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Mighty seed
Times change, quite radically. How do we Christians confront changes that seem clearly beyond our control?
Marguerite Shuster

The immortality of the soul: Could Christianity survive without it? Part 1
Questions about the soul’s immortality are considered from both theological and historical perspectives.
Bryan W. Ball

A broken commandment or an affirmation of hope?
Read how a law-centered religion would get us so wrapped up in ourselves that our vision of others becomes distorted.
Carl P. Cosaert

The Trinitarian dynamic of worship
The author explores the link between the doctrine of the Trinity and worship.
Alain Coralie

“My God, My God!”: On the mystery of the Incarnation
The subject of the Incarnation will be studied by the redeemed through eternity.
George E. Rice
Praying boldly

Derek Morris’s excellent article “The Pastor as a Harvest Worker: Praying the Radical Prayer” (January 2011), gave me an energy boost. I have read it several times, and thank him for speaking to my heart at a time when I needed it. Every pastor is called upon to pray, as I do in the critical care unit of a hospital, on the phone with a discouraged believer, with our men’s group before they deliver food to the homeless, or with a dear saint of the church facing heart valve replacement surgery. Even so, I could have and should have prayed more radical prayers.

Thanks for the reminder via this great article.

—Ned Flexer, pastor, First Baptist Church, Mt. Holly, New Jersey, United States

Jesus and political labels

Skip Bell’s article, “Pastors and Life in the Public Square” (November 2010), was timely. In a world where social pressure groups are mushrooming every day, both in political and social circles, surely gospel ministers need a sober, Christ-centered, biblical approach to complex political and social issues affecting our societies today.

As a result of the heavy influence of liberation theology in the world today, there is a tragic tendency—even by pastors—to shift the focus from Christ as the greatest need of our society to political structures.

To Jesus, God’s will in the life of everyone—irrespective of gender, age, race, or social class—was paramount. Humanity stood as one before Him. Jesus was never a political activist or revolutionary terrorist. The people in His time failed to classify Him with the Qumran isolationists, Zealot activists, Sadducees, Pharisees, or even the Essenes. In fact, that is the reason they finally united as one against Him. Christ showed the way in which Christians should present themselves in our turbulent world; not through political revolutions, but through His most profound ethical principle, “…Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets’” (Matt. 7:12, NKJV).

I concur with Bell that Jesus’ approach to life in the public square should be our model if we are sincerely His followers.

—Erick O. Were, pastor, Koru District, Central Nyanza Field, East African Union

Stereotyping Catholicism?

I have been receiving your magazine for more than 25 years. Thank you. I find your general pastoral articles helpful as they are often very practical. Occasionally, however, you print articles that stereotype the Catholic Church. When I see this, I simply pray again to the Holy Spirit for guidance that leads to the unity for which Jesus prayed.

The calumny against Theresa (presumably of Avila) that was printed in James R. Kilmer’s otherwise excellent article (“Transforming Prayer”—November 2010) cannot go unchallenged. The article implies that Theresa claimed to have “such an encounter with God that she did not need Jesus to be a Mediator.” The author softens the blow by saying that she “is said to have had” these encounters. Said by whom? Certainly not Theresa herself. The judges of the Inquisition? They found her innocent of this heresy. Jealous people who accused her before the judges of the Inquisition? Probably, yes. But then why would a Protestant magazine give credence to such allegations when the Catholic Church itself found her innocent of this heresy. I

Continued on page 29
A call for reformation

As a Christian community, we have recently been reminded of the need for reformation within our churches and within our own lives as followers of Jesus.* An appeal for personal and corporate reformation challenges us to ask a vital question: what kind of reformation do we need?

Some would urge us to go back to the way things used to be—old-fashioned dress codes and ancient liturgical styles. Others suggest that we should randomly discard everything from the past, like the young pastor who recently told me, “If it isn’t broken, break it.” Some of us have suffered through nihilistic reformations like that throughout our lives. So when we hear another call for reformation, we do well to ask ourselves what kind of reformation we need.

True reformation always finds its center in God and His Word—that powerful life-changing Word that Marguerite Shuster writes about in this issue. We always need to test our long held traditions and cherished opinions by the Word of God. Nonbiblical teachings and non-functional or dysfunctional practices need to be discarded—no matter how old they are. Reformation is not so much about old or new but rather about yielding our lives to the shaping influence of our Creator and Redeemer.

The psalmist David longed for reformation in his own life when he wrote the words to this ancient Scripture song (Ps. 51:10–12, NKJV):

Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

The reformation we all need is a continued shaping of our hearts and lives in harmony with the will of God. After you read the article by Carl P. Cosset, ask yourself this question, Who was in the greatest need of reformation in this story, the girl with pink hair or the couple who wrote the letter? Perhaps we shouldn’t even ask that question. We can easily see the need for reformation in others, but we must first hear the call for reformation ourselves, a call to allow God to shape us, to form us, so that we more fully reflect His beautiful character to all of His children.

After reading Jeremiah 18, hymn writer Adelaide Pollard gave the Lord permission to reform her life with these words that have blessed the lives of countless followers of Jesus since the day this prayer was written in 1902:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.

How will the Potter reform us? What will we look like after this reformation takes place? Changing may have little to do with clothing styles, hair color, or liturgical styles, and much to do with surrendering our hearts and lives to the shaping influence of God. Pollard’s prayer is so timely in a day when we long for personal and corporate reformation. I challenge you not only to listen to her testimony but to live what you hear.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Hold o’er my being absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me!

Mighty seed

Times, we have been told, change. And they do, even quite radically. In particular, times for the church in the United States and western Europe have not only changed, they’ve changed in ways that don’t look so good for us.

For one thing, as we are constantly told, we are failing to reach our young people. More, a whole culture once thought of as Judeo-Christian is moving from indifference to Christianity to hostility toward it (and not a minute too soon, the New Atheists would tell us).

Today, the dismal science of statistics says more Americans profess “no religion” than do all those who profess Episcopalianism, Methodism, and Lutheranism combined.¹

How do we Christians confront these changes, changes that seem clearly beyond our control?

A parable

In this context of threatening change, I want to look at Mark 4:26–29, a parable found solely in Mark’s Gospel: “He also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.’”²

There’s something about that seed that isn’t in our control. Even the parable itself doesn’t conform itself easily to the tidy control of interpreters. The sower and the reaper seem to be the same person. But if it’s Jesus, why is He so ignorant of how the seed grows? If it’s a farmer, how could a mere human be an end-time harvester (there is clear allusion in the text to the end-time language of Joel 3:13)? And, besides, everybody knows that you don’t just throw seed on the ground and walk away.

In truth, though, the parable is more mysterious than obscure. If a certain elusiveness about identities exists here, I suspect it has to do with the larger truth that the human story takes place, not independently, but firmly inside the divine story. In other words, we can’t neatly dissect out what God does from what God’s people do.

Paul can say, “I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10); or again, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13, NASB). What we plant comes to nothing without the Divine Planter; what we harvest is but a taste of the final harvest; and yet God, in His wisdom, has determined that our labor should, somehow, matter.

Nonetheless, we need to be reminded that the gift of life, that the power of the seed itself, is not ours to produce, manage, or control. In this parable, set in a context of seed parables, it’s all about the seed.

The seed

Yes, it’s all about the seed. Either the seed is good or it’s not. Before you get anxious about mulching, fertilizing, watering, and weeding, remember that none of that will do any good if you plant marbles, no matter how beautiful and nicely sculpted those marbles might be or how diligently you mulch, fertilize, water, or weed them.

Imagine a magnificent green field, full of plants. But it’s worse to have such a wonderfully green field if all you see are weeds. For, as the disturbing parable in Matthew 13 reminds us, wheat and weeds look a good deal alike, especially when they are young. Thus, we can be seduced. We can look at results produced by CEO-types who have replaced pastoral duties with administrative ones and be persuaded that we—whose efforts seem to produce much more meager results—have it all wrong and, thus, these worldly tools are what is really essential. In contrast, the parable in Mark emphasizes the complete passivity of the farmer once he has sown the seed.

In short, if the seed isn’t good, nothing else matters. We must, therefore, be careful about tampering with the seed. Yes, of course, we interpret and apply in contexts, and painting the seed blue in a blue world—if you use nontoxic paint—won’t likely be fatal. But we must maintain the integrity of the whole. Chopping the seed up into tiny pieces, on the theory that just a very little, too little really to be...
recognizable, will be easier for folks to get down, and the rest can be provided later, is fatal. (That Bill Hybels and the seeker-sensitive movement have had the courage to recognize and own up to their failures at such points is to be commended.)

