his father, as well as also referring to him as a brother (vv. 10, 16). He acknowledges the cultural relationship Philemon and Onesimus have, but asks Philemon to redefine this relationship into a familial one, not necessarily affecting Onesimus’s standing and position in society, but rather fundamentally changing the way Philemon and Onesimus see themselves and each other. This radical proposition was possibly much more personally transformative than had Paul directly asked Philemon to free Onesimus. If Philemon had merely changed Onesimus’s outward social status, Philemon would still be free to think of Onesimus as inferior and a slave.

Paul connects God to this familial language at the beginning of the letter by calling God “our Father” (v. 1). Although this may be a standard salutation, it acts as a foundational force in these relationships, gives substance to Paul’s request of Philemon, and allows one to understand how Paul understood the believer’s familial relationship with God and, therefore, with a fellow believer. The importance of this point can be realized only when one sees Paul’s expansion of this idea in Galatians, as he declares that in Christ Jesus, “you are all children of God” (3:26). Curiously, in expanding this concept, Paul uses an analogy involving being enslaved and finishes his point by exclaiming, “So you are no longer a slave, but a child, and if a child, then also an heir, through God” (4:7). Although Paul does not refer to slavery in the social or cultural sense, his reference to the dichotomy between slave and child is poignant.

These relationship structures, fluctuating from the temporal to the eternal, from cultural norms to “new creation,” appear to be delineated by a central theme: the appeal for love—more than duty or obligation—to act as the transformational agent. Paul places himself in a somewhat vulnerable position; although he could command, he appeals. Although he could cancel Onesimus’s debt on the basis of his authority, he pays it. Paul desires that Philemon's relational shift be from the heart, thus allowing Philemon the power to choose to be transformed. This vulnerability and appeal to love also shows evidence of a new relational ethic being lived out by Paul. Although he recognizes his social and cultural status, he chooses not to act upon it in traditional forms. Instead, he sets his power aside out of love in order that Philemon’s “good deed might be voluntary” (v. 14).

**Thematic conclusions: Social manifestation of the new creation**

From this analysis, certain conclusions can be drawn. First, although new kinship relationships created out of a familial relationship with God transcend social and cultural relationships, they are still lived out within the social and cultural context, thereby creating numerous tensions. Paul does not necessarily condemn the social institution of slavery, but he asks Philemon to put his identity as a slaveholder behind that of their kinship bond with each other through Christ. He capitulates to the social structure by sending Onesimus back in the first place, yet challenges that same structure by asking him to be welcomed back the same way Paul, Philemon's spiritual father, would be welcomed—that...
is, in a position of high honor and respect. Second, love, operating in its truest sense, becomes primary in facilitating this true relational change. Paul’s deliberate refusal to formally use duty or obligation to compel Philemon’s obedience significantly displays what he must have really believed about the power of love to transform and compel. The fact that Paul does not ask Onesimus to be freed likely indicates his cultural trappings but also, perhaps, shows evidence of something deeper: as Isaac and DuVos point out, a freed slave is still captive to their own views about themselves as well as society’s stereotypes. How difficult would it have been at that time to think and treat a slave as an equal and brother or sister? The multiple levels of relationship between Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon illustrate the tension found in applying the gospel’s new creation of relationships in the middle of a social structure, particularly when confronted with the power brokers within that societal structure.

Although Paul, most likely, was the initiator of transformation in Onesimus, it is significant that Paul writes a letter of intercession to the person who holds the power in the relationship. Likewise, although transformation is always necessary on both sides of a relationship equation, the person or group holding the power often has a more difficult role to bring about a change. In Philemon’s case, Paul asks for a relinquishment of social power in order to manifest a fundamental change in God’s new order of relationships. This relinquishment of power brings about a fundamental identity shift: Philemon will no longer exercise his legal right as a slaveholder in a way that exerts relational power over Onesimus.

Another important factor rests on Paul’s assumption of Philemon’s prior example of living by love. In other words, Philemon was, apparently, a faithful and mature follower of Christ as well as a leader of his house church; Paul seems impressed by his love for “all the saints” and even expresses personal encouragement from it (vv. 4, 7). This factor seems a crucial precursor for what Paul is asking. If Philemon had been less mature, would Paul have merely commanded instead of asked?

Would this have wrought a fundamental personal change between Onesimus and Philemon? One can only speculate, but it is essential to reflect on this component in the analogy. For an individual to purposefully relinquish power in a relationship, the groundwork of mature faith and love must already be fostered in order to withstand the intensity of walking against cultural norms.

The church’s prophetic role: Relationships that transform culture

As we have seen, Paul focused on transformation of relationships rather than on the social structure. However, the social structure of any society is maintained and fostered by relationships. At this intersection, one can see the potency of Paul’s message. What are the sociocultural, economic, and/or political allegiances that prevent such a relational transformation today? Although this varies across nations and cultures, one of the current trends that significantly affects the church worldwide, both positively and negatively, is increasing global migration. One negative reality emerging from this phenomenon comprises significant social and political power differences within a given society, sometimes resulting in the overt and covert violence between the immigrant and native-born. The motivations behind these tensions are multivariate and interconnected: nationalism, issues of identity, economic fears, blaming others, religious differences, ethnic/tribal conflict, and a generalized fear of “the other.”

For example, in many Western countries, what kind of relationship should exist between an often affluent church and an immigrant church that has members without legal documentation? Similar to Philemon’s dilemma, how does one navigate one’s social norms and political governance with the transformed relationships that are essential to a fundamental change in identity found in Christ?

In fact, the tension of relationships exhibited by Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon demonstrate the difficulty of manifesting the horizontal consequences of being a new creation in Christ, if one’s nationalist, ethnic, or social identity conflicts with those of another believer. It seems that for true relationship transformation to take place, some kind of “identity dissonance” is required and, as Paul indicated, it must be voluntary. As Paul necessarily made his request to Philemon, the power broker, power relinquishment from the person(s) who holds greater societal power is necessary. Harris and Schaupp explore this concept in relation to the concept of “white privilege” in America. They argue that power can be relinquished by a voluntary identity displacement, or intentionally putting oneself in a minority position before one undergoes disintegration, in which an individual begins to form a new identity outside of the established norms.

One can see a difference in the two situations here. Paul talked about returning Onesimus into his original context, albeit under a different identity. For the relational transformation to take place, it was necessary for Onesimus and Philemon to “rub shoulders,” living out their new relational identity in their day-to-day interactions. For a person to move beyond the bounds of their socio-economic, ethnic, or cultural identity, however, a transformation of relationships with other cultures becomes possible only if the individual or group leaves the original context. Leaving one’s comfortable perspective and placing oneself into a situation where one rates as a minority, means leaving some kind of power behind.

Perhaps one of the most powerful and prophetic voices the church can have in this age of tension and fear
consists of purposively seeking and maintaining relationships that would require a laying down of power. How can a church truly partner with a church of another ethnicity in a way that does not promote the dominant’s power, but manifests a true equality, partnership, and love? For example, if there was an economic disparity between the two churches, one church might be inclined to take the beneficiary role, offering assistance in multiple ways. This in itself is not negative, of course. However, little or no transformation will have happened relationally, unless the dominant church allowed itself to be taught and ministered to by the other church. This may require the dominant church to adopt some of the other church’s cultural norms instead of assuming that the dominant power will set the standard.

In conclusion, the analysis of Philemon reveals that Paul does not talk about the concept of transformation or change in some remote context, but asks for it on a level that would affect both Philemon, and Onesimus’s day-to-day decisions and behavior. In fact, the relationship transformation apparent in Philemon seems to be a manifestation of Jesus’ prayer in John 17:23: “I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them.” Only through such truly transformative relationships, lived within the tension of cultural and societal norms, can the church influence the structures of society as a whole, and, at this intersection, the church’s prophetic voice can be heard.

4. See 2 Corinthians 5:16, 17. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version.
5. I actually mean Paul’s truest sense of which he expounds upon in 1 Corinthians 13. Particular definitions which are pertinent to this letter are: “It does not insist on its own way. . . . it believes all things, hopes all things…” (vv. 5, 7).
7. For example, consider the 2008 xenophobic violence in South Africa or the post 9/11 “Islamophobia” in the United States and parts of western Europe.
8. White privilege, as found in the United States, can be defined as the social, political, and cultural norms that give power or advantage to an individual or group of people because of their white skin color. According to Karen Brodkin, through the institution of slavery, whiteness was continually defined in opposition against blacks and American Indians. As one consequence of this dichotomy, race became the way America organized labor (70, 75). Even after slavery was abolished, menial jobs were often associated with someone who was not white. In fact, Brodkin asserts that because of this history, capitalism itself is racially structured (151). In the present time, although much has changed, white privilege continues to be fostered, albeit sometimes more subtly. See Karen Brodkin, How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
Factionalism within a congregation is no strange phenomenon. One faction, for example, may promote a theology (or ecclesiology) as rooted in biblical teachings, and too often offer proof texts to support this or that point of view. However, when the Gospel of Matthew was written, the Old Testament was available but access to Jesus’ words and deeds depended upon oral tradition and some written texts (mostly collections of sayings). Today, we have an even larger pool from which to draw our proof texts: both the Old and New Testaments. Just as today’s factional leaders use selected proof texts that support their position, ancient parties in the same community would appeal to some of Jesus’ sayings and parables to foster the legitimacy of their own points of view.