We must have the whole gospel. Leaving out the hard parts—sin, self-sacrifice, and suffering, for instance—and the symbols that remind us of these things in worship, is worse than nothing at all. Why? Because it can inoculate folks against the gospel in the same way that exposure to a pathogen in a dose too small to give us a disease can make us immune to the disease altogether.

But just as bad as leaving critical stuff out is adding stuff that doesn’t belong, creating a gospel injected with alien material, tailored to allow us to do what we want but probably shouldn’t. Consider, by analogy, seeds engineered to tolerate high doses of herbicide (known as a genetically modified organism, or GMO). Plants grown from such seeds have already been implicated in the colony collapse phenomenon decimating honey bee populations, and in the deaths of monarch butterflies. Such causal chains are hard to prove, but it should hardly surprise anyone that creating poison tolerance and then using more and more poison is bad for living things.

While the example is a contemporary one, the danger in its basic shape is anything but new. Paul had to counter those who thought he was teaching that we should sin in order that grace might abound. Should we today, for instance, be reassured by those preachers who tell us to feel free to be our fallen selves and act out our fallen impulses and accumulate our worldly goods indefinitely, without any pangs of conscience (and, indeed, to see all this freedom and accumulation as a clear sign of God’s generous love and blessing)? Don’t count on it. That is GMO seed, which brings short-term gain but long-term disaster.

Who would have thought that a sermon preached or a word spoken by, well, you, might be the very word that sets another human life on an entirely new course?

Not the faintest idea

There’s something about good seed. Plant that, and nothing else. And then let it alone and go about your daily business in peace. Of course, there’s the watering and the weeding. Jesus knew that. It’s just that all these other activities are not the point of the parable. The text’s verb forms tell us that the
planting is a one-time event; the sleeping and rising continue. We can let things be and go on living our lives, once we have done the essential thing. It’s just not true that everything stops the minute we stop our frantic efforts. No, the seed grows “automatically,” of itself.

The seed takes root and springs up because of what it is. Something about the seed is fitted to the soil, to the human heart. The appearance of fruit is gradual. If the development has a sort of orderliness, it is often only a general one, not one that specifies this many leaves of just this shade of green or this many blossoms arranged just so. God’s way of working in each heart is particular to that heart. And we haven’t the faintest idea how it happens, much less the knowledge to engineer it. I repeat, we haven’t the faintest idea how it happens, how God’s kingdom comes, shoot by tender shoot. Forecasts, projections, and busy strategies deceive us.

Gurus of today’s church culture have bought into a contrary view, the idea that we should figure out what God is doing in the world and get on board. Yet, surely, Jesus told this parable at least in part to reassure His disciples because evidence of the growth of the kingdom in His own day was so slight. And surely anyone looking for what God was doing in the world around A.D. 30 would hardly have started with a wandering Galilean nobody from nowhere. Furthermore, Jesus HImself seemed, as Thielicke put it, “to ignore with a sovereign indifference the . . . ‘world-historical perspective’ of his mission” and instead persisted in tending to the nobodies of the world, being obedient in small and immediate matters, and letting the rest go. That is not quite what large church leaders are generally advised to do. Granted that the contexts, and to some extent the responsibilities, are different, but there is surely still a lesson to be learned here.

The hidden things
The problem with the current mind-set runs deeper still. Very often, when God has been doing

God’s ways of bringing His kingdom

ARE MORE MYSTERIOUS THAN WE CAN KNOW.

His most important work—as He did through the thoroughly immoral and unjust execution of Jesus—we would have been morally obligated, not to get on board, but to oppose it with all our strength. As Jesus said in Matthew’s Gospel, “ ‘The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born’ ” (Matt. 26:24). God’s ways of bringing His kingdom are more mysterious than we can know. Our duty is not to fathom these ways but to be obedient to what the Lord tells us to do. In the context of Mark’s parable, obedience would lead us to plant good seed, and then be at peace.

In fact, many of the most important things in life are like the growth of that mysterious seed, things that fretting and labor cannot produce once we have done the right thing. We cannot make someone love us or forgive us; we can only accept these good gifts. We cannot even will something as superficially straightforward as the understanding of a sermon or the recognition of a face. We can will the reading or the listening or the looking, but not the understanding or the recognition. Striving for happiness makes it ever more beyond our reach. How often what counts most is least in our control.

These good things that we cannot force into existence come, if they come at all, in ways as ordinary as they are mysterious. We love and, sometimes, are loved in return. We repent and suddenly know, deeper than words, that God welcomes us home. We read and do understand; we look and rejoice in recognizing the face of a long-absent friend. If we deny the mystery, try to control it, we are left with nothing but the grinding wheels of our own machinery. The miracle of it all is a hidden thing, just as the miraculous quality of all of life is hidden under its sheer familiarity.

But hidden, too, are more ominous things. These are not the point of Mark’s parable, but we can hardly help but notice them. So far as we can tell, God Himself seems to allow all sorts of things that make us doubt a harvest is even conceivable.
We see not just a barren field, but stones, weeds, floods, blazing heat, voracious insects, and marauding strangers. We see the vast empire of opponents to God’s kingdom, the endless assaults of evil that can lead us to wonder if God is, really, doing anything at all.

So be it. Sleep and rise, night and day, and be at peace. It must be that even in the midst of evil, precisely in the darkness of the seed hidden in the earth, God is somehow ensuring that all will not be lost but will be brought to fulfillment in the end. If He were not working in the dark, the seed would not sprout at all. Let the wretched outward appearance go.

Signs of the kingdom

At the same time, it’s also OK to notice the sound green shoots, stalks, perhaps even heads of grain; that is, it is OK to notice signs of the kingdom even, or maybe, especially, in fields that are not yours. It may be that someone else, and not you at all, will see the growth in your own field. That way we are less likely to get confused about where the growth comes from.

One of the finest pastors I have ever known, a person whose own life has been marked by relentless suffering, loves to look for signs of the kingdom. He finds them in surprising places. Favorites of his have been episodes of the popular old television series M*A*S*H, where (believe it or not) he spies green shoots everywhere. Some are plain enough: one recognizes things like so-called enemy soldiers cared for with the same grace and skill as anyone else or orphaned children loved and provided with toys. But don’t neglect to notice the less obvious signs—like the goofy gurney races when the hospital unit was, for once, empty. Or the futile and entertaining bombing missions of “Five O’Clock Charlie,” whose plane arrived daily like clockwork and every single time missed its target—the only question being by how much. Desperate hilarity and terrible courage in impossible situations, these, too, can be signs of the kingdom, things to celebrate and for which to give thanks. Every hint of love, grace, and wholesome laughter augurs something better to come.

Conclusion

Remember, it’s all about the seed. There’s something about that seed that assures the harvest. It’s like the mushroom a tiny child can crumple in her hand but still has enough life to push through pavement and come out whole. Any sensible person would have said it was impossible. But there it is.

Who would have dreamed that Joshua Josephson, the Nobody from nowhere, born in a barn, executed at thirty years of age, betrayed by one of His tiny band of a dozen followers and denied by another, would be the Source of a faith and hope that spans the globe? Who would ever have supposed that the violently suppressed churches of Russia and China, pushed underground, kept alive at times by faithful grandmothers with mere fragments of the Bible, would survive to put up not just green shoots but fields fruitful and ripe? Who would have thought that a sermon preached or a word spoken by, well, you, might be the very word that sets another human life on an entirely new course?

Yes, times are changing. Fortunately, our God doesn’t. Therefore, preach that Word. Sow good seed and be at peace, rejoicing confidently in every sign of the kingdom. For God’s own promise means that the harvest is sure.

1. Quoted in Martin Marty’s newsletter Context, January 2010, 6.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptures are from the New International Version of the Bible.
The immortality of the soul: Could Christianity survive without it? 

(Part 1 of 2)

More than half a century has passed since Oscar Cullmann delivered the Ingersoll lecture at Harvard and it was published under the title Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? Cullmann was, at the time, a professor of theology at the University of Basel and at the Sorbonne in Paris and had already published Christ and Time, described by one reviewer as “one of the most significant theological works” of the decade.

Given the almost universal adherence to the immortality of the soul within contemporary Christendom, it may be legitimate to raise Cullmann’s question once more, even to press it further. Could Christianity survive without the soul’s immortality? Or is resurrection at the last day a more credible and biblical alternative? We shall attempt to answer these questions from theological and historical perspectives; the theological from within the context of the historical, bearing in mind that Cullmann was in the mid-twentieth century, the latest in a very long line of distinguished thinkers and writers who had raised similar questions.

We shall perhaps be surprised to discover that some of Europe’s keenest minds were engaged in this discussion, challenging the assumption that the immortality of the soul was central to the Christian proclamation and propounding an alternative eschatology, which to each of them was always more biblical, more thoroughly Christological, and, therefore, nearer to the heart of the authentic Christian message.

Some preliminary considerations

Although it hardly seems necessary to explain the traditional view of the immortality of the soul, yet for the sake of clarity, it may be helpful to restate the doctrine briefly. Human beings consist of two components: a material, mortal body and an immaterial, immortal soul. At death, the immortal soul leaves the body and, in the case of the righteous believer, ascends immediately to heaven and into the presence of God to enjoy eternal bliss. The souls of the unsaved go somewhere else. This belief has defined and undergirded Christianity for at least 1,000 years. It is almost impossible to overstate how crucial it has been in the faith structure of countless millions of believers in every country where Christianity has taken root, who have died believing that they were about to go to heaven and enter eternal glory.

By the time the Westminster Assembly finally articulated this doctrine in its influential Confession in 1646, English Protestantism was over 100 years old, continental Protestantism a generation older than that, and belief in the soul’s immortality several hundred years older still. It was unthinkable that belief in the soul and its immortality could ever seriously be challenged or that a credible alternative should even be considered. Yet that is precisely what has taken place over the past four centuries, beginning, as we have said, in the very earliest years of the Protestant Reformation and continuing in an unbroken succession of biblical scholars ever since.

Those who have challenged the traditional doctrine and proposed an alternative eschatology have generally been known as mortalsists, Christian mortalists, or conditionalists-mortalists because they believed that human beings are essentially mortal rather than inherently immortal creatures. Or they were known as conditionalists because they argued that immortality belonged only to God and was attainable by humans through Christ and that its acquisition was dependent on the believer’s faith in Him and the resurrection at the last day, rather than on themselves.

It is important for a correct understanding of the mortalist position to recognize that there were, from the early days, two forms of Christian mortalism: psychopannychism and thenetopsychism. Psychopannychists believed that the soul was a separate immortal entity, which left the body at death, did not ascend immediately to heaven, but slept in rest and peace until the last day when it would be
reunited with the body and then received into glory. Thnetopsychists did not believe in the existence of a separate soul, holding instead that the word soul referred to the whole person and that at death the whole person died, to await the resurrection at the last day.

N. T. Burns explains, “The psychopannychists believed that the immortal substance called soul literally slept until the resurrection of the body; the thnetopsychists, denying that the soul was an immortal substance, believed that the soul slept after the death only in a figurative sense. Both groups of soul sleepers believed in the personal immortality of the individual after the resurrection of the body.”

Both forms of the mortalist understanding appeared throughout Europe within only a few years of the onset of the Reformation.

We will briefly trace mortalism’s development in the early Reformation years in Europe and England and then turn our attention to some of the more influential mortalist spokesmen, specifically to note their concerns and the arguments they used to challenge the traditional view and sustain their own position.

**Early continental mortalism**

In 1439, the Council of Florence declared canonical a belief that had already existed for some time, the doctrine of purgatory, with its essential presupposition that the souls of the dead are conscious and “capable of pain or joy even prior to the resurrection of their bodies.” Few doctrines of the medieval church provoked such widespread opposition from the early Reformers and those who followed them than this doctrine of an intermediate state between death and a future life in which those who had died would undergo purification and punishment prior to the resurrection and the last judgment. Eamon Duffy more recently described purgatory as an “out-patient department of Hell.”

The abuses deriving from the belief in purgatory were to become one of the major concerns of Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, along with his attack on the sale of indulgences and the “audacious” claim that souls could be released from purgatory thereby. Luther would soon conclude that the underlying doctrines of the soul’s reality and immortality were “monstrous” opinions concocted by the medieval church.

A careful analysis of Luther’s writings reveals more than 300 instances where he rebuts the medieval view of the soul, substituting in its place an undeniable psychopannychism. Indeed, all the essentials of the psychopannychistic view of man are found in Luther’s writings; most of them stated repeatedly: the separate existence of the soul, its unconscious sleep in death, its exclusion from heavenly bliss until the resurrection, and the ultimate reunification of body and soul at the last day as the true way to immortality and eternal life. In his lectures on Ecclesiastes (1526), Luther asserted that the dead are “completely asleep” and do not “feel anything at all . . . they lie there not counting days or years; but when they are raised it will seem to them that they have only slept a moment.”

Luther actually says of the resurrection at the last day, that it is “the chief article of Christian doctrine.”

Already, by the mid-1520s, psychopannychism was being advocated in Austria, Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands as well as in Germany. In 1527, the Swiss Anabaptist leader Michael Sattler was burned at the stake, convicted on numerous counts of heresy, including denying the efficacy of the intercession of the virgin Mary and the departed saints (since, like all the faithful, they were asleep, awaiting the resurrection and the last judgment). In the Netherlands, Anthony Pocquet, a former priest and doctor in canon law, proclaimed that the redemptive work of Christ would culminate in the resurrection of the righteous. Believers who had died in anticipation of the resurrection were asleep in the grave.

G. H. Williams of Princeton, in his monumental analysis of the Radical Reformation, maintains that mortalism, in either of its forms, was a central article in the theology of many continental radicals. He argues that the evangelical rationalists of the Radical Reformation, Italian in origin, spread widely across eastern Europe by the latter half of the sixteenth century, took mortalism convincingly to what he calls its “extreme” position of thnetopsychism. The evangelical rationalists themselves, with their insistence that reason must prevail in the interpretation of Scripture, might have called it the more logical and consistent formulation of mortalist theology.

Thus, by the mid-sixteenth century, psychopannychism and thnetopsychism were established in various parts of Europe and had already given Calvin the motivation for his *Psychopannychia*, which first appeared in print in 1542 but possibly had been written as early as 1536. This was a fierce attack on mortalists and mortalist theology, which had enormous and lasting implications for the future of Protestantism.

**English mortality**

We now turn our attention to the English scene for it is English Reformation theology that has most influenced Protestantism, particularly in its Anglican and non-conformist forms, throughout the English-speaking world.

In 1526, eight years before the English Reformation, William Tyndale’s historic translation of the New Testament in English was published in Germany and smuggled into England. Not only was Tyndale’s New Testament influential in the development of the English language and English Protestantism, it also contributed to the early mortalist-immortalist debate. A second edition of Tyndale’s New Testament appeared in 1534 under unusual circumstances. George Joye, a fellow Reformer had, without Tyndale’s knowledge or permission, published a revision of the 1526 New Testament. One of the main issues
in the ensuing exchange between Tyndale and Joye concerned the soul and its state after death and Joye’s intense desire that the New Testament should not be construed to support the mortalist idea of soul sleep.

Joye had, “with breathtaking folly” (to use David Daniell’s phrase), made several significant changes in Tyndale’s original English text, some 20 in all, changing the word resurrection to read “life after this life” or “the next life” or an equivalent alternative phrase, to avoid the word resurrection with its obvious implications. Tyndale feared that, as a result of Joye’s unauthorized manipulation of the 1526 translation, many might misunderstand the emphasis in the original text on the resurrection of the body. This has become an important, but frequently overlooked, episode in the history of religious thought as well as in the mortalist debate itself.

Tyndale, therefore, reaffirmed his position and what he considered the biblical teaching concerning man’s future arising from his own careful study of the text in the original and his translation of it into English. In his introduction to the 1534 edition, he says, concerning the souls of the departed: “I am not persuaded that they be already in the full glory that Christ is in, or the elect angels of God are in. Neither is it any article of my faith; for if it were so, I see not but then the preaching of the resurrection of the flesh were in vain.”

For Tyndale, the believer’s hope of immortality is grounded in the resurrection of the dead as the culmination of a thoroughly biblical eschatology. “And we shall all both good and bad rise both flesh and body and appear together before the judgement seat of Christ, to receive every man according to his deeds. And that the bodies of all that believe and continue in the true faith of Christ, shall be endued with like immortality and glory as is the body of Christ.”