How do we approach the problem of such sectarian impulses? Matthew provides us with a strategy. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel of Matthew groups various sayings of Jesus to help us appreciate how different (sometimes apparently contrasting) statements were, in fact, to be understood in the wider context of the teaching of Jesus. By doing so, Matthew acknowledges the different points of view, and instead of refuting them, tries to give each party’s arguments a role, making them converge towards a fuller understanding of Jesus’ point of view.

To discipline or not to discipline?

Consider passages such as Matthew 7:15, 21 and 10:17. They clearly evidence a strong suspicion against the “false prophets” who constitute a threat to the Matthean community. In contrast, striking is the omission of the exorcism (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49) performed by an outsider and the rephrasing of Mark 9:40 (cf. Luke 9:50) in Matthew 12:30. Apparently, Matthew made no acknowledgment of outsider Christians.

Nevertheless, Matthew 12:49 is especially addressed to the members of his own community, rather than to people in general as in Mark 3:34 and Luke 8:21. Moreover, the strong group identity is not paired with a fierce sharpness in dealing with those who disqualify themselves from being members of the community.

Matthew surrounded his disciplinary instructions (Matt. 18:15–18) with the parable of the lost sheep (vv. 12–14), an injunction about unlimited
forgiveness (vv. 21, 22), and the parable of the unmerciful steward (vv. 23–35). William G. Thompson points out that Matthew “distinguished between the sheep going astray and one that was lost (Mt 18,12–14 = Lk 15,4–7) and separated the sayings about fraternal correction and unlimited forgiveness in order to expand and develop each theme (Mt 18,15a.21–22 = Lk 17,3–4).”3 In doing so, Matthew was strongly mitigating the attempt of the community to hysterically purge itself.4

Matthew 18 also has an appeal to the disciples to become like children and humble themselves (vv. 3, 4), and to receive others in the name of Jesus (v. 5). At the same time, they were exhorted to avoid despising or causing “little ones” to stumble (vv. 6, 10), even though they might be considered lost (v. 11).

If the Matthean community was struggling to maintain internal order, expelling some members would have been an inevitable choice in some instances. But, as J. Andrew Overman argues, Matthew “may have included this disciplinary process reluctantly,”5 while inviting the community to exert forgiveness and humble themselves (vv. 3, 4), and to receive others in the name of Jesus (v. 5). The letter of Ignatius seems to show that the Matthean community had to face the influence of the Pharisees fleeing Palestine as well as a new generation of Gentile Christian leaders.10 On the one hand, there were internal issues as Gentiles joined the ranks, and maybe a rural mind-set clashed with a more urban one; on the other hand, there were external frictions with other Jewish communities in the public arena.

Matthew, to counteract sectarian impulses coming from within his community, accounted for different (and probably incompatible) ideologies and attitudes in order to reorganize them into the more comprehensive picture given by Jesus’ historical teaching and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What Matthew wrote is not a monolithic theological treatise,11 but something that has more of the character of messages of instruction. In doing so, Matthew’s purpose was to facilitate a difficult, though vital and necessary, transition.

Matthew’s developing community

The Matthean community started under the influence of missionary Christian Jews coming from rural Palestine. After a couple of decades, the group evolved into an urban, economically stable, “comparatively wealthy” community.5

Robert Hann remarks that the “poor” and those who “hunger now” in Luke 6:20, 21 are changed into “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” in Matthew 5:6, and the injunction “Sell your possessions” of Luke 12:33 becomes “[do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth” in Matthew 6:19.5

The Matthean group probably experienced change and growth as the years passed. The letter of Ignatius seems to show that the Matthean community had to face the influence of the Pharisees fleeing Palestine as well as a new generation of Gentile Christian leaders.10 On the one hand, there were internal issues as Gentiles joined the ranks, and maybe a rural mind-set clashed with a more urban one; on the other hand, there were external frictions with other Jewish communities in the public arena.

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The parable of the tares and its explanation

To support this hypothesis, we move to the study of the parable of the tares and the tension between the parable and its explanation (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). Though Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the parable of the sower and its explanation, only Matthew contains the parable of the tares and its explanation.

Matthew 13:40, which claims to reveal the true meaning of the parable, omits the exhortation to patience and tolerance that characterizes the parable (cf. Matt 13:30, “Let both grow together”). The explanation emphasizing the destiny of the tares (v. 36, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field”) clearly indicates a change of perspective.

From a narrative point of view, the climax of the parable occurs in the interaction between the servants and their master. The master utterly discards the servants’ proposal (anticipated collection of the tares). The master’s order is an invitation to consider the present time’s tolerance as necessary and useful for the resolution of the problem: “Let both grow together” refers to the present time while maintaining the validity of a solution in the future. Although the future’s resolution does not belong to the servants, it is naturally rendered possible by their patience and required attitude to let grow.

Notice that the actions of the sower and the enemy in the parable are performed only once, and they are limited to the past.13 In the explanation, however, we witness a change in perspective: the Sower, now identified as the Son of man (v. 37), is the One who “soweth” (v. 37, KJV, which gives to His action a status of mixed prolepses), while the enemy (the devil) is the one who “sowed” (v. 39, KJV). The enemy/devil’s action is situated in the past (analepses) but is, by now, revealed.

The most interesting shift between the point the parable is trying to make and the perspective of its explanation occurs in the second part of the explanation: here the parable’s emphasis on the servants’ action (the passive action of letting the seeds grow) is totally ignored, and instead replaced by a long...
description of what will happen at the end of the time. In other words, the temporal elements found in the parable are resumed in the explanation but with a displaced accent.

The center of the narrative structure in the parable is identified by mixed prolepses. The explanation, however, drops the exhortation to be patient and emphasizes only one aspect of the wheat-tares coexistence: the lengthy and detailed “little apocalypse” (vv. 41–43). Most of the narrative focuses on the bad seed/sons of the devil.

Interestingly, the explanation (vv. 41–43a) introduces an apocalyptic element totally absent in the parable. In this “little apocalypse,” what is surprising is the fact that the lawless are found within the kingdom of the Son of man; the kingdom of the Son of man is therefore described as a body that has both wheat and tares (a corpus mixtum). The concluding appeal (v. 43b) of the parable is to comprehend the meaning of the explanation.

Tolerance and excommunication

Tolerance and excommunication seem to coexist within the same gospel: Matthew 13:30 and 18:15–17. We believe that Matthew’s strategy is to reorganize his sources to convey a more accurate and complete legacy of Jesus. In other words, Matthew uses the same argument of those who want to enforce a strict discipline within the community (namely Matt. 18:18) with a twist in favor of Jesus’ own view. The eschatological element (excommunication equals deprivation of salvation: Matt. 18:18; cf. 16:19b), which for some justifies excommunication, becomes for Matthew the very reason for which the community members should not be so quick in purging and condemning (cf. Matt. 13:41, “The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil’ ”).

Matthew presents the parable of the tares according to his inspired theological and ecclesiological perspective as expressed in the entire of chapter 18 of his Gospel. Those who are going astray need, first of all, to be accepted as still being a part of the community; secondly, to be forgiven; thirdly, to be looked after and patiently rescued and encouraged; and, only as a last and drastic measure, to be disciplined.

Matthew presents the parable of the tares in such a way as to highlight that the tares are found in the midst of the wheat and that the bad seed had been sowed upon and among the good seed; the servants are surprised by the presence of the tares in the field; the “fruit” (works) will indicate the difference between the two plants; the danger of pulling out the good plants along with the tares is because of their intermingled roots; and the master asks the servants to wait (aphiēmi), a word which can be also translated as to forgive or to permit.15

To this interpretation, if we add the fact that the word oikodespotês ("master of the house") may refer to Jesus as well as to the Christians,16 it is natural to conclude that Jesus’ parable was, in fact, encouraging the community to accept and deal with its status of corpus mixtum (mixed body composed of good and evil).

The servants in the parable do not receive any allegorical counterpart in the explanation. Matthew does not censure the radical dualism which sees the children of God as opposed to the children of the evil one, but reframes it into the correct original context: the kingdom of the Son of man (13:41).

In the “little apocalypse” (vv. 40–43), the kingdom of the Son of man is inhabited by the righteous (who will eventually enter into the kingdom of the Father) as well as by the scandalous and the unrighteous. The difficulty of the text rests in the understanding of the nature of the kingdom of the Son of man (v. 41); is it the church, the world, or an eschatological entity?17

Regardless of which position one may stand for, it is logical to see the church’s specific responsibility: the action of “sowing” performed by the Son of man is not limited to His past earthly life but continues in the present time. Matthew 13:37 clearly reads a present tense ("the one sowing the good seed is the Son of Man")18 whereas the parable reads the aorist “sowed” (v. 24). The very fact that Matthew puts the scandals and “all who do evil” (v. 41) within the kingdom of the Son
of man might be an attack against a form of soteriological security common in contemporary Palestinian Judaism.

Matthew 13:24–30 (the parable of the tares) and 36–43 (its explanation) refuse any anticipation of the eschatological judgment. Matthew makes the kingdom of the Son of man the theater of this judgement. By doing so, Matthew follows a tradition already found in Ezekiel 9:6 (“‘Begin at my sanctuary’”) and 12:2 (cf. also Matt. 13:13–16; Isa. 6:9, 10). It is precisely the people of God, as Israel, but also as the kingdom of Christ, that the Judge will sift.19 The final judgment will surely run over “‘his [of the Son of man] kingdom’” (Matt. 13:41), and surely run over “‘his [of the Son of God] kingdom’” (Matt. 13:41), and this should be enough to discourage any illusion of soteriological security and discourage his people from any utopian attempts to constitute themselves into a community free of any impurity. Self-understanding, community discipline, and relationships with other Jewish groups are all intimately related in the Gospel of Mathew.

Such an ecclesiological approach might prove useful in today’s congregations struggling with internal tensions. As with Matthew, we need a wholehearted pastoral attitude, a keen knowledge of the different claims, and an inspired understanding of Jesus’ teaching and ministry as a whole.

1. All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New International Version.
10. Ibid., 352, 353.
13. A. J. Kerr, “Matthew 13:25. Sowing/Zoara Among Another’s Wheat: Realistic or Anticonflict?” Journal of Theological Studies 46 (1995): 168. Kerr notes that in the Didascalia (9:2.27.14, published in n.s. 1.531 in Justinian’s Corpus Juris Civilis): “Celsus asks, if you sow tares (Ilium) or wild oats in another man’s crops and spoil them, not only can the owner bring the interdict against damage caused secretly or by force, but he can proceed in action under the lex Aquilia” (emphasis in original). Celsus was consul in n.s. 129.
15. See Matthew 13:30. The imperative form of ἀφαίρεσις means “leave, permit, leave in place” but also “forgive” (e.g., Matt. 6:14).
16. In Matthew, the word ἀφοδισώμεθα is used as referring to Jesus (10:25). God (20:1, 11, 21:33) and even every Christian (13:52; 24:43).
18. The New Jerusalem disapproves the present tense and translates as it were an aorist: “’The one who sowed.’” (Matt. 13:37).

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Our eternally righteous God: Paul’s great controversy theme in Romans 11

Luther’s study of Romans provided the dramatic insight that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone, and not through any good deeds humans perform. Recent studies have given rise to further opinions about the central theme (righteousness by faith) of the epistle. The “new perspective,” resulting from the study of intertestamental Jewish literature, suggests Jews understood the gracious nature of salvation, and their laws were simply their part of the covenant God made with them. Their problem was the exclusive ethnocentricty that effectively blocked Paul’s mission to the Gentiles. Another perspective, which is gaining acceptance, considers Paul’s focus as apocalyptic—the revelation and triumph of God’s righteousness—what Adventists have understood as the central motif of Scripture, “the great controversy.”

The old perspective

Many Christians today read Paul’s epistles primarily from Luther’s “old perspective,” so an appraisal of these other perspectives would be valuable. For starters, we must understand the importance of recognizing that Paul wrote with profound knowledge of Jewish Scripture, particularly its narrative qualities. Recent scholarship has recognized that the New Testament should not be isolated from the Old, narrative is crucial to any worldview, and the Old Testament narrative forms the framework of Romans. Others plead for Christians to acknowledge the Bible as one story.

Paul often used narrative. He frequently told his own conversion story (Acts 22:3–21; 26:4–18; Gal. 1:13–17), used personal narrative to build his argument to the Galatians (Gal. 1:18–2:14), and indicates narrative when he writes, “You foolish Galatians! . . . It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!” (Gal. 3:1, NRSV). His doctrine of the Resurrection was based on narrative (1 Cor. 15:3–8) and, most famously, he used the narrative of Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah to build his doctrine of salvation by grace (Rom. 4: Gal. 3:6–9; 4). Finally, Paul states clearly in the first two verses of his epistle to the Romans that “the gospel of God . . . [was] promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures” (Rom. 1:1, 2, NRSV), indicating the foundation of his teaching.

Koch states there are 89 Old Testament quotations in the Pauline letters, 51 occur in Romans. The density of scriptural quotation increases in Romans 9–11, where some theologians believe Paul reaches the climax of his argument that God’s dealings with Israel are consistent with the way He has always worked. For centuries, Paul has been seen as the champion of a new way of salvation in Christ, as opposed to an obsolete way of striving through obedience to the law. But what does Paul really emphasize?

Paul and the people of Israel

In Romans 11, Paul’s first proof that God has not rejected His people, Israel, is that Paul himself is an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin. This simple statement alludes to two narratives: Paul’s own dramatic conversion story, which he was very fond of telling (Paul, once so destructive towards the followers of Jesus, has not been rejected), and that of the tribe of Benjamin—the son born by grace to a dying mother (Gen. 35:16–19), the recipient of special graces from his brother Joseph (Gen. 43:8, 9, 16–34; 45:14–20)—saved from Egypt, and finally part of a remnant returned from the Babylonian exile (Ezra 10:9).

Paul repeats that God has not rejected His people. Many times Israel appeared close to rejection. They had barely become a nation when God threatened their destruction because they worshiped the golden calf. Moses pleaded their case, offering his own rejection (Exod. 32:9, 10, 31–34). Moses remade the stone tablets, and God repeated
His covenant with explicit words of grace (Exod. 34:1, 5–7, 10–12). On the very borders of the Promised Land, Israel rebelled, fearing the military might of Canaan (Num. 13:25–14:10). Again God threatened to disinherit them (Num. 14:11, 12), and Moses pleaded for them, on the basis of the covenant of grace made after the golden calf episode (Num. 14:13–21).

As Paul thought of Israel, a long parade of narratives suggested they were always on the verge of rejection. A common thread runs through all these near-rejection events: it was always the people who turned from God, not God from the people. But in Romans 11:2–5, Paul chose to zero in on one of the most blatant of these episodes: when Israel was a prosperous nation, settled into the Promised Land, under no military threat or difficulty, during the time of Ahab and Elijah. Frustrated and discouraged, Elijah complains to God against them. Did Paul sense a similarity between Elijah’s and his own situation? Paul focuses, however, not on the failure of Israel but on God’s revelation of the still-faithful remnant. Did Paul focus on Elijah’s situation because he was thinking of Elijah’s coming before the day of the Lord?

Paul thus rapidly establishes, through scriptural narrative, that God does not abandon His people: a remnant will be saved by grace, and God will be vindicated (Rom. 11:5). Verse 6 repeats this thought. The verse echoes Isaiah 11:11, the promise of God saving the remnant of His people. Paul loved the book of Isaiah, quoting from it more than from any other Old Testament book. Isaiah 11 narrates the coming righteous Branch of Jesse and the future new earth, where barriers will be removed from between all former enemies: wolves lie with lambs, toddlers with adders (and by inference, Jews with Gentiles). In just a few words, Paul alludes to both the coming Messiah and the dreamed restoration of Israel. In verses 5 and 6 of Romans 11, he sums up this whole wonderful situation: restoration comes entirely by grace. Israel’s repeated failure to be true to God can be remedied only by God’s amazing grace.

Thus, the first six verses of Romans 11 present the old perspective—Paul’s teaching that human beings are saved individually by grace alone. They also suggest the first premise of the new perspective, that Jews also understood this grace. However, there are hints in the Elijah message and the new world to come that Paul sees beyond human issues.

The blindness of Jews and Gentiles

Romans 11:7–15 presents a complex argument that Israel has been blinded (or hardened) and made jealous so that Gentiles can come in. Modern scholarship favors the idea of the word being “hardened” not “blinded” (v. 7), but the scriptures Paul quotes in verses 8–10 (Deut. 29:4; Isa. 29:10; Ps. 69:22, 23) refer to blindness: “God gave them...
... eyes that should not see.’ ... ’[L]et their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see.’ “ Is Paul alluding to a story here? Between the verses quoted from the Elijah story (1 Kings 19:10, 18) are verses commanding Elijah to anoint a new king over Syria (God’s involvement with Gentiles), a new king over northern Israel (God’s involvement with Israel), and a new prophet (Elisha, who will reveal God’s ways).