The early Anglican articles of religion are also enlightening in terms of the growing appeal of mortalism across the country. The first formal doctrinal statement of the Church of England, the Forty-Two Articles of Religion formulated in 1552, were largely the work of Thomas Cranmer. They were intended to preserve peace and unity within Anglicanism and some of the articles were specifically directed against the swelling ranks of Anabaptists and others disaffected with the newly established national church and those whose teachings were already threatening the unity of the English church. The heading to Article 40 reads, “The soules of them that departe this life doe neither die with the bodies, nor sleepe idle,” with the following text: “Thei which saie that the soules of suche as departe hens

Hardwick correctly noted that the Forty-Two Articles were drawn up with “an eye . . . to the existing necessities of the times,” one of which clearly was mortalism, in both forms. While no figure can be put on the number of mortalists throughout England at the time, it had to be a considerable amount. A Baptist Confession of Faith, published in 1660 with two prominent mortalists as signatories, claimed to represent 20,000 followers in Kent, Sussex, and London alone, and a pamphlet published in 1701 accused one of those signatories of spreading heresy throughout the region. An old document, only discovered in 2007, provides evidence that mortalism was still strong among General Baptists in Kent and Sussex in 1745. It seems beyond doubt that mortalist belief had prevailed among Baptists in southeast England for at least 200 years.

During this period, a succession of able and prominent writers advocated the mortalist view as the preferred interpretation of biblical eschatology. They included the following:
You said I’d learn more than what’s in the books. That I’d learn to serve. Surrounded by mentors to help me shape my values and live them daily.

You said I am our future.

You were right about going to an Adventist college.

And now I am ready. Put me to work.
These seventeenth-century writers were followed by a succession of equally illustrious names in the eighteenth century:

- Henry Layton, lawyer, mortalism’s most prolific apologist, who produced 1,500 pages in all, most in response to advocates of the traditional view.
- William Coward, physician and member of the College of Surgeons, who argued that the idea that immaterial substance has existence is self-contradictory and contrary to reason, saying, “I can as soon conceive a black whiteness as frame such a concept in my mind.”
- Edmund Law, bishop of Carlisle and professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge, where he had defended his doctoral dissertation on théonopsychism in 1749.
- Peter Peckard, vice-chancellor of Cambridge University and dean of Peterborough, one of mortalism’s most articulate apologists.
- Francis Blackburne, another Cambridge graduate, a disciple of Locke, a friend of Law, and the first English historian of mortalist thought, tracing the then-known origins of mortalism back to the fifteenth century.

- Joseph Priestley, the scientist known for his “discovery” of oxygen but undeservedly not as well known as a competent biblical scholar who had reached mortalist conclusions through his own study of the text.

All these, and many others throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were persuaded of the essential correctness of the mortalist viewpoint and felt strongly enough about it to publish their convictions for their contemporaries and for posterity. What, then, did they believe? We shall consider this in part 2 of this article.

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4. The entry under “soul” in the 3rd edition of The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church notes that, in recent times, philosophical difficulties over the traditional dichotomy between soul and body, “and the recovery of the biblical insight into the unity of man have meant that the doctrine of the soul, if considered at all, is thought of in relation to the whole biblical doctrine of man.”
5. Article 32 of the Westminster Confession, “Of the State of Men After Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead,” reads, “The bodies of men, after death, return to dust and ashes; and soul corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them.”
6. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgement of the great day. Besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none. But G. S. Hendry noted “several reasons” that have led many people to question whether the immortality of the soul (“an ingenious theory”) should be considered an integral part of the Christian hope. G. S. Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1980), 245, 246.
7. See The Soul Sleepers for a historical survey and analysis of continental and English mortalist writers to 1800.
13. On Calvin’s Psychopannychia and its implications for Protestant eschatology then and in the future, see Ball, The Soul Sleepers, 38–42.
15. Daniell, Tyndale, 324.
17. Ibid.
20. This article, together with Articles 39, 41, and 42, was omitted from the revised Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563, which remain the classic formulation of Anglican belief. The Anglican scholar Francis Blackburne argued that the omission of this article was a “certain sign” that mortalism was no longer thought to “differ from the right faith and orthodox belief delivered in the Scriptures.” F. Blackburne, No Proof in the Scriptures of an Intermediate State of Happiness or Morey Between Death and the Resurrection (n.p., 1756), 37.
21. See Ball, “Appendix III: The Eighteenth-Century Sussex Baptists,” in The Soul Sleepers. The eighteenth-century Sussex Baptists were widely known in their day as “Soul Sleepers” on account of their mortalist eschatology.
22. More Mortalism was well known and controversial. A second edition appeared in 1665 with the title Man Wholly Mortal!
24. Milton’s mortalism was set out in detail in his most comprehensive theological work, A Treatise on Christian Doctrine, which was unknown in his own day and only discovered in 1925.
25. Taylor is one of the two most frequently quoted authors to represent Anglican belief and practice in the extensive anthology edited by P. E. More and F. L. Cross, Anglicanism (London: SPCK, 1962).
26. Locke’s theology is now being recognized after being virtually ignored for three centuries.
27. Only a few copies of Layton’s Search for Souls (1708) have survived since the work was suppressed by the authorities as being heretical.
28. Coward’s works were also unacceptable to those in authority. A committee appointed by the House of Commons decided that they contained “offensive” doctrine and ordered them to be burnt.
29. In addition to opposing enforced subscription and the immortality of the soul, Peckard was also one of the early opponents of the slave trade.
30. Blackburne’s mortalism was advocated in the context of strenuous opposition to required subscription to articles of belief, creeds, and confessions of faith.
31. Priestley’s An History of the Compulsory of Christianity was read widely in his day, caused much debate, and was also burned in public in 1785.
Tuesday afternoon, December 12, 2006. As I sorted through my mail, I came across a small handwritten envelope. Although I did not recognize the name on the return address, I had a hunch it was probably related to the death of my 16-year-old daughter Mindy, who had drowned nearly five months earlier.

Unable to find a local job, Mindy had decided to spend the summer helping to take care of her great-grandmother, who lived with Mindy’s aunt three hours north of us. Mindy was excited about the opportunity. But, like most parents, my wife and I were a little nervous since it would be Mindy’s first extended stay away from home.

A few days after Mindy left, I flew to Turkey for an international Bible conference. I did not like being so far away from my family, but I thought everything would be all right. Unfortunately, that was not the case. A parent’s worst nightmare turned into a reality for me when an early morning knock on my door brought the horrible news that Mindy had been in an accident. I was to come home immediately.

After church, Mindy had gone with the church youth group for an afternoon trip to the river. After seeing a girl float across to the other side of the river, Mindy and her friend decided to do the same. The girls did not realize, however, that the current was strong in the middle of the river, and that just around the bend was a long stretch of severe rapids. So instead of quickly crossing to the other bank, they floated across leisurely. Before they knew it, they found themselves caught in the current. They screamed for help, but it was too late. Another girl dived in to save them, but she never made it out of the rapids alive. The girl my daughter was with actually made it through the rapids and walked away with only a few scratches. My daughter was not so fortunate.

My life was shattered. How could God let something like that happen? If one girl escaped, why did my daughter and the girl who tried to save her, die? God could certainly have saved all three girls. Where was He when my daughter needed Him most?

Shortly after the accident, I wrote an article recounting my spiritual struggle with God as I desperately tried to race home from Turkey (“My Journey With Jairus,” Adventist Review, November 23, 2006). In response to the article, I received several emails from people who identified with my pain and wanted to let my family know they cared. So, as I opened the handwritten envelope, I assumed it was probably a similar note of encouragement.

I was right. Well, at least partly.

Dear Pastor Cosaert,

We were very saddened and impressed with your story of Mindy in the Review. However, both my husband and I have a deep concern.

When we were raising our children we strongly emphasized Isaiah 58:13, 14 for direction for truly honoring the Sabbath. Floating or swimming seems more like one’s own pleasure. We have seen a friend’s son die while water-skiing on Lake Shasta; and another son at La Sierra who went snow-skiing on Sabbath, had an accident and was left a paraplegic. What is that pleasure worth?

Just what does “doing thine own pleasure” involve? We think we should give strong attention to these verses. And to teach our children the import of honoring God’s Sabbath. We wonder if you stress that to your students and family.

As older parents, it is very distressing to see the compromises to the world that many younger parents are making, rather than standing firm to God’s principles.

The letter—saddened, but . . .

The opening line confirmed that the letter was indeed related to my article about Mindy’s death. “Dear Pastor Cosaert,” it began. “We were very saddened and impressed with your story of Mindy . . .” But the second sentence began with the word however. I immediately sensed this letter was not what I expected. My hands began to quiver and a strange array of emotions began to well up within me as I read and re-read the letter.

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As older parents, it is very distressing to see the compromises to the world that many younger parents are making, rather than standing firm to God’s principles.
Our prayer is for you to give much thought and prayer to this text.
Cordially . . .

I couldn’t believe what I read. I felt that someone had taken my fragile heart that still hurt with so much pain and crushed it again. At a time when I was struggling to hold on to my faith in a loving God in the midst of such a tragedy, a fellow Christian, someone who did not know my family, had felt compelled to write me a letter not to express sympathy but condemnation. In disbelief, I read through the letter several times, hoping that my eyes had somehow played a trick on me. But the only thing my eyes had missed was what was printed on the stationery just below the person’s signature: “Have a great day!”

I was so hurt. My initial response was to tear the letter to pieces. But I didn’t. Instead, I decided to keep it. And I am glad I did. Were the author’s comments intended to be mean-spirited? I don’t know, but I hope not. What I do know is that the author was very serious about the subject. Was it insensitive? Definitely! But was the author right in what was said? Was the author’s use of Isaiah 58 accurate? Did God really punish my daughter for deciding to go in to the river on a Sabbath afternoon? As painful as the letter was for me to consider, I decided to examine Isaiah 58:13.

What I discovered in the process surprised me.

**Sabbath and our own “pleasure”**

Isaiah 58:13, 14 states,

“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,
And call the Sabbath a delight,
The holy day of the LORD honorable,
And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,
Nor finding your own pleasure,
Nor speaking your own words,
Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD” (NKJV).

Isaiah 58:13, 14 is a powerful statement about the importance of the Sabbath. Isaiah portrays the Sabbath as a sacred institution—so sacred that we should be careful not to trample on it with our feet as if it were no different than any other day. At the same time, however, the passage is ambiguous. We should refrain, it says, from doing our own “pleasure” on that day. What does **pleasure** mean?

As a young person, I grew up with the idea that not “doing your pleasure” meant you could not do anything fun. My parents would come home from church and take a long nap, while my brother and I were not allowed to do much of anything except sleep, sit around, or go on a walk. We got the idea that the test of determining what one should or should not do on the Sabbath was, if you enjoy it, do not do it. Having now been in the church for several years, I know that this verse has certainly been the source of much finger-pointing.

The Hebrew word translated as “pleasure” is **chephetz**. This word occurs 38 times in the Old Testament and can refer to a variety of things based on its context. It is used to describe land or words of “delight” (Eccles. 12:10; Mal. 3:12). It is used of the righteous person who “delights” in the law of the Lord (Ps. 1:2). It is also used in relation to something a person would like to have (“Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all that she desired” [1 Kings 10:13]).

Since context is so important for understanding the specific meaning of **pleasure** or **delight**, it is helpful to note that the same word Isaiah used in chapter 58, verse 13, is also used in verse 3. Isaiah writes, “Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.” Where English poetry builds on the repetition of similar sounding words or word endings at the end of a line, Hebrew poetry builds on the repetition of similar ideas in parallel lines. An example of this can be seen in Isaiah 58:1 where the idea of “cry[ing] aloud” parallels “lift[ing] up your voice like a trumpet,” and “transgression” parallels “sins.”

We simply do not know what God is doing in the heart of a person—regardless of what we might think of his or her actions.
parallel concept in verse 3 between pleasure and the oppression of workers indicates that in Isaiah’s mind “pleasure” doesn’t simply refer to something enjoyable but has more of a business sense. In fact, the English Standard Version lists “business” as an alternate translation of the word pleasure in Isaiah 58. In this context, the use of the word pleasure in Isaiah 58:13 refers to the social oppression and injustice described in other prophetic books such as Amos.

In a world driven by economic growth and the accumulation of wealth, Isaiah 58:13 has an important message for us today. The Sabbath reminds us that there is more to life than just personal profit. The Sabbath reminds us of our roots—a day for growing in faith and renewing relationships between family and friends. To apply the passage to a Sabbath afternoon outing in nature certainly seems to be taking Isaiah 58:13 out of context.

While understanding the specific way Isaiah used “pleasure” in chapter 58 is important, we also need to look at the larger literary context of the entire chapter.

The heart-centered context

Isaiah 58 divides into three main sections: verses 1–5, 6–12, and 13, 14. In the first section, God calls Israel to account for her transgressions. Israel, however, feigns surprise, insisting that she observes fast days. The problem, God says, is not Israel’s actions, but her heart. Israel’s religious experience had become merely a collection of rituals. Her heart was no longer in it. Rather than grasping the spiritual meaning that was symbolized in the outward expressions of her faith, she was simply going through the motions.

Then in verses 6–12, God vividly describes, in an artistically breathtaking fashion, that true religion stems from the heart, and is to be expressed in the way grace is extended to others. Indeed, Isaiah’s description of loosing the bonds of wickedness, sharing bread with the hungry, and removing the yokes of oppression aptly summarizes the ministry of Jesus. And, in the heart of this description is verse 9, where God states that the one thing that should be absent from true religion is finger-pointing.

Seen in this light, it is clear that Isaiah 58 is not law centered, but heart centered. While the Sabbath is mentioned, it is mentioned in the context of genuine worship rooted in the heart. When verse 13 is isolated from this context, it is easy to lose the entire meaning of what the passage is really about. A law-centered religion gets us so wrapped up in ourselves that our vision of others becomes distorted. Instead of seeing others through the compassionate eyes of Jesus, we only see the outside—whether they measure up to our standards of behavior or not.

**A broken commandment or an affirmation of hope?**

In the letter I received, all that the writer could see in the story of my daughter’s death was what they thought was a broken commandment. Somehow they were blind to the hopes and dreams of a 16-year-old girl, which were tragically snatched away in a moment’s time, and blind to a broken family that will never be the same. What has become of us if all we can see are broken commandments?

My point in sharing the letter I received is not to solicit condemnation of its author. No, that would be just as equally un-Christian. I share the letter because it is a reminder that we are often more like the author than we think. While we would probably never say it so directly in a letter, if we are honest, we have thought and acted in the same judgmental way ourselves.

At a Friday vespers service a few weeks before Mindy’s death, as part of an offering appeal for needy students, a young college-age girl...
was invited forward to share the difference Christian education had made in her life. I did not catch her name, and it would not have mattered at the time. All I could see was her wildly colored pink hair. I was shocked. I immediately thought to myself, Surely, there has to be a better representative. My conscience quickly began to reprove me for judging her by her appearance. I felt even guiltier after hearing how Christ had changed her life. Abused as a child, a Christian family had adopted her, and through their love she had discovered how much God loved her too. My eyes had led me astray. I had seen her hair, not her heart.

It was only later, however, that I fully realized how misguided my original thoughts had been. Shortly after my daughter’s death, I learned that the heroic girl who had given her life in the attempt to save my precious daughter was none other than that girl with the pink hair. I had judged her by her outward appearance, when in reality, she was far more like Jesus than I could have ever imagined, for she was willing to lay down her life to try to save another—my daughter.

The loss of a loved one, especially a child, certainly poses one of the greatest challenges to one’s faith in a loving God. But that is not the only difficulty. Just as challenging is the way we, as Christians, treat one another. Life in this world is full of pain. As followers of Jesus, we certainly can do a lot to make those situations easier by encouraging the wounded, rather than condemning them. We simply do not know what God is doing in the heart of a person—regardless of what we might think of his or her actions.

I was encouraged when I recently learned that earlier on the day Mindy died she had stood up at church and told her class how much she loved Jesus and how she wanted to serve Him forever. While we don’t fully understand why things happen like they do on this planet, we are confident that the day Mindy needed Jesus most was not that day she drowned. No, the day Mindy will need Jesus most is resurrection morning, and on that day He will be there for her—and for all of us. May that day come soon!

2. Unless otherwise noted, scriptures are from the English Standard Version.
Our thoughts about God determine the way we worship Him. Therefore, a correct theological framework is essential for good liturgical practice. In other words, theology shapes the way we worship. That being the case, I can hardly recall a time when I intentionally let the Adventist doctrine of God impact my worship ministry in a major way. My interest in renewing worship had more to do with changing the format than looking at the deep structures of worship. I firmly believe in God as a Trinity, yet could hardly see the link between the Trinity and worship. Like all committed Christians, I acknowledge the matchless love of the Father, the incomparable sacrifice of Christ, and the sanctifying power of the Spirit, but the problem involves not having articulated these truths clearly in my own experience and the worship style of the church.

This gap between theology and practice does not come about due to a lack in the Adventist formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Our second fundamental belief clearly states, “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.”