What narrative connects these events, showing blinded people sitting down to a table that is a snare and trap, as quoted in Psalm 69:22, 23? He alludes to the narrative of 2 Kings 6:8–23: Elisha’s terrified servant wakes to discover Syrian soldiers surrounding his city, Dothan. Elisha prays that his servant’s eyes will be opened to see the protective horses and chariots of fire around the enemy and for the Syrian army to be blinded. Elisha then calmly goes to the armed, but blinded Syrians, says they are in the wrong place, and leads them into the heart of Samaria!

There their eyes are opened to their dire predicament. The king of Israel, blind to spiritual opportunity, eagerly asks, “ ‘Shall I slay them?’ ” (v. 21). No, says Elisha, give them food and water to drink. Now the king “sees,” and prepares a great feast for his “guests,” who afterward simply go away (v. 23).

This narrative captures the blindness of all concerned—the Jews to the power of God and their calling to bless the nations and the Gentiles to the benefits the Jews offer. This blindness serves to demonstrate that everyone needs God’s saving grace, Jew and Gentile equally. Paul concludes, “[i]f their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15). The narrative beautifully endorses both the old perspective of salvation by grace alone and the inclusion of the Gentiles as envisioned by the new perspective. However, in the narrative, the barriers broken down are not simply those of national identity but of attitude. This occurs by the revelation of God’s power and character to Elisha, to his servant, to the king of Israel, and to the Syrians; that is, to everyone.

The olive-tree analogy

Paul now develops the idea of broken pieces (remnants) being made a viable whole, and embarks on the best-known passage in the chapter—his exposition of oleiculture. The more unusual aspects of Paul’s parable may not be as fanciful as sometimes supposed.11 While the norm in cultivating olive trees was to graft cultivated scions to wild olive roots, sometimes trees that stopped fruiting could be shocked back into productivity by grafting a wild shoot into a cultivated branch.

However, in the olive motif, Paul, no doubt, alludes to Jeremiah 11 and perhaps echoes the narrative of the olive branch as a sign of safety for the remnant saved from the Flood (Gen. 8:10, 11). Jeremiah 11:16 reads, “ ‘The Lord once called you, the flockish hungry!...
The wisdom of God

In words of warning lest the Gentiles be conceived about their new relationship with God and compared with the blindness of the Jews, Paul reminds them that he is dealing with a mystery. Quoting somewhat loosely from Psalm 147:3 (longing for a Deliverer), Isaiah 59:20, 21 (the Redeemer will come to those turning from transgression), Isaiah 27:9 (remove sin), and Jeremiah 31:33 (the new covenant), Paul reminds us that the covenantal promises were first made with Israel. However, he rephrases these quotations: “This will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins” (Rom. 11:27).

These words allude to distinctive Christian narrative: John saw Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Not merely Jewish sin needs removal, but the sin of the whole world, and this is the covenant God has made with His people.

As Paul contemplates all that God must accomplish for His goal, he bursts into praise. “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom. 11:33). His final quotes are a tour de force. “Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” comes from the richly Messianic and powerfully God-revealing Isaiah 40, bristling with echoes: “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem . . . her warfare is ended, / that her iniquity is pardoned. . . . A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord.’ ” “He will feed his flock like a shepherd.” “The Lord is the everlasting God, / the Creator of the ends of the earth. / He does not faint / or grow weary.” “[T]hey who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:2, 3, 11, 28, 31).

Romans 11:35, quoted from Job 41:11, “Who has given a gift to him / that he might be repaid?” shows that God owes nothing. But the power of the quote lies in the echoes of the narrative. The Job narrative draws aside the curtain of mere human need, showing the vast celestial struggle between the powers of good and evil. Job did not understand his predicament; Paul does not understand the predicament of the Jews. But, in Job’s story, Paul sees a vision of the future triumph of God and the restoration of His people.

Conclusion

Thus Paul weaves a rich, multihued tapestry of Old Testament narrative that clearly shows he moves from the old perspective of individual salvation by grace to the new perspective of Gentile inclusion, to the apocalyptic perspective that God will save His people from sin, and will finally be vindicated when He renews all things.

Paul’s focus is therefore profoundly apocalyptic and classic Seventh-day Adventist theology—the great controversy between God and evil is completely in accord with him. The old and new perspectives simply guide our mission to the world.\footnote{1. E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (London: SCM Press, 1977). This was a pivotal study that initiated the development of the concepts of the new perspective.}


The passage is thus rich in imagery and narrative that confirms the old-perspective emphasis on grace and the new-perspective recognition of the need for all to be included as recipients of this grace. But Paul has focused far beyond the needs of humanity to the perspective of the faithful Lover: God spurned by those who will not keep (obey) His covenant.

1. E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (London: SCM Press, 1977). This was a pivotal study that initiated the development of the concepts of the new perspective.
8. Hays, Echoes, 64.
9. All scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are quoted from the Revised Standard Version.
10. Hays, Echoes, 162. Paul uses 28 quotes from Isaiah, 20 from Psalms, 15 from Deuteronomy, 15 from Genesis, and no other book more than 5 times.

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Music in worship—a look at a difficult but important subject

Music in worship remains a difficult topic in the Christian church. Music, intensely complex, can be interpreted in many different ways. Typically, the topic of music and worship is approached with considerable bias for or against certain forms; however, this topic will be approached with the assumption that appropriate worship styles are difficult to universally define because of complex cultural differences. Musical worship comprises a God-centered activity entirely focused on Him. In order for music to fulfill this purpose, inspired perspectives, musical linguistics, and a synthesis of current implications must be considered.

An inspired perspective of musical worship

Throughout the Bible, inspired writers conveyed their messages through the avenue of song. Moses and the children of Israel lifted their voices in inspired adoration to the Lord after being delivered from the Egyptians at the Red Sea. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses again uses music to impress the minds of his audience in a historical and prophetic utterance. The entire book of the Psalms presents a mixture of musical meditations clearly fixated upon the Torah and the Messiah. Clearly, God uses music as an avenue to impress truth upon His people.

In addition to the impartation of biblical truth, inspired writers recognize music’s ability to turn the thoughts of worshipers toward God. Within the school of the prophets, “Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God.” The psalmist purposed to sing praises to God, praising Him as long as he lived with all his being (Ps. 9:2; 104:33). Isaiah entreats us to “praise the Lord in song, for He has done excellent things” (Isa. 12:5, NASB). As a response to the Lord’s healing, Hezekiah declares his intent to have songs played on stringed instruments at the house of the Lord all the days of his life (Isa. 38:20). Paul invites us to sing and make melody with our hearts to the Lord (Eph. 5:19). The use of music to declare one’s adoration to God for who He is and what He has done is deeply rooted in Scripture.

God is the center of worship. “Worship is not something we do for ourselves. Worship is meant to be done for God and to God. It is a God-centered activity, entirely focused on Him.” The worshiper is not the most important person in worship; God is. An attitude of selfless sacrifice becomes essential in order to enter into God-centered worship.

Unfortunately, many current worship formats have become venues for entertainment and debate. Socially pleasing services are sometimes offered in order to attract individuals to hear consumer-focused messages. Worship must never digress into a self-seeking therapy session centered on the worshiper; rather, sacrificial worship necessitates a recognition and response to God.

Musical linguistics

The complexities of music and its relationship to worship are considerable. One important distinction is music’s ability to communicate in two

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Like spoken languages, culture plays a major role in defining the meaning of music. “Qualities which have been acquired by an object through association and suggestion” determine the meaning of that object. The effect that a certain type of music has on one person might have the opposite effect on someone else. “Quite simply, music can mean different things to different people at different times.” Just as certain words are considered offensive because of their historical and cultural connections, culture plays a major role in defining instrumental music.

Yet, whatever the influence of culture, music conveys a universal message of good or evil. In order to understand the implications of this statement, morality must first be considered. Jesus asserted that “there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man” (Mark 7:15, NASB). Negative music does not necessarily equate personal defilement, yet music can represent the negative outcropping of sinfulness within the composer and, as such, influence others. Evil tendencies that exist within people can be impacted by music.

Dr. Howard Hansen, dean of the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, New York, asserted the following: “Music is a curiously subtle art with innumerable varying emotional connotations. It is made up of many ingredients, and according to the proportions of these components, it can be soothing or invigorating, ennobling, or vulgarizing, philosophical or orgiastic. It has powers for evil as well as for good.”

"Music does not merely imitate, it speaks; and its language—inarticulate but vivid, ardent, passionate—has a hundred times more energy than speech itself." Music itself, devoid of words, communicates.
it shocks the senses and begins to cross the threshold of consciousness. Repetition and variety with periods of tension and relaxation are essential in producing quality music.

Music must fit the atmosphere and message being presented. In general, dance tunes and sacred words do not mix. Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, relates an experience of observing youth at a Christian assembly participating in music she described as “a frivolous ditty, fit for the dance hall.” Though we do not know exactly what the music was, there is no question some inappropriate forms of music are better suited for popular celebrations and should not be appropriated for worship.

Just as the rhythms and melodies of instrumental music must match the lyrical message, the message itself must be raised to a higher standard. Steve Taylor, American singer, songwriter, record producer, and film director, says, “I realize that what’s critically important about Christian music must transcend and transform culture, offering something more than what is found at a secular club or social gathering.

Formulative synthesis

One aspect of music consists of its ability to speak the language of the culture that defines it. Musical styles related with negative behavior or imagery should be avoided. While aspects of these musical styles can be integrated appropriately, it remains difficult to implement a culturally negative form of music into the worship setting. Lilianne Doukhan, associate professor of music at Andrews University, asks, “Will this particular mode of expression within a given culture truly be understood as expressing reverence to God?”

Caution must be used when implementing new forms of music into worship because of their ability to act as a gateway to other musical extremes. Many contemporary music enthusiasts find themselves attracted to similar styles of music associated with inappropriate behavior. Too often individuals find inspiration in the instrumental genius of secular artists who promote eliciting sex, violence, greed, and/or selfish behavior. In fact, the use of wrong kinds of music in worship can influence individuals to return to negative musical choices or environments.

Worship musicians must be converted individuals. To a certain degree, musicians share their philosophy and outlook on life through their music. “There is nothing more offensive in God’s sight than a display of instrumental music when those taking part are not consecrated, are not making melody in their hearts to the Lord.”

Music affects the mood and response of the worshiper. The Church of Satan teaches that “there is no higher god than oneself and individuals should worship accordingly.” When musical worship purposes to fulfill the selfish desires of the worshiper, worship of the one true God is lost. Individuals who find it necessary to act as a gateway to other musical extremes. Many contemporary music enthusiasts find themselves attracted to similar styles of music associated with inappropriate behavior. Too often individuals find inspiration in the instrumental genius of secular artists who promote eliciting sex, violence, greed, and/or selfish behavior. In fact, the use of wrong kinds of music in worship can influence individuals to return to negative musical choices or environments.

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In 1934, Emil Brunner wrote an article titled “Nature and Grace,” to which his former teacher and mentor, Karl Barth, responded with an article titled “No!” Barth believed humanity to be so corrupted by the Fall that no revelation of God existed outside of the Christian revelation of God. Thus began one of the great debates of modern theology between general and special revelation.

In this article, I seek to present a balanced approach to the topic of general revelation. My purpose is threefold: (1) to explore the biblical evidence for general revelation; (2) to understand the limitations of general revelation and the need for special revelation; and (3) to discover the purpose of general revelation. The primary biblical focus will be on the figure of Melchizedek and the apostle Paul’s references to the revelation of God in nature in the Epistle to the Romans. The method will be based on the biblical text and the thinking of exegetes, theologians, and missiologists surrounding the issue of general revelation. The hope is that a fair and balanced approach to this topic can be achieved through an exploration of this material.

The Melchizedek factor

Melchizedek is perhaps an enigmatic figure in the Bible, but an important one. He has much to tell us. In Genesis 14:18–20, Abram receives a blessing from King Melchizedek. After the blessing, Abram pays a tithe to this king of Salem, who is called a “priest of God Most High.” Psalm 110, clearly a Messianic psalm, provides a very high place to Melchizedek. Verse 4 states that the Messiah will be a “priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” According to the author of Hebrews, Melchizedek is “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever” (7:3). Drawing from this verse, Don Richardson calls Melchizedek the “archetype of general revelation”—the kind of revelation that is “just there.” Richardson goes one step further, referring to general revelation as the Melchizedek factor. Millard Erickson defines general revelation as “God’s self-manifestation through nature, history, and the inner being of the human person.” This factor is already present and working even before God’s special revelation appears. Richardson refers to special revelation as the Abraham factor, because God revealed Himself to Abraham in a specific time and place. Erickson defines special revelation as “God’s manifestation of himself to particular persons at definitive times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him.”

So, when Psalm 110 and Hebrews refer to Christ as a “priest forever in the order of Melchizedek,” they make Christ the Lord of general revelation. Richardson’s apt interpretation of John 1:9 makes this clear: “The true light [Christ] that gives light to every man [through general revelation] was coming into the world [i.e., to shine upon men in a new way—special revelation].” So, in this interpretation of the person of Melchizedek, general revelation takes on a new and important meaning. If Jesus is, in fact, a priest in the order of the “archetype of general revelation [Melchizedek],” then He must speak, move, and act through general revelation.

General revelation in Romans

Romans 1:19, 20 and 2:14, 15a, reveals a troubling problem for the Christian: how much can be known of God outside of His special revelation? As was noted earlier, Karl Barth argued that a human being could know nothing outside of God’s self-revelation. However, if one adheres to Barth’s rejection of general revelation, one must deal with these two passages in Romans. The apostle Paul states that what can be known about God is plain because “God has shown it to
them [humanity],” but he goes on to state that through His creation, the natural order of things, His “eternal power and divine nature” is made known. The context of this verse includes the wrath of God against humankind. One of the results of this wrath is God giving humanity over to their “degrading passions,” resulting in a perversion of God-given natural relations between men and women (1:26, 27).

In his New International Biblical Commentary, James Edwards makes an interesting clarification. He emphasizes the phrase “suppress the truth” (1:8). Through the lens of this verse, one can see that the problem is not a matter of reason, but of will: “The problem is not lack of knowledge, but failure to acknowledge God and render proper worship and obedience.”10 God is revealing Himself to humanity. They are not ignorant of truth, but rather willfully suppress the truth. This comprises an important clarification.

However, the question remains, how is it that humanity remains without excuse even outside of the special revelation of Jesus Christ? The apostle Paul seems to suggest that the Gentiles, those outside of Israel, could know God outside of God’s special revelation. So, what does it mean to know God outside of Jesus Christ? Again Edwards makes an important point. The Greek word for “known” actually connotes knowledge of something by experience rather than knowledge about something. This means that humanity is “without excuse” because they have experienced God in nature and in themselves and have willfully rejected Him. Humanity’s problem is a broken will.

This clarification is interesting, especially in light of Romans 2:14, 15a. Again, this is not a matter of knowledge about something, but a matter of obedience, or of the will. “Where Paul speaks of the law written on Gentile hearts, he argues that even people without religious instruction are responsible moral agents.”11 All was not lost in the Fall. Humanity has maintained an innate moral sense. John Calvin called this the sensus divinitatis—a sense of the divine that points the human being to God. Jonathan Edwards “wrote of an innate, prereflective awareness of God, a natural inclination that predisposes the soul to believe in God.”12 For Edwards, nature is full of evidence of God “in ourselves, in our own bodies and souls, and in everything about us wherever we turn our eye, whether to heaven, or to earth, the air, or the seas.”13

In the passages in Romans under discussion, Paul can be speaking of nothing else besides general revelation. The evidence is clear. God is at work in His creation, even outside of special revelation. If one questions the revelation of God in nature, they only need to read Psalm 19 to receive the answer: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; . . . / In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, / which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy” (vv. 1a, 4b, 5a). Furthermore, the image of God in humans has remained in some form after the Fall. Romans 2:14–16 cannot be denied on this point. So, it would seem that there is no doubt that God reveals Himself in a general way through nature and through humanity. The question remains: what are the limitations of this revelation?

The limitations of general revelation

Jesus said, “ ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ ” (John 14:6). Thus Jesus claims that salvation is through Him. The Cross and Resurrection are exclusive. Men and women have struggled with this claim for Christian exclusivism for years. Enlightenment thinkers attempted to dismantle Christian- ity based on this exclusivity. For example, Kant argued that Chris- tianity “dispenses with the most important mark of truth, namely, a rightful claim to universality, when it bases itself upon a revealed faith.”14

In other words, Christianity is not true because of its exclusive special revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. In response to this claim, one might want to immediately point to a biblical character like Melchizedek and say, “Look, there is an example of a man saved outside of God’s exclusive special revelation.” However, this idea can in no way be sustained in the text. The Bible is clear: salvation comes through Jesus Christ. So what do we do with the challenge of religious pluralism?

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen makes an important contribution here. In his book, An Introduction to the Theology of Religions, he elucidates the desire of God that all of humanity be saved. He quotes 1 Timothy 2:4, which affirms that God “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” He terms this the “optimism of salvation.” However, as is clear in John 14:6, salvation does not exist outside of Jesus Christ. So, the theological formula is as follows: “universal salvation (salvation of the world) is reached by way of particularity (salvation through the mediation of Jesus Christ).”15

Thus, general revelation works up to a point. Both Calvin and Edwards agreed that general revelation only points to “God the Creator, not God the Redeemer.” In other words, nature shows the moral demands of God, but it does not show “how sinners can be restored to God after they have failed to meet those demands.”16 Only God’s revelation in the person of Jesus Christ answers the question of how we can be restored to God. Christ is our redeeming God. He is the answer to a general revelation that is so incomplete.