This article attempts to explore the link between the doctrine of the Trinity and worship and to reflect theologically on Trinitarian worship, leaving the pastoral and liturgical implications for another time.

I start with a simple premise: if worship is God centered and if God is a Trinity, then worship must be Trinitarian. Paul captures this Trinitarian emphasis in Ephesians 2:18, where he declares that “through him [the Son] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (NIV). How does this really happen in worship? Basically, we come first and foremost to the Father through the work of the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that all Three Persons of the Godhead are involved in our worship.

In its simplest and most authentic form, Trinitarian worship equates with our Spirit-empowered response to the Father’s call to worship through Christ. In what follows, I will explore this Trinitarian dynamic of worship in terms of three images: (1) the Father seeking worshipers; (2) the Son leading worshipers; and (3) the Holy Spirit empowering worshipers.

The Father seeking worshipers

In His conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7–26), Jesus emphasized that God seeks worshipers more than worshipers seek God. This shift of emphasis reminds us that God initiates true worship by confronting us with His love. Thus, worship becomes our response to God’s seeking and self-revelation. The initial downward movement from God shapes authentic Christian worship.

In that same conversation, Jesus also highlighted the fact that true worship is not tied to geography, ethnicity, rituals, or traditions but to a new way of relating to God—as a “Father in spirit and in truth” (v. 23, KJV). This relationship component comprises the key to the understanding and enacting of worship. Effectively, worship is not predominantly based on what we do but on how we relate to God. We cannot truly worship God unless we relate to Him and to Christ properly. The most excellent way of communing with God means relating to Him as a Father.

True worship is ultimately to the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. The preponderance of the Father does not mean that we cannot ascribe honor and praise to the Son and the Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus clearly taught that giving glory to the Son means giving glory to the Father (John 17). However, in the New Testament, prayers to and worship of the Father far outnumber that offered to the Son and the Holy Spirit. Early Christians were urged to “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:18–20, NKJV). Similarly, worship allusions and references in the New Testament clearly reveal the Father’s centrality in worship.
Testament often followed a Trinitarian pattern, without, of course, a worship of the Father that in any way diminished the importance of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This same Trinitarian movement can also be seen in Galatians 4:6: “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (NKJV).

Hence, our worship of the Father depends on the activity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, God cannot be embraced as a Father without Christ and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, we cannot understand worshiping the Father apart from the work of Christ for us and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us. In Christ, we can approach the Father; in the Spirit, we can know Him experientially.

Thus, Christian worship is more relational than cultic. In God’s economy, religious services do not take precedence over worshipful hearts, for God is more interested in the condition of our hearts than in our most elaborate worship services. This understanding of a loving and seeking Father, as demonstrated in the gospel, gives fresh impetus to our worship, making it clear that the Father is more interested in seeking worshipers than in simply seeking worship. His greatest joy is to be in relationships with us as we respond to His love.

The Son leading worshipers

Worship also has a Christological focus. We worship God as a Trinity because of the Christ event. Through His incarnation, death, and resurrection, He offered us a window through which we can catch a clearer glimpse of God. As the Son of man, He offered perfect worship to God by glorifying Him through His spotless life and ministry. As Emmanuel—God with us—He represented and revealed the Lord of creation. Throughout His entire ministry, Jesus acted and spoke on behalf of the Father. Hence, Jesus could say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, NKJV).

Worship becomes possible only because of the reconciling ministry of Christ. On Calvary, Jesus reconciled humanity to God by destroying sin, hence opening the way for a new covenant. He offered Himself on the cross so that we could, in turn, offer our lives as a willing sacrifice (see Rom. 12:1, 2). Without Him, our worship would be idolatry because we would be worshiping a self-constructed image of God, something built outside of God’s revelation of Himself in Christ.

True worship cannot be separated from the gospel. It is Christ centered and cross focused. For instance, the book of Revelation constantly depicts Christ as a kingly warrior and a slaughtered lamb who is worthy “to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise” (Rev. 5:12, NIV). By conquering the grave, Jesus delivered us from the hands of the evil one and transported us into the kingdom of God’s love. This explains why Jesus shares the same authority (Rev. 5:6–9; 7:17; 12:10) and glory (Rev. 5:13; 21:22, 23) as the Father. Praise, worship, and honor belong “to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev. 5:13, NIV). What applies to God the Creator equally applies to Jesus the Lamb.

The New Testament also focuses on the present ministry of the living Christ, who stands in “the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb. 9:24, ESV). He is our High Priest and Mediator through whom we have access to the Father (Heb. 7:25). He is also our leitourgos (Heb. 8:2), heavenly Liturgist, or worship Leader, who carries our names, lives, petitions, and praises on His heart as He ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. He cleanses and purifies our tainted worship and prayers to offer them spotless to the Father.

In short, Christ mediates God’s blessings and salvation to us but also mediates our worship to God. For that reason, worship becomes our participation in Christ’s own perfect worship.

Obviously, this image of Christ leading worshipers strips our worship of its Pelagian tendencies. It has become increasingly common in some circles to view worship as our...
ability to move God’s heart through our singing, our thanksgiving, or our prayers, as if worship was a liturgical ride to impress an impassive God. This emphasis on our response, our faith, and our sincerity is theologically flawed and spiritually unhealthy because it subtly focuses our attention on self rather than on God. This eclipse of Christ’s mediatorial role on our behalf is often matched by the ascendency of worship leaders and preachers. Regrettably, they are too often viewed as unique instruments for bringing us into the manifest presence of God. This is a return to a pre-Reformation concept of worship where the priest serves as the link between the worshiper and God. Under such conditions worship is viewed as a performance done for an audience instead of a communal activity done by the body of believers. This is not to disparage the fact that the body of Christ has individuals that have been clearly set apart for leading worship. Yet, we need to be reminded of Christ as the Supreme Worship Leader. We do not come into the presence of God through gifted worship leaders but through the merits of a mighty Savior. The blood of Jesus gives us access to the throne room, not human giftedness. Within such a vision, the local worship leader does not act on behalf of worshipers but among them in recognition that a single High Priest now serves on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary.

**The Holy Spirit empowering worshipers**

Any understanding of worship must be closely linked to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the church. As the apostle Paul declares, we receive the Spirit of sonship whereby we can approach God as “Abba Father” and proclaim Jesus as Lord (Rom. 8:15, NIV; 1 Cor. 12:3).

Unless the Holy Spirit empowers the worshiping community, worship loses its relational and prophetic aspect. In worship, we declare God’s praises while being continuously transformed for service in the world. We are prophetically proclaiming that God’s kingdom finds its expression in the life of the church until it manifests itself fully throughout the universe at the end of ages. The Holy Spirit, as the Divine Connector, brings us into the presence of God and helps us become what God wants us to be. The church, animated by the Spirit, becomes a catalyst for praises in the world by reminding its inhabitants of their supreme reason for living—to glorify God. While God brings His work of redemption to its historic climax, it becomes our privilege to declare God’s glory and summon people to join God’s redeemed and faithful remnant in true worship (Rev. 14:6–12).
Viewed thus, worship is not our attempt to impress God or prove how much we love Him, but our response to the Father’s work of salvation in Christ and of His transformative power through the Holy Spirit in anticipation of the renewal of the whole cosmos.

In fact, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the worshipping community turns worship into an eschatological event. Worship provides worshipers with a foretaste of the future glory by allowing them to experience the life of the kingdom in the here and now. For this reason, what characterizes genuine worship is a sense of immediacy and an awareness of new possibilities.

An implication for the practice of worship that arises from the eschatological nature of the Holy Spirit’s presence is the challenge to have Spirit-filled services that are creative and relevant. There can be no teaching, no preaching, no healing of human brokenness, and no genuine communion unless worshipping communities are baptized into the creative and life-giving power of the Divine Spirit.

**Conclusion**

Trinitarian faith means Trinitarian worship. This theological posture is biblical and deserves further exploration and amplification. However, unleashing this Trinitarian dynamic fully in our worship is easier said than done and requires thoughtful theological reflection and a real desire to fully honor God. Hence, pastors and worship leaders should recognize the importance of engaging themselves in further Trinitarian thinking and meditation so as to carefully plan worship services that magnify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The songs we sing, prayers we offer, thanks we give, sermons we preach, and the bread and wine we partake of, must declare the glory of the Godhead.

3. For a recent discussion on early Christology and worship, see James D. G. Dunn, Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence (London: SPCK, 2010).