The purpose of general revelation

But how can both optimism and exclusivity be true in terms of salvation? The answer lies in the purpose of general revelation. Amidst the plurality of religions today, there exist two extremes: (1) emphasizing...
the optimism of salvation to the point that the exclusivity of Jesus Christ is lost, and (2) emphasizing the exclusivity of Christ to the point that all other religions are seen to have absolutely no value. Neither of these extremes is correct. Again, we do not want to fall too far on one side of the debate as Barth did in his complete denial of general revelation. Instead, the answer lies somewhere in the middle.

If Jesus Christ is Lord of both general and special revelation, then the two must coexist and cooperate with one another. General revelation is not in opposition to special revelation. Instead, general revelation serves a preparatory purpose—the introduction to special revelation. It prepares the hearer to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. In his enlightening discussion of Abraham and mission, Arthur Glasser calls those people who know God only through general revelation “Melchizedek people.” Looking at Abraham’s response to Melchizedek, he draws some poignant conclusions for evangelists and missionaries today: “When the people of God are in mission, they need to be alert to the possibility of encountering ‘Melchizedek people’ . . . people like Melchizedek may worship the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though they may never have heard the name of Jesus Christ.” It is this type of attitude that the missionaries, pastors, and evangelists of today need to hold. God is already at work when they arrive to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When the apostle Paul preached on Mars’ Hill (Acts 17), he did not discount that God was already at work. Using information from a third century work entitled The Lives of Eminent Philosophers by a Greek philosopher named Diogenes Laertius, Richardson constructed a history of how the altar inscribed “To an unknown god” appeared in Athens six centuries before Christ. When a plague struck Athens, the people there discovered that their gods did not respond to their sacrifices. Then a man named Epimenides arrived in Athens and offered three reasons as to why an altar to an unknown god should be constructed: (1) there is still another god concerned in the matter of this plague, whose name is unknown, and therefore not represented by any idol; (2) this god is great enough and good enough to do something about the plague; and (3) if this is true, then this god is also great enough and good enough to “smile upon us in our ignorance—if we acknowledge our ignorance and call upon him!” After the altar was constructed, the plague ceased and all people in Athens praised this “unknown God.”

The God who is at work in His creation and in the hearts of people is the same God who sent His Son to die on a cross and resurrected Him from the dead for the salvation of all people. This Paul preached to the crowd in Athens. He emphasized that God is already at work, calling the Athenians “‘extremely religious’” (v. 22) and commending their altar to an unknown god (v. 23). General revelation served its purpose in Athens and prepared the way for Paul’s preaching on Mars’ Hill. Missionaries and evangelists today need to heed to the call of the “Melchizedek people” or they may miss out on an opportunity to win people to salvation in Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion: The priesthood of general revelation**

Did Melchizedek come to know God through general or special revelation? Any attempt to arrive at a decisive answer to this question will end up only in frustration. That is not the point of the character of Melchizedek, nor the point of this paper. Melchizedek is, as Richardson makes clear, an “archetype of general revelation.” Unfortunately, no way exists to determine how Melchizedek came to know God and why Abram received a blessing from him and paid him a tithe. This demonstrates an instance where what is known must be emphasized as opposed to the troubling questions that surround such a figure.

Besides being the king of Salem, Melchizedek represented a special priesthood after which Christ’s priesthood was established. This priesthood is the “priesthood of general revelation”; the priesthood of the God who was, is, and will continue to work in and through His creation. It is the priesthood that beckons missionaries and evangelists to see the preparation that God has laid for their ministry and proclamation of the gospel. Informed Christians of today must learn to embrace the “God at work” in all of creation. Only then can they truly begin to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the only means by which anyone is saved.

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2. For a more in-depth discussion, see Christoph Schoenleber’s article on Barth’s theology entitled “Theology” in The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially 32, 33.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages in this article are from the New Revised Standard Version.
7. Ibid., 201.
8. He is already clearly the Lord of special revelation.
9. Richardson’s interpretation is in the brackets. He uses the New International Version.
11. Ibid., 70.
17. See Kärkkäinen, 27.
Trends in biblical hermeneutics (part 1 of 2)

From the outset, Protestantism was fragmented into different confessions of faith, each having its own center of interest in a special truth. Orthodoxy or pure doctrine was the primary concern of the Protestant confessions in both the Lutheran and Reformed churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this epoch of orthodoxy, the doctrine of Holy Scripture received priority. On the assumption that the Bible was verbally inspired, Scripture was used as a law book to find “proofs for a comprehensive system of doctrine” and to decide controversial issues.1 This trend to Protestant scholasticism shifted the focus away from Christ to a systematic order of revealed doctrines that addressed primarily the human intellect. The living unity of the Word and the Spirit of God was dissolved in the triumph of an arid rationalistic thinking.

In reaction to this dead orthodoxy, two new movements arose with the intention to bring corrective actions: Pietism and liberal theology. Pietism arose in the seventeenth century with the claim to complete the Lutheran Reformation by a second one of a sanctified life. This trend to individualize and internalize the Christian gospel took the form of Puritanism within the Calvinistic or Reformed tradition. Common to these moral renewal movements was the belief in the guidance of the Holy Spirit for a correct understanding of Scripture, the new birth experience, and the practical imitation of Christ as a restoration of the primitive church.2

Under the guidance of two German theology professors, Philipp J. Spener (1635–1705) and August H. Francke (1663–1727), the Pietistic movement began in Germany to reverse the prevailing doctrinalism. Spener and Francke exalted the Bible as the supreme authority over all Lutheran creeds and stressed the need for a grammatical-historical exegesis of Scripture. Characteristic of this new trend was, generally speaking, its individualism that sought to make Christianity a matter for the individual. By incorporating the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ in the believer’s heart, “a pietistic Biblicism set in which was as different from that of the Reformation as grasping is from being grasped.”3

Exceptional was the pastor-professor Johann A. Bengel (1687–1752) in Württemberg, who introduced the idea that the Bible should be considered as the progressive unfolding of the divine plan of redemption that culminates in the second coming of Christ. Viewing the Bible as a self-explanatory whole was Bengel’s basic hermeneutical contribution to the biblicism of Pietism.4

A shift to liberal hermeneutics

The second reaction to the orthodox theology in the eighteenth century was the rise of historical thinking, a trend that became characteristic of the general intellectual development. Historical thinking, as introduced by the Pietist theologian Johann S. Semler (1725–1791) in Halle, Germany, undermined the orthodox doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture by arguing that the Christian dogma of inspiration was based on a philosophical abstraction and therefore could not be part of the Christian faith. Religion was considered more a human feeling than the rational acceptance of a church dogma.

In reaction to the moralistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, as presented by Immanuel Kant, a new approach to the Bible began to develop. This new theology was initiated by Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the most influential theologian of the nineteenth century. Raised in Lutheran Pietism, and highly educated in the cultural sciences, he was dissatisfied not only with the Lutheran dogmas but also the abstract deism of the Enlightenment. He began to create his own *synthesis* of how one can be a modern thinker and a Christian at the same time. To him the issue became how to maintain intellectual integrity within the Christian faith.5 Thus liberal theology was born as a blending of the piety of the Lutheran Moravians and rational Enlightenment.

The newness of Schleiermacher’s philosophical theology lies in his starting point of authority: the immediate touch of God on the human heart, the religious “feeling of absolute dependence” implying an intuition of the Infinite. This idea was rooted in the popular Romantic philosophy that there is a unity and communion among God, humans, and nature. For him, the central point of religion was not in the human intellect or the moral
conscience but in a personal “feeling” of the unity of the soul with God, in an immediate consciousness of being “in relation with God.” This exclusive emphasis on a personal religious experience touched a nerve in his time and culture.6 But it came with a price of compromise with the scientific culture: Schleiermacher made a person’s religious consciousness the central theme of his theology.7 This psychological starting point signified a fundamental shift of authority in Christian theology: a hermeneutical paradigm shift.8

The Bible, particularly its New Testament gospel, was no longer the supreme authority and judge of humans before God, because Schleiermacher considered the Scriptures to be only a description of earlier confessions of faith. Scripture, therefore, cannot provide the basis for a personal faith in Christ.9 Accordingly, Schleiermacher states that “redemption” comes when our natural intuition of God “becomes stimulated and made dominant by the entrance of the living influence of Christ.”10 The concept of “sin” consists merely of human forgetfulness of God.

Schleiermacher’s revision of Christian theology accepts no external authority in Scripture or church creed. His hermeneutic of subjectivism (taking its starting point in the self-consciousness of human beings) no longer asks, “What is God saying in the text?” but, “What says the text about the religious consciousness of ancient Israel or of the early Christians?” This interpretative method changed the hermeneutical key of authority from the biblical truth to that of the subjective religious experience. Bernard Ramm is right: “This is nothing short of a Copernican revolution in theology.”11 How would Protestant theologians react to Schleiermacher’s audacious transformation of theology to a Christian anthropology?