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
In his First Epistle to Timothy, Paul says, “Great is the mystery of godliness” (3:16). Then he lists six truths included in this mystery, God was (1) “manifested in the flesh,” (2) “justified in the Spirit,” (3) “seen by angels,” (4) “preached among the Gentiles,” (5) “believed on in the world,” and (6) “received up in glory.” Of these six truths, the first, “God was manifested in the flesh,” staggers our thinking. This theme will be studied by the redeemed throughout eternity. But for now, an aspect of this mystery fascinates and humbles anyone who tries to understand it.

“My Father”

In the Gospels, Jesus’ use of the phrase My Father becomes a familiar refrain. His claim to be the Son of God is an important foundation. Jesus’ use of this title helps us to understand the relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Godhead, within the context of the plan of salvation. As humans, we know that a true and loving relationship between a father and a son can be a joy beyond description. This human experience helps us to understand the relationship between the Father and Jesus. Although Jesus assumed the position of Son in the master plan of dealing with sin, He has assured us that the pre-Incarnation relationship with His Father was not compromised. “I and My Father are,” He said, “one” (John 10:30).

“My God”

Jesus introduced a second truth about His relationship with His Father. The first truth, the Father-Son relationship, begins in the birth narrative, the start of most of the Gospels; in contrast the introduction of the second truth comes at the end of the Gospels. As Jesus died upon the cross, a cry of despair escaped His lips: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34).

What was Jesus saying when He uttered, “My God”? What was He telling us? He spoke of this relationship only once more. On the day of His resurrection, He revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene at the tomb and told her, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34). The Second Person recognized the First Person as His God.

“Eternally linked to humanity”

In this context, look at what Ellen White wrote, By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we

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GEORGE E. RICE
become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son.” John 3:16. He gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature. This is the pledge that God will fulfill His word.

God gave His Son to the human race, forever to retain His human nature. Thus, Jesus referred to the Father as His God because Jesus is now a human being. As a human being, Jesus related to the Father as we are to relate to Him. Jesus is still God, still the Second Person of the Godhead, but now He is a human being as well. Jesus voluntarily subordinated Himself to the First Person, always to remain in this position of subordination. This fact was part of the plan of redemption from the beginning.

In Philippians, Paul sets out this truth. He said that Jesus existed upon two platforms. From each platform, there were three descending steps. The first and higher platform was His pre-Incarnation existence, where He was “in the form of God, [and] did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (Phil. 2:6). From here He took three descending steps: (1) He “made Himself of no reputation,” (2) “taking the form of a bondservant,” and (3) “coming in the likeness of men” (v. 7). At this point, He stood upon the second and lower platform, “being found in appearance as a man” (v. 8). Then He took three more descending steps: (1) “He humbled Himself,” (2) “became obedient to the point of death,” and (3) “even the death of the cross” (v. 8). After Jesus reached the bottom, with His “death of the cross,” the First Person “also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (vv. 8, 9). When Jesus was exalted, He was exalted in His incarnate form. He was exalted in the form He had upon the second platform as a human. “Christ,” Ellen White wrote, “had ascended to heaven in the form of humanity.”

Linked with this eternal truth is another event that staggers the mind. When God created the first beings in the universe with the freedom of choice, He knew that a rebellion might arise against His universe would be eternally secure, even though all created beings would still have freedom of choice. All this happened through the death of Jesus, who had subordinated Himself to the Father.

The New Testament reveals this subordination over and over: “ ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself’” (John 5:19); “ ‘I can of Myself do nothing,’ ” (v. 30); “ ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ ” (Matt. 28:18); “ ‘All things have been delivered to Me by My Father’ ” (Matt. 11:27); “ ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’ ” (Matt. 26:39); “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place” (Rev. 1:1).

The Father gave all authority in heaven and on earth to Jesus so that He could fight the great controversy against Lucifer. And, when the controversy is over, Jesus returns this authority to the First Person. “Then comes the end, when
He [Jesus] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. . . . The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. . . . Now when all things are made subject to Him [Father], then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24, 26, 28).

What humanity gains

When sin is no more and Jesus returns the power and authority back to the First Person, how will redeemed humanity fare? Let’s go back to the first two sentences of the quotation from The Desire of Ages, page 25: “By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen.”

“More closely united to God than if we had never fallen”? How can this be? We are the only beings in the universe that has a Member of the Godhead as a part of our family. When Jesus subordinated Himself and permanently took humanity upon Himself, the human family became unique, in a position like no other beings in the universe, not even the angels.

How do our minds grasp these amazing truths? They don’t; that’s why it is called “the mystery of godliness.” If we understood, it would no longer be a mystery. Thus, the mystery of God “manifested in the flesh” will be the focus of study and attention of the redeemed throughout eternity, and the center of all praise will be given to the Father and the Son.

1. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptures are from the New King James Version.
3. Ibid., 832.
Genesis
by R. R. Reno, Brazos
Theological Commentary
on the Bible, Grand Rapids,

This Genesis commentary cannot be classed as ordinary, for this volume was not written by a biblical scholar, as is usually the case, but by a theologian, and it only deals with a number of selected texts or passages. In many chapters, the author comments on only one verse. Thus, out of the 1,533 verses in the book of Genesis, only 189 verses received any comments in this volume.

R. R. Reno teaches theological ethics at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. Not only did he author this volume, but he also holds the position of general editor of the series. In his introduction, he explains that this “series of biblical commentaries was born out of the conviction that dogma clarifies rather than obscures” the biblical text (11). Hence he wrote this theological commentary on the assumption that the Nicene Creed “provides the proper basis for the interpretation of the Bible as Christian Scripture” (12). The editors, we are told, “did not hold the commentators to any particular hermeneutical” method (13). Therefore, “the commentary series is tentative and exploratory” and “deliberately ecumenical in scope” (13).

When it comes to Genesis 1:1, for example, the author quite happily endorses evolution because he read the text theologically, not historically. “In the beginning” is not a temporal statement but rather a statement of origin and source. By combining Genesis 1:1 with John 1:1 and 1 Corinthians 8:6, which he sees as a direct commentary on Genesis 1:1, he views Christ as the Beginning, “for in him all things were created” (Col. 1:16, RSV). Therefore, “the world has a beginning by and in the divine Word, and we best orient ourselves to reality when we focus on Christ” (36).

The theological approach allows him to be eclectic in his interpretation. “No single rule or principle,” he says, “guides my judgment about what makes for a telling verse, and as a result I do not follow a consistent method or pattern of exegesis” (21). Thus, on the one hand, he accepts the results of the historical-critical method with Genesis 1 being a priestly document (34) from the sixth century B.C. and Genesis 2 coming from the hand of the Yahwist author (79) from the tenth century B.C. On the other hand, he sees the two Creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 as complementary and not contradictory (22); he accepts the biblical teaching that the serpent is Satan, a fallen angel (81), who led Eve and Adam into sin (82); and he emphasizes that only through Christ can we be freed from sin. “It is here and now that we do the work of Satan, and it is here and now that we encounter Christ, who has the power to free us from the thrall of our own past choices, from the primordial choice of Adam and Eve, and from the original wickedness of Satan” (85). The author sees the whole book of Genesis as a promise-driven, future-oriented text that finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

The reason for this inclusive attitude centers on his commitment to the Christian faith, demonstrated in his use of the Nicene Creed and the writings of the church fathers as theological guideposts. The commentary is saturated with references to the writings of the church fathers, the Jewish apocryphal writings, and the Jewish commentator Rashi (1040–1105). Nevertheless, Reno provides many interesting and valuable insights into the texts, and the connections between the book of Genesis and the New Testament are, by and large, very helpful. For example, the shift from the universal view (Creation, global flood) to the particular view of the history of one family (Abraham and his descendants) comprises for Reno the “clearest way in which the Old Testament prefigures the fulfillment of the divine plan in Jesus Christ” (139). Whether he wrestles with God over Sodom and Gomorrah or becomes willing to sacrifice his son, Abraham’s story prepares us for the claim that salvation rests on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Genesis 12:1, therefore, is for Reno “the beginning of the gospel” (139).

In spite of its accommodation of critical scholarship, this volume provides helpful insights for preachers, teachers, and students, and demonstrates the continuing intellectual and practical viability of a theological interpretation of the Bible.

—Reviewed by Gerhard Pfandl, PhD, associate director, Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

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Sharon E. Terrell
Pastor for Stewardship
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**New White Estate Web site and apps**

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—For the past several years, the Ellen G. White Estate has been actively working on producing a Web site of Ellen White books in multiple languages. Currently, this free Web site, www.egwwritings.org, contains resources in the following nine languages: Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish. The Web site is fully searchable instantly in all the languages.