The hermeneutics of Lutheran liberalism

Schleiermacher deeply influenced the theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This counts in particular for two creative German theologians: Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) and Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976).

Ritschl developed the priority of the moral reason over the abstract theoretical reason (as in Kant’s philosophy). He argued passionately against all supernatural as well as Pietistic dogmas in order to free theology from its mixture with human philosophies: “Dogmatic preaching... contributes nothing to a better understanding of what is involved in Evangelical perfection.”12 In his zeal to de-Hellenize all Christian doctrines, Ritschl robbed the Scriptures from their supernatural character. His hermeneutical a priori was do theology without metaphysics, that is, without the supernatural dimension. God is conceived “as necessary to guarantee our personal morality and our moral fellowship.”13 Prayer is reduced to a state of mind, so that one scholar concludes: “Ritschl denies that in this life any communication between God and the soul can take place, except in the form of what he calls faith.”14

Although Ritschl says nothing of our love to God or to Christ, he advances his own concept of a God as a loving Father in heaven, One who is solely “love,” but without holy justice and wrath against sin. He, then, sets forth this rational postulate as the ultimate norm for his Scripture interpretation.15 To him “sin” is nothing but ignorance and a lack of trust in God. Forgiveness is God’s overlooking human ignorance and lifting the consciousness of guilt. No atonement, in the classical Protestant sense, is therefore needed, no penal substitutionary death of Christ. Atonement is only the subjective change of heart about God. The “wrath” of God in Scripture is a fiction of the mind, “only” a metaphor.

Ritschl’s concept of biblical revelation is thus determined by his ethical rationalism. He does not start with biblical exegesis but with his own postulation of God’s nature, with his own philosophical definition of Christ as the archetype of man in his normal relation to God in His kingdom.16 Thus he united Kant’s moral imperative and Schleiermacher’s kingdom concept in an astounding originality.17 Ritchl’s theology became the dominant theology in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Bultmann continues Ritschl’s antisupernatural assumptions in his existentialist exegesis. He starts from a frankly acknowledged philosophical preunderstanding of Scripture, namely, “the right way to ask the right questions” to possibly understand “human existence.” He explains, “Existentialist philosophy... makes personal existence my own responsibility, and by doing so it helps to make me open to the word of the Bible.”18 Bultmann argues that humans are in need of a Savior and that each one must make a personal decision to receive salvation through Jesus Christ. To this end he wants to eliminate all false securities in which the Christian has come to trust. By means of the historical-critical method of analyzing Scripture, his interest is focused on the inner experience with the Holy God; thus creating a new form of Pietism.

His pastoral concern is, the kerugma (“proclamation”) must become the encounter with the speaking God. In other words, not the historical Jesus of past history but the presently proclaimed Christ is Lord and foundation of the Christian faith. In his view, the New Testament describes Christ in terms of a “mythological” worldview (the prescientific concept of the world as being structured in three stories: heaven, earth, and underworld). This cosmology has become antiquated in our modern age of science. Now we need a scientific method of hermeneutics to arrive at an understanding of personal, “authentic existence” today.

“Myth” is the view that outside powers interfere with the natural cause-and-effect sequence. This requires the sacrifice of the modern intellect. Bultmann includes in his definition of “myth” all miracles, prophecy, even the substitutionary death of Christ and the literal
resurrection of the body of Jesus. Nevertheless, he does not want to eliminate the mythological language of the New Testament but to re-interpret it, while retaining the religious intention of the myth. He interprets Jesus’ message of the nearness of the kingdom of God as meaning that “the hour of decision is of limited duration” and that “God summons men to definite decision . . . not the belief that the end of the world is just ahead.” This demythologizing program informs his hermeneutical method, called the existentialistic interpretation. Bultmann wants to prevent the equation of the gospel message with the prevalent worldview of Gnosticism. The gospel in the four Gospels must be liberated from its cultural package, particularly from its Greek philosophy of the human soul. That is the program of Bultmann’s kerugma theology. He explains his motivation to remain a faithful Lutheran: “Indeed, demythologizing is a task parallel to that performed by Paul and Luther in their doctrine of justification by faith alone without the works of law.”

The neo-Reformed hermeneutic of Karl Barth

Within the Reformed tradition, the strongest protest against liberal Protestantism came from the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968). He tried to offer an alternative to the nineteenth century mixture of philosophy and theology: a new foundation and orientation of Christian theology, a new “evangelical theology.” To him the Christian gospel is not a philosophical system. He warns against turning Christian faith into philosophical knowledge, or gnosis, as he detected it in Bultmann, Tillich, and others. To him systems do not save, only the gospel saves. On the other hand, he warns against becoming a fideist by renouncing all reason or logic. He defends a “Christening” of the human reason, in the sense of Anselm’s: “I believe in order to understand.”

Barth’s sole passion was the interpretation of Scripture, the proclamation of the Word of God, because the Word is “something spoken and heard prior to all interpretation”: “The Word of God is the Word that God spoke, speaks, and will speak in the midst of all men.” He moved away from the modern, anthropological starting point with its pious “feeling,” to a theology of God Himself. “The God of the Gospel.” Barth explains, “This is the God who reveals himself in the Gospel, who himself speaks to men and acts among and upon them. . . . Having this God for its object, it can be nothing else but the most thankful and happy science!” He describes this as “theo-anthropology,” in which the highest point in the whole history of revelation is the Incarnation: “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). The unifying theme of the Christological principle gave to Barth’s theology a unity of procedure. He restored the Old Testament as part of the whole Word of God, because God spoke and acted in Israel’s history. Christ realized the fulfillment and accomplishment of the reconciliation of Israel. In their succession and unity, the histories of Israel and of Jesus Christ “form the whole Logos or Word of God.” Barth has been called by Küng “the principal initiator of a postmodern paradigm of theology,” and by Ramm “the best paradigm we have for theology in our times.”

Barth’s monumental (but incompletely) Church Dogmatics (in English translation, 13 vols., 1936–1969) concentrates on Jesus Christ as the decisive criterion for speaking about God and human beings. His special emphasis on a Christocentric and redemptive theology opened up unforeseen perspectives in his quest for truth, even to himself. An example of Barth’s Christocentrism is his doctrine of the “Election of God.” He chooses as his hermeneutical guideline: “Jesus Christ . . . is both the electing God and elected man in one.” In the freedom of divine love, God establishes a covenant relationship with the pre-existent Christ that results in the creation of all things including humankind. Thus God constitutes Himself as the “Lord of the covenant,” who elects the human race as the
“secondary partner of the covenant.” This “divine election of grace is the sum of the Gospel. It is the content of the good news which is Jesus Christ,” and “the concept election means that the good news which is Jesus Christ,” sum of the Gospel. It is the content of salvation and predestined to life eternal, and that He chose Himself to eternal, and that He chose Himself to be rejected and to perish: “its twofold content is that God wills to lose in order that man may gain. There is a sure and certain salvation for man, and a sure and certain risk for God.”

What seems to come short, however, in Barth’s Christocentric hermeneutic is attention to the proper power of God in the here and now.”

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


This second edition of the commentary on Revelation by Ranko Stefanovic does not differ greatly from the first edition, but it does make some subtle improvements in a few areas, apparently, in part at least, due to some feedback received from readers of the first edition.

The first major revision is with the methodological approach to the text. Stefanovic has added some clarity to the approach that he follows in the commentary. Although

Continued on page 28
he still notes that all of the various approaches “have some elements of truth” (12)—a debatable premise—he concludes, “Despite the fact that historicism has generally been denied and marginalized by modern scholarship, this commentary shows it to be the most appropriate approach to the book of Revelation” (14; cf. 16). This is a departure from the eclectic approach he argued for in the first edition, though in practical terms, he followed a largely historicist methodology while avoiding some specific applications that are controversial.

The clearer and more consistent historicist approach plays out in notable fashion in his exposition of the letters to the seven churches where he shows how the message of each church applies appropriately to specific consecutive periods of church history. Similarly, Stefanovic has attempted to add some material on the parallels between the historicist interpretation of the seven churches and that of the seven seals, positing “specific applications in different periods in Christian history” (227). He has revised his statement regarding the failure of the historicist interpretation in Revelation 11 to one that admits that “such a historical application is quite tenable” (354), although he offers a second, nonhistorical interpretation as well.

Another area in which Stefanovic has attempted to accommodate historicism is in his discussion of the 1,260-day/year period at various points where it appears in Revelation (11:2; 3; 12:6; 14; 13:5). He still does this a bit awkwardly, clearly preferring an approximate period to a specific one, but at least he does acknowledge the existence of the interpretation beginning in A.D. 538 and ending in A.D. 1798 (346, 387, 392, 411). At the same time, he argues for both a quantitative and qualitative understanding of this time period (346, 347, 387), detracting somewhat from a purely historicist interpretation. And, he wavers on applying the imagery of the beast from the sea to the papacy: “We must acknowledge, however, that applying the seventh head of the sea beast to the Medieval ecclesiastical power alone is inadequate. History depicts similar behaviors and activities by the hierarchy of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Sadly, religious-political oppression was also demonstrated by the newly established Protestant orthodoxy in the Western world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries characterized by religious intolerance” (420).