In addition to the writings of Ellen G. White, the writings of many Adventist pioneers, as well as the Bible in each language, are also included. The online books section of the site has more than 80 Ellen White audio books in various languages, in addition to free downloads of various popular e-book formats: ePub, Kindle, Mobi, and PDF (ePub books are available in all languages). With the ability to download all of Ellen G. White’s published books in e-book formats from our site, users of these devices can access the writings of Ellen White on the go like never before.

At the 2010 General Conference Session in Atlanta, the White Estate launched a new app for the iPhone/iPad/iPod touch called EGW Free, with 17 Ellen White titles. Just six months later, the Ellen G. White Estate released its much anticipated upgrade to the EGW Free iTunes app on December 20, 2010, in the iTunes app store: http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/egw-free/id374790551?mt=8. The latest release also has a new name: EGW Writings. The application’s name change reflects that it now contains 412 books of the complete published writings of Ellen G. White. This app is compatible with iPhone/iPod touch iOS 3.2 and above as well as with the latest iPhone iOS 4 retina display. Also, a high-definition version for the iPad is included with the app. It is still free and available in the iTunes app store right now. Developers have started working on an Android version of the app and are seeking partners to provide funding for its development costs so that it also can be made available at no cost when completed.

Users who currently have EGW Free installed will be notified of an upgrade available for version 2 of EGW Writings. More than 13,000 iTunes accounts have downloaded the EGW Free app to date. The White Estate also has a second new app called EGW Lite, using the same interface as EGW Writings, but the content is based on the ten Connecting With Jesus (CWJ) books by Ellen G. White. This lite app was created for users with limited storage on their devices, limited bandwidth, or no option other than mobile broadband coverage.

EGW Writings allows you to create bookmarks, highlight passages, create notes, and share them via email, Facebook, or Twitter. You can manage all of these in the new study center by creating subject category folders for different studies or topics. You can also use AirPrint with supported printing devices or output your iPhone 4 or the iPad device’s screen to an external monitor or data projector. [Darryl Thompson, Ellen G. White Estate]

**Faith, politics, and organ donation**

London, United Kingdom—Faith and politics rarely mix well. However, on November 23, 2010, a group of members of Parliament and faith representatives sat around a parliamentary table in the House of Commons to discuss faith and cultural aspects in relation to a national campaign on organ donation.

Seventh-day Adventists were among the invited guests to the official launch of the report on work with faith communities and organ donation. Sharon Platt-McDonald, health and disability ministries director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Great Britain, was there as a contributor to the document. She reported on work undertaken within...
The Seventh-day Adventist Church to raise awareness of this issue.

The Organ Donation Campaign is a joint national initiative of the Organ Donation Taskforce and the Department of Health. The faith communities and organ donation document highlights the key objectives of the national campaign and sets out recommendations to raise awareness and increase the level of organ donations, particularly among black and minority ethnic groups (BME).

This is important as people from these groups are three to four times more likely to be affected with kidney failure; while they make up 8 percent of the UK population, 25 percent of patients actively waiting for kidney transplants are from this group. Thus, it is hardly surprising that they have to wait longer for transplants—up to eight years—and are far more likely to die while waiting.

The statistics note that only 1.7 percent of donors are black, 1.6 percent Asian, and 95.6 percent white; thus, increasing donations from BME groups will make a radical difference in the treatment of diseases such as end-stage kidney, heart, and liver failure.

The work with faith groups is key in helping raise awareness among BME groups as faith and cultural beliefs and practices often impact an individual’s perception and decision to become a donor or recipient. Groups participating in the Organ Donation Campaign include Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists; representatives from these groups attended the launch event. They were able to share some of the barriers, challenges, myths, and cultural and religious perspectives that had previously discouraged individuals from becoming involved in organ donation. However, there were many encouraging reports about the increase in engagement within these communities as a result of the ongoing national campaign.

For more information on the Organ Donation Campaign and/or to register to become a donor, visit www.theodc.org.uk. [Sharon Platt-McDonald/tedNEWS]

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Ministry in a diverse society

Thank you for Kenley Hall’s article “Ministry in a Diverse Society” (November 2010). I hope and pray that someday soon we, as a church organization, can start this process of corporate confession and reconciliation and begin an educational process that will clear the way for the latter rain to fall on God’s people and usher in the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the power to finish the work.

—Kessle R. Hodgson, email

invite Dr. Kilmer to read a little more in the works of Theresa of Jesus (Avila). I think he will find that Theresa had a profound biblical spirituality, which is not surprising since the monastic life that she was reforming encountered the Word of God in the Scriptures at least nine times a day.

To give credibility to an allegation that Theresa “did not need Jesus to be a Mediator” in an eminent magazine is really not acceptable. If the author had written the same thing about Ellen White’s revelations, I am sure a retraction and apology would be forthcoming. I can only hope that a similar apology to all those who have been guided closer to Christ by Theresa of Avila might be made.

—Douglas W. Young, archbishop of Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea
Screening for colorectal cancer

People of faith sometimes have difficulty understanding why they might acquire an illness such as cancer. Until one becomes ill, we seldom understand how it affects the quality of life. What is your perception of cancer? Have you thought about getting screened? What are some steps you can take to prevent this disease?

A recent story of cancer involves a 55-year-old female pastor who told of her tumultuous emotions when informed of her cancer. After her diagnosis, she was in denial. She exclaimed, “I don’t get cancer. It can’t be.” She had been the “healthy” one in her family, with a lot of energy. Her job was to visit the sick in the hospitals, including cancer patients facing chemotherapy or surgery. Now she is thankful she was screened and caught the cancer early. She learned a humbling lesson by recognizing that she is not superwoman. We know cancer exists, but few of us think it can actually happen to us.¹

Cancer is characterized by abnormal and unregulated cell growth. There are more than 200 types of cancer—lung cancer, breast cancer, and colorectal cancer are among the most common forms. Risk factors, such as smoking and alcohol consumption, increase the chances of getting cancer. General symptoms include fatigue, weight loss, decreased appetite, a new lump or bump, and sometimes pain.

Colorectal cancer is a common cancer whose prevalence can be reduced. The colon, or large bowel, the last portion of the digestive or gastrointestinal tract, begins at the end of the small intestine and ends at the rectum—the final six inches of the digestive system. The colon, a hollow and muscular tube about five feet long, absorbs water and mineral nutrients from food matter and serves as a storage place for waste matter.²

In most people, colorectal cancers develop slowly over a period of several years. Before a cancer develops, a growth of tissue or tumor begins as a noncancerous polyp, developing on the lining of the colon or rectum, which may change into cancer. Another type of precancerous condition, called dysplasia, is seen in people with diseases such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease. British researchers say they have developed a vaccine that stimulates the immune system to fight colorectal cancer cells. The vaccine helps stimulate immune cell production in up to 70 percent of cancer patients before and after surgery to remove cancerous tumors.³

Cancer can affect anyone. However, for colorectal cancer, individuals are at higher risk if they

- are age 50 and older
- have a family history that includes colorectal cancer
- have certain lifestyle risks (smoking, inactivity, obesity, and a high-fat, low-fiber diet)
- consume large quantities of meat, especially smoked and processed meats
- have a low intake of whole grains and legumes
- are African American (recommended to start getting screened at the age of 45)

According to the 2003 World Cancer Report, “cancer rates could further increase by 50% to 15 million new cases in the year 2020” globally. The report also provides clear evidence that living healthier can prevent one-third of cancers. Fortunately, another third can be cured.⁴

Living a healthy lifestyle is key. If you smoke, quit smoking. Include more fiber in your diet, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and legumes. Get vaccinated against the hepatitis B and C viruses (which can lead to liver cancer), and human papillomaviruses (which can lead to cervical and anogenital cancers). “In developing countries, up to 23 percent of malignancies are caused by infectious agents.”⁵

Education and awareness are imperative steps to increase behavior change and reduce risks. The number of cancer screenings could increase by breaking barriers, dispelling myths, and enlightening individuals. Government initiatives, community cancer programs, and other screening prevention programs are readily available in participating regions. The World Health Organization provides practical advice on cancer prevention.

As people decide to change their lifestyles and be more conscious of ways to inhibit cancer, they will also benefit from looking to their heavenly Father as He leads and guides their lives. God gives words of hope and you will always find Him there, even through the darkest times. “‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; / I have called you by your name; / You are Mine. / When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; / And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. / When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, / Nor shall the flame scorch you’ “ (Isa. 43:1, 2, NKJV).

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

5. Ibid.
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