One area in which Stefanovic has not accommodated himself to traditional historicist interpretation is in the matter of the number of the beast’s name in 13:18. In fact, he has added arguments against the traditional interpretation (425, 426), and urges instead for a purely figurative significance based on a purported triple six, “a human number,” which “stands for the satanic triumvirate in contrast to the triple seven of the Godhead in Revelation 1:4-6. . . . This leads to the conclusion that the number 666 functions as a parody of the divine name of perfection” (437).

Aside from the issue of historicism, Stefanovic has made some accommodation to the interpretation of Revelation 1:10 in that, while he still leans toward “the Lord’s day” as referring to “the eschatological day of the Lord” (97), he now admits that “John might have used the phrase ‘the Lord’s day’ in a twofold meaning,” including the seventh-day Sabbath as an option which “would fit the eschatological connotation of the Sabbath in the Bible” (ibid.).

Another area in which Stefanovic has made some improvement is in the discussion of the symbolism of Revelation. The messages of Revelation “come not through a literal understanding of its contents but through the interpretation of symbols” (59). “The interpretive key of the book’s symbols is not allegory but typology” (59, 60). “Careful study indicates that most of the book’s symbolism is drawn from the Old Testament. . . . In portraying the events to take place in the future, inspiration employs the language of the past” (60). This explanation is very helpful, countering the literalism of dispensational futurist interpretations.

Still problematic is Stefanovic’s discussion of the structure of Revelation. He has made no revision of his structure in the new edition. The problem is an inconsistency in the structure—or structures—he proposes. He begins by arguing for a seven-part chiastic structure based on seven introductory sanctuary scenes (31). He then suggests an eleven-part chiastic outline of the book that synchronizes “the chiastic parallel segments,” including the prologue and epilogue (37). Finally, Stefanovic revises his proposed structure: “This commentary argues for the threefold structure of the book of Revelation with a prologue (1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-21). Such a structure is self-evident on the basis of Revelation 1:19” (40). Although one can question how “self-evident” this structure is, it is certainly different from those previously proposed. It departs from the chiastic structure, and does not entirely agree in where the divisions are in the outline. For example, the issue of what to do with 11:19 is never fully resolved, and he takes differing positions at different points in the commentary.

Despite some concerns about structure and content, this is an excellent commentary, one of the best on the market.

—Reviewed by Edwin Reynolds, PhD, professor of New Testament Studies and Greek at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee, United States.
Zoetermeer, Netherlands—June 5, 2010, was a historic day for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Netherlands when 84 people accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and were baptized.

This year’s theme at the Antillean Explosion, formerly known as the Antillean Rally, was “United Until He Comes,” an event conducted by Pastor Cherrel Francisca, staff coordinator for the Antillean church plants in the Netherlands Union. The aim of this event was to emphasize unity and togetherness.

Four evangelistic series were held simultaneously in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Delft, and Tilburg. The aim was to focus on Jesus as our Savior and to promote cooperation and unity among believers. After two weeks, the Antillean communities were invited to come together to attend a special fellowship program.

An invigorating program filled the day including praise and worship time, interviews with the lay preachers, video clips on unity, an interview with the evangelist, group interaction, and a presentation of the vision on respect and unity by the president of the Adventist Church in the Netherlands, Pastor Wim Altink.

“Together with members, lay-evangelists, and ministers, we can do much for Christ in an inspired [mind-set] of cooperation, within the diversity God has given to His church. We praise God for His leadership,” concluded Pastor Francisca.

Through this special service and the recent baptismal services in the Ghanaian churches in Amsterdam, Almere, and Eindhoven, the membership of the Adventist Church in the Netherlands has passed the 5,000 mark. [Wim Altink/TED News Staff/TED News]

Andrews Study Bible released

Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States—The only formal study Bible ever produced by a Seventh-day Adventist publishing house, the Andrews Study Bible, was released to the public for sale June 10, 2010. Three years in the making from concept to reality, it was formally introduced to the world church at the General Conference Session, June 24–July 3, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Using the New King James Version of the Bible, this historic publication is a full-feature study Bible, with more than 12,000 original study notes written by an international team of Adventist scholars who represent the latest in faithful biblical scholarship, according to Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University. The volume includes navigational tools, articles, helps, cross-references, maps, and notes, and a unique, linked reference system to highlight the great themes of the Christian faith. “All of this is to make Bible reading and understanding more accessible and easier—and it’s all within the cover of one reasonably sized book,” says Andreasen.

A project committee, chaired by Andreasen, was charged with supervising the development. Committee members included Mark A. Finley, vice president, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; Denis Fortin, dean, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary; Andrews University; Ernő Gyéresi, business manager, Andrews University Press; Gerry D. Karst, vice president, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; Ronald A. Knott, director, Andrews University Press; Juan R. Prestol, undertreasurer, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; Ángel M. Rodríguez, director, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; and Jon L. Dybdahl, professor emeritus of biblical studies, Walla Walla University and general editor of the Andrews Study Bible.

The contributors, all well-established scholars from academic environments, clearly understood their job was to write for lay readers. Andreasen notes, “This is a practical study Bible the lay reader can really use to understand the depth of scripture. In fact, our tag line for the Bible is ‘Light. Depth. Truth.’ We’ve tried to bring light and depth to our understanding of the truth in God’s Word.”

The Andrews Study Bible takes its name from Adventist pioneer John Nevins Andrews. Andreasen says, “Andrews was the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s first overseas missionary and was a renowned Bible scholar. It’s fitting to use the Andrews name for this study Bible because that name inspired the University and the University is now inspiring Bible study all over the world. Today, with the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in particular, Andrews is committed to providing theological education all over the world, and the church needs the Andrews Study Bible to go there too.” The Bible can be purchased through Andrews University Press at http://www.andrews.edu/universitypress/catalog.cgi?category=1. [Keri Suarez]
Have a good night

How well do you sleep? Do you take naps? Do you find it hard to fall asleep before midnight? Are you working on your sermons late at night? As a pastor, what types of issues and concerns keep your mind most active? Challenge yourself and try finding ways to get at least seven hours of sleep per night.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, most adults need seven to nine hours of nightly sleep to feel fully rested, and kids need even more sleep. An estimated 50–70 million people in the United States have chronic sleep and wakefulness disorders, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The American Insomnia Association defines insomnia as trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Occasional insomnia is experienced by more than one-third of American adults, and chronic insomnia affects more than one in ten. It may cause sleepiness or fatigue during the day, mood swings, and decreased concentration.

If you are having trouble falling or staying asleep, try these tips from the Better Sleep Council:

- Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule, including weekends.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine, such as soaking in a warm—but not very hot—bath, and then reading a meditative book or listening to restful music.
- Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillow.
- Eat nothing at least two to three hours before your bedtime.
- Exercise regularly. Ideally, complete your workout at least a few hours before bedtime.

- Avoid depressants and stimulants, such as alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, caffeinated soda, and even chocolate) close to bedtime. These can lead to poor sleep, keep you awake, or disrupt sleep later in the night.

Other helpful tips

- Relieve stress, anxiety, and other mental conditions in healthy ways.
- Do not go to bed with a full stomach or be hungry because you missed meals.
- Restrict fluid intake two hours before retiring to bed.
- Weight management—keeping off the pounds—may help you sleep better.
- If you snore excessively or have pauses in breathing during the night (usually noted by your spouse or other family members), a diagnosis of sleep apnea and corrective measures may assist in promoting better sleep.
- Avoid naps close to the evening hours.
- Wear earplugs in noisy environments or eyeshades if the room cannot be sufficiently darkened.

Seek help from health professionals regarding your sleep problems. They may recommend counseling or prescribe medications. Recognize the importance of correcting insomnia and get restful sleep because sleep deprivation may affect all areas of life: physical, mental, social, and emotional.

How many times have you been deprived of sleep? When does it usually occur? Take note and then act to counter the identified stressors. You will find it best to take work materials, computers, and televisions out of the sleep environment.

Medical consultants: Allan Handysides, MB, ChB, FRCP, FRCSC, FACOG; and Peter Landless, MB, Ch, MMed, FCP(SA), FACC, FASNC.

Sources:

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

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The Pastor and Health | Jina Kim

The quote by Ben Franklin, “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,” may have some truth to it. Studies suggest that sleeping before midnight is a healthier alternative for a better quality of sleep, with added health benefits such as weight loss (or less weight fluctuation), heart disease prevention, and longevity. Reap the benefits of a good quality sleep by following these health tips and have a good night.

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